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# Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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Chair: Mrs. Salma Zahid





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• (1715)

[English]

**The Chair (Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 72 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. Sorry for the delay because of the votes.

Today, we are continuing our study of the exploitation scheme targeting certain international students.

Before we begin, I will let all members know that because of the time period and services not being available for this meeting beyond 6:15 p.m., I've asked the clerk to cancel the second panel. They were coming in virtually in the second panel. I have kept the first panel, as they are here in person.

I would like to welcome two senior officials from the Canada Border Services Agency. They are Aaron McCrorie, vice-president, intelligence and enforcement; and Carl Desmarais, director general, enforcement.

Thanks and welcome. Sorry for the delay. You had to wait for almost an hour here.

You have five minutes for your opening remarks. Please begin, and then we will go to a round of questioning.

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie (Vice-President, Intelligence and Enforcement, Canada Border Services Agency):** Good afternoon, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to be here. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss today the challenges of fraudulent student documents.

I would like to give you an overview of the CBSA's mandate under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, or IRPA, with respect to protecting the integrity of the immigration system.

The admission of international students to Canada is a shared responsibility among the CBSA, IRCC and the Immigration and Refugee Board, or IRB. The system includes a number of layers of defence to ensure the integrity of our immigration system.

First of all, applicants are required by law to answer truthfully all questions asked in the context of the immigration application. They are also responsible for all the information and documentation contained in their application.

Second, the IRCC is responsible for reviewing, validating and approving study permit requests made from overseas. You heard

last week about their efforts in this space to combat fraudulent documentation.

Third, the CBSA will verify the admissibility of applicants at the port of entry and issue the study permit once satisfied of the applicant's admissibility.

Finally, the CBSA conducts intelligence-driven inland investigations into possible fraud. In terms of those inland investigations, the CBSA is responsible for gathering intelligence to identify patterns of concern and, based on those patterns, for gathering evidence and assessing, on a case-by-case basis, possible inadmissibility. It presents those allegations to the IRB.

The IRB, which is an independent tribunal, will hear the case, weigh the evidence presented by both sides and make a determination of admissibility. If the applicant is found inadmissible, the IRB is responsible for issuing the removal order.

The law and jurisprudence are clear. Persons who misrepresent themselves to seek entry into Canada or to remain in Canada are contravening IRPA and risk being removed from the country. However, there are other mitigations in place. All individuals who are ordered to be removed have access to due process and can challenge removal orders through various levels of recourse, as well as have access to the Federal Court. As you heard last week from our colleagues at IRCC, they have tools like the temporary resident permit to restore status and effectively stay removals. Once the IRB has found an applicant inadmissible and all avenues of recourse have been pursued, the CBSA has a statutory obligation to remove foreign nationals as quickly as possible.

As the committee is aware, currently there are a number of active IRPA investigations into cases of misrepresentation involving students. In 2018, the CBSA was investigating organized crime groups and became aware of issues with students not attending school and getting involved in criminality and gangs. This led to new lines of inquiry, which, ultimately, based on tips we had from the public in 2020, led us to identify over 2,000 cases where fraudulent documents may have been used to obtain a student visa.

In collaboration with IRCC, we reviewed those cases, and you could see the layers of defence working. As you heard last week from our IRCC colleagues, those 2,000 cases of interest were narrowed down to 1,485 study permit applications, 970 of which were refused. Then 440 applications were approved, indicating the possible number of students in Canada. Of those 440 applications, we have identified a little over 300 cases of concern. This compares to the 817,000 student permits that have been issued since 2020.

The investigations so far have found that about half of the 300 were genuine students who came to Canada to study. For the other half, we have no evidence that they were genuine students, and that will require further review. We found some instances where individuals were engaged in criminal activity.

As announced last week, a task force of IRCC officials is working closely with the CBSA to identify genuine students by assessing each case's specific circumstances. For these cases, we are pausing removals to allow the review to take place. Those who are found to be genuine students will be issued a temporary resident permit to allow them to continue their journey in Canada. Others will continue to benefit from due process and all the protections that are in place.

The CBSA's mandate under IRPA is about upholding the integrity of Canada's immigration system. Doing so allows the government to protect the 250,000 students who choose to come to Canada each year by providing them with a path that is honest and fair. By working with others like IRCC and the IRB, we can ensure that we have a system that is rigorous, fair and compassionate.

Thank you. We welcome questions from members.

• (1720)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

With that, we will go to our round of questioning. We will begin with Mr. Kmiec for six minutes.

Go ahead, Mr. Kmiec.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

You mentioned “tips”. You used the plural, but the IRCC assistant deputy minister said “tip”—one tip.

Which one is it? Was this a series of tips the CBSA had, or was it just one? It was in 2020. Are there other years in which you've had them as well?

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** In this particular case—my apologies—it was a tip in 2020 that led us to look into particular documents, verifying the validity of them. That led to about—

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Where did the tip come from?

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** We have a tip line, the border watch line. That's where it came in.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** It was just an anonymous tip from the public that came in.

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** It was an indication of a concern with an overstay.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** You said there were tips. You mentioned organized crime groups. That was the language used both by the minis-

ter and by officials from the department. Can you elaborate more on that?

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** We'll have a number of active investigations, from an administrative and criminal point of view, but also from an intel point of view, looking into the integrity of the immigration system. Each of them on their own will generate new information.

In 2018, we became concerned with what we were seeing in terms of a pattern of individuals coming into Canada and potentially using the student visa process to join criminal gangs. That, in turn, led to us looking more closely at the student visa process. There was a tip in 2020 that led to these particular cases.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** The CBSA is the one that identified the 2,000 potential cases, not IRCC.

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** We were working with IRCC.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** You were working with them, but you were the lead agency on that.

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** Correct.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Are you confident, then, that you've identified all of the fraudulent cases?

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** Do you mean in this particular instance?

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Yes.

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** I'd say the numbers are always going to be subject to change as we continue our investigations and as we dig into this further. There may be other instances that we're not aware of. That's why we continue our investigations.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** You're still investigating the particular type of fraud that was committed against these students.

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** We've tied it back to a single source, if you will, of the documentation, but this is a larger issue with ongoing concerns.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** You're still going through files, going back to these 800,000-plus study permits that have been issued.

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** No. We looked at 2,000 cases. We've narrowed—

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** You stopped there.

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** Those are the cases we stopped, yes, about 2,000.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Are you not going to continue checking into them, or are these 2,000 cases all related to the same consultants who committed this fraud against the students?

• (1725)

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** It's all related to the same consultant. We have about 6,000 active investigations under way at any one time. It's a going concern in terms of the integrity of the system.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Is it a standard practice? Once you identify these education consultants, or fraudulent, scam immigration consultants, is a notice sent out to CBSA officers so they're aware of it when they look at someone at the border and look at the documentation to try to identify if perhaps their name appears anywhere on the documents?

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** We do share information. We do have border watch-lists. I'm sure in this particular instance we did that.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Can I ask you, then, about school administrators? I have an email here between CBSA and a school administrator for international admissions. This one is with Seneca College.

How often does this type of exchange happen? This is three years after the fact in the particular case that I have on my tablet. How often do officers communicate with colleges to verify whether an admissions letter is real or not?

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** I wouldn't be able to hazard a guess in terms of how often it occurs. As part of normal investigative practices, one way of confirming the validity of a letter would be to confirm with the educational institution.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** When through IRCC, through the portal, a person provides an application, does CBSA at that point, when it's an international student getting a study permit, do a secondary review to validate whether the acceptance letter is a real letter or whether the students are being defrauded? Or do you only check after, once it's a permanent residency application? In each case that I have here, it's a permanent residency application.

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** Again, in terms of roles and responsibilities, the IRCC is responsible at the stage of the initial application to assess the validity of the documents. That's their role and responsibility. You've heard what they do to combat fraudulent documents.

The particular role we played in this case was doing the inland investigations. Post-arrival, we received the tips and information that led us down an investigative path. That led us to conclude that there were fraudulent documents being used.

That's why I speak about the layers of defence, because you can't rely on a single layer of defence. You have that initial requirement on the students to complete their applications completely and honestly. The second layer of defence is the IRCC reviewing the application itself, and then we come in and, based on the information, may do an investigation.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Has any college ever reached out to you proactively on cases where they find out that a student has come to them and said they're a student but it turns out they're not and they've been scammed? Has any college ever reached out to the CBSA at your level or other levels proactively to tell you there's something going on?

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** I'm not aware of any.

**Mr. Carl Desmarais (Director General, Enforcement, Canada Border Services Agency):** We receive tips and information from a variety of sources via the different mechanisms we have, including the border watch line.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** I'm asking about colleges specifically.

**Mr. Carl Desmarais:** Specifically about that particular issue, I wouldn't be able to tell, but we frequently receive tips from a variety of different sources.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** What colleges, specifically?

**Mr. Carl Desmarais:** They would not necessarily preclude colleges.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Okay.

When you found out about these 2,000 cases, was an internal investigation done by CBSA about how some of these students were able to cross the border?

I have at least one study permit where the birthday on the visa doesn't match the birthday on the acceptance letter. I would have thought that at the border, that's something obvious a CBSA officer would catch. It's glaring that the two don't match.

Was there an internal investigation done into what went wrong?

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** I'm not familiar with the specific example you're talking about. You have to bear in mind that we have 33 million people arriving in Canada in any given year. Our frontline officers do their very best to confirm the validity of every document they see, but 33 million documents are a lot to review.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Your time is up, Mr. Kmiec.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ):** Point of order, Madam Chair.

[English]

**The Chair:** Yes, go ahead.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I didn't want to interrupt my colleague, since he was on a roll. However, there were several simultaneous exchanges, which made the interpreters' job more difficult.

If we want the interpreters to do their job properly, we shouldn't all be speaking at the same time. To be honest, I was able to follow the discussion quite well, since I'm in the room, but those listening to us may not be able to hear all the information in the language of their choice.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

We will now proceed to MP Ali. You have six minutes.

**Mr. Shafqat Ali (Brampton Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

First of all, thank you to the officials for appearing before the committee. Thank you for your service to Canada.

You explained how you received a tip. I understand that's how the investigation started on this. What sort of information was provided to CBSA that led it to uncover this issue of large-scale misrepresentation?

• (1730)

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** We received information indicating that an individual was possibly overstaying their time in Canada. That prompted us to look more deeply into their file, their circumstances and how they came into the country. I will not get into the specifics of the investigation, given that those are the techniques we use to find fraudulent behaviour.

**Mr. Shafqat Ali:** The media has reported that there are approximately 700 students in this situation. They are being accused of having studied in Canada using fraudulent documents. These students claim to be victims, but the investigation seems to suggest that some of the students knowingly took advantage of Canada's immigration system.

Is this 700 number accurate? What is the breakdown of the students who are deemed to be victims versus those who are not genuine? I know you mentioned it, but can you expand on that, please?

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** The 700 is a bit of mystery. We're not sure what the source of that number is. As I noted, when we launched this investigation, we identified about 2,000 files of concern. We then worked with our colleagues at IRCC to further refine them. That's when we identified 1,485 study permit applicants who may have had fraudulent documents.

That resulted in the cancellation of about 900 student permits. We identified about 440 applicants whose permits had been approved and who were here in the country. That then led to the about 300 that we are concerned about where the individuals may have had fraudulent documents.

I really want to give a caution around the numbers, because it is an active investigation, so they are subject to change. Of those, about 50% appear to have been genuine students. There were some who made real, concerted efforts when they arrived at school and found out that they hadn't, in fact, been admitted to the college or university. They made real, concentrated efforts to re-establish their status as a student and become a student.

Again, the numbers are going to fluctuate, but for 45% to 50% of the cases, we have no evidence at all that there was an attempt by the individual to go to school. We're going to dig into those cases further to understand what the exact circumstances are. Also, I'm going to say that in about 3% of files, or about 10 of the 300, we've found individuals who were involved in criminal behaviour.

There could be overlap between those numbers as well. I want to emphasize that they are subject to change, but that is exactly the work of the task force that IRCC has set up. It will be to go through those 300 files and understand the exact status of each individual.

**Mr. Shafqat Ali:** Just to be clear, there are 700 that, as you said, are a mystery. It's close to 300 students who may be actively dealing with this issue.

What efforts are being made by Canada to stop these fraudulent actors abroad who take advantage of students seeking to study in Canada?

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** This is why I think it's important to talk about the layers of defence. Our colleagues last week here at the committee talked about the efforts being made on the part of the IRCC both overseas and here domestically. The layer of defence where we become involved is doing inland investigations here in Canada. We like to think that we're intelligence-driven. We have an intel function that tries to seek information, identify patterns of concern and use that information to drive investigations.

We have two types of investigations that we undertake. There are those that are administrative but tied to the regulations. We also do criminal investigations that are primarily focused on people doing large-scale attempts at fraud and those who are facilitating the fraud rather than those who are victims of the fraud.

Those are the layers of defence. It's a constant game as we refine them and get better at detecting fraud. Those who want to benefit from our system will seek other ways of circumventing the measures that are put in place. It's a continual effort to learn with each instance we work through, and to refine our measures further and continue our efforts.

Students have the initial responsibility of completing their documentation. If they feel they are a victim of fraud, they should report that to us so we can take additional action.

• (1735)

**Mr. Shafqat Ali:** Thank you.

Do I just have 30 seconds?

**The Chair:** It's 25 seconds now.

**Mr. Shafqat Ali:** If you want to add something more for 15 or 20 seconds, that would be great.

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** I would just say again that it's important for students who may suspect they have been provided with fraudulent documents to share that information with us so we can proactively launch additional investigations and tackle this problem.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

With that, we will now go to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for six minutes.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for being here today, gentlemen, for this important study. The committee really needed to hear from you.

In your opening remarks, and also in response to certain questions put to you, you said you had investigative techniques and precise rules to determine what constitutes fraud.

Who makes these rules at the Canada Border Services Agency?

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** Thank you for the question.

[English]

I'm not sure I understand that in terms of who sets out the rules. We provide our investigators with guidelines on how and when to conduct investigations. That is the function of our organization at CBSA. We are then seeking to ensure compliance with the IRPA regulations and legislation. We guide how our investigators do their work, and they're doing assessments against legislation and regulations.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** That's what I wanted to know.

Have these rules been updated since we began discussing the issue we are debating today, which affects some Indian students? Or have they remained the same? Should we be satisfied with them as they currently stand?

[English]

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** I would say that our guidelines are constantly evolving. They're evolving in at least two different respects. One is, as I noted, that efforts or attempts to engage in fraud evolve over time, so we need to provide new and additional guidance to our frontline staff on detection techniques.

In terms of how we do case management and where we set our priorities, that's also a constantly evolving product. Part of managing the program as a constant evolution is to make sure that we're focusing on the right things and giving our staff the right tools to address the challenges we're facing.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** In short, today's experience may lead to changes within your organization for future investigations.

[English]

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** Absolutely, we're always trying to learn.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Very well. Thank you for that.

In September 2022, the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, in response to a report by the Committee on the inequity between Francophone African students and the rest of international students, admitted that there was indeed racism within its own department when it came to processing applications from Francophone students from Africa, in particular. Yet the same discriminatory criteria are used when processing applications from French-speaking foreign students from Africa to determine whether or not there is fraud in a student's file. This worries me.

Because the government has admitted that there is racism within the Department of Citizenship and Immigration when processing certain applications, I would like to know if you think there is racism or unconscious bias when processing cases of fraud within your organization. I'd like to be reassured on this point. I'm asking you to clarify this because many people listening or watching would like to hear from you on this subject.

[English]

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** Especially around issues of systemic racism, it's a constant struggle. We always have to be focusing on

that and asking ourselves the question of how we're doing as an organization.

I would say that with the processes we have in place, though, we do have safeguards. Our system isn't designed around an individual being able to make an arbitrary decision about what investigations to pursue and what action to take with that. We have a system of safeguards in place, including a management oversight review by ministerial delegates, and the guidance I've talked about to help ensure we avoid any challenges around systemic racism.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Does your organization provide training on unconscious bias when handling a case?

Sometimes it's unconscious racism. Unconscious bias is unconscious racism. So it's not necessarily the fault of the official dealing with a case of fraud or a foreign student's application.

● (1740)

[English]

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** I'm going to turn to my colleague.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Very well.

**Mr. Carl Desmarais:** We could provide you with information indicating precisely what the training given to our front-line agents consists of.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** That's wonderful. I think it's very important to offer this kind of training within the government apparatus.

