



Third Session – Forty-Third Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
Standing Committee
on
Social and Economic Development

Chairperson
David Pankratz
Constituency of Waverley



Vol. LXXX No. 1 - 6 p.m., Wednesday, March 18, 2026

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Third Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ASAGWARA, Uzoma, Hon.	Union Station	NDP
BALCAEN, Wayne	Brandon West	PC
BEREZA, Jeff	Portage la Prairie	PC
BLASHKO, Tyler	Lagimodière	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian, Hon.	Keewatinook	NDP
BYRAM, Jodie	Agassiz	PC
CABLE, Renée, Hon.	Southdale	NDP
CHEN, Jennifer	Fort Richmond	NDP
COMPTON, Carla	Tuxedo	NDP
COOK, Kathleen	Roblin	PC
CORBETT, Shannon	Transcona	NDP
CROSS, Billie	Seine River	NDP
DELA CRUZ, Jelynn	Radisson	NDP
DEVGAN, JD	McPhillips	NDP
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni, Hon.	St. Johns	NDP
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	PC
GUENTER, Josh	Borderland	PC
HIEBERT, Carrie	Morden-Winkler	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake-Gimli	PC
KENNEDY, Nellie, Hon.	Assiniboia	NDP
KHAN, Obby	Fort Whyte	PC
KINEW, Wab, Hon.	Fort Rouge	NDP
KING, Trevor	Lakeside	PC
KOSTYSHYN, Ron, Hon.	Dauphin	NDP
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	Ind.
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Tyndall Park	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas-Kameesak	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom, Hon.	Flin Flon	NDP
LOISELLE, Robert	St. Boniface	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Malaya, Hon.	Notre Dame	NDP
MOROZ, Mike, Hon.	River Heights	NDP
MOSES, Jamie, Hon.	St. Vital	NDP
MOYES, Mike, Hon.	Riel	NDP
NARTH, Konrad	La Vérendrye	PC
NAYLOR, Lisa, Hon.	Wolseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
OXENHAM, Logan	Kirkfield Park	NDP
PANKRATZ, David	Waverley	NDP
PERCHOTTE, Richard	Selkirk	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Turtle Mountain	PC
REDHEAD, Eric	Thompson	NDP
ROBBINS, Colleen	Spruce Woods	PC
SALA, Adrien, Hon.	St. James	NDP
SANDHU, Mintu, Hon.	The Maples	NDP
SCHMIDT, Tracy, Hon.	Rossmere	NDP
SCHOTT, Rachelle	Kildonan-River East	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield-Ritchot	PC
SIMARD, Glen, Hon.	Brandon East	NDP
SMITH, Bernadette, Hon.	Point Douglas	NDP
STONE, Lauren	Midland	PC
WASYLIW, Mark	Fort Garry	Ind.
WHARTON, Jeff	Red River North	PC
WIEBE, Matt, Hon.	Concordia	NDP
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA
THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
Wednesday, March 18, 2026

TIME – 6 p.m.

LOCATION – Winnipeg, Manitoba

CHAIRPERSON – MLA David Pankratz (Waverley)

VICE-CHAIRPERSON – Mr. Tyler Blashko (Lagimodière)

ATTENDANCE – 6 QUORUM – 4

Members of the committee present:

Hon. Min. Marcelino

Mr. Blashko, Ms. Byram, Messrs. Guenter, Oxenham, MLA Pankratz

Substitutions:

Hon. Min. Fontaine for Hon. Min. Marcelino at 7:17 p.m.

APPEARING:

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine, Minister of Families and responsible for Accessibility

PUBLIC PRESENTERS:

Bill 5–The Accessibility for Manitobans Amendment Act and The Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Amendment Act (Access Awareness Week)

Allen Mankewich, Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities

Samuel Unrau, private citizen

Monique Curci, private citizen

Angie Conrad, Barrier-Free Manitoba

Patrick Stewart, Independent Living Resource Centre

Bill 10–The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (Attachment Leave for Adoption and Surrogacy)

Kevin Rebeck, Manitoba Federation of Labour

Bill 17–The Adult Abuse Registry Amendment Act

Fernanda Vallejo, Latinas Manitoba Inc.

Bill 23–The Advocate for Children and Youth Amendment Act

Fernanda Vallejo, Latinas Manitoba Inc.

WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS:

Bill 5–The Accessibility for Manitobans Amendment Act and The Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Amendment Act (Access Awareness Week)

*Caryn Birch, Inclusion Winnipeg
Rhonda Svendsen, private citizen
Randie Locken, private citizen*

MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION:

Bill 5–The Accessibility for Manitobans Amendment Act and The Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Amendment Act (Access Awareness Week)

Bill 10–The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (Attachment Leave for Adoption and Surrogacy)

Bill 17–The Adult Abuse Registry Amendment Act

Bill 23–The Advocate for Children and Youth Amendment Act

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Deputy Clerk (Mr. Tim Abbott): Good evening. Will the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development please come to order.

Before the committee can proceed with the business before it, it must elect a Chairperson.

Are there any nominations?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): I nominate MLA David Pankratz.

Deputy Clerk: Mr. Pankratz has been nominated.

Are there any other nominations?

Seeing none, Mr. Pankratz, will you please take the Chair.

The Chairperson: Our next item of business is the election of a Vice-Chairperson.

Are there any nominations?

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): I'd like to nominate the MLA for Lagimodière.

The Chairperson: The—oh, so, MLA Blashko has been nominated as the Vice-Chairperson.

Are there any other nominations?

Hearing no other nominations, MLA Blashko is elected Vice-Chairperson.

So this meeting has been called to consider the following bills: Bill 5, The Accessibility for Manitobans Amendment Act and The Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Amendment Act (Access Awareness Week); Bill 10, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (Attachment Leave for Adoption and Surrogacy); Bill 17, The Adult Abuse Registry Amendment Act; and Bill 23, The Advocate for Children and Youth Amendment Act.

I would like to inform all in attendance of the provisions in our rules regarding the hour of adjournment. A standing committee meeting to consider a bill must not sit past midnight to hear public presentations or to consider clause by clause of a bill, except by unanimous consent of the committee.

I would also like to inform all members of the public in the gallery of the rules of decorum for standing committees. Please note that any participation from the gallery is not allowed. Examples of specific actions that are not allowed include clapping, cheering or interrupting presentations. Taking photos or video of the meeting is also not allowed. And please set your phones to mute. I thank everyone in advance for their co-operation.

