



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development

AANO • NUMBER 030 • 2nd SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Wednesday, May 28, 2008

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Chair

Mr. Barry Devolin

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• (1540)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC)): Good afternoon. I would like to welcome everyone to meeting number 30 of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

We've had a slight change in our agenda today. We are going to be hearing from two panels—the first is before us now—dealing with housing issues. We have witnesses here from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, as well as the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

We will continue with panel A until 4:20, and at 4:20 we will break very briefly to bring panel B to the table. Panel B will be discussing a separate issue, the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada program and process.

We will deal with panel B until about 5:15, at which point we will go back in camera. We're going to defer our in camera discussion of the agenda until the end of our meeting today, rather than having it at the beginning, for a couple of reasons: the first is that a couple of our regular members, whom I would like to have here to participate in that conversation, are not here; second, as Monsieur Lemay pointed out, we do have a vote tonight and we are all going back to the House from here for six o'clock. If necessary, we can probably stay for 10 or 15 minutes after our normal end of the meeting at 5:30 and go to 5:40 to discuss committee business.

I would like to welcome to the committee today members from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, as well as the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, to discuss housing issues. I understand we are going to have two presentations: the first from Sharon Matthews, vice-president of the assisted housing sector, and the second by Christine Cram, acting senior assistant deputy minister of socio-economic policy and regional operations. Subsequent to that, we will proceed with our normal rounds of questioning.

Welcome, all of you, to the furthest side of Parliament Hill here in the east block.

Sharon Matthews, if you would like to begin, the floor is yours.

Ms. Sharon Matthews (Vice-President, Assisted Housing Sector, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We really appreciate this opportunity to share with you CMHC's role in aboriginal housing in Canada. A little over a year ago, we

provided the committee with a brief on this issue. Our intention this afternoon is to provide an update, highlighting some of the successes, and then speak a little bit about where we're headed.

As Canada's housing agency, CMHC has a mandate to improve housing conditions for all Canadians, regardless of where they live. We fulfill our mandate through the provision of mortgage loan insurance products, affordable housing programs—

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): We are going to give you five minutes extra, but *shh*.

Ms. Sharon Matthews: No problem.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Thank you.

[English]

Ms. Sharon Matthews: We fulfill our mandate through the provision of mortgage loan insurance products, affordable housing programs, research, and the sharing of expertise.

As you are aware, INAC has the lead role with respect to on-reserve housing policy. The department is a key participant in the pursuit of healthy and sustainable communities and the broader economic and social development objectives. As a result, INAC is one of CMHC's key partners in delivering housing programs, our products, and the services to first nations across this country.

First nation communities themselves, however, are also critical partners for CMHC. With the assistance of our various programs, first nations decide whether or not they will participate in a specific CMHC housing program or initiative. In other words, is the initiative the appropriate tool for that specific community's needs?

The first nation largely determines the physical design of a project that will be built. They decide, once built or renovated, who from the community has access to the low-income housing. The first nation also manages the actual construction or renovation under our programs and is responsible for the ongoing maintenance of the homes constructed. Even in the context of allocations, CMHC works hand in hand with first nations organizations, such as the Assembly of First Nations, to determine the priorities and to ensure that the limited resources flow where they can best have an impact.

At CMHC we are also keenly aware that the need for suitable and affordable housing for first nations people is enormous. We estimate that 22% of first nations members live in inadequate housing on reserve. Another 10% face overcrowding.

It's important to understand, however, that there are success stories from which all those involved in aboriginal housing are learning. CMHC works hard to effectively manage the resources we have and to maximize the benefits on the ground while respecting the autonomy and the choices made by first nations.

CMHC's strategy in approaching the challenge of housing for first nations people can be described as a three-pronged approach: first, delivery of our assisted housing programs; second, our work in aboriginal capacity development; and third, our facilitation of market-based solutions on reserve.

With respect to assisted housing, the federal government, through CMHC, supports, as I believe you know, some 626,000 existing social housing units in Canada at a cost of over \$1.7 billion annually. Within this off-reserve portfolio, an estimated \$156 million is spent annually in support of projects specifically targeted to aboriginal peoples. In addition, the federal government, through CMHC, supports new affordable housing supply through a \$1 billion affordable housing initiative. Another \$128 million in annual federal funding is provided for CMHC's suite of renovation assistance programs. These programs, which generally apply to all Canadians, also help advance housing for aboriginal peoples.

Off reserve and in the north, much of the funding CMHC receives for housing is administered by the provinces and territories. Through CMHC, there are also a number of specialized housing programs and initiatives specifically targeted to first nations on-reserve communities. In 2007 CMHC spent approximately \$134 million on these housing initiatives. The on-reserve non-profit housing program assists first nations in buying, building, renovating, and administering suitable and affordable rental housing on reserve. This has resulted in, on average, around 1,000 additional units of social housing on reserve each year.

CMHC provides a subsidy to the project to assist with its financing and ongoing operation. The accountability regime also helps to ensure that housing built under this program is well built and well maintained. Specifically, CMHC requires that the first nation confirm that all units constructed conform to a minimum standard under the National Building Code of Canada. The program funding also includes a provision for the ongoing maintenance of units as well as an allocation for a replacement reserve fund to cover the replacement costs of worn-out capital items. This helps first nations keep the homes maintained over time.

CMHC renovation programs repair existing units, convert non-residential spaces into housing, and provide home adaptation funding in support of seniors. Approximately 1,000 housing units are repaired under these programs annually.

• (1545)

Such programming also supports the construction and renovation of the shelter network for victims of family violence across this country.

In addition to the specific program funding that I've outlined, CMHC also plays a very significant role in supporting first nations as they build their housing capacity. This is where the future lies, as without the housing capacity, many communities don't have the skills locally to maintain what they have and, equally important, to plan for future successes.

For example, I spoke a bit earlier about the new construction program. Thanks to the training and support the CMHC can provide, it often becomes the job of trained members of the first nation community itself to inspect a project during construction and ensure it is built to code, as well as for the ongoing maintenance of the on-reserve housing. In fact, more than 90% of the inspections undertaken during the delivery of CMHC programs are undertaken by aboriginal inspectors themselves.

Through our housing quality initiative, we work with individual first nations to help them build the capacity to prevent, remediate, and manage mould and related housing air quality problems. For example, we have entered into multi-year agreements with 43 band councils under which we are working to build the skills and the knowledge of their members. We offer a series of training modules tailored for the various audiences, covering an array of topics, including air quality, building practices, and renovation techniques.