This isn't the first instance of student fraud, and it's not the first time students have been victimized. In the past, I think it's happened to students from Haiti or French-speaking Africa.

However, today we find ourselves at committee to discuss a story that is disastrous for many students from India. All of a sudden, the government is implementing specific measures regarding this issue, due to the fact that these students were victims of fraud.

How is it that, in the past, when this sort of thing happened to African and Haitian students, among others, the government neglected to put specific measures in place? What is your analysis of that situation? Isn't it proof that there is indeed discrimination against students from other countries compared to students from India? How is this currently perceived?

[English]

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** It will be hard for me to comment. I'm not familiar with those previous cases. What I would say is that I think the system is working as it should. There are safeguards in place to avoid issues, and I think you're absolutely right that there are unconscious biases and the potential for systemic racism. We have safeguards against that.

The immigration system as a whole plays a role in gathering information and putting forward an allegation. It's just that; it's not our decision. The IRB then makes a decision. The IRB is an independent decision-maker that has the ability to make a decision and then reach a conclusion. After that, there are other safeguards in place, including appeals, recourse to the Federal Court and the ability to get a pre-removal risk assessment, that protect the rights of the individuals involved.

**The Chair:** Your time is up, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you will have six minutes. Please begin.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the officials for coming to our committee today.

I'd like to go back to the numbers just a bit.

The minister and officials came last week and indicated that, of the 304 people who have been flagged as having a potential issue regarding misrepresentation, 57 received a removal order from the IRB. Your number seems to indicate that it's higher than 57.

I just want to circle back to that number 57. Is 57 the correct number for this cohort of students?

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** Again, I think we want to be very careful about the numbers. This is a live investigation. We are working with our IRCC colleagues in the task force in real time.

What I would say is that the numbers are subject to change. Today I can tell you that 52 removal orders have been issued.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Does that mean the discrepancy is such that those other students are no longer facing a removal order and it has now been eliminated? Or is it just that there's a simple discrepancy in the number?

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** It's the best information available at that moment in time. That's what I would say.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I see.

The CBSA, of course, enforces deportation orders. In this instance with the students who have been identified, some of them are awaiting meetings with the CBSA. Will the CBSA be having separate meetings with them, or will they be rolled into part of the task force investigation?

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** Just bear in mind that the universe of potential people being removed from Canada is considerably larger than the 300 we're talking about or even the 52. However, with regard to the individuals implicated in this case, we're going to put them through the task force process to understand exactly what

their statuses are. Were they legitimate, genuine students or not? At that point, we'll be closing the loop with the individuals involved.

• (1745)

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Okay, so they won't have to do both meetings—a meeting with the task force and then an additional one with the CBSA.

I'm just trying to determine whether we are duplicating the effort here. Do the students have to meet with the CBSA and then go through the task force process separately?

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** I don't anticipate that the task force will meet with the students, although it may meet with officials to gather information about particular cases. In particular, if we don't have evidence that they attended a school, we will give people the opportunity to provide that information.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** That means the meetings will be ongoing, so they will be meeting with the CBSA separately from the task force.

**Mr. Aaron McCrorie:** Conceivably.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

Madam Chair, at this juncture I'd like to raise an issue as a question of privilege. As you will recall, I flagged the issue and discrepancy around the press release. It's very upsetting to me that this has occurred. I note that you have since sent an email to all committee members with your explanation. However, your explanation, frankly, does not resolve the issue, in my view.

Just by way of background, on June 5, I moved the following motion:

That, following news reports that international students admitted into Canada with valid study permits were issued fraudulent college acceptance letters by immigration consultants, and are now facing deportation, the committee issue a news release to condemn the actions of these fraudulent 'ghost consultants' and call on the Canada Border Services Agency to immediately stay pending deportations of affected international students, waive inadmissibility on the basis of misrepresentation and provide an alternate pathway to permanent status...or a broad regularization program.

That motion was subsequently amended by MP Sukh Dhaliwal to add the following: "that the committee invite the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship for one hour, the Minister of Public Safety for one hour, and department officials for one hour each to provide a briefing on the situation, for a total of four hours." That amendment was passed unanimously.

Following that debate, a Conservative member, MP Brad Redekopp, moved an amendment to change the language of my motion from "provide an alternate pathway to permanent status for those impacted" to "provide a path to reapply for permanent residency for those impacted". I objected to that proposed amendment. After some debate with the committee, that amendment was called to a recorded vote and it was defeated. There was some other ongoing discussion, but ultimately the motion that was finally passed unanimously incorporated my wording of the motion along with the amendment proposed by MP Dhaliwal. I won't belabour the point in terms of what that language is. I already put that on the record.



Then on June 14, one week following the adoption of that motion, committee members received a copy of the press release from the clerk. To my dismay, the release did not reflect the language of the motion passed. In fact, it misconstrued the motion that was passed. It contained information that was not part of the motion. Namely, it indicated that the committee will begin a study on the issue.

Moreover—and more critically, from my perspective—it omitted critical language, that being the call for the government to waive inadmissibility based on misrepresentation and to provide an alternate pathway to permanent residency to the international students. That language was not incorporated. There were clearly editorial measures taken with the drafting of that press release.

Madam Chair, after I raised that with you, as indicated, you sent committee members an email on June 19. We received your email, and your explanation is as follows:

The text was drafted with the intention of providing a coherent, accurate, and faithful news release based on the information available at the time and the motion adopted by the committee on June 7. As Chair, I approved this draft and instructed staff to publish it.

Then you went on to say, “It is regrettable that all members of the committee were not satisfied with the final form of the news release.”

What's clear, Madam Chair, is that you directed this press release to be issued and the press release does not reflect the direction from the committee. It omitted, as I indicated, critical information. It editorialized other information that you perceived to be valid for the press release.

• (1750)

To that end, I believe that all committee members' privilege has been violated. In the past, press releases have been issued. For example, I cite when my good colleague sitting next to me, MP Brunelle-Duceppe, moved a motion related to the Uyghurs. That motion and the intent of it were entirely reflected in the press release. It did not have editorialized language in it, as we do in this instance. The press release did not omit critical information, as we are seeing in this instance. That is to say that I believe a violation of privilege has occurred, and I am therefore seeking a remedy.

On the committee chair's role, the online “Privileges and Immunities” chapter states:

Unlike the Speaker, the Chair of a committee does not have the power to censure disorder or decide questions of privilege. Should a Member wish to raise a question of privilege in committee, or should some event occur in committee which appears to be a breach of privilege or contempt, the Chair of the committee will recognize the Member and hear the question of privilege, or, in the case of some incident, suggest that the committee deal with the matter.

It goes on to say:

The Chair, however, has no authority to rule that a breach of privilege or contempt has occurred. The role of the Chair in such instances is to determine whether the matter raised does in fact touch on privilege and is not a point of order, a grievance or a matter of debate. If the Chair is of the opinion that the Member's interjection deals with a point of order, a grievance or a matter of debate, or that the incident is within the powers of the committee to deal with, the Chair will rule accordingly giving reasons. The committee cannot then consider the matter further as a question of privilege. Should a Member disagree with the Chair's decision, the Member can appeal the decision to the committee.... The committee may sustain or overturn the Chair's decision.

Madam Chair, I do believe—and I'm so sad to say this—that committee members' privilege has been violated. This is not something I enjoy doing today, but I am very upset about it. We debated the issue. I trusted that the process would follow suit, but the end result shows something different.

I have a motion ready and written out in both French and English, Madam Chair, if you find this was indeed a breach of privilege.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

I'll suspend the meeting for a few minutes. I need to get advice before we proceed any further.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Even before I say something....

**The Chair:** Yes.

I need some advice. Then we will go from there.

• (1750)

(Pause)

• (1755)

**The Chair:** I call the meeting back to order.

With regard to what Ms. Kwan has raised, I would like to give my ruling.

On June 7, 2023, the committee adopted a motion to issue a news release concerning international students who were victims of fraud. The motion indicated what message the news release should convey but did not go as far as to require specific, unchanged wording.

As is normally the case, a draft was prepared using the best information at the time and seeking to remain faithful to the terms of the motion. The chair used due and proper discretion to approve this draft based on the chair's interpretation of the motion. While the chair recognizes that certain members are not satisfied with the final form of the news release, and while I'll make sure as chair to endeavour to avoid this situation in the future by consulting the committee, the order of the committee was nevertheless duly carried out. Accordingly, the matter raised by the member does not relate to privilege.

That's my ruling.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I challenge the chair.

**The Chair:** Based on what Ms. Kwan has said, we will vote. The question is, shall the ruling of the chair be sustained?

(Ruling of the chair overturned: nays 6; yeas 5)

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Ms. Kwan.

• (1800)

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you very much.

To that end, Madam Chair, I have a motion that I would like to move. I have copies of it in both French and English. I'll pass them down.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Do you want me to pass them around?

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Yes, if you will, please.

Thank you very much to my very helpful colleague MP Brunelle-Duceppe.

I'll wait for everybody to get a copy of this motion. My staff is also sending it electronically to the clerk.

**The Chair:** I'll suspend the meeting for two or three minutes so that all members can read the motion, and then we will come back.

I'm sorry to both our witnesses.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.):** Madam Chair, I had my hand up.

**The Chair:** Mr. Dhaliwal, you have the floor.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just want to make sure that I thank the officials. This was a very important issue, very near and dear to me and to some of my constituents—

**The Chair:** Mr. Dhaliwal, I'm sorry for interrupting, but that's not a point of order.

I am suspending the meeting for two minutes so that everyone can look at the motion, and then we will come back.

The meeting is suspended.

• (1800)

(Pause)

• (1800)

**The Chair:** I call the meeting back to order. I request that all members take their seat.

Go ahead, Ms. Kwan.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I move the following motion:

That the committee report to the House of Commons the potential breach of privilege resulting from the issuance of a press release by the committee on June 14, 2023, which altered the language that was adopted in the motion unanimously on June 7, 2023, by editorializing the content of the motion, adding additional information that was not part of the original motion, and outright omitting information, including the specific call to waive inadmissibility on the basis of misrepresentation; the motion specifically instructed the committee to issue a news release to “condemn the actions of these fraudulent ‘ghost consultants’ and call on the Canada Border Services Agency to immediately stay pending deportations of affected international students, waive inadmissibility on the basis of misrepresentation and provide an alternate pathway to permanent status for those impacted, such as the Humanitarian and Compassionate application process or a broad regularization program” and this was not accurately reflected in the content of the issued press release.

I will speak very briefly to it.

I don't normally like these procedural games. Those who know me will know that this is not the kind of thing I do. I don't relish this moment, but I think it is wrong for the work of the committee—when we agreed and a motion was passed unanimously—to not be carried out.

The explanation you provided, Madam Chair, is deficient. It does not even acknowledge the very premise of the discrepancy that did occur. It's not a matter of interpretation when the motion very specifically calls for inadmissibility to be acknowledged and for it to be waived.

We debated the matter with respect to making the broad regularization program available and providing the alternate permanent residency status initiative to the students. We debated this and still the press release came out not reflecting it. Rather, it very much aligned with what the government is going to proceed with.

That is not acceptable. That is why I'm moving this motion.

• (1805)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

I have a speaking list.

We'll go to Mr. Redekopp and then Mr. Dhaliwal.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Point of order, Madam Chair.

I asked to speak before you decided to suspend the meeting. My name should have been on the list quite awhile ago.

[English]

**The Chair:** I gave the floor to Mr. Redekopp, so we will come to you after that.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Madam Chair, I raised my hand 10 minutes ago.

[English]

**The Chair:** We suspended. I'm sorry for that.

I gave the floor, so we will come back to you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

**Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.):** Can I have a copy of the press release to analyze it and understand what was released exactly?

**The Chair:** Okay. We will get it to you.

Go ahead, Mr. Redekopp.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have a couple thoughts on this motion.

I agree with what Ms. Kwan is saying. In this specific motion, she highlighted that when we talked about this at committee, we agreed with part of it. We wanted to make some changes. Quite frankly, we weren't super happy with the final version of this motion, but it was better than nothing, so we did agree to it. It was unanimous, as she pointed out. The point is that it wasn't exactly what we wanted, but it was close enough, so we went with it.

I agree with her that I don't think the way the press release came out at all reflected what was passed by the committee. I may have agreed or disagreed with what the press release looked like, but that's not the point. The point is that the committee made a decision. Whether I agreed with it fully or not is also not the point. The committee made a decision and that's how it should have come out. That's the reason I agree with this.

Another point related to that is that I find a bit of a similarity here. As you all know, I moved a motion four times to study this issue of international students and four times it was voted down by the NDP and the Liberals. Ultimately, it was eventually adopted in a different motion by Ms. Kwan, which was massaged and changed into something that was better suited to, I think, what the Liberals wanted.

My point is that it's the same type of thing: We wanted to do something, and then it was massaged over time and changed into something else. That's a little like what we're seeing here with this press release. That concerns me. If we make a decision, I think we need to do it. That's why I'm supporting what Ms. Kwan is talking about here.

● (1810)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Redekopp.

We will go to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, I'm sorry for that confusion. At that time, the meeting was suspended.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** There's no problem, Madam Chair. You know you're my favourite chair, even if I vote against your decisions.

There are barely five minutes left for our meeting and we won't be able to go past 6:15 p.m. because of House resources.

I therefore propose to my honourable colleagues that we proceed to the vote immediately if we want to move on to something else at the next meeting. Otherwise, we'll have to come back to this.

The Liberals are signalling that they don't agree with me; I have a feeling I won't be successful, which is unfortunate, because we should be doing our job. We already know how everyone is going to vote. I know exactly how my Conservative friends are going to vote and I know exactly how Ms. Kwan is going to vote. Of course, I also know how I'm going to vote.

I think we should end the meeting by doing our job, by voting on the motion, by not trying to filibuster and by making the people we represent in the federal government proud. Those are the words of a Quebec sovereignist.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Go ahead, Mr. Dhaliwal.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair, I always respect my dear friend Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe. On the other hand, I have to be accountable to my constituents and have to make sure that I put things on the record as well.

Earlier, Mr. Redekopp mentioned that we Liberals did not support his motion. That has never been the intent. The intent was to make sure that we finished the citizenship bill first and then continued with this study. This study was equally important, but at the

same time, we as committee members had a legislative agenda in front of us that we needed to finish. In fact, we know exactly who filibustered that one. I don't need to mention it, because I don't want to get into an argument on this.

I can tell you that as soon as that bill was reported to the House, we as a committee started important work on the issue that the students are facing. Those victim students already have a lot of toll on their minds, and they want to clear up many questions. I had a meeting with them in June and they raised many questions. In fact, I was ready to ask those questions today of the officials from the CBSA so those students could have first-hand answers from the CBSA. Unfortunately, with the way things are going now, I don't think I will be able to get to those questions on what students faced. I can tell you that the intent from every member was to help those students, whether members were Conservative, Liberal, NDP, you name it. However, that is another issue.

The issue right now is the students who were victims of this fraudulent scheme, which is very important. We need to know what the process from the CBSA is going to be. I know the CBSA had already said to us that if the students have gone to university, have completed their education, are working in a workplace and have not been involved in any criminal activities.... Those types of students were genuine students. I wanted to make sure that I was able to ask questions today of the CBSA so the victim students have that information.

I feel very sorry that we all have to go through this, not only me. In fact, I am very frustrated today seeing all this petty politics just for one press release. We are taking time away from the officials, who have come all the way here to give the answers that students want to hear.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Point of order, Madam Chair.

We were debating the motion on the table, but I think my colleague is getting a little off track.

Unfortunately, it is now 6:14.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** That's not a point of order. Mr. Dhaliwal has the floor.

Go ahead, Mr. Dhaliwal.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I had to clear that up because I'm really mad and frustrated that we are all here. In fact, on the mind of every member on this committee was helping those students. Are we helping those students now by bringing in one motion after the other?

● (1815)

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting, Mr. Dhaliwal.

We don't have resources available for this committee after 6:15 p.m. It's already 6:15 p.m., so I will have to suspend the meeting, and we'll come back on Wednesday.

The meeting is suspended.

[*The meeting was suspended at 6:15 p.m., Monday, June 19*]

[*The meeting resumed at 4:50 p.m., Wednesday, June 21*]

● (6450)

**The Chair:** We are resuming meeting number 72 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

When the meeting was suspended on June 19, the committee was debating a motion moved by Ms. Kwan to report a question of privilege to the House. Mr. Dhaliwal had the floor.