Written submissions from the following persons have been received and distributed to committee members: Caryn Birch, Inclusion Winnipeg, on Bill 5; Rhonda Svendsen, private citizen, on Bill 5; and Randie Locken, private citizen, on Bill 5.

Does the committee agree to have these documents appear in the Hansard transcripts of this meeting?
[Agreed]

Prior to proceeding with public presentations, I would like to advise members of the public regarding the process for speaking in a committee.

In accordance with our rules, a time limit of 10 minutes has been allotted for presentations, with another five minutes allowed for questions from committee members.

Questions shall not exceed 45 seconds in length, with no time limit for answers. Questions may be addressed to presenters in the following rotation: first, the minister sponsoring the bill or another member of their caucus; second, a member of the official opposition; and third, an independent member.

If a presenter is not in attendance when their name is called, they will be dropped to the bottom of the list. If the presenter is not in attendance when their name is called a second time, they will be removed from the presenters' list.

* (18:10)

The proceedings of our meetings are recorded in order to provide a verbatim transcript, and each time someone wishes to speak, whether it be an MLA or a presenter, I first have to say the person's name. This is the signal for the Hansard recorder to turn the mics on and off.

On the topic of determining the order of public presentations, is there anyone present in the public gallery who wishes to present using ASL?

Okay. We also have two presenters on Bill 5 who will be using a wheelchair.

Is it the will of the committee to allow them to present first? [Agreed]

Okay, is there—okay, with this consideration in mind, in what order does the committee wish to hear the presentations? Okay, I will now ask for one of our ASL interpreters to—

Seeing none, I will note that we have out-of-town presenters registered to speak in person tonight, marked with an asterisk on the list.

With this consideration in mind then, in what order does the committee wish to hear the presentations?

An Honourable Member: So our presenters in wheelchairs and then any out-of-town presenters that are here, present, and then the rest of the folks that are here to present, in numerical order of bills.

The Chairperson: Is it the will of the committee to follow that order for the committee this evening?
[Agreed]

Okay. Thank you for your patience, and we will now proceed with public presentations.

**Bill 5—The Accessibility for Manitobans
Amendment Act and The Commemoration of
Days, Weeks and Months Amendment Act
(Access Awareness Week)**

The Chairperson: I will now call on Mr. Allen Mankewich from Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities.

Okay. Hello, Mr. Mankewich. Please go ahead with your presentation when you're ready.

Allen Mankewich (Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities): Good evening, everyone. My name is Allen Mankewich and I am the interim executive director of the Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities.

I'm here tonight to speak about Bill 5, the accessibility for Manitobans amendment act. There are good—some good changes in the bill that we agree with. We agree that the membership of the Accessibility Advisory Council should be representative of Manitoba and the majority of members should be persons with disabilities.

We are also in general agreement that amounts collected from administrative penalties must be used for the purpose of educating the public or promoting awareness about accessibility, although we would like the government to consider using this money for other things related to accessibility that extend beyond educating the public and promoting awareness.

We also agree that a public sector body's accessibility plan must include a description of the consultation undertaken by the public sector body when preparing its plan.

Now let's get to the things in the bill that we have an issue with.

Currently, public sector bodies are required to prepare accessibility plans every two years. Beginning in 2032, they must prepare or update accessibility plans every four years according to these amendments. We feel that four years is too long of a time frame to track progress the public sector bodies are making on accessibility. We also feel that public sector bodies should be required to share their plans publicly as a form of accountability.

The bill also extends the legislative review cycle to every 10 years instead of every five years. These provisions in the bill that extend the time frame to prepare or update accessibility plans and also extend the legislative review cycle are not acceptable. If we were further along in this journey and our community

had seen more meaningful progress as a result of The Accessibility for Manitobans Act, I could understand perhaps loosening some of these requirements and extending some of these time frames.

But many in the disability community, we would argue that we are not there yet. In fact, the fifth standard of The Accessibility for Manitobans Act has not even been implemented yet, and here we are already talking about relaxing requirements on organizations for reporting as well as extending the legislative review time frame. This simply doesn't make sense to us at this time and, given the lack of progress on accessibility in Manitoba, the government, we feel, is premature in contemplating these changes.

The changes proposed in this bill that will slow progress on making Manitoba more accessible is not something the disability community expects from a progressive government. There's a saying that justice delayed is justice denied. This bill, unless amended, will create further delays for people with disabilities in having their rights fully realized in Manitoba.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation, Mr. Mankewich.

Are there any questions?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister responsible for Accessibility): Miigwech for coming to present to us this evening. It's good to see you, and we appreciate all of your good work. And I've been hearing really positive things about the work that you're doing, and I just want to say miigwech for coming to present tonight.

The Chairperson: Mr. Mankewich, did you want to respond at all?

A. Mankewich: Yes, thanks for the opportunity to be here, and we thank the government and everyone else involved in contemplating these amendments. And, yes, we look forward to seeing how it turns out.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Mr. Mankewich.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Thank you, Allen, for coming and taking the time tonight to make your presentation. You've got lived experience and, coming from an organization that is able to provide their views and their thoughts on this legislation, I can appreciate where you're coming from.

So I just want to say thank you and—for taking the time and making your presentation here.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Mr. Mankewich, would you like to respond?

A. Mankewich: Yes, I'll say again, thank you for the opportunity and, yes, look forward to seeing how these—this bill transpires.

The Chairperson: Thank you so much.

Are there any further questions?

Okay, thank you for your time today, Mr. Mankewich.

Okay, our next presenter will be Mr. Samuel Unrau, private citizen.

Hello, Mr. Unrau. When you are ready, please proceed with your presentation.

Samuel Unrau (Private Citizen): Great, thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, committee, for having me today to speak on Bill 5, the accessibility for Manitobans amendment act.

When I reflect back, when the act was created in 2013, I remember coming to this building and speaking to committee when that act first came, when Minister Howard brought this legislation forward; and pleased to be here again to continue to advocate.

* (18:20)

The Accessibility for Manitobans Act is an important piece of legislation, and it sought to achieve significant improvement to accessibility in our communities by 2023. We're now three years past that deadline, and we continue to witness countless barriers that persons with disabilities continue to navigate in our communities. From the built environment to attitudes that both government and our society as a whole continue to hold on to, the path ahead towards accessibility is long and it's also windy.

I'll begin briefly with just—with some of the positives of the legislation. Often, we see the perspectives of persons with disabilities being sidelined or ignored, often rooted in infantilization of our community and the belief that others are better at making decisions about our needs rather than us. I'm pleased to see the amendment to make the majority of the Accessibility Advisory Council be members from our community. It's an important step, as well as also the additional representation of what Manitoba is as a whole.