Specifically with regard to mould, during the fall of 2007 a committee consisting of CMHC, INAC, Health Canada, and the Assembly of First Nations consulted with first nations organizations involved in housing regarding a draft national strategy to address mould in housing on reserve. That committee is making progress toward the implementation of that strategy during 2008. However, I will leave it to my colleague at INAC to speak today of the details of that strategy, as INAC is the lead agency and I know we are short on time.

CMHC has also helped support and develop two critically important national aboriginal associations, the First Nations National Building Officers Association—we call it FNNBOA—and the First Nations Housing Managers' Association.

FNNBOA is leading the way for other organizations, frankly, both on and off reserve when it comes to certification programs and ensuring the professionalism and maintenance of the skills in the sector. CMHC supported the development of FNNBOA through funding to help launch and establish the organization and help them develop their websites and attend events to promote their association.

The First Nations Housing Managers' Association was created to promote and enhance the professional development of housing managers on reserve. This emerging association has for its objectives the creation of a central professional network for sharing best practices. Similar to FNNBOA, CMHC has funded the initial conceptualization and development of the core organization with the intent that it become self-sustaining over the longer term. Partners again, such as INAC and Health Canada, have also participated in support of these very important organizations.

In addition to the assistance programs and the capacity developments for support that I've already spoken of, a third area of focus for CMHC is to facilitate market-based solutions on reserve in a manner that respects the underlying communal ownership of the land. Market solutions are not for every first nation and not for every member of a given first nation. However, it is about the choice and the opportunity. We believe that the more we can do to facilitate market solutions for those who can afford them, the more first nations communities can take advantage of the economic benefits of housing that most other Canadians take for granted.

The Assembly of First Nations estimates that about 30% of first nations housing needs on reserve could actually be addressed through market-based housing.

CMHC has been very active in the search for ways to facilitate private sector lending on reserve. We've been proactive in explaining market concepts, sharing success stories, and showing how our mortgage insurance products can assist.

The most recent innovation in this regard, and the one that has the potential to most fundamentally change housing finance on reserve, is the new first nations market housing fund. Earlier this month, the start of the operations of the new \$300 million fund was announced by the minister of INAC, the minister responsible for CMHC, Chief John Beaucage, the new chair of the first nations fund, along with the Assembly of First Nations.

•(1550)

This fund will guarantee, on behalf of a first nation, private sector loans made to their members on reserve for market-based housing. The development of this fund is extremely significant for first nations people living on reserve. It represents an innovative new tool that can give eligible first nations members the opportunity to build, buy, or renovate their own homes on reserve. It is estimated that over the next 10 years, the fund will facilitate financing for up to 25,000 homes on reserve.

Over the last year, CMHC, INAC, and the Assembly of First Nations have sought the advice and input from first nations leaders, experts, organizations, members, as well as the Canadian financial community, on the design of the fund.

While the new tool is vital to improving living conditions of first nations communities, I really want to emphasize that it is also important to understand that by no means is it a complete solution, and it will not solve all the housing challenges that first nations people face. Tools like CMHC's aboriginal programs, the assisted programs, and capacity development support remain of critical importance.

As we look to the future, CMHC remains committed to continuing to deliver our programs as efficiently and effectively as possible. In terms of aboriginal capacity development, our focus remains on supporting housing quality, including mould avoidance and remediation, supporting the understanding of market solutions, and working towards building sustainable aboriginal organizations. Finally, we want to continue to facilitate market solutions for first nations communities.

Thank you again for the opportunity to meet with you today. I look forward to any questions and clarifications I can offer this afternoon.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Matthews.

Ms. Cram, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Cram (Acting Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Socio-Economic Policy and Regional Operations, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Good afternoon. I would like to thank the chair and committee members for the opportunity to provide an update on housing on-reserve.

Housing is a key component of strong and healthy communities and the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs works with First Nations to increase the supply of housing on-reserve.

The department acknowledges that addressing the high demand for housing in First Nations is critical. We are working hard to support better housing outcomes by improving housing support to help those in the most in need, and by encouraging First Nations to embrace housing as a lifelong asset.

•(1555)

[*English*]

On INAC's role in housing on reserve, as part of its capital program, INAC provides first nations with subsidies for the delivery of housing services. This amounts to \$138 million annually to improve access to adequate housing on reserve. In addition, INAC provides approximately \$118 million annually to first nations on reserve in the form of shelter allowance payments under the income assistance program.

It should be noted that INAC does not build or maintain homes on reserve, but rather provides subsidy funding. As Sharon pointed out, first nations or their designated housing authorities are responsible for implementing and managing housing activities on reserve, as well as identifying and obtaining other necessary funding, such as through financial institutions, to complete their housing projects.

[*Translation*]

The Government of Canada delivered its response to the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development on October 12, 2007 and committed to conducting a review of the 1996 on-reserve housing policy. This review was completed in 2007 by the Audit and Evaluation Branch, and will soon be available on INAC's website.

[English]

The review of the 1996 on-reserve housing policy recommended that INAC revise and improve the delivery and performance monitoring of its housing program. We are addressing these recommendations in several ways.

We are developing a housing procedures guide that will increase national consistency and delivery of the housing program across the department. We are working on introducing steps to ensure that first nations communities comply with the requirements of the housing policy through the introduction of a compliance regime that identifies both incentives for compliance and consequences for non-compliance.

We are also introducing the integrated capital management system database in all regions and first nations to streamline data collection and reporting and aid in measuring housing program outcomes and performance indicators.

The 1996 on-reserve housing policy review also recommended that a much broader and comprehensive evaluation of all housing programs supported by the Government of Canada be undertaken. This evaluation has begun.

The joint INAC-CMHC evaluation of Budget 2005 funding for on-reserve housing programs will be used to consider policy alternatives to existing on-reserve housing programs. The evaluation includes a review of the current implementation of the housing policy and consideration of future policy alternatives such as a needs-based allocation of housing support. The evaluation will also address the administration of ministerial loan guarantees and shelter allowance and the implementation of community rental and inspection regimes. Preliminary results will be available in summer 2009.

Implementation of the evaluation recommendations will be supported by first nations input, and we expect it will assist in shaping Government of Canada on-reserve housing policies and programs.

[Translation]

Sharon also mentioned indoor air quality. As everyone knows, mould continues to be a concern in First Nation communities. In 2006, the Auditor General and the Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommended that a strategic plan be developed to address the problem of mould in on-reserve housing.