Go ahead, Mr. Dhaliwal.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair, first of all today, I would love to wish everyone a happy National Indigenous Peoples Day.

You were talking about my tie, Madam Chair. This was embroidered by former chief Karen Telford.

I want to thank Madam Kwan for bringing forward her motion.

The point Madam Kwan has made is an important one and should be addressed. However, it's also important, Madam Chair, that we hear from the panels of witnesses on this matter concerning international students. Therefore, I move that the debate be now adjourned.

**The Chair:** MP Dhaliwal has moved a motion for the debate to be adjourned. I will ask the clerk to take the vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 5; nays 0)

**The Chair:** We will go back to our study of the exploitation scheme targeting certain international students. We have the witnesses for the first panel. I will suspend the meeting for two minutes so witnesses can take their seats.

● (1650)

(Pause)

● (1650)

**The Chair:** I call the meeting back to order.

For this panel, we are joined by three witnesses: Mr. Balbir Singh, Mr. Lovepreet Singh and Madam Sarom Rho.

The witnesses will have five minutes for their opening remarks.

Two witnesses, Mr. Balbir Singh and Mr. Lovepreet Singh, are sharing a presentation.

You will have five minutes. Please begin.

**Mr. Balbir Singh (As an Individual):** Good morning, honourable members of Parliament. Thank you so much for giving us this opportunity.

My name is Balbir Singh. I'm one of the student victims. I have been suffering due to this situation for the last two years. My friend Lovepreet is in the same situation, and he will explain further our issue and our recommendations.

Thank you.

● (6455)

**Mr. Lovepreet Singh (As an Individual):** Good evening, Madam Chair and honourable members of the parliamentary committee.

I rise before you today with profound gratitude to express my sincere appreciation to each and every one of you for giving us this opportunity to address the critical issue of exploitation faced by international students. I want to thank all the MPs, ministers, members of this committee and the honourable immigration minister for halting the further deportations until the final investigation is completed.

I am here to represent those students who participated in the protest. We are affected students who have fallen victim to unscrupulous agents who have provided us fake offer letters and ruined our lives. We are victims of fraud. We are already victims back home, and we are revictimized again here in Canada.

I want to make one recommendation to the task force on how to determine whether a student is genuine or not—by checking their capability and intention. If the student is already capable of obtaining the original offer letter, then why do we need a fake one? Moreover, their intentions are clear. That's why they went to the school. They completed their studies.

In addition, once the student has got clearance from the task force, then we have a gentle request to the minister to use his powers to revoke the inadmissibility and five-year ban under section 25.2 of IRPA.

Studies have shown that 50% of the affected international students have suicidal thoughts. There are four or five dead bodies going back home to India every month due to mental stress. Students are visiting counsellors for their mental stability. Our families back home are on the verge of filing for bankruptcy, because we pay five times more fees than a domestic student. Now we have paid around \$15,000 to \$20,000 to lawyers as legal fees.

Now immigration consultants are threatening our families, too, because we are openly exposing them in the media and spreading awareness about these ghost consultants. The mother of one of the students who was protesting with us was sick. She was waiting for him, and he lost his mother. Now he has to live with this regret for his whole life. His only crime was that he was defrauded by a ghost immigration consultant. That's why revoking the inadmissibility is so important, so that we can travel back home in emergency situations.

We are broken mentally and financially, and we are losing confidence in ourselves because all of us are suffering this unbearable pain from the last two to three years. We are expecting that real justice should be delivered to us.

Apart from that, Canadian colleges are now in a race to recruit many international students. That's why they are dealing with these ghost consultants who act as sales representatives to these colleges. These ghost consultants, who are dealing with several colleges in Canada, sell fake dreams to students. Colleges in Canada intentionally create a barrier between the students and the colleges, so that students have no choice. They have to go to immigration consultants.

According to a CBC documentary on *The Fifth Estate*, colleges in Canada issued 10 times more acceptance letters than their physical occupancy limit, and when these students came to Canada, these colleges deferred these students to the next semester. A recent example of a similar incident was when a student protested in front of Alpha College in Toronto. Here I want to make one recommendation: that colleges in Canada be required to deal only with authorized agents who are regulated by the Canadian immigration authorities.

We care about the integrity of the Canadian system, and we believe the culprits should face consequences. We believe that no system is perfect in this world. However, the exploitation of international students has happened because the ghost consultants got to know about some deficiencies in our system.

Now we have to work as a team—the government, the immigration department and the international students—to rectify our system. As a representative of affected international students, I want to mention that we are already working on an awareness campaign. We are going to spread awareness among students who want to come to Canada on study permits from all over the world, because we don't want any other student to have to suffer the same pain that we went through.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Singh.

We will now proceed to our next witness, Ms. Sarom Rho, representing Migrant Workers Alliance for Change.

You will have five minutes for your opening remarks. You can please begin.

**Mrs. Sarom Rho (Organizer, Migrant Workers Alliance for Change):** Honourable members of Parliament, thank you for inviting me to speak to you today on behalf of the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change.

We are a membership-based organization of tens of thousands of migrant farm workers, care workers, study permit holders, postgraduate work permit holders, refugees and undocumented people. I coordinate Migrant Students United, the sector of our work that organizes and supports current and former international students and that has membership in every province and territory in the country.

As of December 2022, there were 807,260 study permit holders and 286,245 postgraduate work permit holders in the country. Of the 1.7 million migrant and undocumented people in Canada, current and former international students are the largest group of non-permanent residents. Like other migrants, they live and work in Canada, mostly for low wages, then are forced to leave or become undocumented. They are, in other words, migrant workers.

Immigration rules that deny permanent residence status to the majority of people arriving in Canada are fundamentally responsible for the exploitation and exclusion of migrant students. We reiterate our call for permanent resident status for all migrants, including working-class migrants arriving today on study permits. I can speak more to that in the question and answer section, but today I want to focus my remarks on recruitment specifically.

We have been organizing with the students tricked by education recruiters, including Lovepreet and Balbir, and we echo their recommendations to waive inadmissibility for all impacted students who are already deemed inadmissible or have admissibility hearings under way. I urge you to give immediate directions to the task force via Minister Sean Fraser to implement a fair process that seeks to support students by allowing all those who are impacted to self-identify and receive temporary resident permits, and also by reversing the onus and ensuring there is a right of appeal for those who are considered complicit.

Based on the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change's decades of experience creating regulations regarding recruiters of temporary foreign workers, we propose the creation of an international student recruiter regulatory regime in consultation with migrant-led organizations.

Such a regulatory regime must be based on the following initial principles.

First, the regulatory mechanism must be designed with the aim of protecting and supporting migrant students, instead of keeping out students whose agents are engaging in illegal and unscrupulous practices.

Second, all recruiters of international students must be registered with the federal government, and their names must be publicly available.

Third, colleges and universities must work only with registered recruiters. Those caught not doing so must face strict penalties.

Fourth, there must be joint and several liability between the educational institutions and recruiters. That is, if a student is exploited by a recruiter, even in India or another sending country, the college or university in Canada must be held financially responsible.

Fifth, a complaint system must be created that includes whistleblower protection, including permanent resident status for international students who come forward with complaints about unfair recruitment practices. Many of the students who have been caught up by Brijesh Mishra, Atul Mahajan, Gurbaaz, Gill and other recruiters in this particular scheme would come forward if they knew they would not be penalized.

For the recruiter regulatory regime to work, Canada must also take two steps.

First, colleges and university education accreditation processes must be taken up by the federal government. Many fly-by-night private colleges make up the bulk of the institutions where students are facing recruiter abuse. The federal government is aware of the substandard nature of these institutions, because the graduates are not issued a postgraduate work permit. Such schools, many of which are basically predatory financial institutions, must be weeded out.

Second, you must reject proposals for self-regulation by colleges and universities. Guidelines and principles created by post-secondary institutions are non-enforceable and do not provide a mechanism of enforcement to migrants.

Many migrant students have become undocumented and are among the half a million people in the country without immigration status. I want to take this opportunity to remind you that 18 months ago, in December 2021, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau promised to create a regularization program for undocumented people and permanent resident status for migrant students and workers.

• (6500)

In two days, or possibly tonight, when Parliament rises, the third consecutive legislative session since that promise was made will end. We do not need further studies or investigations. I urge you to call on the Prime Minister to tell him to do the right thing and immediately create an uncapped regularization program that grants permanent residence status to all undocumented people, without exclusion.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

• (6505)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now proceed to our rounds of questioning. We will begin with Mr. Redekopp for six minutes.

Mr. Redekopp, go ahead.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, for coming here today and sharing some of your stories. Certainly this is an issue we've talked a lot about at committee. It's great to actually have you here to answer some questions. It's taken an emotional toll, obviously, on you guys and on your families, as you described.

The protest held in Mississauga really brought this issue to light. I was pleased to visit with you guys there. I'm told I was the first politician of any level to come there. That was great, but the courage and bravery you guys showed there for your entire community and other students is the reason, really, we're here today.

What encouraged you to begin speaking publicly on your situation?

Maybe we could start with Balbir.

**Mr. Balbir Singh:** Thank you so much, sir. You came to the protest site. Thank you for that.

Actually, we have been suffering from this situation for the last two years. We visited so many MPs' offices and other places. We

didn't go public. We chose a peaceful protest to come out publicly and to share our stories with other people and the media about how we are suffering right now and the kinds of situations we have been facing over the last two years, what our real story is and how we got defrauded by those agents.

That's why we came out publicly and chose a peaceful protest.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** Are you saying that you went to MPs' offices and you didn't get a favourable result? Is that what you're saying?

**Mr. Balbir Singh:** Yes, we got a response there, but it might have taken some time. That's why we chose to do this thing, a peaceful protest, to make this thing public so the public could know about this thing too.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** Lovepreet, do you think that if this protest had never happened, if you had just waited and said nothing, the government would have brought in the measures that it did bring in finally?

**Mr. Lovepreet Singh:** I doubt it. This protest played a very important role, because we just wanted to convey the message to people, to the government, about how we feel. We are being punished for a crime we never committed. Some people are saying we should be deported and that should be our punishment. I just want to make one thing clear here. We have already been punished for the last two years, or maybe three years for some students. They have high levels of depression and anxiety. A recent study has shown that 50% of the students have had suicidal thoughts too. This is the way, the peaceful protest. We just wanted to convey our pain and how we are feeling to the public and to the government.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** Thanks for that.

Because of your voice, I guess we've gotten to the bottom of this issue, especially with respect to this specific consultant who affected you guys, but recently it was revealed that this is actually a much wider problem, with potentially multiple consultants, as you mentioned, and also consultants in other countries.

Lovepreet, do you have any idea how many students may be suffering from this scam? How many students may have fake documents, from what you know?

**Mr. Lovepreet Singh:** To be very honest, we don't know the real number, but we can say that many organizations have done surveys. Some have gotten around 50. In the protest, only 18 to 20 students came and helped us.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** Do you think in India, for example, there are only 80 people who have been affected by this?

Do you think there are more than that?

**Mr. Lovepreet Singh:** No. It's not like that. These are just the people who are coming forward and raising their voices against the injustice of the problem. This is a big problem. Some students out there are suffering in silence. They are afraid of coming openly to the media. I don't know why that is.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** Would you say there are another 10 students, 100 students, 1,000 students?

What would be your guess, if you had to guess?

**Mr. Lovepreet Singh:** It's hard to guess a number.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** Balbir, when you first came to Canada, did you have to change schools?

That is one of the stories we've heard.

Did you go to a school and then find that the acceptance letter wasn't real? What was your experience?

• (6510)

**Mr. Balbir Singh:** I graduated from Langara College. I never went to Fanshawe College, for various reasons. I got my offer letter.

I can provide a written submission of my whole story that will present it much better.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** The question that I'm really getting at is this. When students like you had to change schools—I know that's a story that some of you have—did you have to have to update IRCC with that revised new school?

**Mr. Balbir Singh:** We needed to change our DLI numbers. We changed our DLI numbers on the IRCC official website.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** Did IRCC come back to you, acknowledge that, and say, "Okay, we understand and we acknowledge it"?

**Mr. Balbir Singh:** Please, it was a long time ago. Maybe we cannot confirm that. We have some proof that shows that we changed our DLI numbers.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** Was it common, then, for IRCC to respond back to that. Do you know?

Lovepreet, do you know?

**Mr. Lovepreet Singh:** To be very honest, I don't know this procedure. In my case, I never had a chance to do that.

The main point here is to understand that the agency men placed the students in such a smart way that the students had to go to another school. That's the whole point here.

Another thing here that is important is that colleges in Canada are still dealing with the consultants who carried out this fraud. They were dealing, they are dealing, and they're going to deal. If those consultants still have connections with colleges here, this scam is not finished.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting, Mr. Singh; the time is up for Mr. Redekopp.

We will now proceed to Mr. Dhaliwal for six minutes.

Mr. Dhaliwal, you can please begin.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair, I want to thank the panel members for coming and presenting.

Madam Chair, Lovepreet Singh has said that ghost consultants are threatening them.

It has come to my knowledge that some of these students know the whereabouts of these consultants. They know where they are and what their names are.

Without naming any individual right now, would you be willing to provide IRCC and CBSA with the names, the whereabouts and information about these agents and consultants who were involved in this fraud?

**Mr. Lovepreet Singh:** We have to understand one thing. I can provide you with only the name. The agents—without saying any particular name in this committee—have major political connections back home. What they do is close their previous business and open a new one. For them, this is a piece of cake. They can be anywhere in this country or any country in the world.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** If you can answer with the name, that's what I wanted to come out. Basically, what you're telling me and the committee members is that you fellows know their names, their new businesses and where they live.

Some of the students, it may not be you.... Why don't you encourage those students to come and tell the CBSA who those people are and where they live, so that in the future no other student will be a victim the way you are?

**Mr. Lovepreet Singh:** That's a very good question, sir. This is what we've been trying to do for the last 17 days, in the protest.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Have you had any success so far?

**Mr. Lovepreet Singh:** Yes, we have some people. As I said earlier, the students were scared. It's from uncertainty. We're still trying to up the awareness.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** You know that it's safe to tell the CBSA, because they would not disclose your identity. Why haven't you done so in the last two weeks?

**Mr. Lovepreet Singh:** Are you asking me this question?

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Yes.

**Mr. Lovepreet Singh:** No CBSA officer has approached me.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Can you approach the CBSA?

**Mr. Lovepreet Singh:** Yes, I can do that.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** That would be great.

The task force gave us a briefing today. I'm very impressed with the process moving forward. Basically, their thought process is the same as yours.

You said that the capability and intention is very clear, that the students' intentions and capabilities to be students were very clear.

Particularly in your case, Balbir Singh, you said that you went to Langara College. It's great to hear that. You got 80%-plus marks. When it comes to capabilities and your intention, it was very clear that your intention was to go to school. You're telling us that students like you should be given clearance.

How do you feel about the others? They have taken their letters, come to this country, not gone to any school and taken work permits. According to you, they should not be here, because their intentions were never to be students. You do not want to see them helped.

• (6515)

**The Chair:** We'll have one person at a time, please.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Either of you.

**Mr. Lovepreet Singh:** According to me it's up to the immigration department as to what they want to do with that. We can't make suggestions to you on this. We are just demanding fairness. Our intention in coming to this country was to study, and we did that.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** That's why I met with you guys as well, and I have raised your issue in person and in confidence. I love to see people like you get the help. There are others who have taken advantage of this fake letter, this fraudulent letter, and they have not studied. Those are the ones I am asking you about. Okay, thank you.

Did the learning institution provide any assistance once you came to know that this letter was fraudulent? You joined Langara, and I'm sure you went to some other college as well. Did you get the help that you needed at that time?

**Mr. Balbir Singh:** No. We didn't contact the college, and they didn't contact us, so it was just kind of.... Our consultant told us to go to this college, and we went there and we have done our studies.

On that last question to Lovepreet about ghost consultants, you asked if we had any names. There's a CBC documentary by *The Fifth Estate*. You should watch that documentary. It's a whole documentary about ghost consultants who are working in India. They explained the whole procedure and the things.... You can get so much information from there.

I think everyone should watch that documentary, which explains everything—all the exploitation of students that is happening. Those consultants were sitting in India using them.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Your suggestion to the task force is that they should not be looking at it in a blanket fashion. They should look at it individually—case by case—to make sure that the capabilities and intentions were very clear. Do you agree with that?