While we've moved on—while we've lived with the phrase Nothing About Us Without Us and it's helped shape some of the representation, I firmly believe it's time to transition even further to anything

about us be led by us, as disabled leadership needs to continue to be centred in the work.

I remain concerned about our pathway moving forward, and while I echo some of the feedback that Mr. Mankewich has previously provided, both on the timelines of the review of the legislation, I really want to focus on the timing of the accessibility plans for public sector organizations.

I believe that the proposed change from two years to four years is a significant gap. And even at two years being the time frame right now, we still see challenges in watching those accessibility plans be implemented. Accessibility plans are challenging. There's a variety of barriers that those with lived experience encounter, and those barriers are countless. A good accessibility plan—and also accessibility consultations—require this broad analysis so that it reflects a diverse group of lived experience in our community.

I can understand that—after reading the 2023 review of the AMA, I can understand that some organizations who are required to prepare accessibility plans can find this to be a challenging task. However, the solution to this is—to this capacity gap is not to slow down the progress of accessibility by lengthening the period, but rather for our Province to reinvest in the knowledge and capacity of these organizations.

While I'm not concerned as to whether it should be two, three or four years in which organizations need to be required to complete their accessibility plan, I am concerned of what occurs between those years. In my personal experience, I've seen that there are some significant gaps to overcome in which sometimes the progress of those accessibility plans either get ignored or forgotten.

As members may know, the majority of provinces typically have a three-year window in requiring accessibility plans, with Ontario being an exception. The Accessible Canada Act also has adopted a three-year window but mandates progress reports on an annual basis to the accessibility commissioner. This model adopted by the federal government deals with what happens in between when these plans need to be created.

If Manitoba is seeking to adopt a four-year cycle, there must be a provision to provide progress reports on the plan so that progress can truly be measured and accounted for. Our community have read and has also been told of many plans and promises, but we truly require a method in which we can make meaningful progress a priority. A simple extension doesn't really go far enough.

If we were able to create a mechanism where we can check in through a progress report either halfway or annually, we could see that progress happen in real time. I would hope that this committee would consider that in continuing to move forward if they choose the four-year timeline.

You know, as I reflect on where we are in Manitoba and just some recent barriers that I encounter, including things like inaccessible exam tables at newly opened extended-care clinics, seeing, you know, social service programs today still infantilize perspectives of persons with disabilities and many, many others, it just further demonstrates the need that we need to do in order to continue the progression of accessibility in Manitoba.

We must speed up and not slow down. We do not need to slow down our progress to accommodate the systems that have historically oppressed persons with disabilities. Instead, we need to affirm that the work of accessibility is important and more so is expected.

Accessibility no longer needs to live on the periphery, as it will deal with it as it arises, or something that lives on the furthest corners of desks in our work. It is central to everything that we do.

I appreciate your time.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thanks so much, Mr. Unrau.

Are there any questions?

MLA Fontaine: I really appreciate you coming here and I really appreciate you coming and providing that historical continuum coming here in 2013 and now in 2026.

I appreciate your comments in respect of progress reports. How might you see that? Like, what would you be looking for that would satisfy some of the concerns that you're raising?

S. Unrau: Thank you for the question, Minister Fontaine. In the progress report, what I would see is the public sector organizations would create their initial accessibility plan.

Within that plan, they would have a series of goals and objectives that they hope to meet within that time period; hypothetically, in this case, a four-year time period. If the government were to either choose either an annual reporting process or even a halfway report process, what I would expect out of that is—ready we have the plan, this is what we so far have accomplished in the plan, but as well as also we can identify

any new barriers that might have been discovered in that plan.

I think it's an important step. I think in some circumstances, organizations might just simply lose track of time. You know, people change roles, stuff like that, and so actually having a further accountability measure just so that gap of progress isn't being captured.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Mr. Unrau.

Are there any further questions?

Ms. Byram: I, too, would like to say thank you, Mr. Unrau, for coming and sharing your story and also giving further insight to see what more could help those from the community where barriers are—or accessibility is a barrier and learning a little bit more about what that can look like for yourself, and thank you very much.

The Chairperson: Mr. Unrau, did you want to reply?

S. Unrau: Thank you very much.

The Chairperson: Okay, are there any further questions for Mr. Unrau? Thank you so much for being here with us this evening.

So as agreed, we'll now move on to out-of-town presenters. We have Ms. Monique Surki [*phonetic*], private citizen.

Good evening, Ms. Surki [*phonetic*], and can you—

Floor Comment: Curci.

The Chairperson: Curci, thank you. Thank you for correcting me.

So please go ahead with your presentation once you're ready, Ms. Curci.

Monique Curci (Private Citizen): Okay, hello, my name is Monique Curci. This is my first time presenting and I want to acknowledge that, as a person with disabilities, navigating processes like this can be challenging, but this is also part of why I'm here today.

I won't be speaking to specific clauses of the bill, but rather to how accessibility is experienced in practice across systems. I am an accessibility and disability consultant and advocate and a chronic pain researcher and someone with lived experience as an autistic individual. I also live with a rare genetic condition and am continuing to recover from a brain injury. These are all forms of disability, much of it invisible.

I am here because there is a significant gap between accessibility as it is written in legislation and accessibility

as it is experienced in real life. This is not only based on my own experience; it also reflects what I am consistently hearing from others across Manitoba.

Through navigating health care, insurance systems, legal processes, disability supports and advocacy work, I continue to see the same barriers repeated across systems. These patterns are part of why I help initiate advocacy efforts such as Manitobans for MPI accountability and co-founded Mino Odewin in Steinbach. These efforts come from real world experiences, not theory.

* (18:30)

Accessibility is often treated as compliance, but in practice, many people with disabilities are still expected to navigate complex, high-stress systems entirely on their own. This includes applications, denials, internal reviews, appeals, health-care access, insurance processes, legal interactions and other public systems where individuals are expected to advocate for themselves, even when they are injured, overwhelmed, cognitively impacted or experiencing mental health challenges. This is not meaningful accessibility; accessibility must include cognitive accessibility.

As an autistic individual and someone living with a brain injury, I often require time to process information, understand what is being asked and respond meaningfully. However, many systems are designed around immediate response, immediate comprehension and high levels of self-advocacy. Communication, verbal ability, eye contact, calm presentation or the ability to answer questions does not always reflect comprehension or capacity.