[English]

Sharon mentioned that a national strategy has been developed to address mould. I want to go into some of the elements of that national strategy. It identifies five strategic directions and provides a number of specific objectives and action steps to support these directions.

First is building awareness and capacity to deal with mould through education and training; second, providing guidance and support to communities in the prevention and remediation of mould in existing housing; third, preventing mould in new first nations housing; fourth, identifying communities with critical mould problems and determining the scope of the challenges facing them;

fifth, building awareness and support for the strategy through proactive communications.

The strategy also calls for an effective regime for managing the further development and implementation of mould-related initiatives. Central to this management regime is the creation of a performance monitoring system to track the performance of the strategy.

In December 2007, the indoor air quality committee completed the first nations engagement process with over 100 key first nations stakeholders. An accountability framework, communications plan, and evaluation approach were developed from December 2007 through March 2008. We expect the implementation of the national strategy to take place during 2008.

Over the past year, INAC has supported innovative projects at first nations communities and through first nations organizations that will facilitate the building of better-quality housing and assist in improving housing management. Projects include the development of community market housing regimes, a building permit system, land management practices, coaching on housing management skills, implementation of rental regimes, and the management of rental arrears.

For example, in British Columbia we partnered with the Shuswap Nation Tribal Council on creating the framework, including land tenure and private sector financing, that will result in a robust market housing regime. The goal is to create a market-based housing program on reserve that supports, encourages, and enables first nations people to participate in home ownership that results in similar benefits to those for people who purchase homes off reserve.

Beyond direct investments in housing, INAC has been active in raising public awareness of the living conditions and the challenges affecting the well-being of first nations. Our department is proud to be one of the sponsors of *Closer to Home*, a six-part documentary series shown on the aboriginal peoples television network that takes viewers onto reserves across Canada to experience home, housing, and life from a uniquely first nations point of view.

We realize that despite progress, much remains to be done; however, by working with first nations and other housing partners such as CMHC, and by moving forward with innovative approaches such as the first nations market housing fund, we are improving housing in first nations communities.

● (1600)

[Translation]

Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak to the committee.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Cram.

We will have time for one round of questions today, and it will be of six minutes instead of seven, in order to try to keep on schedule. I'd like to begin with the Liberal Party.

Ms. Karetak-Lindell, you have six minutes.

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell (Nunavut, Lib.): Thank you so much for coming before us today. We've dealt with this issue many a time. I'm thankful that we have different programs that can help alleviate the housing shortage in our communities, but at the end of the day we know we face a bottleneck in most communities, where so many people are waiting for social housing.

Most people, I know, in my community cannot afford to have their own homes. They can't afford to go to the bank and take advantage of the new programs. The majority of the people end up needing social housing. Unless we invest in new housing, I think the numbers are going to keep getting worse, because we have the fastest population growths in our communities, and therefore by the time these young people get their house—let's say in three years—they might have three children and need a bigger house than the one they applied for.

As much as we have these programs to help people, I'm wondering whether really we're just nibbling at the top and not getting to the real issue, which is numbers—the people on the waiting list—and the fact that we need to have higher investments in actually building new homes. Even if we do what we do, it's just a drop in the bucket. I just see it getting worse and worse all the time.

My question is, unless we make a real investment in new social housing, we really cannot deal with the shortage of houses in the aboriginal communities—and that's on and off reserve.

•(1605)

Ms. Sharon Matthews: From a CMHC program perspective, as I said, we do have a number of programs in place. Typically there are about 1,000 units renovated each year. There are about 1,000 from new construction. Last year we actually did a little better than that in terms of renovation; we were up over 1,200.

In addition, Budget 2005 allocated over a five-year period \$295 million as an additional budget allocation, above and beyond what our normal A-base would be. INAC and CMHC shared in the funding of that initiative. Through CMHC's allocation, which was just over \$100 million of that \$295 million as of the end of this fiscal year 2007-08, I'm pleased to say that in addition to the normal units we've put on the ground, we've put almost 4,500 new construction units on reserve. We also did renovation of an additional 1,200 units.

Certainly there is no doubt...and I don't think anybody here would suggest that we're keeping up with the pace. As you said, on reserve the growth is significant. But there's another challenge on the ground. I can tell you from a first nations and CMHC delivery perspective that that \$295 million budget tripled—almost quadrupled—delivery on the ground during that period. I can tell you that first nations were pushed to the max in terms of the ability and the capacity to get those dollars and the units delivered on the ground.

So as I emphasized in my opening comments, certainly dollars and budgets matter, but capacity development and building that on the ground take time. When they suddenly did get that injection, I can tell you, a lot of first nations really struggled to make it work. Certainly our staff on the ground as well was trying to make sure that we got that budget delivered as quickly as we could.

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell: My understanding, though, is that it was a one-time investment.

Ms. Sharon Matthews: That was a one-time investment out of the 2005 budget.

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell: How much time do we have? Can I pass it on to Tina?

The Chair: You have about a minute and twenty seconds.

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): I have a quick question. It has to do with the off-reserve housing funding and whether there's any accounting for that money. I know there was the \$300 million announced, and I have yet to get a response on whether that money is being allocated for use by aboriginal people in housing.

Ms. Sharon Matthews: You may be referring to the trust funding that—

Ms. Tina Keeper: No, I'm referring to the off-reserve aboriginal housing fund.

Ms. Christine Cram: I think you're referring to the \$300 million in the 2006 budget that went out to provinces. So the money did go out to the provinces, and I can—

Ms. Tina Keeper: I know it went out, but I'm wondering how it is you monitor whether it is actually being used for housing and how we can find that information.

Ms. Christine Cram: We do have some information. I do have a bit of information on different provinces, in terms of what they've done. Different provinces have handled it differently.

I'll just give you British Columbia as an example. They received \$50.9 million, and they transferred it to an off-reserve aboriginal housing trust. On March 1, 2007, they issued a province-wide expression of interest to aboriginal non-profit societies for applications.

So each province has had a different process. I don't personally have the information on all of them, but—

Ms. Tina Keeper: If I can't get it from the province and I can't get it from them, can I just try to get that from your department?

Ms. Christine Cram: I'd be prepared to go back. I think we'd have to go to the Department of Finance—

Ms. Sharon Matthews: Wasn't it the Department of Finance who was managing the trust?