**Mr. Balbir Singh:** Yes, I agree. They should check our capabilities and intentions. These are the main things. We came here with an intention, and we are capable. We got very good marks back in India, and we graduated here with very good marks. We are capable.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** I also want to bring to your attention that the minister and his staff have already been working on this plan since March. It's not that the whole thing came just after the protest, but certainly it was escalated after the protest.

**The Chair:** Sorry for interrupting, Mr. Dhaliwal, your time is up.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** We will now proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you will have six minutes. You can please begin.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll give my colleagues time to put on their earpiece, unless everyone speaks French.

[*English*]

**Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.):** Would you like translation?

**The Chair:** If I can request.... Yes, wait just one second. I will stop the clock. Can I request that all the witnesses put their headsets on, so that they can hear the interpretation?

Yes, and you have to change the channel on the speaker. Can you have a look, Mr. Dhaliwal?

Thank you. I really appreciate that.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you can please begin.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you so much for being here today at this important committee meeting.

Mr. Singh, you talked a lot about the mental health of students who are victims of fraud. You even said that 50% of them have suicidal thoughts.

Did the federal government inquire about the psychological state of students who were targets of this fraud? Are you aware of this?

All witnesses can answer this question.

• (6520)

[*English*]

**Mr. Balbir Singh:** That's why we want a quick intervention by the task force in this case, because all of these students are still struggling from depression, anxiety and financial breakdown. That's why we are again and again saying the same thing: the task force should intervene quickly, so all these students can get their misrepresentation waived and maybe can go further with their future.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Has the working group you mentioned deployed any resources?

To your knowledge, were resources deployed to offer these students psychological assistance?



[English]

**Mr. Balbir Singh:** It's still not the case, I think. We haven't had any resources from anyone until now. We are still struggling with depression on a day-to-day basis. Our loneliness is killing us. We haven't been back to see our families for the past six years. We haven't had any help until now.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** My next question may be a sensitive one, but above all I want you to speak from the heart. There's no right or wrong answer, of course.

A recent report published by the Department of Citizenship and Immigration at the end of September 2022 officially admitted that there was racism within the department itself. This was in the context of the remarkably high refusal rate for French-speaking students from Africa, in particular.

The important thing, and what I want to emphasize, is that the department has officially admitted that there was racism within it. Feel free to respond as you wish.

Did you feel that you were a victim of racism as a result of the fraud detection system and the process that followed?

If the answer is no, so much the better, but this issue really intrigues me.

[English]

**Mr. Lovepreet Singh:** With regard to racism, to be very honest, I personally don't feel it whenever I meet IRCC officers and the CBSA. It's not there.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you.

A few years ago, a similar situation happened in Quebec. Indian students had come to study at private English colleges in Quebec. At the time, they experienced the same thing as you. The Quebec government reported irregularities in the students' files to the federal government. However, the Canadian government was slow to take action. Today, we find ourselves in much the same situation.

Do you believe that the situation affecting you and your fellow students today could have been avoided if the federal government, in collaboration with the Indian government, had put certain mechanisms in place?

I get the impression that there are no bilateral discussions between the two governments, although both governments are aware of these kinds of situations.

[English]

**Mr. Lovepreet Singh:** Yes. It's correct that it could have been rectified before. As I said in my opening statement, this is our system. No system in this world is perfect. We have to make it perfect.

Another recommendation that I want to make is that we have to stop the connection between the ghost consultants and the colleges here. We have to make regulations whereby any of the colleges here in Canada can deal with only those consultants who are regulated by Canada's immigration department, and not just anyone. If

you can do that, maybe we can avoid these kinds of scams in the future.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I put the same question to the minister. In Canada, one authority licenses immigration consultants, the College of Immigration and Citizenship Consultants. However, the College only considers consultants who have settled in Canada. There's no such thing abroad.

I was told that we can't control what happens elsewhere. But I think the opposite is true. We can monitor schools and universities that do business with these people.

What you're telling me proves me right. We need to impose a framework on schools and universities in which certain foreign agencies will no longer be able to do business with these institutions on Canadian soil.

Did I understand you correctly, Mr. Singh?

• (6525)

[English]

**Mr. Lovepreet Singh:** Yes. You're absolutely right. My friend talked earlier about a documentary on CBC's *The Fifth Estate*. It explains the real connection between the consultants back home and the colleges here.

I think, to be very honest, from the limited knowledge I have, it's a matter of investigation. If a proper investigation is done, maybe new things will come up on the connections between these colleges and unscrupulous agents. Some of the colleges here in Canada are owned by the unscrupulous agents back home.

**The Chair:** Your time is up, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe. Thank you.

We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you have six minutes. You can please begin.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for their presentations today.

I also had the pleasure of meeting the students.

Also, to the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, thank you for the incredible work you do—not just on this situation but on many others as well—for people who are seeking regularization and landed status on arrival.

I just want the committee to be very clear in terms of support for the students into the future. We now have a situation in which the government has established a task force. It has temporarily halted your deportation, and it's investigating the cases to ensure that the victims are not going to be penalized.

The government is ensuring that inadmissibility based on misrepresentation is a component or part of the solution, which I think is very important.

Today, at our briefing with officials, they confirmed that they will be using section 25.2 of IRPA to apply the inadmissibility, so that's really good.

The question I have for you, though, is in terms of the long term. Many of you, of course, come to Canada to study not only to develop your education. I think many of you hope to also stay here in Canada permanently. Part of the solution I don't yet see clearly from the government in addressing this is whether or not the government will actually offer you an ultimate pathway to permanent residency. My question to you, as impacted students who are victims of this fraud scam, is this. Are you calling for the government to provide you with an ultimate permanent residency pathway?

**Mr. Lovepreet Singh:** Yes, 100%, because we have already suffered a lot from the last two to three years. Many of the students may have to spend two to three more years.

Our recommendation and our suggestion is that we be given an alternative pathway to permanent residency, yes.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you, Mr. Lovepreet Singh.

How about you, Mr. Balbir Singh?

**Mr. Balbir Singh:** Yes, I think the same way as Lovepreet Singh.

We have been studying for a long time, and mentally, financially... We don't want to spend that much money again with lawyers and other things. It's a big financial burden on us, so that's why all the students need some kind of easier pathway for their status here.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Some people would argue that the PR pathway should be the process that you would otherwise just continue to embark on.

Do you think that would be the appropriate approach, or do you think there should be a special immigration measure targeted at the victims?

**Mr. Lovepreet Singh:** If they treated us as victims and, in the investigation, took whatever recommendations we provided to the investigation team so they could find the genuine and the not genuine.... If the student got a clean sheet from the investigation, then 100%, a permanent pathway would be appreciated.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you very much.

I'm going to turn to Ms. Sarom Rho on this question.

Many of the students come to Canada with temporary status, and then we see in this instance that they are being cheated by unscrupulous immigration consultants. Other temporary foreign workers come to Canada and are also abused by the system, just because of the temporary status piece.

On this question, the NDP believes in the principle that if you're good enough to work here and if you're good enough to study here, you're good enough to stay here.

Could you advise us on whether or not that is an immigration policy the government should be adopting?

• (6530)

**Mrs. Sarom Rho:** Yes, it's a policy decision to bring people here on temporary permits and keep them permanently temporary. These

are the people who grow our food, but also students who are working in warehouses, in delivery and in restaurants, and many of the students who are part of the committee that held down the permanent protest.

Permanent resident status is not really just about the ability to stay or live in the country. It's fundamentally a mechanism for people to access the same rights, and protections and services.

Had the students had permanent resident status, they would have had the power to protect themselves and speak up when these agents did wrong, when colleges did wrong, which was largely what *The Fifth Estate* documentary was about.

Our work with care workers and with farm workers has shown us that without joint and several liability, without a regulatory mechanism, it's impossible for people to protect themselves.

Fundamentally, we call for permanent resident status and, in the lead-up to that, a regulatory regime for international students, hundreds of thousands of whom at a time are coming into the country each year.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** The students who are already here and who have been subject to this fraud scam are the students, in many ways, whom Canada is looking for. We're still looking for international students to come, but many of them are already here.

The government is embarking on a process of regularization. That's regularizing people and giving full status to people who are temporarily here in Canada, who have lost status, who are undocumented or who are refugees.

Do you think that as part of the measure for addressing this situation, the government should regularize the victims of this scam?

Maybe we'll start with Lovepreet.

**The Chair:** Give a quick answer.

**Mr. Lovepreet Singh:** Yes, you're right. As you said earlier, if a person is good enough to study and work here, they should stay here.

**The Chair:** The time is up for Ms. Kwan.

We will now proceed to Mr. Kmiec for five minutes.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Thank you, Chair.

I want to go back to something Ms. Sarom Rho said.

You said to weed out predatory schools. Can you expand on that?

**Mrs. Sarom Rho:** Many of the private colleges that set up shop on the second floor of a building are designated as learning institutions by provinces and territories, which means that the federal government is issuing study permits for people to come to the country and study at these institutions.

Many of these private colleges also work in partnership with public colleges. For example, Lambton College is a public college and Cestar is its private college wing. There's a massive proliferation of these public and private partnerships.

The students who graduate from private colleges, even as they're here on study permits, are not allowed to apply for postgraduate work permits, which creates a minefield for exploitation—for recruiters to seek to exploit these students and for public colleges to get tens of thousands in tuition fees. Ultimately, there's no guarantee that even after these massive sacrifices and this massive investment, migrant student workers will get permanent resident status.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** You called them predatory because of the way they're using consultants. Something that both of you have said is that some of them might own some of these colleges. There's a mechanism by which they're owning and streaming people into them.

Is that part of the reason you're calling them predatory, or is it the recruitment practices in other countries? Three countries are affected that we know of: India, the People's Republic of China and Vietnam. The predatory nature of it sounds like it's just shady business practices.

The provinces are designating them as DLIs, therefore there has to be some type of verification being done. Is there no verification being done?

I'm trying to understand. Is it the business practices, or is their very existence questionable? Where's the starting point of the issues here?

**Mrs. Sarom Rho:** There's a business model of recruitment that is being driven. Largely this is happening because there is no regulatory regime for the way these recruiters and colleges can operate.

We're calling for the federal government to create a registry of recruiters and make that publicly available. Colleges and universities who work in partnership with these recruiters and agents must also be liable, so that the students are not the ones being punished, ultimately.

• (6535)

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** That's one way of doing it. I'm going to suggest a different one.

Wouldn't it be wiser, perhaps, for the federal government to simply tell DLIs that a DLI that's recognized by a province cannot use a consultant overseas; it must use a consultant here in Canada who's registered with the college. It can't use them for any type of recruitment, because we don't know whether they're doing their work in the public interest.

That kind of sounded like what both Lovepreet and Balbir were saying, which was that they shouldn't be allowed to do work on behalf of colleges. Colleges should not be allowed to hire them, because we don't know what the business practice is—whether they're

getting a percentage or whether they're owned through the back door. That's my first question.

The second question would be this: Should there also be a ban whereby if you are a consultant, you're forbidden from owning a private college?

**Mrs. Sarom Rho:** There are so many examples. Every time a private college or a recruiter shuts down a firm, five new ones may pop up. We're calling for a system in which there is regulation for recruiters and these private colleges that work in partnership with public colleges.

One thing to add here is that there is a global recruitment chain, but we must focus on the Canadian anchor. The Canadian anchor is these colleges and universities that are jumping to their feet right now to self-regulate, but self-regulation means that these mechanisms are not enforceable.

We need the federal government to create a regulatory regime.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** I have to interrupt you, because I want to ask both Balbir and Lovepreet this.

In your cases, or in cases in general, how are international students paying their consultants right now?

**Mr. Lovepreet Singh:** It's different in every case, but I've paid from my account.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Is it like a direct deposit? Is it a third-party—

**Mr. Lovepreet Singh:** It's a bank transfer.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** It's a straight bank transfer. Is this transfer done before you get to Canada, or is it done once you are in Canada?

**Mr. Lovepreet Singh:** It was before. I was back home.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** It was before you came to Canada.

I'll just make a suggestion here. What would your experience be like if Canada introduced a rule, through IRCC or CBSA, that said no consultant can be paid until you are here in Canada and have confirmed that you can attend your college? Would that be, perhaps, a better way of doing it? There's a condition set for the payment of consultants. Would that have helped some of the international students?

**Mr. Lovepreet Singh:** If this could happen, it would be great.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** I have no further questions, Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now proceed to Ms. Sahota for five minutes.

Ms. Sahota.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

My first question is for Lovepreet and Balbir.

I commend you for appearing at the committee today. I think it takes a lot of courage, and you both spoke very well on behalf of other international students. You also played a leadership role in advocating to members of Parliament, to the media and in the protests. I think that's great.

In a previous exchange with Ms. Kwan, we were talking about how this group of students should be provided a pathway to permanent residency. I think there's some confusion in my understanding. To help me better understand, do you think that you should be put on the same footing as other international students, who did not encounter fake documents being a part of their file? Should you be treated the same as them, or should you be treated better than them?

**Mr. Balbir Singh:** I think we should be treated the same as them, but the thing is that some of these students—as in the example from Lovepreet—are suffering so much for such a long time. We are paying our consultants. We are financially totally broken right now. Our mental stability.... Some of the students are in depression.

I think we need to have some better treatment for that. If it is a PR pathway, or something like that, that's going to be much better, but we will agree with the minister on whatever pathway they suggest to us.

We want this thing to be resolved quickly, because it could cause some more problems to the students in the future. We expect it to be done quickly, whatever is done.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Yes, and I think things are moving in terms of government standards. Generally, things have been moving quickly in regard to your issue, because over the last couple of months they were able to override and create a special category in the system—a task force—that will give a second chance to students.

I also want to be clear that your documents and the evidence that you present will be looked at by that task force, and if you're found to be a genuine student, you will be provided the opportunity to finish your studies, finish your work and then be placed on the same footing as any other international student, so you can resume and eventually apply for PR. An opportunity to a pathway is there for those who are genuine students.

Now, I wanted to ask a bit more about your ideas in terms of unscrupulous agents who are working in connection with colleges here in Ontario and in other provinces as well. You mentioned that you believe some of them to have ownership or some interest in colleges. Are there any colleges that you can give us examples of, or can you help explain what this process looks like? How do they recruit? What do they say to the students? In your particular cases, why did you believe your documents to be accurate?

• (6540)

**Mr. Lovepreet Singh:** The first question is how they work. The connection between the unscrupulous agents back home and the colleges here is very well explained in the CBC documentary on *The Fifth Estate*. Even in that documentary, they mentioned a few names, too.

That's my answer.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Can you explain for this committee, so it's on the record as well, what the process looks like?

**Mr. Lovepreet Singh:** My recommendation...? I'm sorry. I don't understand.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** No. What is the process of recruiting a student? What exactly happened in your case? How were you recruited? Do you feel the agent who recruited you had some connection with the school or an ownership interest? How are we at this stage at this point?

**Mr. Balbir Singh:** I think they have some connection, because of all the students who were followed by those agents, most were related to just two to three colleges. That agent provided the offer letters just based on Ontario. Some students are from Fanshawe College, and others were from Humber College, so it looks like something is fishy here. Why did those consultants provide fake offer letters for just two to three colleges? There are many hundreds of colleges here in Canada. Maybe they could have provided fake offer letters for those colleges. They provided fake offer letters for just two to three colleges, so this is the thing, maybe.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** That's interesting. You also stated earlier that the particular cohort of students you're dealing with were eligible, or they met the criteria, to get into school themselves.

Can you explain that, and elaborate a bit on it? What were your qualifications? What did your grade point average look like, and why do you believe all these students would have gotten enrolment?

**Mr. Lovepreet Singh:** I did mechanical engineering back home, and I got seven bands in IELTS, so that is enough to gain admission to pretty much any college here in Canada. I graduated here in supply chain management, and if I had the chance, I could get a very good job in any field here in Canada. I could make my life better, and I could make this country better.

**The Chair:** Thank you. Time is up for Ms. Sahota.

We will now proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for two and a half minutes, and then we will end this panel with Ms. Kwan for two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Singh, as this is the last time I will address you today, I would like to thank you for being here. Your testimony is essential and we will take it into account when drafting our report.

Mr. Singh, you mentioned the working group. How much confidence do you currently have in this working group?

[English]

**Mr. Lovepreet Singh:** To be very honest, this is a very good question.

Yes, we trust the task force, and we trust the government. We hope that whatever recommendations we give here in this committee will be considered.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Isn't one of the concerns created by this working group related to delays? You had a problem with delays, as you said, earlier. Some people experience delays of two or three years.