This is a serious issue. This is also a major barrier in how accessibility needs are identified. Individuals are often expected to clearly define and communicate their accessibility needs in order to receive the support. But for many people, especially those with new injuries, brain injuries, new diagnoses or newly recognized disabilities, they are still in the process of understanding their own limitations. They may not yet have the language, diagnosis or awareness to accurately identify what supports they require. This creates a situation where people are expected to advocate for needs they do not fully understand. Accessibility should not depend solely on self-identification. Systems should be designed to proactively recognize and respond to potential needs.

Mental health is also a critical part of accessibility. Many individuals navigating these systems are doing so while experiencing anxiety, trauma, distress, burnout, chronic stress. And these realities directly affect

a person's ability to process information, make decisions, regulate emotions and advocate. When systems do not account for their—this, accessibility is not being achieved.

There is also a major issue with inconsistencies across the systems. Individuals who are formally recognized as requiring support in one system are not always recognized in the same way in another. This is especially important when it comes to substitute decision makers and other decision-making supports. If someone is recognized as requiring support in one environment but that recognition is not meaningfully respected in another, it creates a serious accessibility gap. It can result in individuals being expected to independently navigate complex or high-stress situations that do not reflect their actual capacity. This becomes particularly concerning in high-stakes environments, including legal and justice-related settings. Accessibility must include consistent recognition of support needs across all systems.

Another major barrier is the lack of navigation support. Many people are expected to manage complex processes independently, including applications, denials, reviews, appeals and ongoing documentation requirements. This process requires organization, comprehension, persistence, emotional regulation and time. This is not realistic for many individuals with disabilities, especially those already managing illness, injury, caregiving, financial stress, trauma and fluctuating symptoms. If a system requires a person to be highly capable in order to access it, then it is not accessible.

There are also significant gaps in eligibility frameworks. Many systems rely—rely on rigid criteria that do not reflect the reality of disability, particularly for individuals with complex, invisible, overlapping or fluctuating conditions. People often fall—fall between systems because they do not meet narrow thresholds even though their daily functioning is clearly impacted. These include people living with episodic or variable conditions such as a brain injury, autism, Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome and other disabling conditions that do not look the same every day. Accessibility frameworks must reflect real-world functioning, not just rigid categories.

Another key issue is timelines. Many processes operate within strict time frames such as 30, 45 or 60 days, but those time limits—timelines often do not reflect the reality of living with disability. Medical appointments take time, documentation takes time, symptoms fluctuate, capacity fluctuates, processing information takes time, mental health affects capacity.

Some people are simply just trying to survive the day they are in. Accessibility is just not about access to services; it's also about access to time. Rigid timelines become barriers that prevent people from accessing support.

These issues do not exist in isolation; they are consistent across all the varying systems. What I'm describing is not a series of isolated frustrations; it is a reoccurring pattern of systemic accessibility gaps.

And I do have some recommendations. So, first, strengthen accountability and enforcement to ensure accessibility is implemented in practice, not only defined in policy; explicitly recognize cognitive accessibility, including processing time, communication differences, sensory burden and neurodivergent needs; move toward a more proactive approach to accessibility rather than relying on individuals to identify their needs before they fully understand them; fourth, implement structured navigation support so individuals are not left to navigate complex systems alone; ensure consistent recognition and support needs, including substitute decision-making supports across all systems; review eligibility frameworks to better reflect real-world functioning, invisible disability in fluctuating conditions; and introduce more flexible realistic timelines that account for the realities of disability.

And then, finally, to ensure that mental health and trauma approaches are integrated into accessibility practices. Accessibility legislation must reflect lived experience, and it must ensure that accessibility is not only defined by—but meaningfully implemented, monitored and enforced.

The Chairperson: Thank you so much for your presentation, Ms. Curci.

Are there any questions from the committee?

MLA Fontaine: Aaniin. [*Hello.*] Miigwech for your presentation. What I can share with you as our—as the minister responsible—and my team were so super impressed with everything that you said in your presentation. And know that, you know, that what you share with us here is heard by myself and by our team, and we really appreciate you coming out and sharing all of that.

And I will also just share that my chief of staff, that woman in the back, is actually going to come and reach out just to get some of your contact information.

Miigwech so much for what you've shared.

The Chairperson: Ms. Curci, would you like to respond?

M. Curci: Just thank you for having me. I really appreciate. This is my first time ever coming out to something like this. I didn't even know that this was a possibility, so I just—I really appreciate the time and the opportunity to speak before everyone.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Curci.

Ms. Byram: Thank you, Ms. Curci, for coming and sharing your personal story and your experience. And I also want to say thank you for the work that you do as a consultant because I think that gives you another layer, too, of insight, I guess, on some of the concerns that people with disabilities live with every day.

What impressed me was that you raised the gaps or the services that you see lacking in the bill, but you also came up with a solution to how to fill those gaps in the end. So really appreciate your presentation and the time you took to come and share that with us. So thank you so much.

M. Curci: Thank you. That's all I guess I can say is thank you to everyone.

The Chairperson: Thank you so much.

Is there anything else, any other questions?

Thank you so much for your presentation tonight, Ms. Curci.

Bill 10—The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (Attachment Leave for Adoption and Surrogacy)

The Chairperson: So we have one more out-of-town presenter. It will be on Bill 10, and it's Mr. Kevin Rebeck.

Good evening, Mr. Rebeck. Whenever you're ready, please go ahead.

Kevin Rebeck (Manitoba Federation of Labour): Great. Thank you.

I'm Kevin Rebeck, president of the Manitoba Federation of Labour. The MFL is Manitoba's central labour body, made up of more than 30 affiliated unions representing the interests of more than 130,000 unionized workers from every sector and every region of the province in the public and private sectors, as well as the building trades.

The MFL works to promote good jobs, fairness in the workplace and social and economic justice for all. Sorry, I've got two bills here. I'm on the constitutional question, right? No. 4? [*interjection*] Sorry; Bill 10. I'm making sure.

The MFL supports this bill, and we're glad to see the government moving quickly to provide workers with up to 16 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave to care for their adopted child or a child that's been placed with them through surrogacy.

This will allow job protection for workers who access the upcoming EI benefits for adoptive parents or parents welcoming a child through a surrogate. These new EI benefits are expected to come into force sometime this year, and it's great to see the government being so proactive on ensuring our employment standards code is kept up to date with the federal EI changes.

