

Summary of Remarks of Brian Crawford to the Law Amendments Committee reviewing the 2024 Nova Scotia Budget

Dear Legislative Committee member;

Sun, Mar 24, 2024 at 10:54 PM

I was employed as a social worker with the Department of Community Services in their Child and Wellbeing Division (I retired 2 years ago). This is the wing of Community Services that is responsible for the provision of Child Protection, Children in Permanent Care, Foster Care and Adoption programs. I was employed for over 35 years and for the bulk of my time I was responsible for a caseload of children in permanent care; the Minister of Community Services is their legal guardian as parental rights had been terminated by a Family Court court order.

I am sure others will speak to you about the inadequacy of Income Assistance rates being frozen in the current budget and the negative cost this **will** have on Nova Scotian society. I am here to note that the Child and Wellbeing division of Community Services only accounts for about 10% of the Departments' 2024/2025 budget. This is woefully inadequate and has very real negative consequences for the Department of Community Services and the vulnerable families and youth that it is mandated to serve.

Some of these negative consequences include;

- 1) A very negative and stressful work environment where a lack of clerical support means professional social workers spend an inordinate amount of time doing admin/clerical tasks and less and less time doing social work with the clients they are meant to serve. The ability to have the time to foster relationships with clients is crucial in child protection social work. The losers in this scenario are the vulnerable families and children that the Department is mandated to serve.

2) Staff turnover is at an all time high. Working conditions are so poor that the Department can not recruit or retain staff. There is no one in the Department's hiring pool. Some offices are at a 50% staff complement due to this staffing shortage. In some cases offices have asked retirees to return for brief periods to help ease the strain. In some offices a worker with only 2 or 3 years experience may be the senior worker in that office. Again the losers in this scenario are the vulnerable families and children that the Department is mandated to serve.

3) The Department does not have the resources it requires to meet the high needs of many of the youth that are in its permanent care. The Department has chosen as a consequence to enter into agreements with private entities who provide unlicensed placements to some of our most vulnerable and traumatised youth. The Department refers to these unlicensed placements as Temporary Emergency Arrangements (TEA). The fact that these placements are unlicensed means that the staffing education and training qualifications for employment are much lower than would be the expectation in a licensed child caring facility.

These unlicensed placements are very costly. When I worked at one point there were 70 such placements province wide, each caring for one child, at a cost in excess of \$40,000 per month. The Department intends that these be temporary emergency placements but due to a lack of resources to meet these youth's complex needs I have known of youth who have been in these temporary placements for 2, 3 and 4 years.

Again the loser in this scenario is Nova Scotia's most vulnerable and traumatized youth. Youth that are ill served by their legal guardian, The Minister of Community Services! Clearly Child Protection Services are not a government priority. The costs to Nova Scotian society are high as these youth tend to do poorly in school and make up a disproportionate number of youth involved in the Youth Criminal Justice system.

Brian Crawford