Do you fear that what has been put in place by the government is prolonging delays?

[English]

**Mr. Balbir Singh:** We are worried about this thing, and that's maybe why we came here to speak up—so we can do this process more quickly. We can give some suggestions to the task force. We gave two filters to them—our capability and our intentions—so they should watch these things. They should do it quickly, to give justice to the students.

• (6545)

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Very well.

You've answered all of my questions. I will give you the remainder of my time so you can tell us what you would like to say to the federal government.

Please go ahead.

[English]

**Mr. Lovepreet Singh:** First of all, thank you so much for inviting us and for giving us this opportunity. This is a very rare opportunity that nobody else gets, and we got this chance.

We just want to say one thing. We are capable. We are capable of obtaining the original offer letter, so why would we need the fake offer letter?

The second thing is that our intention is clear. Imagine you had a fake offer letter in your hand to come to Canada. Would you go to any school? The person who just wants to come to Canada with a fake letter will never go to school, but these students went to school. It was clearly their intention to study, and they completed their studies.

Thank you so much for this opportunity.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe. Your time is up.

We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Kwan.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

I also just want to take a moment to recognize the South Asian community. When I was at the gathering in Brampton, there were about 200-300 people who showed up to support the students, and who just really treated you as though you were their children. It was very lovely to see. It was the strength of the community that really showed, which I very much appreciated.

I want to make a point of clarification here in terms of the supposed "special treatment" of giving the victims or the students an alternate permanent residency pathway. Isn't it the case that the students have paid exorbitant amounts of tuition fees, not because you're international students but because you're victims of fraud? You have had to pay tuition fees multiple times, and didn't actually get a return for those education fees. In addition to that, you're also faced with a situation in which you have had to hire lawyers to fight this battle, which is also costing a significant amount of money.

In light of the emotional stress and the trauma that you have experienced throughout all of this, the call is for the government to recognize that, to act in a compassionate and humanitarian way, and to offer you a special alternate pathway for permanent residency. Isn't that what you're calling for? It's just for me to be clear and to understand.

**Mr. Lovepreet Singh:** Yes, you're right.

We have to understand what our biggest loss is in this process. Our biggest loss is not the money. Our biggest loss is our precious time. That time, and the mental harassment we are facing right now... We are feeling helpless. That mental harassment and the precious time we lost cannot be compensated for.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Some of your family members have reported the matter to the police. In some cases, I'm advised by students that when they reported it to the police, the police wouldn't believe them. In fact, the unscrupulous actors were harassing your families back home. That is a price the family is paying, too.

Can you elaborate on that for us?

**Mr. Balbir Singh:** Most of the students filed a complaint against those agents, but in the initial stage, the police didn't file anything against them, because these guys have political connections. Maybe they are so financially strong in India, and that's why the police didn't file anything, but now we are seeing some success in that.

There are some files and cases against them, so we hope for the best.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Singh. The time is up for Ms. Kwan.

There are some members who are interested in having another two minutes for the Conservatives and two minutes for the Liberals. That might shorten the duration of the second and third panels.

Are all members okay with having another four minutes with this panel, before we suspend it?

**An hon. member:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Okay.

We will have two minutes for Ms. Rempel Garner, and then we will come to the Liberal side.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC):** Briefly, Ms. Rho, on your recommendations, are you saying, essentially, there should be some sort of legal requirement for colleges to warn students that if they are receiving advice, it should be from a list of government-approved consultants?

I have only two minutes.

**Mrs. Sarom Rho:** This case of the students facing deportation clearly shows that colleges and universities were looking away. The regulatory mechanism we're proposing is a way for them to not look away.

● (6550)

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** That's what I'm looking at; there needs to be some sort of legal requirement.

The second thing I wanted to ask was this: Do you think there should be legal consequences for colleges that are engaged in this activity and that are not providing students with warnings, their rights or whatnot? Would you go as far as to say that?

**Mrs. Sarom Rho:** If they're not compliant with the rules of the regime, they should face penalties, yes. I have printouts for everybody to read.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Please table that with the committee.

The last thing is that I think we have to be careful that we're not creating a pull to Canada for actual admissibility, but that we're also putting safeguards in place. There's dealing with the situation and the fraud that's happened here, and the lives that have been affected, but also making sure that our systems aren't creating pulls or loopholes in the future that could create more problems.

What I heard from you and from the testimony here was that there needs to be some sort of requirement for any sort of consultant who's providing advice abroad to be legally registered or listed with the Canadian government and for colleges to have some sort of requirement to disclose that list to students, and some sort of legal mechanism or requirement for colleges to be compliant with that sort of regime.

Is that broadly what you were getting at?

**Mrs. Sarom Rho:** Yes, and fundamentally that students have the power to protect themselves if and when these situations happen. That's possible only through permanent resident status.

**The Chair:** Thank you. Your time is up, Ms. Rempel Garner.

We will end this panel with Mr. Dhaliwal for two minutes.

Go ahead, Mr. Dhaliwal.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Again, I want to thank, in particular, Lovepreet and yourself for being able to visit.

Thank you for coming and talking to me in my office and in the online meeting with the other students. I was very impressed by the way you handled it. You went to school. You got 80-plus per cent.

You have been working with the same company for the last five years, and the same company owner has given you a very good reference. I don't think the task force has any problem—from the discussions we had with them—because you have already applied for TRP status. Basically, people like you had the intention, from day one, to study.

I'm sure it's a similar case with you, Lovepreet—that you are capable.

They had no issues. I think it's going to go very fast. I will tell you right now that we asked all the questions. You asked whether you were able to bring your lawyer. You don't need to, because it's going to be an exchange of information, but you are welcome to, if you want to get your lawyer involved.

If you have any further questions, don't hesitate to write to a member of Parliament. They will be able to bring those answers to you. You do not have to spend any more money. You do not need to be under stress. I will tell you—I give you my assurance—that everyone on this committee, I'm sure, is fighting for you as long as... You were capable and honest. Your intentions were very clear. I can tell you that, on the Liberal side, the minister is very committed to helping people like yourself.

I wish you the very best, and I thank you for your leadership, as well. Make sure you are the leaders of today and tomorrow, and bring awareness throughout the globe, particularly in India and Punjab, so no other student falls into the trap you did.

What would you do to do that?

**Mr. Balbir Singh:** First of all, thank you so much for that, sir.

Our organization has already started this campaign. We are awaiting other students. They might be in India. We will try to make it bigger, and we'll choose a different path to inform students: "Stop listening to these ghost consultants; try to find colleges by yourself and have a bright future in Canada."

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Dhaliwal, your time is up.

With that, I want to thank all three witnesses for appearing before the committee.

I will suspend the meeting for a few minutes so these witnesses can leave and we can have the next witnesses.

With that, the meeting is suspended.

● (6550)

(Pause)

● (6600)

**The Chair:** We are beginning our second panel for today.

I would like to welcome Mr. James Casey from the Canadian Federation of Students, appearing in person. We have Larissa Bezo from the Canadian Bureau of International Education joining us virtually. We are also joined by Janet Morrison and Rajan Sandhu from Sheridan College.

Welcome to all the witnesses.

We will begin with five minutes of opening remarks from each witness.

We will begin with Ms. Larissa Bezo from the Canadian Bureau of International Education for five minutes.

Please begin.

**Ms. Larissa Bezo (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Bureau for International Education):** Thank you.

On behalf of the Canadian Bureau for International Education, I am grateful for the opportunity to share with the standing committee a few observations regarding the unsettling situation that has significantly impacted a number of international students in Canada.

As the national association focused on advancing international education for Canada, the focus of CBIE's interventions will be on section (e) of Standing Order 108(2) and how to prevent similar situations from occurring in the future.

CBIE is not indifferent to the eventual disposition of these cases. We support fair, balanced and compassionate treatment for those who were duped by ghost immigration consultants. It is important for me to recognize at the outset, however, that CBIE is neither mandated nor equipped to take a position on individual cases, as our organization simply does not operate on so granular a level.

I have four brief points to make before taking questions.

First, Canada has a duty to do right by international students and live up to the commitments we have made to them. The international education sector is a globally competitive one, and Canada is vying with other countries for market share and for the best talent. If Canada fails to uphold its end of the bargain with international students and if we do not provide a first-rate educational experience, our global reputation as a study destination will be diminished and could have a deleterious impact on inbound international student flows to Canada in the future.

That is why CBIE has long advocated for a whole-of-government and sector-wide strategy to ensure that Canada is delivering the true value of what is marketed to students under the EduCanada brand. To give international students a positive and successful study experience, Canada needs to support them well from the time they apply to study with a Canadian institution through to post graduation and transition to work.

We've seen a rise of intermediary organizations offering counsel to prospective international students, and we need to ensure that these organizations and other independent agents are helping to advance the goals of the Canadian education sector in a responsible and ethical manner.

Second, EduCanada, Canada's global international education brand, should reflect Canada's commitment to both academic excellence and an ethical approach to how we treat international students. CBIE is already leading the way by working closely with our education institutions to give concrete expression to long-standing commitments to promoting ethical international educational practices and supporting rigour and professionalism across Canada's international education sector.

We're presently updating a new code of ethical practice for international education in Canada that will not only require educational institutions to commit to the values of quality, equity, inclusion and partnership but also provide them with ethical guidelines to follow against which they can assess performance.

We're also actively exploring options to develop an enhanced code of ethical practice that would apply specifically to the use of education consultants. To inform these objectives and to support our stakeholders, CBIE hosts round tables; we administer a survey of international students on a regular basis, and we develop and deliver training and professional certification programs for international education professionals, including training for registered international student immigration advisers, RISIAs.

As a complement to these efforts, we're exploring with CMIC how to more clearly articulate the requirement for designated learning institutions under the EduCanada brand, to demonstrate their commitment to and capacity for developing values-driven international education programming.

Third, CBIE is actively mobilizing its resources to generate and share insights on successful educational experiences for international students. There are numerous and long-standing gaps that exist about what we know and don't know about international education in Canada, including data on the longer-term benefits for Canada of inbound student mobility, but also how international students are faring at each stage of the international education continuum, from recruitment to arrival to Canada, from study experiences to transition to work.

One key aspect is that of paying particular attention to the interactions between prospective international students to Canada and education consultants. We'll be tackling that element within our next international student survey this fall, to tease out specifically how international students can engage with those support providers in making decisions and in submitting their study permit requests.

Lastly, on a practical level, CBIE is partnering with the provincial governments and regional international education associations to train trusted agents to build the capacity to provide quality support to prospective students considering Canada as a learning destination.

From our perspective, it's critical that international students to Canada who are seeking information on legal pathways to study in Canada obtain counsel from those who are not only qualified but also capable of providing immigration advice.

Thank you for the opportunity to share with the standing committee.

• (6605)

I look forward to your questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Bezo.

We will now proceed to Mr. James Casey.

Mr. James Casey, you will have five minutes. Please begin.

**Mr. James Casey (Research and Policy Analyst, Canadian Federation of Students):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the students who are impacted and all their advocacy work. We are here today only because of the students who stood and slept outside, endured flooding and told their stories in protests 24-7 for 18 days. Justice cannot wait for these students, which is why it is imperative that they see immediate and permanent solutions to stop the deportations immediately, waive inadmissibility and provide immediate access to regularization and permanent residency.

It is abhorrent that it took this long from the time of initial reporting for these students to see an ounce of justice, and it is frustrating that these protests were even needed in order for the livelihoods of these students to be taken seriously. Members of the public and the media have suggested that because only a portion of the impacted students have come forward, the government is doing too much. Madam Chair, let me be clear. The number of students does not matter, because even one student without access to justice is too many.

Some of these students have been dealing with being blamed for simply wanting for years to come to Canada and contribute to this country in pursuit of a dream. Some of them have been in this debate for almost eight years. We need to think about the message this sends to international students here and to future students.

We have heard the phrase, “It takes a village to raise a child,” and this is true. In the case of these Punjabi international students, this lack of access to justice and the lateral violence it creates affects their families and communities as well.

There are families and lives threatened by these deportation orders. Imagine your entire life—what you have built and sowed, and the roots you have placed in your community—gone. You can only imagine the toll that has on someone, but these students lived it, and they're still living that reality. The fact of the matter is that these students are still awaiting a permanent solution, and they're paying close attention to the actions of this government and this committee. These are some of the best years of their lives, and they have had to sacrifice, not just financially, but mentally and physically.

Many of these students are from low-income families and are the sons and daughters of farmers who may have farmed the potatoes in our poutine or the rice we have in our stir fry. Most of these families have had to make enormous sacrifices, like selling plots of land or expensive tractors, taking out high-interest loans and giving all they have for these students, who have been victims of an exploitation scheme.

These students have been defrauded of tens of thousands of dollars by this one education consultant, and have spent thousands more just to have legal representation. The consultant was known to have forged fake documents for students previously, and is still on the run. He has made death threats against these students, should they be deported.

Madam Chair, let me be very clear: the situation has not been dealt with, and deportation for any of these students is equivalent to a death sentence.

We have decided to focus on the exploitation of these students before they arrived in Canada, but when they are students studying here they have to pay over five times the amount in tuition fees as domestic students and are not eligible for housing vouchers, public health insurance, or federal and provincial loans or grants. It is truly a two-tiered system we have for international students. How can we expect international students to want to stay in Canada, let alone continue their studies, when there are international students constantly being targeted by predatory housing and employment and human trafficking schemes?

It is no wonder that there are reports by multiple funeral homes of international students going back to their home countries in coffins by the dozen each month and facing rising rates of hate crimes in Canada, but because the government does not track those statistics, I cannot give an accurate number on those figures other than to speak about the many individual cases.

When we talk about the exploitation of international students, it cannot just be about the failures in our immigration system. It must also be about the failures of our two-tiered education system, which looks only at the monetary value of international students, instead of their humanity.

Some of the suggestions to fix these issues offered at this committee are promising to see, such as the deputy minister's suggestion last week that there should be an increase in data sharing among DLIs, or that we should take up recommendations from a 2017 study by this same committee on ghost consultants.

Instead, I want to offer a different suggestion, one that enacts justice for these students and that is called for by these students: Stop the deportations immediately; waive inadmissibility, and provide immediate access to regularization and permanent residency.

Thank you.

I welcome any questions from the committee.

• (6610)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Casey.

We will proceed to Ms. Morrison for five minutes.

Ms. Morrison, please begin.



**Dr. Janet Morrison (President and Vice-Chancellor, Sheridan College):** Thank you very much.

I'm Dr. Janet Morrison, and for the past five years, I've served as the president and vice-chancellor of Sheridan College. Joining me today is my colleague Rajan Sandhu, Sheridan's vice-president of strategy and general counsel. He and I have travelled together to inform our leadership lens on international enrolment. Together, we thank you for inviting us to provide a deputation on this really important topic.

Let me start by underscoring my view that the integrity of international enrolment at the post-secondary level in Canada demands your urgent attention. I'm out in the community all the time, and the stories I hear from learners, consistent with those you've heard today, can be heartbreaking.

I'm equally concerned about the economic and social impacts reverberating across the communities that Sheridan and I, by extension, serve. I am deeply troubled by the potential impact that a failure to act could have on "brand Canada" around the world. In that context, I want to share what Sheridan is doing to improve the international student experience through the Brampton charter, which was co-created with the City of Brampton.

To start, as a leader in the post-secondary system and public system and as a champion of education, I don't frankly care where a student is enrolled or to whom they're paying tuition. Rather, my preoccupation is with ensuring that every international student receives a quality education and the services they need to be successful. This has to include transparency around costs, graduate and employment outcomes, and pathways to immigration. Our collective integrity rests on those imperatives, and they need to happen across every institution, regardless of whether it's public, private or a public-private partnership.

Sheridan leaders, including Rajan and I, for example, travel regularly to countries of origin to do in-person, predeparture orientations that are purposely designed to be transparent and frank. In between those sessions, Sheridan engages a small circle of trusted staff and partners in-country to ensure that students are fully briefed on the experience, the costs and the outcomes.

More broadly, Sheridan's response to the integrity challenge is the Brampton charter, which was ideated and crystallized through a collective impact model. I believe that this experience and leadership can support the work of this committee, can be adopted and scaled for deployment in other communities across Canada and has the potential to make Canada a best-practice model for attracting international talent.