As is common practice, the government asked the Labour Management Review Committee, a group made up of employer and labour reps, for advice on updating the code prior to the introduction of this bill, and the LMRC gave consensus advice to ensure workers have job protection in the event they need to access these new EI benefits. The LMRC has a strong track record of reaching consensus on issues like this, and we're glad the provincial government listens to this advice.

At the end of the day, employers and workers are the ones who have to live with the decisions that government make regarding our labour laws.

* (18:40)

Unfortunately, the previous PC government constantly disregarded the consensus advice of the Labour Management Review Committee, and we often had to make government aware of federal changes that would require updates to the Employment Standards Code.

It's refreshing that this government is much more on the ball and much more willing to heed the consensus advice of employers and labour. These are important employment standard changes that recognize the ways that many families are formed now, and we appreciate the Labour Minister being so proactive on this file.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you so much, Mr. Rebeck. Any questions?

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): I just want to thank you, Mr. Rebeck, for all of your work on the LMRC and for all of your work on behalf of the MFL. It's not a week that goes by, perhaps, that I don't get a letter or an email or some type of correspondence or a visit where you're bringing up the concerns of the workers that you represent. So, you know, thank you from our government for all

your hard work and all your efforts and advocacy on behalf of workers across Manitoba.

K. Rebeck: Thank you, Minister, I really appreciate government seeking the advice through Labour Management Review Committee and acting on it. It's very much appreciated, and there's lots more we can work on together.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Any other questions?

Okay, seeing no further questions, thank you for your presentation, Mr. Rebeck.

**Bill 5—The Accessibility for Manitobans
Amendment Act and The Commemoration of
Days, Weeks and Months Amendment Act
(Access Awareness Week)**

(Continued)

The Chairperson: We have no further out-of-town presenters, so I'll move back to Bill 5 and ask Ms. Angie Conrad from Barrier-Free Manitoba to please present.

Good evening, Ms. Conrad. Whenever you're ready, you can go ahead, please.

Angie Conrad (Barrier-Free Manitoba): Good evening, everyone. Thank you, Chair, and good evening, committee members. My name is Angie Conrad, and I am here on behalf of Barrier-Free Manitoba. Barrier-Free Manitoba appreciates the opportunity to provide input on Bill 5.

We recognize several positive elements in the proposed amendments, including strengthening representation of persons disabled by barriers on the Accessibility Advisory Council and clarifying the use of administrative penalties for accessibility awareness and education.

However, Bill 5, as currently drafted, does not meaningfully strengthen accountability or accelerate progress towards accessibility in Manitoba. In several key areas, it risks weakening the pace and impact of implementation, and our recommendations focus on ensuring that the legislation delivers measurable progress, transparency and public accountability.

So I'll just outline our key areas of concern. No. 1: restoring shorter planning cycles. So our issue with this is that Bill 5 moves public sector accessibility plans to a four-year cycle. Our concerns are that accessibility planning is the primary accountability mechanism under the act. Extending the cycle reduces urgency, delays improvements and weakens oversight. Our recommendation is to amend the act to require accessibility

plans every two years or, at minimum, every three years, with a requirement for interim progress updates, as it is in other jurisdictions.

Concern No. 2: requiring public posting of accessibility plans and progress reports. So our issue is that Bill 5 requires plans to be submitted to the director but does not require public posting. Our concern is that without public access, there is limited transparency and reduced ability for persons disabled by barriers and the public to monitor progress. Our recommendation is that the requirement is that all accessibility plans and progress updates are publicly posted in accessible formats, and that they're easy to locate on organizational websites.

(3) Strengthen accountability for consultation. Our issue is that Bill 5 requires a description of consultation but does not address quality or impact. Our concern is that consultation can become a procedural exercise without meaningful engagement or influence. Our recommendations are that the act require organizations to engage persons disabled by barriers early in the planning process, describe how feedback influenced the final plan and identify any key concerns raised that were not addressed, and why.

(4) Strengthen oversight by the director. So our issue is that plans must be submitted to the director; however, there's no requirement for review, feedback or reporting. It's simply just submitted. Our concerns are that submission alone does not create accountability, and our recommendations are to amend the act to require the director to review plans for completeness and alignment with standards, provide feedback to organizations and publish an annual public report on compliance and trends.

(5) Maintain frequent review cycles. Our issue is that Bill 5 allows up to 10 years between reviews of standards and the act. Our concern is that accessibility is an evolving area. Long review cycles risk outdated standards and delayed improvements. Our recommendations are that we—that it's maintained as a five-year review cycle for standards and the act, requiring interim public reporting on progress between reviews.

(6) Ensure transparency and administrative penalties. So, our issue is that Bill 5 specifies how funds are used but does not require reporting. Our concern is that without transparency, there's no public accountability for enforcement. And our recommendations are is that—require—that the act require annual public reporting on number of penalties issued, amounts collected and how funds were used; and,

(7) Strengthen legislative ambition. Our issue is that Bill 5 does not establish a renewed provincial accessibility goal or advance new standards. Our concern is that Manitoba is not on track to achieve accessibility, and progress has been slow. Our recommendation is to establish a clear, measurable provincial accessibility goal and timeline, commit to achieving priority standards, including accessible health care and accessible education.

So, in conclusion, Bill 5 introduces several positive procedural improvements. However, without stronger accountability, transparency, and shorter timelines, it will not significantly improve accessibility outcomes for Manitobans. Accessibility legislation must do more than signal intention. It must drive measurable change. Barrier-Free Manitoba urges the committee to adopt the amendments outlined as mentioned to ensure the act fulfills its purpose.

Thank you for your consideration.

French spoken

Merci beaucoup pour votre temps et miigwech.

Translation

Thank you for your time and miigwech.

The Chairperson: Thank you so much, Ms. Conrad.

Any questions?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister responsible for Accessibility): Miigwech very much for your presentation. Very thorough and very thoughtful. I appreciate all the feedback and the concerns and the recommendations that are brought forward, and I want you to know that certainly we will review those, and those are things that are important to us when folks come and present.

I also just want to say that Barrier-Free Manitoba is a very respected partner of us in the work that we do in government. We have profound respect for all of the work that you folks do. So I want to say miigwech for that.

A. Conrad: Thank you, Minister. Thank you for the compliments. We welcome any opportunity to meet with your office to further discuss the amendments and—you know, and improving accessibility in our province.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Thank you, Ms. Conrad, for coming here and taking the time to present, and also thank you for your work with Barrier-Free Manitoba. And thank you for identifying where you see the gaps in this legislation and making mention of

how you think it can be strengthened. And you were very clear and concise in how those steps can be taken, so thank you for your presentation.