Ms. Tina Keeper: From your department, there's no actual monitoring or criteria in terms of accounting for that?

•(1610)

Ms. Sharon Matthews: There's no mandate for CMHC to be monitoring or managing those funds. I believe the same can be said for INAC, so it would be the Department of Finance that you'd have to raise the question with.

Ms. Tina Keeper: The Department of Finance would be accountable for that funding. They would require accounting for that funding.

Ms. Christine Cram: I suspect that for the trusts that were set up for the transfer of the money from the Department of Finance to those provinces, they would have specified any accountability requirements.

Ms. Sharon Matthews: I do believe there were some principles and whatnot, but we're just not the right people to answer that question, I'm afraid.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

M. Lemay, six minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Actually, I am not very happy. You can explain to me why I am not very happy. I am sick and tired of getting reports; we know where the problem is. You said that the money allocated for repair and for new home construction in the communities is not all spent.

Did I understand correctly?

[English]

Ms. Christine Cram: No.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Ms. Matthews, I thought that you had said that there was money left. Is that correct?

[English]

Ms. Sharon Matthews: No, I was referring to the \$295 million that came in Budget 2005. All of that budget has been committed, but projects are built over a period of time. All of those projects are under way, advances are under way, so that was what I was referring to in terms of it taking time to get those things actually built and on the ground. But they're all committed.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Okay.

I have a problem. In April 2003, the Auditor General said:

...about \$750 million would be required annually to meet the increasing housing needs of the growing on-reserve population and that an additional \$2.5 billion would be needed to deal with the shortage of adequate houses.

That is not me saying that. In 2005, in 2006, in 2007 and in 2008, how much money did you allocate for housing construction and repair?

[English]

Ms. Sharon Matthews: I wouldn't have that for each and every year, but I could certainly get you the detailed information.

As an illustration for today, for the \$295 million budget that we were referring to earlier, the 2005 budget, it was projected that with the dollars it would be allocated, CMHC would be able to deliver 4,400 new units, and it would be able to renovate 1,100 units. As of March 2008 we had delivered 4,498, so we exceeded the target and managed to squeeze a few more out, and on the renovation we went to 1,296, so again, we exceeded the target.

By and large, you will find in our annual report that we're quite clear. We say, "This is what our target is for the year", and every year we report against it. The information is right there; I can readily get it for you.

By and large, we meet or exceed our targets, but I'll get you the details, sir.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Was that money spent in on-reserve or off-reserve communities? When you paid for homes to be repaired, improved or built, were they on-reserve or off-reserve?

[English]

Ms. Sharon Matthews: The numbers I just gave you were solely for on reserve. CMHC has a budget for special on-reserve programs as well; they're designated. For example, that was the \$134 million for this year and last year that we had.

In addition, CMHC has off-reserve funding that it provides. That is the annual \$1.7 billion for existing projects that we continue to subsidize on an ongoing basis, as well as renovation programs. Most of that, I must say, is administered by the provinces and territories.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Okay. That brings me to a subject that interests me a lot. I asked the question last year, when the Auditor General said that key players disagree on their roles and responsibilities.

Specifically, how is it working today? Do you have regular meetings with representatives of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, with CMHA and with the Assembly of First Nations to determine priority projects and the ways to implement them? Is there a report on that? Can we have it?

•(1615)

[English]

Ms. Sharon Matthews: I'm actually very pleased to say we took the Auditor General's report very seriously. Since then we've had in place national and regional liaison committees. These committees meet regularly. They look at priorities. They are a perfect example of how we actually work very well together. The Assembly of First Nations, by the way, is a member of the national committee. On the regional committees it is the different, more regional associations, aboriginal associations.

I'll speak about the national committee, for example. It is the committee that actually sits down and works through the needs information we have. We have a certain budget allocation. We know we can deliver so many units, we estimate, in a year. With that liaison committee, we work through where those dollars go, to which regions, and how it is split up.

Once that national committee sets the regional splits, it goes to those regional committees. Those regional liaison committees determine which first nations, how the funding will go. They plan; they're into multi-year planning. They're trying to make sure we spend the money we get as efficiently and effectively as we can.

We are working with the first nations hand in hand with this. This is not a bureaucrat in Ottawa deciding that this is the allocation today. We do, to the degree numbers are available, base that as much as possible on the housing needs. So we have a methodology that allows the committee to work with us.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Matthews.

Mr. Bruinooge, you're next and you have six minutes.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): Thank you. Just due to the fact that I'm taking the New Democratic Party's slot, I surely won't lean in that direction with my questioning. We've moved up one spot.

I'd like to start by thanking both the department and CMHC for being here today, but also for the important work that's done on behalf of all aboriginal people, especially in relation to housing. I think one of the points I personally am very excited about is the market-based solutions that both CMHC and the department are working on.

The first question I would like to ask is in relation to the \$300 million. Could you perhaps walk us through how applications would be made for that, how the communities would leverage that asset? At one point would a community have to actually receive funds from that \$300 million to correct any sort of default they might have?

Ms. Sharon Matthews: It's a complicated question. This is an independent fund. It's set up. We have new trustees in place, and they're working through right now exactly how all the logistics of this thing will work. I can conceptually walk you through it in terms of the concepts and how this will work, but the individual rules and terms and conditions are still being finalized by that set of trustees.

An eligible first nation.... As I said in my opening comments, not every first nation would be eligible for this. Eligibility would be based on things like their record on repayment, how they managed their finances, their financial capacity, much like any corporation, frankly, going to a lender trying to determine whether this is a risk-worthy situation.

A first nation would apply to the fund. If they're approved by the fund, basically what would happen is that first nation would be assigned a certain amount of what we call "credit enhancement". Think of it as a loan guarantee. As an illustration, say this first nation X gets assigned a \$10 million guarantee. That's the backing that fund will give them. What they can do with that guarantee or credit enhancement is they can basically enter into an agreement with a private sector lender and say, "Okay, I want you to make loans to my members on reserve. I have a member, Fred, who wants to renovate or build a new house. I'd like you, lender, to go out and make a loan to that member. I will guarantee, as the first nation, that if that member doesn't pay their loan, as a first nation I'll back that loan up." The reason the lender is going to be looking for somebody else other than the member to back up that loan is because under the Indian Act a lender can't go on reserve, take the security, and take the normal actions they would for you and I off reserve.

So the first nation will say, "Okay, the first step is, if the member that you ultimately approve through your normal lending practices doesn't pay that loan, as a first nation I will step up and pay." We're hoping, in most cases, that's the end of it. The member doesn't pay; the first nation will step up.