As some of you will know, Sheridan is one of 24 publicly assisted colleges in Ontario. We have over 31,000 full-time and part-time students enrolled across a variety of programs. We have campuses in some of Canada's fastest-growing cities: Oakville, Mississauga, Toronto and Brampton. Our campus in Brampton attracts just over 11,000 learners, approximately 40% of whom are registered as international students, largely from India. These students are smart and courageous, and they work incredibly hard. Post-graduation, they make significant economic and social contributions, locally and nationally.

We've called Brampton home for 55 years. The city, however, is currently home to 70 private career colleges, 10 private-public partnership campuses—if we include those in neighbouring Mississauga—and thousands of international students who live in Brampton but attend school elsewhere, including as far away as rural and northern Ontario and Quebec. North Peel is home to a very significant number of post-secondary learners from outside Canada, a reality that was further fuelled during the pandemic by remote online learning.

For years, we've been hearing concerns from community partners about issues like housing and food insecurity, negative mental health, violence, employment exploitation and human trafficking. I can tell you that none of the most egregious circumstances recounted by media involved our students, but in our role as an anchor institution, Sheridan was compelled to step up in the fall of 2021 to embark on this collective impact journey to address the pressing concerns.

In collaboration with the city, we co-convened a group of community leaders to tackle those challenges. This round table was co-chaired by the chief of Brampton Fire and Emergency Services and the CEO of Indus Community Services, a local service agency. It included leaders from the college, from public health, from the local hospital, from the board of trade, from faith and cultural groups and from students who brought their lived experiences to the table. They met five times in six months and engaged all kinds of stakeholders.

● (6615)

The work yielded 150 ideas and informed the organization of a public summit where those ideas were more fully explored. It was a two-day event hosted at our Davis campus. There were 250 delegates in person and 600 plus who attended online. I want to give a special thank you to one of our local MPs, MP Ali, a member of this committee, for his attendance, and also a vote of thanks to our local MPs, MP Sidhu and MP Sahota.

Participants in the summit represented all levels of government, public and private post-secondary institutions, social services, the police and local businesses—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Morrison, but your time is up. You will get an opportunity to speak further during the round of questioning. We will have to end it here. I'm sorry about that.

**Dr. Janet Morrison:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will proceed to our round of questioning, and we will begin with Ms. Rempel Garner for six minutes.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll start with Mr. Casey. I was really struck by some of your comments. It really resonated with me how international students deserve dignity in a bunch of different areas.

Just looking at solutions at this point, do you think the federal government should intervene to set some sort of policy where admissions for international students should be matched or capped based on the percentage of available rental housing, dorm rooms or something else in a given region?

**Mr. James Casey:** Those are definitely aspects the government should be looking at, because right now we're taking in a certain number of international students every single year. According to the latest estimates, I believe we have just over 800,000 international students. Obviously, given the realities of the situation, especially in major urban centres like Toronto and Vancouver, where there is a major housing crisis going on, we've heard reports of some students having to pay up front a whole year's worth of rent just to secure a placement. We've heard stories of different international students having to share beds that are infected with bed bugs.

The conditions on the ground are certainly abhorrent for a lot of international students.

• (6620)

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** I'm just going to interrupt because I'm short on time.

**Mr. James Casey:** Sure.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** I want to go to the other witnesses as well, but I want to underscore your point about living conditions. It's a big concern for me.

I'll go to the president of Sheridan College. What policy does your institution have in place for matching admissions levels to the amount of available housing in the Brampton region?

**Dr. Janet Morrison:** Sheridan has actually limited and held constant its international enrolment for the past few years precisely because of feedback from community agencies about the capacity of the community to absorb—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Thank you.

Is it tied formally to a vacancy rate? Has your admissions level changed as the number of available housing units has either increased or decreased, or has that just stayed...? You haven't decreased it, for example. Is there a formal—

**Dr. Janet Morrison:** We were responsive and made a decision internally not to increase our international enrolment, as a consequence of direct feedback from the community about issues, not just in housing but also in the capacity to support students in terms of food security or local services—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Thank you. I'll take that to mean there's no formal tie between vacancy rates and admission rates.

I'll go to the Canadian Bureau for International Education. What steps have you recommended the government take to sanction edu-

cational institutions for issuing fraudulent letters? Has your organization advocated for any potential criminal sanctions or other sanctions—for example, loss of accreditation—for educational institutions that might be found engaging in the types of activities that have impacted these students?

**Ms. Larissa Bezo:** We haven't directly advocated for criminal sanctions to be put into place. Our focus has been on engaging with our interlocutors at all levels of government to push for a code of ethical practice that will finally make explicit commitments on the part of all stakeholders, including our institutions. The reality is that—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Can I just dive into that?

**Ms. Larissa Bezo:** Yes.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** When you say “a code of ethical practice” for institutions, does that mean institutions would have some sort of government-regulated responsibility to share information with international students about potential fraud and/or that institutions would have to face some sort of sanction if they were not compliant with similar regulations? Have you suggested that, or has it just been more general?

**Ms. Larissa Bezo:** We're working on a draft code at the moment. It is quite specific, but it addresses concerns. For example, you posed a question related to capacity: Do institutions have adequate capacity to host students and support their well-being? We're talking about a code that would explicitly address those issues—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Thank you.

**Ms. Larissa Bezo:** —and be clear about the institutions' obligations.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** I guess where I'm confused in all of this is that there seems to be more of an emphasis on revenue, frankly, for colleges and post-secondary education when it comes to setting recruitment targets for international students as opposed to looking at well-being. I'm not saying this in an accusatory way. It just seems, from what I've seen, that there's a lot of talk about the well-being of students, but what that really translates into is wanting revenue, primarily.

I would love to get Sheridan College on the record as an institution. Would you support this committee recommending to the government that educational institutions in Canada that are offering spots to international students should be formally required to match their admissions levels to available housing in the area and should face sanctions if they are found to not have adequate regulatory or internal processes and controls to prevent fraudulent letters from being issued to international students, for example?

• (6625)

**Dr. Janet Morrison:** We're happy to be held accountable. If the profit margin was our priority, we would have grown internationally at a time when we did not. I think the complexity of the housing market is really difficult when there are 70 private colleges with no on-campus housing and thousands of international students living in the communities that Sheridan calls home.

**The Chair:** Your time is up, Ms. Rempel Garner.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** With that, we will go to Ms. Sidhu, who will be sharing her time with Mr. El-Khoury.

Go ahead, Ms. Sidhu.

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

My first question will be for Dr. Morrison.

Dr. Morrison, I know the amount of work that Sheridan puts into providing support for international students. It is remarkable. It is true that the same standard applies to both you and small plaza colleges. You mentioned that there are 70 colleges there. Can you describe what you are hearing about these plaza colleges in Brampton?

**Dr. Janet Morrison:** I can't be specific, but Sheridan regularly convenes small tables of international students who call Brampton home. Many of them are not registered with Sheridan. We continue to hear stories of falsehoods around promises made prior to arrival in the country. We certainly hear stories about insecure housing and a lack of housing support. We hear stories about landlord-tenant exploitation. We hear stories about food insecurity.

Sheridan's programming, and I think the programming at public colleges across the province, is purposefully designed to address those issues. For example, we have mental health services that are multilingual and culturally designed for the students we welcome, support and serve at Sheridan. That's simply not the case across the board.

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu:** I have a follow-up question. I know that you are providing the necessary resources and quality education that students expect. However, in terms of the other colleges, do you think they are providing orientation or student services or other supports that students expect and that are necessary?

**Dr. Janet Morrison:** No.

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu:** Can you comment on that?

**Dr. Janet Morrison:** Certainly, from the stories we hear from learners at some of the private, smaller, unregulated colleges, they are not privy to the same array of supports. They don't have mandatory health insurance. They don't have housing support. They don't have legal support. There aren't mental health supports in place. All these things are fundamental to post-secondary success and, frankly, to the integrity of Canada's commitment to those learners.

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu:** Finally, do you think inspections and audits are necessary?

**Dr. Janet Morrison:** We're open to that and embrace it.

I would tell the committee that Colleges Ontario has proposed a charter for all members that will include a quality assurance audit to be done by a third party. That process is expected to launch in the next year.

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu:** Thank you.

It's over to you, Mr. El-Khoury.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. El-Khoury.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for joining us. The study we are currently conducting is very important, and we must be constructive and rigorous in order to find real solutions.

My first question will be addressed to Ms. Morrison or Ms. Bezo.

When I study the situation, I find myself faced with three elements that form a triangle and are linked to this scandal: students, consultants and institutions. If students know that the documents are forged, that's one thing. If not, it means they are innocent and should be treated as such. As far as consultants and institutions are concerned, if they are complicit, it means they are equally responsible. If not, it's one of them.

If a consultant is responsible, are you going to take legal action against them in Canada or abroad, through our embassies? If not, why aren't you?

As for institutions, will there also be disciplinary and judicial measures to prevent this problem from ever recurring?

• (6630)

[*English*]

**Dr. Janet Morrison:** I'm sorry, to whom is the question directed?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury:** It's addressed to you or to Ms. Bezo.

[*English*]

**Dr. Janet Morrison:** I'll just suggest that Sheridan supports putting a mechanism in place for IRCC to authenticate admissions letters directly with post-secondary institutions. Sheridan employs that practice internally. We would certainly support that being deployed nationally.

**The Chair:** Is there anyone else who would like to speak?

**Ms. Larissa Bezo:** Perhaps I will just add to that.

With respect to those institutions that in fact partner with educational consultants or agents, I think it's important to note that, first of all, not all institutions partner directly. Some institutions do not have partnerships. In fact, students individually take those initiatives in working with educational consultants.

As Global Affairs is marketing Canada and branding the value proposition, we have an opportunity to do more to educate our prospective students about who they are able to rely on in seeking that support in that initial part of the process. There's more we can do to inform and empower those students because that is not information that is proactively shared. There's more we can do to raise that profile and awareness.

The other part of this is that a significant number of recruitment and educational consultants who work with our institutions behave very ethically and do strive to support students in very meaningful ways. I think it's important for us to see there's a very significant number who fall into that category.

As I mentioned during my opening remarks, those are the trust partners with whom... I know CBIE is working with individual provincial governments and some regional international education associations to further build their capacity. You have agents who are behaving ethically, but may not have a full and well-rounded grounding in how immigration processes related to study permit applications function and how best to support students. There's capacity we can build to help mitigate some of those risks.

Not all of them are behaving nefariously, but with further capacity building, they can be an even stronger ethical partner in working with our institutions to shore up some of these opportunities for our students.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Casey, I think you were listening when we heard from the first group of witnesses, the students who were directly affected by the cases of fraud and who are experiencing appalling stress and pressure on their mental health. I want to emphasize this, because I feel that the government played a part in the current state of their mental health by sending out deportation notices.

Do you know whether the government contacted any of these students to inquire about their mental health?

**Mr. James Casey:** Thank you for the question.

[*English*]

I am not aware at this point of whether the government has reached out regarding their mental health.

I can certainly agree with the students, and from all the students I've spoken with, the longer this goes on, the larger a toll it takes on their mental health.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you.

In that case, perhaps the Committee should recommend that the Government of Canada make mental health resources available to these students.

Would you agree?

[*English*]

**Mr. James Casey:** Absolutely. They need to take the initiative. I think it's incumbent on all parties involved to be proactive and take the initiative to reach out and make sure those resources are available for those students.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Very well.

Mr. Casey, several recommendations and solutions have been proposed to prevent this from recurring.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Madam Chair, it is difficult for me to speak when people are having conversations around me.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Can I request that members not have side conversations? It's very difficult to get the interpretation.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Let's be serious. We're nearly done, but not quite yet.

There are several solutions. We've been told that a framework should be put in place for schools when dealing with students abroad to ensure that no ghost agencies were involved in their study permit applications.

Do you think that's possible? Should the Canadian government be responsible for this? In your opinion, should this solution be seriously adopted by the Government of Canada?

• (6635)

[*English*]

**Mr. James Casey:** Absolutely. The federal government should be able to increase the regulations with regard to ghost consultants. I believe, as I mentioned in my opening speech, this committee enacted a study on that same exact issue. To my knowledge, those recommendations have not been implemented properly.

Again, going back to some of the broader issues with these students, education is a shared responsibility. Provincial governments have a huge part to play in this, as well. We've seen a number of private colleges in the GTA that have not been audited at all or learned whether they are actual DLIs, yet they continue to market themselves as DLIs. There was an Auditor General of Ontario report, specifically—since we're on the topic of the GTA—where a significant number of these private colleges have not been audited. There hasn't been any mention of that, at all, and that is a provincial responsibility.

I think, if the federal government were serious about this issue, it would pressure provincial governments to audit those private colleges, so students know whether or not they are going to a college—where they pay high tuition fees—where they are actually going to get an education and graduate.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Something similar happened in Quebec. I don't know if you saw it in the media. Foreign students had paid their tuition fees in advance. When they arrived here, the college had closed and didn't reimburse the students because it placed itself under the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act. When that happened, the Quebec government alerted the federal government.

What jurisdiction does this case fall under?

First, the federal government obviously has a role to play in this, since it ultimately grants or denies the student a study permit.

Secondly, I quite agree with you that the provincial and federal governments should discuss this problem.

That said, other questions also come to mind. For example, are there enough bilateral discussions between countries? We can see that there's a particular problem in India. I have no idea why. Given its enormous population, perhaps it's easier to open agencies there, then close them and open others under new names.

In your opinion, does improving the situation necessarily involve bilateral discussions between the Canadian and Indian governments?

[English]

**Mr. James Casey:** It would be incumbent upon the federal government to have those conversations take place. Considering the education system, as we have it right now, is so heavily reliant on international students as revenue sources—specifically at many of these institutions—it doesn't make any sense why we would not want to ensure the highest ethical practices when we sign off on approving different recruiters.

A lot of immigration consultants have brought up the 2012 London statement that enacts certain regular, basic standards for ethical practices so that, when we are dealing with different consultants, those ethical practices are ensured and we don't have a situation, as we do now, where multiple consultants in different countries are saying to these students that it's very easy to get permanent residency—that they will get it within a year, and so on and so forth. They are making these large, ambitious promises that are far from the truth, and making it seem as if it's a lot easier a situation than it actually is.

**The Chair:** The time is up for Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

We will now go to Ms. Kwan for six minutes.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for their presentations.

Mr. Casey, first off, thank you for your work as the representative for the Federation of Students and, of course, for advocating for international students as well.

You mentioned in your presentation the concern that international students pay five times the tuition than that of domestic students. In the case of these victims, not only are they subject to the high tuition fees, but they are subject to having to pay it sometimes twice, if you will, because of the fraudulent activities that took place with the unscrupulous actors. In addition to that, they are also faced with legal fees that they have already incurred. Some of them have had to file to the Federal Court and to deal with this entire situation.

On the issue around ensuring that this is properly addressed, students are calling for the government to stay their deportation, to waive the inadmissibility based on misrepresentation and then, finally, to provide them with an alternative pathway to permanent residency. You touched on that, as well, in your comments.

Can you advise the committee?

Do you think that in providing them with an alternative pathway to permanent residency, such as the H and C application process or the regularization process, we're giving them special treatment compared to other international students?

• (6640)

**Mr. James Casey:** Yes. That's actually a great point.

When we visited these students and spoke to them directly, they wanted me to communicate one thing to this committee and to all the different stakeholders trying to see that these students have a pathway to justice. They made it a point for me to mention to everyone that they're not looking for any special treatment. What they are looking for is fairness.

They are making a specific point that they want the integrity of our immigration system to be upheld. They want it to be strong. They want it to be fair. At the same time, they are in the situation right now where for many of them, as far as we have heard from those different announcements from the minister, inadmissibility is not really subject to those actions that are currently taking place.

Again, the words aren't really matching up with the actions, so to speak. These students are more concerned about ensuring that the system is fair to everyone who comes here. They've made a specific point that they want the integrity of our system to be upheld and that they are not looking for any special treatment.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Yes, we've heard from the students that for them to be given an alternative pathway to permanent residency is not really deemed special treatment per se.

Do I understand that correctly from you?

**Mr. James Casey:** Yes, that's correct.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** In terms of dealing with the unscrupulous actors, this was something, as you mentioned, back in 2017. The committee studied this issue. These ghost consultants are still carrying on and preying on individuals. In this instance, it happens to be students. In other instances, it would be other immigration measures.

However, since 2017...these recommendations came forward and there's not much that seems to have corrected the situation. Here we are once again.

If actions were to be taken by the government, what would you say the government needs to do to address the issue of ghost consultants? How do we deal with these unscrupulous actors? How do we ensure that they don't prey on the students the way they are right now?