A. Conrad: Thank you for your comments and consideration.

* (18:50)

The Chairperson: Thank you so much.

Any further questions?

Thank you so much for joining us and presenting tonight, Ms. Conrad.

A. Conrad: Thank you for your time.

The Chairperson: Next we have Mrs. Fernanda Vallejo. *[interjection]*

My apologies. We have one more on Bill 5 before Mrs. Fernanda Vallejo. We have Mr. Patrick Stewart from Independent Living Resource Centre. Mr. Stewart is virtual.

And Mr. Stewart, whenever you're ready, you can go ahead with your presentation.

Patrick Stewart (Independent Living Resource Centre): Okay, can you hear me okay?

The Chairperson: We can, yes.

P. Stewart: Wonderful. Thanks. It's customary to always ask that before a Zoom presentation.

First of all, thanks to the entire committee and the minister for being here tonight and for the great opportunity to speak. My name is Patrick Stewart and I am here representing the Independent Living Resource Centre. We are a Manitoba non-profit established to promote the full inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of life and society. We have been actively associated with the development of The Accessibility for Manitobans Act since its inception in 2013, attending every consultation and review.

Personally, I served as a member of the Transportation Standard Development Committee, and I'm glad to be here this evening to discuss the very serious implications that Bill 5 proposes on the future of the AMA.

Yes, I'd like to begin by reminding us that when the AMA was passed in 2013, it was intended to be landmark legislation. It was meant to set Manitoba on a path towards becoming a dramatically more accessible province by 2023. It was meant to actively remove and prevent barriers to employment, customer service, transportation, information in the built environ-

ment and provide generational change for a community that has already waited many lifetimes over for meaningful change.

Today, I am here, unfortunately, because Bill 5 is prepared to move us in the opposite direction. Bill 5 extends the mandatory review cycle for accessibility standards and for the act itself from five to 10 years. And I'd like to pause on that number: 10 years. It has been 13 years since the act was originally passed, and in that time we've had, by my count, three elections, multiple governments and still have not implemented all five standards. Yet we are already talking about extending review cycles and extending compliance deadlines.

Since 2013, there have been two mandatory reviews of the act in 2019 and in 2023, and, unfortunately, they both identified that the AMA has had minimal impact. They both identify a lack of government leadership as the culprit, and neither make any mention or recommendation of extending the critical and mandatory review periods that the community has as their opportunity to express whether or not the AMA is making a difference in their lives, and importantly, to correct course.

In 2019, the first independent review of the AMA concluded that progress was too slow, that leadership was lacking and that stronger enforcement was needed. Theresa Harvey Pruden, the government's independent reviewer, wrote, quote: Manitobans with disabilities cannot wait another decade for meaningful change.

In 2023, the second mandatory review said that the same thing, but even more clearly. After extensive public consultation—including in-person forums in Brandon, Thompson and Winnipeg—the reviewer reported that, quote: Accessibility progress has been far too slow and that the government must demonstrate urgency, leadership and accountability. Further, the 2020—pardon me, 2023 review found that, quote: The act and standards are not yet having a significant impact, that the act is not reaching its potential and that available data indicates that compliance with standards is low.

If compliance is already low, if progress is already slow, if leadership is already lacking—according to the only two reports we have on the books—how does extending the review cycle to 10 years improve anything? It doesn't. It weakens accountability, it delays course correction and it risks locking Manitoba into another decade of limited progress.

Now, I do want to acknowledge a very positive step in this bill. The government has implemented the reviewer's recommendation that the Accessibility Advisory Committee have a mandatory majority of members who are people with disabilities, and this is a great step. It strengthens representation and it deserves recognition.

But it is one recommendation, noteworthy, because the 2023 review also made several clear practical recommendations that are not reflected in Bill 5, including increasing the staffing and capacity of the accessibility secretariat; strengthening leadership and accountability across government; fixing delays in the standard development process so committees aren't reconvened years later; improving compliance, monitoring and enforcement; providing clear communication and support to help organizations meet their obligations; and, really notably, restoring the 20-employee threshold for accessibility plans and reporting.

And the 20-employee threshold is especially important because the threshold was raised from 20 to 50 employees in 2019, so this is the threshold for creating a formal accessibility plan. And when that threshold was changed from 20 to 50, it excluded virtually every business from requiring a formal accessibility plan because 96 per cent of Manitoba businesses have fewer than 50 employees. This change effectively removed almost the entire private sector from a key accessibility obligation.

The reviewer heard from Manitobans that this weakening had a negative effect on the act's effectiveness. I believe the Accessibility Advisory Council recommended lowering the threshold back to 20 in 2021, and the 2023 review repeats that recommendation explicitly. Yet Bill 5 does not act on it.

When requirements are weakened, accessibility outcomes suffer. When timelines are extended, progress slows, and when leadership is lacking, the AMA stalls. Bill 5 does not fix these structural issues. It extends timelines instead of strengthening accountability. It delays progress instead of accelerating it. And it moves Manitoba further away from the intent of the AMA, not closer to it.

The AMA was meant to be a human rights law. It was meant to remove barriers, not create new ones, and extending the review cycle to 10 years sends the opposite message. Failing to restore the 20-employee threshold sends the opposite message. Ignoring key recommendations from the 2023 review sends the opposite message.

I hope that we can do better and that this opportunity to speak to these issues will be a step in the right direction.

Thank you very much.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Mr. Stewart.

Are there any questions?

MLA Fontaine: Where's the camera? Oh, here we go. I want to make sure that I'm looking at—directly at you.

I appreciate your presentation and I appreciate you being here this evening. And everything that you put on the official record was very thorough, very clear, very historic chronologically.

I do want to just share a couple of things just so that we've got a little bit of clarity. The change from 50 to 20 is actually a regulatory change and we are working on that right now. So I wanted you to know that.

And we have added staff to the accessibility compliance office. So I wanted to assure you that we're doing those things, and once again, I really do appreciate your comments and being here this evening.

Miigwech.

The Chairperson: Mr. Stewart, would you like to reply?

P. Stewart: Yes, I suppose I would like to maybe offer a quick reply.

The AMA, as mentioned, our organization has been involved in the development and review since 2013. So there's been a lot of meetings and a lot of reviews, a lot of coming together and talking about things. And depending on which standard we're talking about, I imagine you could—you'd definitely have a different report card in terms of results.