The problem is, if you're a private sector lender, the first nation saying "I'll pay if the member doesn't pay" still isn't sufficient, because at the end of the day, if the first nation reneged, didn't follow up and pay, that lender still couldn't go and recover any security or

anything else. What the fund does is it allows that first nation to say, "If I don't pay, I now have the backing of this fund. I have that \$10 million credit enhancement, as an example, that this fund gave me, that I can put up to back me up." In this way, the way the fund should work and will work, a private sector lender can go on reserve and can deal with normal financing. Individual members can apply for loans like anybody else, and as long as they have this arrangement with the first nation and the fund, it will look on the surface, by and large, like somebody borrowing off reserve.

You asked the question, will the fund actually have to step up and spend money at the end of the day? If the trustees select the right first nations, the first nations aren't going to renege on those obligations. In the ideal world, that fund will continue to grow. The interest is earned on that fund. Those dollars are available, and more and more first nations can get access to the guarantees.

We're also working this fund in terms of capacity development, trying to get first nations ready to be using the fund, in addition to what CMHC does on capacity development. While it's complicated, the real goal here is for a first nation and for first nations members to be able to proxy, by and large, what I could do when I went to my bank off reserve in terms of being able to get a loan. The reason a lender is agreeable to it is because a lender ultimately is going to have the security.

A first nation wants to do it because at the end of the day, unlike a lender off reserve, the first nation has the ability to take action, to take back that property on the reserve, to build the market. If a member reneges, that first nation has the opportunity to take that property back and sell it to another member. So the first nations shouldn't lose as they develop the market.

• (1620)

It's great for the individual borrower, because if you're on reserve today and try to get a loan from a bank, it's unsecured. It's a personal loan; your interest rate is considerably higher than it would be in a secured situation. With this, the individual member is going to get lower financing costs and greater access to the funds. So it's a winning proposition all around.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Now that I've asked the questions on behalf of the NDP, can I start the Conservative round?

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Bruinooge. Thank you, Ms. Matthews.

We have been joined by Ms. Crowder, so she'll be filling the Conservative slot in this case.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: We're doing six minutes today, Ms. Crowder. Please go ahead.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Thank you.

I appreciate the committee's indulgence. I was speaking to the very important Bill C-21.

And I apologize to the witnesses for missing your presentations. Hopefully I'm not going to ask something that's been duplicated.

I went to the CMHC and INAC websites and took a look at some housing announcements that had been made. I know we're dealing with estimates, and of course in the plans and priorities in the estimates that came out there were not the specific numbers that I would have hoped to have.

In 2005-06, there was a commitment made to build 2,000 new housing units in Canada over three years, to renovate 400 existing housing units over two years, to service 5,400 lots over three years, and that section 95 housing will be available to build 4,400 non-profit rental housing units over three years. The residential rehabilitation assistance program would renovate approximately 1,100 housing units over two years. We know there was money allocated into trust funds.

That's one part of it. The second part of it concerned the money that went into northern housing. When the minister came before the committee, he talked about the fact that Nunavut allocates money on a priority basis, and so on, but a study of women's homelessness north of 60 was highly critical of the vulnerability of women, not just in Nunavut but north of 60 all the way across the country.

I wonder if you could do two things. In the first list of numbers I gave, could you update the committee on exactly how many units have been built since 2005? If you can't do that today, perhaps you could supply the committee with the number later or tell us how we can, on an ongoing basis, find out that information.

The second piece of it is this. Concerning the \$300 million allocated to northern housing, my understanding is that it wasn't specifically just for aboriginal housing; it was \$300 million for the north. Could you tell the committee how much of that money has been allocated for aboriginal housing? This money sunsets, and we know the housing needs haven't been met, so what's the next plan, for after the time the money sunsets?

That should take up the rest of my time.

• (1625)

Ms. Sharon Matthews: We can certainly get you the detailed numbers, and I think we can provide them to the committee. I had answered an earlier question, I think in your absence. I believe the numbers you were quoting for CMHC were related to the 2005 budget—

Ms. Jean Crowder: That's right.

Ms. Sharon Matthews: —and I had answered an earlier question that said—I won't repeat it—that we actually exceeded those targets. But we'll get you that information.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Did you exceed in all of those categories?

Ms. Sharon Matthews: On the new construction the goal was 4,400, and we actually achieved 4,498. On the renovation side it was 1,100, and we actually achieved 1,296.

On the trust, again a question came up earlier, and neither of us is really in a position...it really is the Department of Finance. However, I can give you some key statistics on the aboriginal population in the north.

While the trust wasn't necessarily in the north allocated strictly to aboriginals, in terms of the statistics, 85% of the population in Nunavut is aboriginal, 50% of the population in NWT is aboriginal, and 25% of the population in the Yukon is aboriginal. So in Nunavut, for example, a great deal of that money, by definition, would be going to aboriginals.

Ms. Jean Crowder: But do you have the numbers?

Ms. Sharon Matthews: No. Again, it would be to the Department of Finance that you'd have to inquire.

Ms. Jean Crowder: So the Department of Finance has the number of houses that are built?

Ms. Sharon Matthews: Neither INAC nor CMHC were involved in the trust allocations. It was the Department of Finance that managed that, so any questions on the trust would be—

Ms. Jean Crowder: Then let me just back up. What you're saying is that \$300 million went north for housing, and we know those agreements actually didn't have specific targets for numbers of housing, so nobody is following up on the number of...

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Ms. Jean Crowder: Well, I'm just asking because this is the accountability side of the House that always wants to know where the money is being spent. So I'm just asking if, at some point, somebody reports on the numbers of houses that are built.

Ms. Sharon Matthews: I guess—

Ms. Jean Crowder: You're talking about provincial governments. When health care dollars went to provincial governments.... This is not about first nations; this is about when there are agreements between two levels of government there is usually some accountability for how that money is spent, whether they were the health care agreements that were made under Bill C-39 or whether they were the early childhood learning agreements that were developed under the devolution about the numbers of child care spaces. So I'm just simply asking, to your knowledge...you have no involvement in the numbers of housing units?

Ms. Sharon Matthews: My understanding is there are principles under the trust. CMHC has no involvement on that side.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Okay. So we have to talk to the Minister of Finance.