**Mr. James Casey:** I would say, because you mentioned that study or report from a few years ago, I believe it's recommendation 17, specifically, that talks about ghost consultants.

As well, we certainly need to have not just more regulation, but actual regulation around ghost consultants in this country. The fact of the matter is that these different ghost consultants...in this situation, this is just one education consultant who has so many different cases connected to him. We saw it as far back as 2013, when we knew he was forging documents and defrauding different students. The fact that it didn't raise any flags in the system or with the different departments is quite concerning.

We definitely need to tackle unethical practices and ensure that DLIs actually have the tools and resources to communicate among one another. We need to see them take a proactive approach to making sure that if they see a student coming to them and saying, "Hey, I just got told by my consultant there aren't any spaces here, but I was told I actually have a placement here. What's going on?"....

I would think, and I think most Canadians would think, that in an ideal situation, they would try to create some sort of communication within CBSA or IRCC whereby they are actually investigating this case, instead of letting it go on.

• (6645)

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** For the students who have been subjected to fraud, of course, it is enormously distressing for them. But even without that situation, in your capacity at the Federation of Students you see lots of international students. What kinds of supports do you think need to be in place to support international students when they're away from their home and trying to build on their educational development, and also contribute to Canada as well? Is there anything that the universities or colleges can do to provide better support for their students?

**Mr. James Casey:** As a start, we shouldn't be raising giant, exorbitant amounts of tuition fees on these students. I have some of the figures in front of me for international undergraduate students. They pay \$36,123 every single year, just on average. Here in Ontario it's significantly higher. I actually received an email yesterday from the University of Ottawa saying that they're raising international student tuition by 12%. That's already on top of a nearly \$50,000 annual tuition fee on international students.

The facts are in front of us. It's very clearly a two-tiered system between domestic students and international students. As I mentioned before—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. You have to wind up.

**Mr. James Casey:** —we see many different crises, but the actual solution to put in place to ensure that these students have the resources and the supports that they need is to essentially treat them like domestic students.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Time is up. With that this panel comes to an end.

I really want to thank all of the witnesses for appearing before the committee this evening. I appreciate your testimonies for this important study.

I will suspend the meeting for a few minutes, because we need a few minutes to get the sound checks done for the next three witnesses. All of them are appearing virtually.

With that, I suspend the meeting.

• (6645) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (6655)

**The Chair:** I call this meeting to order.

This is the last panel for this evening.

I would like to welcome Mr. Dory Jade and Ms. Monica O'Brien from the Canadian Association of Professional Immigration Consultants. We are also joined by Anna Boyden from the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities; and Ms. Kamaljit Kaur Lehal, barrister and solicitor at Lehal Law.

We will begin with opening remarks from our witnesses. Thank you all for appearing before this committee.

We will begin with Mr. Jade or Ms. O'Brien, representing the Canadian Association of Professional Immigration Consultants.

You will have five minutes for your opening remarks. Please begin.

**Mr. Dory Jade (Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Association of Professional Immigration Consultants):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair and committee members, thank you for the invitation. I will just give you a friendly reminder: I have been before this committee on several occasions, and I am legally blind, so I would appreciate your mentioning things to me by voice. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for the information and invitation regarding foreign students being exploited by the system.

This subject is of the utmost importance, and it's one that everyone needs to address.

[*English*]

First, as the professional association of about 5,000 licensed immigration consultants, CAPIC recommends avoiding the terms "ghost consultants" and "ghost immigration consultants" and any variation of these. Through this committee, it went to Parliament, and section 77 of the College of Immigration and Citizenship Consultants Act has clearly identified "immigration consultant" and "citizenship consultant" as being terms that cannot be used outside of this parameter.

Those who are not licensed to practise are named by the law societies, by the college, by IRCC, and by CAPIC and other stakeholders as being unauthorized practitioners, UAPs. Using the terms “ghost immigration consultant” or “ghost consultants” or other terms within that consultant terminology inside the immigration system.... The people are known. We know where they are. We know their addresses. We know who they are, so they're not ghosts and they're not consultants at all. They can be called UAPs.

The immigration consultant profession is enshrined in the law under the college act, and those who are licensed deserve to be called immigration and citizenship consultants as per the law, unlike those who provide unauthorized advice. It is critical for consistency and accuracy that proper terms be used across the board by this committee, the media and other stakeholders.

[Translation]

As such, immigration consultants should be properly recognized, especially under paragraph 77(c) of the College of Immigration and Citizenship Consultants Act, to put a stop to misleading the public in this regard.

• (6700)

[English]

I'll hand it over now to Monica, who will be addressing the other points within the five minutes.

Thanks, Madam Chair.

**Ms. Monica O'Brien (Education Manager, Canadian Association of Professional Immigration Consultants):** Thank you, Dory.

I'm CAPIC's education manager, but I'm also a licensed immigration and citizenship consultant with more than 25 years in the profession.

We also wish to acknowledge the plight of those impacted by fraud and the incredible stress and anxiety it causes.

I will add further to Dory's comments.

CAPIC acknowledges that the minister's announcement on June 14 is an appropriate approach to protect victims of fraud and meanwhile hold those who are complicit accountable. Misrepresentation is a serious matter according to paragraph 40(1)(a) of IRPA.

Coming to Canada to study is a tremendous undertaking and requires serious consideration and preparation. It is incumbent on future students, and indeed all applicants, to do their own due diligence in understanding the obligations, requirements and pathways. Not every single student will have a pathway for permanent residence. In fact, a permanent resident pathway is a privilege, not a right, and one that must be earned legally.

CAPIC's recommendations for addressing the issue of exploitation of international students are the following.

Currently, after the initial study permit is issued, post-secondary students in Canada can change their program or education institution easily by only inputting information in their immigration account. We recommend tightening up the requirements for transferring to new schools or designated learning institutions, DLIs, by re-

quiring confirmation from the existing and new DLI of the student's change of information. If such actions are required, fraud can be detected much earlier.

While victims of fraud should not be penalized, the integrity of the Canadian immigration system should be maintained. We recommend modifying all immigration application forms to add the question: Have you been assisted by any third party with this application? This will reinforce the consequence of misrepresentation. This is an amendment beyond the Use of a Representative form. Such a question should be standard on all types of immigration applications.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting, but your time is up. You will get an opportunity to talk further when we go to our round of questioning.

We will proceed to Ms. Anna Boyden from the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities.

Ms. Boyden, you will have five minutes for your opening remarks. You can please begin.

**Ms. Anna Boyden (Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry of Colleges and Universities, Government of Ontario):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Hello, my name is Anna Boyden. I'm the assistant deputy minister responsible for the advanced education learner supports division at Ontario's Ministry of Colleges and Universities. I'm here today as a representative of the ministry.

I'd like to begin by thanking the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration for the invitation to appear today to address this important matter.

Students and academics from around the world are attracted to the high-quality education offered by Ontario's post-secondary institutions and by our reputation as a multicultural, welcoming and supportive destination for post-secondary education studies. That's why there were over 200,000 international students enrolled at publicly assisted colleges and universities in Ontario just last year.

International students studying in Ontario are here as a result of considerable coordination between all levels of government, individual post-secondary institutions and local communities, with each playing a part in the journey that brings students from around the globe to study in Ontario. From the student permit provided by the federal government to the health and wellness supports from a student's post-secondary institution, the success of any given international learner is thanks to many partners coming together to prepare and support a student.

Today I'd like to take this opportunity to speak on the part of the equation that the Ministry of Colleges and Universities plays among the many partners. International post-secondary education is a critical part of building up Ontario's skilled workforce. It plays an important role in fostering the skills and future prosperity of the province. It ensures that we have a pipeline of talent ready to fill the gaps in the job market of Ontario.

International students enrich the academic, social and cultural life of our post-secondary institutions and communities across the province. They are part of why Ontario is such a vibrant and globally competitive destination.

Preliminary 2022-23 enrolment figures tell us that we're continuing to see an increase in international students enrolling in Ontario's publicly assisted colleges and universities. This is a trend we've been noticing for the past decade. That's an increase in individual learners, each with a dream of receiving a world-class education, which Ontario is well known for. That's why we continue to work with all of our post-secondary education institutions, as well as our federal and municipal partners, to create the conditions that make it easier for everyone to access high-quality post-secondary education.

All levels of government, in collaboration with Ontario's post-secondary institutions, have a part to play in the future of our international students. For Ontario, we're responsible for overseeing and supporting post-secondary institutions, and setting regulations and standards to ensure our sector is delivering excellent post-secondary education to all students, including international students.

However, it's important to note that Ontario's post-secondary institutions are separate legal entities. That means that as long as they continue to meet the requirements set by the ministry under the applicable policies and legislation, they have the authority to determine their own policies and practices. This includes partnership with education agencies and the provision of supports to their international students.

However, the ministry has heard about the challenges that many international students have faced in Ontario recently. Improving their experience while in the province is an important priority for the ministry.

When international students come to Ontario to receive a world-class education, they deserve to be free from predatory treatment from bad actors. Last December, Ontario's Minister of Colleges and Universities wrote to Minister Fraser about the need for the federal government to protect the prospective international student and reduce visa backlog wait times. The backlog on visa wait times has led to talented students choosing other countries to pursue their education and leaves those wanting to get to Ontario vulnerable to predatory marketing and recruiters from their home countries.

Ontario is doing its part through the credible work and new standards set by Colleges Ontario. This new standard will ensure that the marketing of programs to international students are accurate and transparent. It will require international agents working for Ontario Colleges to complete a sector-endorsed agent training program. It will ensure that information on services, supports and facilities is provided to students before they arrive in Ontario and once

they're in the province. Lastly, it will provide targeted assistance to help international students adjust to a new environment.

All levels of government, in collaboration with Ontario's post-secondary education institutions, have a part to play in the future of our international students. Together, we can work together to ensure that Ontario continues to be the best place to further an education.

The Government of Ontario is proud to play its part in meeting this collective goal. We strive to ensure that from the moment an international student sets foot on campus to the day they graduate, the quality of education they are here to receive is second to none and ultimately helps them to prepare for success in the workforce.

• (6705)

Thank you. I'm happy to take your questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Boyden. That was exactly on time.

We will now proceed to Ms. Kamaljit Kaur Lehal, a barrister and solicitor at Lehal Law.

Ms. Kaur Lehal, you have five minutes for your opening remarks.

**Ms. Kamaljit Kaur Lehal (Barrister and Solicitor, Lehal Law Corporation):** Thank you, Madam Chair, and honourable members for inviting me here today.

I'm pleased to see that this committee is working towards supporting students who are innocent victims in a fraudulent scheme, and having discussions about creating systems that will prevent such occurrences in the future.

I will be breaking my submissions into two parts: one regarding the affected students and the second regarding steps moving forward.

Dealing with the first part, I have heard first-hand from students caught in this fraudulent scheme how their lives have turned upside down. The halt on deportations is indeed a relief for the students. While I would have preferred an option that did not necessitate the inadmissibility and TRP route, it is reassuring that TRPs will be issued immediately after the finding of inadmissibility, to allow students to continue to complete their studies or work, depending on what stage of the process they are in.

I understand that a task force will then determine, on a case-by-case basis, who the victims of fraud are. My understanding is that the process to be undertaken will be on a priority basis and will be compassionate. I'm relieved to hear that.



However, in line with this goal to be expeditious and compassionate, I believe it is imperative that the task force permit these students to have legal representation, should they choose, given the significance of the possible outcome. Principles of procedural fairness must govern the proceedings of the task force.

Immigration is one of those unique areas of law where lawyers may be permitted into an interview with the CBSA or an immigration officer but not actively allowed to participate. Again, given the seriousness of the proceedings to be undertaken, I urge that students be provided with full disclosure, know the case to be met, and be permitted to have fulsome legal representation.

I appreciate and commend the decision to not invoke the five-year ban against these students. This is indeed a huge relief for students moving forward with their immigration processes in Canada.

However, as H and C submissions will likely have to be made to overcome a finding of inadmissibility, I would urge that the agency assessment also be conducted on an expedited basis. This can be done by way of flagging the file for expedited processing. Normally, applications with agency submissions can take well over a year or more to process.

I have been involved in other areas of immigration law where vulnerable persons, such as victims of family violence, are able to flag their H and C files for priority processing with the coding “FV” for family violence. I would recommend some kind of coding be issued for the student H and C files for priority processing. Doing so will ensure—as the minister himself said—that these students' journeys are not interrupted by the process.

Another matter that needs to be addressed is the impact of an inadmissibility finding outside of Canada for these students. Internally, we may be able to resolve the matter via the TRP and H and C processes, but what about beyond our borders? Should these students wish to travel to other countries, the finding of inadmissibility in Canada may make them ineligible, or complicate their admission to other countries. It would be important for these students to have something, perhaps a letter from the task force stating that they were innocent victims in a fraudulent scheme. This would hopefully make them whole, as best as possible, and remove potential barriers to admission to other countries.

I'll turn to the second part of my submissions regarding next steps.

Moving forward, we want to make sure that we have measures in place that will deter bad actors. Using technology strategically is going to be an important part of being able to accomplish that.

We already use technology to allow for the unique client identification of individuals through various parts of the immigration process. For example, medical examination requests and biometrics requests include bar codes that are unique to the named individual.

Perhaps something similar can be created for students, a unique bar code—or something akin to that—issued by the DLI when a student applies to that institute. That unique bar code would match the student to the DLI database and allow the student to independently verify their status.

My understanding is that DLIs already have portals that are used for reporting requirements. Perhaps these portals can be modified or adapted to incorporate this verification process. I would defer the precise process to experts in technology, but I'm confident that in this day and age we should be able to come up with something.

I would also encourage further discussions with whomever the counterparts are in India to address the exploitation by consultants of students wanting to study in Canada. Perhaps this will require consultation with criminal law experts, both in India and Canada, who can advise on ways to take enforcement steps against individuals engaged in such criminal conduct.

● (6710)

In closing, I thank this committee once again for inviting me here today.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Lehal.

With that, the opening remarks come to an end.

We will now proceed to our first round of questioning.

We will begin with Mr. Kmiec for six minutes.

Mr. Kmiec, please begin.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Thank you, Chair.

My questions are for Ms. Anna Boyden, the assistant deputy minister.

You mentioned a letter sent from the provincial minister to the federal minister. When was the letter sent? Can you provide the committee with a copy of the letter?

**Ms. Anna Boyden:** It is my understanding that the letter was sent in December 2022. I would have to follow up on the letter itself.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** That's okay. If you could provide it, I think it would be very informative.

You mentioned that the letter discussed two primary issues. One was concerns about the processing times of international student applications, and the second one was about potential fraud happening in the system and scammers who are scamming international students.

**Ms. Anna Boyden:** It's my understanding that the letter sent last December from Ontario's minister was to point out the need for the federal government to protect prospective international students and reduce the backlog on visa wait times. It's our understanding that the backlog on visa wait times has led talented students to choose other countries over coming to Canada to pursue their education, and it can leave some of those wanting to come to Canada or Ontario particularly vulnerable to these bad actors.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** I'm struggling to understand how that would impact them.

Are you implying that, because they weren't able to have their applications processed quickly enough by IRCC, they would be more likely, then, to seek out a consultant overseas who would guarantee them a spot in Canada and then provide them with a fake acceptance letter to a college in Ontario?

**Ms. Anna Boyden:** That could be one potential outcome.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Okay.

Can I then ask you about DLIs?

How does the Province of Ontario make sure that colleges live up to the standards you set? We've heard from different international students now that there are serious issues around the quality of some of these colleges and their business practices in attracting students and convincing them to come to Ontario specifically, but all across Canada. This is a specific situation in Ontario I want to know about.

What type of standards do you have? Do you have any rules set down about when you can use an education consultant? What are the rules around using a consultant either overseas or in Canada? Do you have any rules around whether colleges can hire consultants to act on their behalf to recruit international students?

• (6715)

**Ms. Anna Boyden:** I think it's important to go back and recognize what a DLI is or how the relationship of the designated learning institutions comes about and how it's a joint provincial and federal program. It's part of the international student program.

There is a memorandum of understanding that's in place between the Ministry of Colleges and Universities and the IRCC to jointly administer the ISP. Our Ontario post-secondary education institutions can only recruit and host international students on a federal study permit if they are a DLI-designated institution under that program.

To be approved as a DLI in Ontario, an institution must comply with the applicable federal, provincial and territorial legislation, and they do have to meet specific requirements that are part of the ISP policy.