I think in a place where the community maybe feels disappointed by the act as a whole, it's very difficult to have—well, grievances rectified, have issues addressed with directly. Because from the very beginning, it was not—you know, it was not set up as an act that could be enforced easily. It took many years for that to be developed.

I think many people were expecting maybe, you know, large investment in capital improvements and renovations and things like that; there maybe being like an—a real, direct change that we would experience in 10 years. And, unfortunately, we haven't seen that.

I would say one way that the AMA has been successful, though, has been in requiring organizations and communities to have critical conversations. That requirement to create plans is a requirement to have a conversation. It's a requirement to engage. And really importantly, the mandatory review processes are that opportunity for the community to engage government on an act that is intended to be one of the most meaningful ones in their life.

So I strongly recommend maintaining the five-year intervals for review periods because that is maybe one of the best things that the AMA has provided to the community.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much, Mr. Stewart.

Any other questions?

Ms. Byram: I have no questions, but I do just want to comment and thank Mr. Stewart for presenting here tonight and giving us a thorough presentation.

* (19:00)

So thank you very much.

The Chairperson: Mr. Stewart?

Okay. Any further questions? No?

Okay. Thank you so much for being with us tonight, Mr. Stewart, and for your presentation.

And next up I will call on Mrs. Fernanda Vallejo to present on Bill 17.

All right. So Mrs. Vallejo is not present at the moment, so we will drop her to the bottom of the list.

The next presenter is Mrs. Vallejo on Bill 23, so we will again drop her to the bottom of the list.

And now we will bring out to present Mr. David Grant on Bill 23. Mr. Grant is virtual.

So Mr. David Grant is not here at the moment, it looks like. Do we have Mrs. Fernanda Vallejo available? So Mr. David Grant will be at the bottom of the list now.

Bill 17—The Adult Abuse Registry Amendment Act

The Chairperson: And going back to Mrs. Fernanda Vallejo for Bill 17.

Fernanda Vallejo (Latinas Manitoba Inc.): Good evening, everyone.

The Chairperson: Okay. Mrs. Vallejo, you're now ready to present on Bill 17.

F. Vallejo: Okay. I've been running around the building, but good evening, everyone. My name is Fernanda Vallejo and I represent Latinas Manitoba Incorporated, a community organization that supports immigrant women and families in Manitoba, especially Spanish-speaking community.

So Bill 17 is important because vulnerable adults and seniors deserve strong protection. Across Canada, studies estimate that about one in 10 seniors experience some form of abuse, and many cases are never reported because victims are afraid or dependent on their caregivers.

In our community, we often see families who don't know where to report abuse or who speak about these kind of concerns. Okay. A stronger adult abuse registry helps ensure that individuals who have abused vulnerable adults cannot continue working in positions of trust with seniors. Sometimes the seniors are afraid of speak up because the abuse comes from their own families, and we need to let them know about more resources, especially to people that English is not their first language.

Yes, so protecting vulnerable adults means protecting dignity, safety and respect for everyone in our community. I spoke to some people from my community that had seniors and, well, they need more information about how—what's accessible for them. Maybe we can try to do something in different languages, because I know this is a barrier that is not only happening in a Spanish-speaking community, it's happening to every single community here and adults, seniors, they deserve respect.

The Chairperson: Wonderful. Okay, thank you for your presentation.

Are there any questions?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): Good evening, miigwech, for being here this evening. It's always lovely to see you and to hear, you know, what you share with the committee and other things in the community that we always see you at. I really appreciate you.

And I think that the recommendation in ensuring that people have information in their language is so important. So certainly I say miigwech for that recommendation and that insight and for being here this evening.

The Chairperson: Mrs. Vallejo, would you like to respond?

F. Vallejo: Yes, absolutely. I hope we can work together in creating these resources. If you need something like, any documentations translated in Spanish, you count with Latinas Manitoba for sure.

The Chairperson: Thank you.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Thank you so much for coming and presenting here tonight and sharing a little bit of your experience here.

So just a quick thank you.

F. Vallejo: No, thank you for the time.

What an honour to be here tonight, first time in this room, yes.

The Chairperson: Wonderful. Thank you so much for your presentation today.

And it so happens that you are next on the list for the presentation.

Bill 23—The Advocate for Children and Youth Amendment Act

The Chairperson: So I'll now ask that you present on Bill 23, whenever you're ready.

Fernanda Vallejo (Latinas Manitoba Inc.): Thank you.

Okay, so as I said, my name is Fernanda Vallejo, I'm the founder of Latinas Manitoba, in support of Bill 23 because the Advocate for Children and Youth plays an essential role in ensuring that children's voices are heard and protected.

In our community work, we have supported families going through very difficult situations involving violence of—or family separation.

In one case, we follow a young child. She went through—she was four years old and she went through a really tough situation that I bring here to the table maybe once or twice before. Being a four-year-old who was abused, then going through the system. She went through Toba. The investigation took a year. Finally, after one year, CFS provided information to the mom, this is happening, he must go to jail.

So that's justice, absolutely, but it took a year. And also this brings a lot of concerns regarding mental health for the little one, for the mom and families. And there are many stories, okay. So many families, especially newcomer families, feel fear when systems like Child and Family Services become involved because they do not always understand how the system works.

So sometimes we are scared of listening—stories about CFS and ANCOR and separating families, so maybe that's why some families are scared or afraid of speaking up about the situations.

And strengthening the advocate helps ensure transparency, fairness and better communication with family while keeping the child's well-being at the centre of the process. When children feel safe to speak and families feel informed, the system works better for everyone.

And, well, it's something that I saw in news, something—Latino news, I don't remember which country, but in order to support these little kids, they ask them to get like a superhero's name, so they'll feel more safe when it's time to talk about what happened. And resources in Spanish and other languages also are important.

The Chairperson: Thank you so much for your presentation.

Are there any questions?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): Once again, miigwech for coming to present this evening and I really do appreciate you again, once again, talking about the importance of language, in being able to access resources and services. That's certainly something that's really important to our government and to our team here looking at these things, so I appreciate it.

Miigwech.

F. Vallejo: Yes, thank you.

* (19:10)

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Thank you, again, for coming and taking the time to present and sharing this story from your community as well.

Thank you. [*interjection*]

The Chairperson: Mrs. Vallejo.

F. Vallejo: Oh, sorry.

Yes, so there are so many stories that I can bring to the table, but I've been running from one room to the other one, but yes. So if we have a better understanding of how the system is working, we can work all together.

The Chairperson: Thank you so much.

Any further questions? Okay.