•(1630)

Ms. Christine Cram: Could I just answer for INAC? Just in terms of the housing trust, I understand the Yukon got...\$32 million of the \$50 million that was provided to the Yukon government was provided directly to first nations governments for the purposes of housing for first nations.

In terms of the 2005 housing budget, and what INAC achieved with that, in terms of new units, it's 1,493; in terms of renovations, it was 1,003; and in terms of lot servicing, it was 5,119. So if you compare that to the targets, what you see is a lot more money was spent on renovations, and it was the first nations that decided what the priority was in terms of allocation. Clearly, they wanted to put the money towards renovations.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

This brings this panel to a conclusion. I want to thank all of you for being here. We will suspend for one minute and bring panel B forward.

• _____ (Pause) _____

•

•(1635)

The Chair: I would ask members to come back to their seats, please. We have a lot to do before 5:40 p.m.

We are now ready to proceed with our second panel today regarding the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada process.

We have before us today, Gina Wilson, assistant deputy minister, and Aideen Nabigon, director general of policy, partnership, and communication. Welcome.

I understand Ms. Wilson will be making a presentation. The floor is yours, Ms. Wilson.

Ms. Gina Wilson (Assistant Deputy Minister, Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good afternoon, everyone.

I'd like to thank the committee for giving me this opportunity to be here today to provide an update on the implementation of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement, which began September 19, 2007.

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank the committee for giving me this opportunity to be here today to provide an update on the implementation of the Indian residential school settlement agreement which began on September 19, 2007.

[*English*]

I will begin with an update on common experience payments that are being made to former students who lived in an eligible federal residential school. Payments are \$10,000 for the first year or part of a year, plus \$3,000 for each additional year or part of a year after that.

To date, the government has processed more than 82,000—

The Chair: Excuse me. Perhaps you would slow down a little bit for the translators, please.

Ms. Gina Wilson: Okay. I'll speak slowly.

To date, the government has processed more than 82,000 common experience payment applications of the more than 92,000 applications received. This is in addition to the approximately 10,000 advance payments that have already been paid to former students 65 years and older.

If applicants are not satisfied with the outcome of their application, a reconsideration process has been established and is now actively processing requests. This is a review of the application by the government to ensure that the original decision was accurate and appropriate. If applicants are still not satisfied following the reconsideration process, an appeal process that is overseen, not by the government but by the parties to the settlement agreement, will be under way.

It is important to note that the administration of the common experience payments, reconsideration, and the appeal processes, as well as other elements of the settlement agreement, are court approved and implemented under the direct supervision of the courts.

Another important element of the settlement agreement is the independent assessment process that allows former students to settle claims of abuse suffered in Indian residential schools in a claimant-centred and culturally appropriate manner. The work of the independent assessment process is under way, currently processing approximately 3,600 claims, 40 of which have made it to the hearing stage of the process.

In addition to financial compensation, the settlement agreement includes the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The government recently announced the appointment of Justice Harry LaForme as the chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the naming of Claudette Dumont-Smith and Jane Brewin Morley as commissioners. With these three commissioners now appointed, the commission will begin its work on June 1, 2008.

•(1640)

[*Translation*]

The commission provides a unique opportunity for all Canadians to become aware of the Indian residential school system. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission will provide a safe environment where former pupils will be able to share their experiences, making all Canadians aware of the system of Indian residential schools and its impact on First Nation communities.

[*English*]

The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement also included a \$125 million contribution to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and additional funding to Health Canada to ensure that former students and their families have access to the health supports they need.

In closing, the implementation of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement is well under way, and we will continue to work in partnership with the parties to the settlement agreement, former students, their families and communities to ensure that implementation continues in a timely and efficient manner that is in line with the courts' direction.

[Translation]

In closing, the implementation of the Indian residential schools settlement agreement is well under way and we will continue to work in partnership with the parties to the settlement agreement, former students, their families and communities, to ensure that implementation continues in a timely and efficient manner that is in line with the courts' direction.

[English]

Thank you for inviting me today. I'll be pleased to answer any questions.

I also want to introduce Aideen Nabigon. Aideen works with me on the common experience payment as well as a number of other initiatives in the department.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Wilson.

We will again have a single round of questioning for six minutes from each of the four caucuses, and I'll begin with Ms. Keeper from the Liberal Party.

Ms. Tina Keeper: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for your presentation.

I do have a specific question in relation to a first nations political organization in my riding, which is the Manitoba Keewatinook Ininew Okimowin. They have been receiving funding to provide services and outreach for the first nations individuals in their region whom they represent, to help them complete their claims and make sure they're informed. They have been informed they will no longer be receiving funding as of May 2008.

This is a deep concern to the region, because as you may know, in northern Manitoba we have many remote communities where many individuals do not have English as a first language. I know you're familiar with these issues. Just in terms of what we deal with in our office with residential school survivors, we hear about numerous difficulties and challenges, and I know you're aware of that. However, losing this funding is going to be a serious detriment to many survivors in the riding. MKIO has suggested that 65% of the former MKIO Indian residential students will not be able to meet the deadline without support.

Could you respond to that, please?

Ms. Gina Wilson: Thank you for the question. We've had an initiative under way called the advocacy and public information program. In 2006-07, we had \$5 million available in funding. Last fiscal year we had \$6 million, and this fiscal year the program has been reduced to \$4 million. So over a single year, the program has been reduced from \$6 million to \$4 million.

Obviously, this means cuts across the country for a number of the aboriginal organizations we've been working with. When it came to working with communities to get information out, which is the objective of the program, the majority of activity took place last fiscal year, and that was when the court approvals were taking place, the settlement agreement was about to be implemented, and so on. That's why we had \$6 million for that particular year. But we had to figure out ways to reduce the number to \$4 million.

In Manitoba we were sponsoring three aboriginal organizations, whereas in other provinces and regions we weren't supporting that number. So the decision was made to support one organization in Manitoba, and funding in that one organization was the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs. So this was a decision for reduction.

• (1645)

Ms. Tina Keeper: I'd like to ask you a couple of questions in response to your answer. First, who made the decision in Manitoba?

Ms. Gina Wilson: The decision was made by government.

Ms. Tina Keeper: So it's made by government. It's not made in consultation with the three organizations?

Ms. Gina Wilson: That's right. We get proposals from a number of different organizations. We assess them based on the terms and conditions. We also assess them based on last year's performance and the deliverables that were provided. And we try to find out where we can maximize the use of the dollars.