I'm happy to share, as part of our MOU with the federal government, that there are specific criteria about the eligibility related—

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** I'm sorry; can you just provide it to the committee? You don't have to read from it, but if you can just table it so the committee has access to it, that would be great.

Has IRCC ever reached out to you with concerns about fraud being committed against international students?

**Ms. Anna Boyden:** To me personally, no. We do have a role and inspectors who exist within our ministry to support and investigate if there were concerns raised by a student. We do have inspectors who are responsible for conducting on-site inspections of private designated learning institutes. They visit campus locations. They visit private degree-granting institutions, so we do have a role where we do follow up and visit institutions where there could be an area of concern.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Has IRCC communicated with you directly?

**Ms. Anna Boyden:** Not with me directly, no.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** But another part of the ministry...

Is it possible, perhaps, for you to provide that information to the committee if, in the future, we decide we want to follow up with them?

Has CBSA ever contacted you about scammers acting against international students with fake acceptance letters?

**Ms. Anna Boyden:** No, CBSA has not been in touch with me or my office.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Have they been in touch with anybody in your department, then, or is there another way CBSA would contact persons in your ministry to inform you that they have concerns about how international students are being treated and that a cohort of them have been given fake acceptance letters?

**Ms. Anna Boyden:** I would have to take that back to see whether there has been any contact within other areas of the ministry.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Just on colleges one more time, we've heard there is a difference of behaviour, it seems, between private colleges and public colleges in terms of their business practices.

Do you know if there is a policy in the Ontario government on whether a consultant of any kind, registered or not, is allowed to own a private college and also provide services for that same college, in order to attract international students?

**Ms. Anna Boyden:** No.

We support and work with private career colleges under the Private Career Colleges Act. Under that act, I do not believe there to be any specific legislation around the employment status or role of an individual who owns a private career college.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Would it be fair to say that, in the province of Ontario, you don't have mechanisms to verify whether either a consultant—registered or not—or an education consultant in Canada or overseas is also the owner of a private college and is funnelling students into a college here in Canada, and doing two sides of the same business?

**Ms. Anna Boyden:** To become a registered private career college in Ontario, there is an extensive process the college goes through. We understand information about their ownership structure and financial background. It is quite a process to become a registered private career college in Ontario. I believe that, through this process, potential fraudulent actors could be weeded out.

Again, for anyone acting outside the country, we would be limited in terms of our jurisdiction.

**The Chair:** That is your time now.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** We will now proceed with Mr. Dhaliwal.

Mr. Dhaliwal, you will have six minutes.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank the panel members for appearing here.

My first question will go to Ms. Lehal.

First of all, I want to thank you for your service in the neighbourhood I have belonged to for many years. Your reputation is one of being helpful and professional in your field of expertise.

My question to you, Madame Lehal, is this: What approach do you believe the task force or government should take in distinguishing between students who genuinely came as students and were misled, and those who knowingly engaged in fraudulent activities and never went to school?

• (6720)

**Ms. Kamaljit Kaur Lehal:** That's where I've stated there needs to be procedural fairness processes in place—with fulsome disclosure—so individuals can answer concerns that may have been raised in their application.

However this task force conducts its assessment, it will obviously have potentially significant consequences for individuals. I will just restate that it's imperative the process be procedurally fair and transparent, and that it allow individuals the opportunity to fully share what they have been through before a decision is made.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** It will be very fair and they will have every chance to go through the other channels available now, whether it is having a lawyer, going to a judicial review or whatnot.

My question was simply, would you suggest we consider that the students who came here, went to school and worked are genuine? For those who took advantage in order to get their feet on our land here and never went to school, do you think they should be treated as victims of fraud, as well, or should those people not be given the advantage this task force will give to other people?

**Ms. Kamaljit Kaur Lehal:** It's a delicate situation, and I think the integrity of the immigration system is something that, as lawyers, we are very mindful of, as well. Individuals coming into Canada need to comply with the act and regulations when they are seeking admission into this country.

If there are other extenuating circumstance, such as duress or fraud—it would depend on the particular facts of the case—those would have to be looked at carefully. I can't give a yes-or-no answer, except to say that I fully agree that our immigration system is based on its integrity. We need to ensure that students who have been defrauded and have come into this country and studied hard, worked and planted roots are supported and not victimized again.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Thank you.

I'm going to pass it on to Ms. Sidhu for the next question, please.

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu:** Thank you, Mr. Dhaliwal, for sharing time with me.

Thank you to all the witnesses.

My question is to Ms. Boyden. We are hearing heartbreaking stories from international students. Suicides are on the rise. They are not getting quality education in these so-called plaza colleges. What is the province doing to maintain high standards of education and support for international students?

The second point is I know when the pandemic began Alpha College, a private career college in Kingston, had more than doubled its enrolment. They have a capacity of 420 students, but they have more than 4,000 students.

Where's the oversight, and what is being done to audit these DLIs? We know it's a shared jurisdiction. The federal government is responsible for study permits, and the province oversees the education component and selects DLI institutions.

Exploitation is happening to the students. Where is the oversight? Why is the audit not happening? Can you tell us?

**Ms. Anna Boyden:** I think it's important to recognize the role of a registered private career college and differentiate that from the term we have been using tonight around plaza colleges.

We have nearly 550 registered private career colleges in Ontario. They are inspected quite regularly and do maintain quite a rigorous relationship with the ministry in terms of reporting. They have KPI outcomes that come back to the ministry. There is subject matter expertise required in terms of review of their curriculum, and approval through our superintendent to ensure the quality and integrity of the program; and it's renewed on a yearly basis.

I would say there is a lot of oversight and work done very proactively to ensure the integrity of our education for students attending our private career colleges.

• (6725)

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu:** How do you explain that the increase in new DLIs in Ontario outpaces any other province based on population?

**Ms. Anna Boyden:** I can't speak to other provinces, because I don't have an understanding of the number of DLIs—

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu:** No, we are not just talking about the sheer numbers. We are talking about per capita. I'm talking about just in Ontario.

**Ms. Anna Boyden:** Our role in issuing the DLIs is to review the application received from the interested party and, in accordance with the memorandum of understanding that we have with the IR-CC, we would grant the DLI to the interested party if they meet the criteria outlined in the MOU.

**The Chair:** The time is up for you, Ms. Sidhu.

We will now proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for six minutes.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would also like to thank the witnesses. It's getting late and everyone must be feeling tired.

Ms. Boyden, good evening.

You told us about a letter sent by your department to minister Fraser. What was the response? I imagine there was an acknowledgment of receipt. Did you receive a direct response to the letter?

[*English*]

**Ms. Anna Boyden:** I can confirm that the letter was sent from our Minister of Colleges and Universities, and I am unaware of any response.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Point of order, Madam Chair. There was no interpretation.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Can you please repeat that, Ms. Boyden?

**Ms. Anna Boyden:** I'm happy to confirm that the letter was sent by the Minister of Colleges and Universities. I cannot confirm and I am unaware of any response that was received.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Was there at least an acknowledgment of receipt?

[*English*]

**Ms. Anna Boyden:** I'm sorry, but I don't know.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** All right. I imagine it would be easy for you to check. If you did receive a reply, I'd be grateful if you could forward it to the committee. Thank you very much.

I will now turn to Mr. Jade.

I imagine you've observed many cases where your customers' mental health has been affected by the pressure or misadventures they were experiencing, depending on their different situations.

Can you tell the committee how the victims of these frauds feel, which is why we're here today? In your opinion, how is their mental health affected by the situation they are currently experiencing?

**Mr. Dory Jade:** In fact, all immigrants who decide to come to Canada, but especially students, who are usually the most vulnerable because they are young, experience anxiety when trying to fig-

ure out how to get into the system. They feel pressure even before they get here.

In my opinion, people who have been through what we're talking about now can certainly experience trauma, especially those who didn't know until they got here that the document they had was fraudulent or allegedly fraudulent.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** If I understand correctly, even before being threatened with deportation, the simple act of entering the system from a foreign country and arriving in Canada, finding housing and enrolling in a secondary school has consequences for a person's mental health and anxiety.

If you add to that a threat of deportation, the pressure increases tenfold. From what we understand, these people have nothing to blame themselves for and are, in fact, victims.

Am I mistaken?

**Mr. Dory Jade:** I think that's exactly right.

I'm sure we all know a young student who arrived here and...

• (6730)

[*English*]

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.):** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** Mr. Jade, I'm sorry to interrupt. There is a point of order.

Yes, Mr. Longfield.

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** The interpreter has asked if the presenter could turn up the volume. She's having difficulty hearing his statement and can't translate for us.

**The Chair:** The clerk will look into it.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Dory Jade:** Madam Chair, would you like me to speak more loudly?

Is that better?

I'm not sure what's going on, but I can no longer hear you.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Actually, that's because no one is answering you, Mr. Jade.

Can someone please answer Mr. Jade?

**Mr. Dory Jade:** Very well, that's fine.

[*English*]

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Keelan Buck):** The technical team is just looking to increase the volume now.

We'll have to give it another try. There's a lot going on behind the scene. We'll give it another try and adjust accordingly.

**Mr. Dory Jade:** Would you like me to speak in English to make things easier for everybody?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** No, I do not think that is advisable, my dear friend.

[English]

**The Chair:** The clerk is working with the IT team to get this sorted out.

[Translation]

**Mr. Dory Jade:** All right.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Jade, can you please say a few sentences so that we can check the sound level?

[Translation]

**Mr. Dory Jade:** Yes, Madam Chair.

As I was saying, people or young students who come to Canada often receive support from a parent or guardian, who accompanies them. It's a bit sensitive. I don't know the average age of the group we're talking about right now, but, in general, undergraduates are young...

[English]

**The Chair:** Is the sound okay for the interpreters? Okay.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you can go back to where we had stopped the clock.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Jade, as you can see, there are two official languages in Canada, English and interpretation. It's fantastic.

You said that people were already experiencing undue pressure, even when they weren't in a difficult situation. When the government threatened all these people with deportation, it inevitably created additional pressure on their already fragile mental health.

Isn't the government responsible for exacerbating these students' mental health problems? If so, wouldn't you agree that it's the government's responsibility to provide mental health resources to help these young people on this disastrous journey?

**Mr. Dory Jade:** It's really about determining which of them are actually party to the fraud and which of them didn't know the documents were fraudulent.

The government should absolutely not neglect to offer mental health support. On the other hand, we don't know whether or not all these people were aware that they had a fraudulent document.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** You're an expert when it comes to immigration consultants. After all, you represent the Canadian association that represents all these people.

Some witnesses suggested to the Committee that a framework should be created to require schools to deal with recognized agencies when working outside Canada.

Would you support such a framework or obligations for schools working with students abroad?

**Mr. Dory Jade:** That's our position, in fact, and we mentioned it to the minister and in our brief, which will be submitted to your committee. That point will be made.

We're arguing that the College of Immigration Consultants created all these criteria. In addition, the College suggests that anyone working in this field must be an RISIA, which stands for regulated international student immigration advisor, or an immigration consultant. These are people who obtained a permit from the College and work in public or private educational establishments. These people are the only ones who can really...

• (6735)

[English]

**The Chair:** Could you wind up, please.

[Translation]

**Mr. Dory Jade:** ... submit the student applications.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I am very grateful to all the witnesses.

[English]

**The Chair:** We will go to Ms. Kwan for six minutes.

Ms. Kwan, please begin.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for their presentation.

My question is to Ms. Boyden, who is the ADM from Ontario, from the Ministry of Colleges and Universities.

Could you advise the committee what the regulatory process is for private colleges in Ontario?

**Ms. Anna Boyden:** Madam Chair, I'm hoping I can ask for a little clarity around the member's question. In terms of regulatory process, there's extensive legislation and regulation that exists related to registered private career colleges. Is there a specific component?

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Okay, maybe more specifically, if there were a complaint about a particular private college, who investigates that and could you explain to the committee how that would be dealt with?

**Ms. Anna Boyden:** If a concern was reported to the Superintendent of Private Career Colleges, there is an enforcement and inspection team that's responsible for working with our private career colleges. There's a whole range of different activities that can happen. We have a scaling enforcement model that begins with education and supporting our private career colleges proactively to ensure compliance with our regulations with our Private Career Colleges Act, and, as a result of that, through progressive enforcement we work to educate the operators and can scale that up through escalating compliance action if required.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Is that a government superintendent or is that self-regulating? Do the colleges and universities themselves choose someone to be that superintendent?

**Ms. Anna Boyden:** No, the superintendent is at arm's length of government but works within my division.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** So when you say it's at arm's length of government, who makes the selection of that superintendent to do this task?

**Ms. Anna Boyden:** Of the superintendent? That falls to the public servants in the Ontario public service.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** So the process of that investigation is done within government, that is to say maybe not within the ministry itself but it's within government. Am I right to understand that?

**Ms. Anna Boyden:** It is within government but there is a very clear line between political involvement and the role of the superintendent.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Okay, I think I understand. Maybe I'll search it up.

Previous to this panel, we had a representative from the federation of students, Mr. James Casey, who advised the committee that international students—of course we know this—pay five times the tuition fees of their domestic counterparts. He also advised that the tuition fee for international students is slated to increase by another 12% in Ontario.

Is that correct?

**Ms. Anna Boyden:** Institutions in Ontario, publicly funded colleges and universities, are established by acts of legislature, and there are separate legal entities that are responsible for the academic, operational and administrative matters of their organizations. This includes responsibility for administrative process and operational policies, including charging, collecting and reimbursing international student tuition and fees. It rests with the individual institutions to determine the fees that are charged to international students.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** What's the average comparison, then, between the international student fees and those of domestic students for Ontario? Can you give us a broad figure?

• (6740)

**Ms. Anna Boyden:** I'm sorry, but I don't have that information at hand.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Is there something you can provide to the committee at a later time?

**Ms. Anna Boyden:** I'd have to follow up.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you very much. I would appreciate that. I think that's an important piece to look into.

Also, in terms of the tuition fee increase, I understand that it's up to individual institutions to make that decision.

With respect to, I guess, follow-up information, if you can also provide the committee with information on the anticipated potential increases, on average, that might be taking place with international students.... Is that something you can provide us with by way of information?

**Ms. Anna Boyden:** Again, to reiterate the province's role, the tuition rates set for international students are done independently at each respective institution. It wouldn't be information that I would

have easy access to any more than a member of the committee would.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** The Ministry of Colleges and Universities has no idea whether the tuition fees are increasing or not. That's a little bit disturbing.

I think an issue here that was raised by the Federation of Students, and that is impacting international students, is that this whole fraudulent scam is also related to the tuition fees they pay. I just want to flag that as a major concern.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Kwan. Your time is up.

We can have 90 seconds for each party. Anyone can take it for the Conservatives.

Mr. Redekopp, who will take it from your side?

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** Madam Chair, I'm wondering if we would all agree to bypass the 90 seconds and end this committee.

**M. Fayçal El-Khoury:** I agree.

**The Chair:** I need unanimous consent for that.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Does everyone have all the answers they were looking for? Okay.

With that, I really want to thank all our witnesses for appearing before the committee today. I know that it has been a late evening.

This is our last meeting before we adjourn for the summer break.

On behalf of all the members of the committee, I really want to thank our clerk, Keelan Buck. Thank you for the service you provide to us in this committee.

Thank you to our amazing analysts, Julie Béchar, Andrea Garland and Philippe Antoine Gagnon. Thank you for your service to this committee.

Thanks to all the interpreters and to the support staff.

This session has been a good one. We did a lot of work. I especially want to thank all the members for their work on Bill S-245.

We have been in many meetings, and many long meetings. All of us are supported by an amazing staff. Let's give a big hand to all our staff. Jeff Jedras does an amazing job. He really provides a lot of service to this committee.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** So does mine, but I don't have a budget to give him a raise. Maybe I can take it out of—

**The Chair:** It's the same problem here.

I want to thank all of the staff who provide us support every day.

Thank you to all the staff from the whips' offices and the House leaders' offices.

It has been a great session. I hope all of you are looking forward to spending time in your ridings. I know there is a lot of work waiting for us in our respective ridings, but I hope all of you will take some time to spend with your families.

My boys have a long list of all I have to cook when I am home. I am really looking forward to connecting with my constituents in the riding. Many amazing things are happening in my riding starting with Canada Day and our community barbeque. All of you will be busy. Maybe we will see each other sometime in the summer somewhere.

I hope all members will take some time to rest also and connect with their constituents.

Have a great summer.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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