Ms. Tina Keeper: I just have to ask if you take into account the complicating factors with those deliverables you talked about? We have a region—and I know you're aware of this—in which we have had difficulties throughout this process with partial payments and the ability of individuals to follow up. Just in that process, it has been really challenging for people who do not speak the language, who do not have English as their first language, and who do not have the appropriate assistance within their communities.

So if we're making decisions because of budgetary constraints, and people on the ground are not being served through this process, what are the answers? I mean, there are many individuals who most need the assistance.

Ms. Gina Wilson: Actually, the objective of the information dissemination program is not as much to be filling out forms and to be working in that capacity, because we have other services and initiatives available for form filling—the Service Canada centres, the CEP response centre, and so on.

We recognize, though, that some of those organizations use the funds provided for information to support former students. That's an acceptable aspect of the contribution agreements, but it's not the specific objective of them.

Ms. Tina Keeper: If that's the reality, why isn't it a specific objective?

Ms. Gina Wilson: Well, it was how the funding was sought a number of years ago. It was for information to be provided to former students as part of the settlement agreement, doing workshops and making presentations, and so on.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Lemay, you have five minutes.

Mr. Marc Lemay: There is one thing I would like to understand. We know that the pupils in those institutions have not written a lot down, so everything is probably passed down orally. I can tell you that it is working relatively well in Québec. The Assembly of the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador has not had a lot to say. The system of compensation is going relatively well. They want to know how the Truth and Reconciliation Commission will work.

Do you have those details? Is there a procedure that will be sent to all First Nations? Given the fact that the Prime Minister is supposed to be delivering the official apology on June 10, and given the fact that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is now in place—we know who will chair it—I would like to know how it is going to work in practice for the people who want to attend. Will there be in camera sessions? It is certainly going to be difficult for some people. Can you give us details about the rules of procedure, or tell us whether we will get them later?

Ms. Gina Wilson: Thank you.

I would first like to clarify that the Prime Minister will deliver the apology on June 11.

Here are some details about the commission. The three commissioners will be Mr. Harry S. LaForme, Ms. Claudette Dumont-Smith and Ms. Jane Brewin Morley and the commission will begin its work next week on June 1st. It is possible to have discussions with the three commissioners now, to make plans and even to design a workplan. I think that hearings will begin only in the fall, perhaps in September.

• (1650)

Mr. Marc Lemay: May I interrupt you, Ms. Wilson?

I understand that the three commissioners are going to start work on Monday and that it is a full-time job. Have you set a term for the commission's work?

Ms. Gina Wilson: The work is supposed to go on for five years. The process calls for seven national events to be held. At the moment, it is impossible to say in which cities or in which regions they will take place. However, the commissioners have reviewed the events with former pupils. Perhaps it would be a good idea for school staff to take part, such as religious orders and the like. There is a lot of truth; there are stories of abuse at the schools, but there were positive experiences too. The people who lived in that setting had a number of experiences.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Will there be rules of procedure for appearing before the commissioners? Are the commissioners going to travel?

I have a very specific example. In my riding in Abitibi, there was one such school at Amos. There were not 40,000 schools, there were just a few.

Is it intended that the commissioners will travel to some places that are easy to get to, like Amos, for example?

Ms. Gina Wilson: It is possible.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Who makes the requests?

Ms. Gina Wilson: Requests could come from organizations or from former pupils.

It is up to former pupils to decide the way in which a hearing will proceed. Former pupils can ask for a hearing to be held in camera, but they can also decide to appear in public.

Mr. Marc Lemay: What is the goal of the commission in your opinion?

Ms. Gina Wilson: That is a good question.

Reconciliation can be seen in a number of ways.

Mr. Marc Lemay: I have read a number of them, but what is yours?

Ms. Gina Wilson: For me, it is about becoming knowledgeable about the history of residential schools in Canada. It is also possible to...

[*English*]

a better understanding of why our people are the way they are—why we have problems with addictions, why we have problems with employment, and so on. A lot of this goes back to Indian residential schools. When Canadians perhaps begin to understand that fact at increased levels, it will be possible to achieve a better understanding and more reconciliation at a very individual level—a town next to an Indian residential school, or a non-native person who meets an aboriginal person. That's my vision.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Wilson.

Ms. Crowder, you have six minutes.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for coming to the committee today.

When Mr. Harrison was here on the estimates he gave us some numbers, and I know you talked about some numbers. He said they had received 92,480 applications since September 19. We've paid out 64,572 payments to individuals; 17,814 have been ineligible for a variety of reasons, so a fairly significant number have been ineligible.

Some of the stories I've heard from elders in my own riding are that sometimes the records are incomplete or they don't.... It's a long time ago; I couldn't tell you who my teachers were 40 years ago, never mind 60 years ago.

Could you tell me, first of all, whether that percentage is fairly accurate? Have that many been rejected, and could you give us a ballpark figure on the numbers of reasons?

Also, out of the ones who have been paid, do you know the percentage that have actually been full payment versus partial payment? I've heard from a significant number of people who say they got payment, but it was really only for part of the years.

Ms. Gina Wilson: I can speak to that. Just to contextualize it again, we've received over 90,000 applications. We've paid over 65,000 now.

I should mention there's a category of applications. There are over 5,000 of them where there is missing or incomplete information. Most of that is regarding missing records. So on those particular files we have certain policies and procedures to deal with that particular group of 5,000 claims.

We also have 17,647 claims that have been deemed non-eligible. I will just give you a breakdown of those non-eligible claims. A lot of students have applied who are day students. Day students are not covered under this particular agreement, and 1,496 applications that came in were deemed day students.

Another 7,338 claims were schools not on the list. So it was people applying who don't have their school currently recognized on the list.

Another 8,812 applications that have come in as deemed ineligible are applications that have come in where we do not have records for those particular claims, but we do have complete records for the particular years they were asking for. That's that category. There are a number of reasons for the ineligibles and so on.

You're talking as well about lower than claimed. I don't have the particular statistics in front of me, but we do have a number of reconsideration requests. In fact, we have over 10,000 applications currently in reconsideration. That means they've been paid initially out of the 65,000, but they've come back to us and said, "You haven't paid me enough", or "You've made a mistake", or something along those lines. We're looking at those applications now. They're giving us additional information. They're providing us with additional details to help us locate specific information about their claim.

On some cases we've been able to provide them with more money based on the additional information they've given us. On other cases we've been able to determine that they were claiming for being a day student, because some students resided for a certain number of years and then they were day students for a number of years. For them, it's all one experience, so they see that as a full claim.

We've been able to explain to some of them that we don't cover for foster care placements or day schools. We've gone back and explained it in a better way and tried to give them more details.

That's what's happening right now. The reconsideration process just got under way in early March, so we're just getting through a lot of the applications for reconsideration now.

Ms. Jean Crowder: On the reconsideration process, what are the timeframes for reconsideration—a ballpark figure?

Ms. Gina Wilson: We expect to have about 4,000 of those claims processed by the first week of June. Then what we've set out as service standards is 90 days to have your reconsideration claim processed, for the majority of cases. However, for many cases, it'll take up to 160 days, because these particular claims are not easy to process. They require a lot of review and so on. For a lot of claims, people can be waiting to the end of the summer and into the fall.

•(1700)

Ms. Jean Crowder: I just have a quick question on the independent process. Did I hear you say you have 3,600 claims and 40 of them have gone to a hearing?

It was my understanding, in the agreement, that it was a commitment to a nine-month processing time.

Ms. Gina Wilson: Yes, and those requirements only kick in at a certain date. There was a provision in the agreement that the independent assessment process had the ability to ramp up, and the provisions kicked in I think in April. But I can get back to you on that.

Ms. Jean Crowder: So nine months from April to process...?

Ms. Gina Wilson: Any of the applications we have from April will have nine months to set a hearing.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Is it reasonable to process those 3,600 claims in nine months? It seems like that's a lot of claims to process in nine months if the date started on April 1.

Ms. Gina Wilson: Yes, it's a challenge. I'll tell you right now people are very challenged by the numbers, but we're going to do our best to meet the requirements, because we're obligated by the courts to do so.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Wilson.

The last questioner in the first and only round will be Mr. Warkentin.

You have six minutes.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for coming in, Ms. Wilson. Thank you for being here this afternoon.

I have a couple of questions. The first question is in regard to the confidentiality of the cases that are coming for consideration. I just want to make sure that, number one, there's the assurance of privacy, especially as information is collected. Of course, many of these files.... There are questions that need to be answered.

How can we, along with the people who are applying, be assured that their stories aren't being shared, possibly even going back to the communities these people came from? Is there a process to protect the confidentiality and privacy of the applicants?

Ms. Gina Wilson: Certainly, yes, we go to great lengths to ensure privacy requirements. For instance, for alternative dispute resolution cases or independent assessment process cases, which are very detailed accounts of abuse, we ensure that we work with files in the department that are security-locked, when one file goes to another file, for instance.

We also work, in the independent assessment process, with Crawford Class Action Services. They go to extreme lengths when it comes to privacy of records and so on. When it comes to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, all privacy requirements will be considered as people come forward.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: In terms of that, specifically with issues of sexual abuse, can you shed some light on how these issues are dealt with? Obviously, this is a criminal act. This isn't just an act against an individual, which is in the past. In some circumstances, both the perpetrator and the victim continue to survive. How is it being dealt with in terms of passing that information on to authorities? Or is there any process to pass it on in terms of the criminality and addressing the criminal charges that may or may not need to be laid?

Ms. Gina Wilson: That's a good question.

It's certainly up to the former students on how they want to handle their case.

In some cases, the perpetrator may no longer be alive. In other cases, we have some policies around how we contact perpetrators to be part of the hearing, for instance, or to offer testimony to the hearing of abuse claims, and so on. There are some very detailed provisions around how we do that, and we try to do that as sensitively as we can for not only the former student but also the perpetrator.

Does that answer your question?

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I guess so. It's left up to the student to pursue. I guess there's not a relationship between you and the police authorities.

Ms. Gina Wilson: When former students come to us with an application to deal with an abuse through a hearing, they've pretty well made up their minds that's how they want to resolve their case. If they choose to resolve it in another way, they wouldn't be coming to us for a settlement.

• (1705)

Mr. Chris Warkentin: But I'm thinking they're coming to you with the expectation they'll be getting a cash payment. I'm concerned about some circumstances. And I recognize that a lot of these perpetrators would be very old now. But there is the possibility that at one point you will hear of a case where there was a perpetrator and the perpetrator continues to be alive, and that perpetrator may or may not still be a perpetrator. So I'm just wondering if there's any provision or assurance, if in fact there is a person who might be of interest to the authorities, that there's some connection. Is there a process by which you inform the authorities?

Ms. Gina Wilson: Certainly not. As I said, when it comes to abuse claims that go through the independent assessment process or the alternative dispute resolution process, they're coming to us to deal with it specifically through a settlement, through a reconciliation, through a resolution-type healing process, if you will. They're not there, and we're not there, to bring the perpetrator before the courts.

Under the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, we have to think of these things, though, as people come forward as witnesses and

identify perpetrators. There is a role there for authorities. We're talking to organizations like the RCMP about how to deal with those cases.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I represent a constituency that has a large native population. Within the boundaries of my constituency we have a school that was run as a residential school. I've been contacted by many people and have learned of some interesting stories surrounding the school.

I've been contacted by a group of non-native students who, because of certain circumstances, ended up in the school as well. They had a lot more questions than the first nations students, because there has been a concentrated effort to get the information out to first nations students but maybe not so much to non-first nations students. We've been able to rectify that.

But their concern was that through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission there be a process that would encourage people who are of non-aboriginal descent to be notified, and that there be a concentrated effort to bring them forward as well.

Have you had any consideration of that or talked about it?

Ms. Gina Wilson: It's a really good point. It's something not well-known, that non-aboriginal people did attend Indian residential schools, for a whole number of reasons, whether because sometimes they were children of staff or that they were just at a certain location where it was best that they attend that particular school. Of course, it depends on whether they were day students or residents, and so on, whether they're eligible for certain aspects of the settlement agreement.

I don't think there have been any considerations that I'm aware of for a special stream or anything like that. It's something that's part of the legacy and the understanding about Indian residential schools, and it's something people should be aware of, that the class action includes not just aboriginal people or just first nations people, but it includes anyone who lived in an Indian residential school at that period. It's important information for Canadians to be aware of, that there were non-aboriginal people who were there.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Warkentin.

Thank you, Ms. Wilson and Ms. Nabigon.

Ms. Nabigon, we didn't get to hold your feet to the fire today, but maybe we'll have another opportunity in the future.

We have appreciated your presentations and your information.

I am going to suspend now for two minutes so that we can clear the room and go in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

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