Thank you so much for your presentations this evening, Mrs. Vallejo.

Okay, I will now call on David Grant, and if he is not present at this time, he will be struck from the list. Mr. David Grant?

It seems Mr. Grant isn't here at the moment.

Is it the will of the committee to have his name struck—okay, his name will be struck from the list as this is the second time that we've called his name.

Okay, and that concludes the list of presenters that I have before me.

* * *

The Chairperson: In what order does the committee wish to proceed with clause-by-clause consideration of these bills?

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): I suggest that we begin with Bill 10, then Bill 5, 17 and then 23.

The Chairperson: Okay, it's been requested that we begin with Bill 10, followed by Bill 5, Bill 17 and Bill 23.

Does the committee agree? *[Agreed]*

**Bill 10—The Employment Standards
Code Amendment Act (Attachment Leave
for Adoption and Surrogacy)**
(Continued)

The Chairperson: Okay, we will now proceed with clause by clause of Bill 10.

Does the minister responsible for Bill 10 have an opening statement?

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): I want to thank everyone for joining us tonight to discuss the proposed amendment to The Employment Standards Code act. The purpose of this bill is to add a 16-week unpaid, protected leave for workers to carry out the responsibilities related to the placement of a child into their care through adoption or surrogacy.

In 2024, the federal government introduced updates to employment insurance benefits and the Canada Labour Code to create a new 15-week benefit and job-protected leave for parents welcoming a child either through adoption or surrogacy. These changes are expected to take effect sometime later this year.

Currently, Manitobans—currently, Manitoba parents who welcome a child through adoption or surrogacy can take the same parental leave as biological parents, but they are not eligible for maternity leave, which is

limited to those who are pregnant. Introducing a 16-week leave for attachment would ensure that Manitoban families who welcome a child through adoption or surrogacy can access the same amount of job protection and employment insurance support currently available to families who can combine maternity and parental leave.

Families in Manitoba are formed in many ways, and our laws should reflect that diversity. The bill demonstrates this government's belief that every child deserves the strongest start and that every parent should be able to have time to build those essential early bonds knowing their job will be protected when they return.

With this bill, Manitoba will align with the new employment insurance benefits, along with Ontario, and build on existing protections in Saskatchewan, Quebec, BC and Newfoundland that are specific to adoption or attachment leave.

I thank all members of the Labour Management Review Committee for their valued expertise and input in providing consensus recommendations for this bill.

I also want to acknowledge and thank all who have made the time today to be part of this process. And with these short remarks, I thank the presenter for coming tonight and the committee for their consideration of this bill. I look forward to passage of this bill in the near future.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister Marcelino.

Does the critic from the official opposition have an opening statement?

No? Okay.

During the consideration of a bill, the enacting clause and the title are postponed until all other clauses have been considered in their proper order.

Also, if there's agreement from the committee, the Chair will call clauses in blocks that conform to pages, with the understanding that we will stop at any particular clause or clauses where members may have comments, questions or amendments to propose.

Is that agreed? *[Agreed]*

Clauses 1 and 2—pass; clauses 3 through 5—pass; clauses 6 through 8—pass; enacting clause—pass; title—pass. Bill be reported.

Committee Substitution

The Chairperson: I'm now announcing a substitution for the committee effective immediately: Minister Fontaine for Minister Marcelino.

Bill 5—The Accessibility for Manitobans Amendment Act and The Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Amendment Act (Access Awareness Week)
(Continued)

The Chairperson: Does the minister responsible for Bill 5 have an opening statement?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister responsible for Accessibility): Bill 5 implements recommendations from the second independent review of The Accessibility for Manitobans Act, and makes amendments to improve efficiency and modernize the act.

Miigwech to all of those who gave their time and thoughtful input towards the independent reviews of the act. As recommended by the review, Bill 5 extends the timeline for public sector bodies to update their accessibility plans from every two years to every four years. We know public sector bodies need time to fully implement and evaluate their plans before updating. We also know the current two-year cycle has been particularly challenging for municipalities and school divisions, which deal with four-year election cycles.

The bill introduces a planned and deadline-driven transition towards the full implementation of four-year accessibility plans by 2032 when all accessibility plans and updates will have one deadline.

The 2023 review of The Accessibility for Manitobans Act also recommended measures to streamline public consultations and avoid consultation fatigue within the disabilities community.

In response, Bill 5 signals our intention to move towards required independent reviews of the act and standards in 10-year periods, allowing for a full implementation period and more time to measure the effectiveness of changes before the next review.

It also allows multiple standards to be reviewed at the same time, which makes better use of time and resources while maintaining the ability to review and amend regulations and the act at any time within the 10 years if urgent matters arise.

* (19:20)

In strengthening representation, Bill 5 will ensure people disabled by barriers make up at least half of the

Accessibility Advisory Council, and we will further ensure the council reflects the diversity of Manitobans, including Indigenous Manitobans.

Bill 5 allows us to direct all funds collected through administrative penalties for non-compliance with the act towards accessibility initiatives focused on education and awareness.

Another step to increasing awareness, Bill 5 also amends The Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act to formally recognize Manitoba Access Awareness Week.

I was very pleased to see support for Bill 5 during second reading debate, and I say miigwech to the member for Agassiz for her remarks on the challenges of creating, updating and implementing required accessibility plans, particularly in rural and northern communities. I hope this leads to all-in support of this bill.

I also want to commend the department's Accessibility Compliance Secretariat and the Manitoba Accessibility Office for the tools, resources and support they continue to provide to assist the public sector bodies in creating these required accessibility plans. Their work on behalf of building a more accessible province for Manitobans living with disabilities is deeply appreciated.

As Minister responsible for Accessibility, I look forward to this bill passing committee.

Miigwech.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister Fontaine.

And does the critic from the official opposition have an opening statement?

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): I'll keep my remarks very brief, here.

I do want to say a shout-out to the presenters that came tonight and expressed their points of view on what Bill 5 illustrates to them, some of the challenges, that they still exist within the bill, but also highlighting some of the positive things in this.

I think there is still room to improve on this, and we all know that accessibility is essential for all Manitobans, whether it's accessing education, whether it's accessing business, whether it's accessing medical supports. We got some really good input tonight, and I think there needs to be some further considerations.

And, again, I just want to shout-out to those individuals that came forward tonight and shared their

concerns and their thoughts on that and, you know, some lived experience.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Byram.

During the consideration of a bill, the enacting clause and the title are postponed until all other clauses have been considered in their proper order.

Also, if there's agreement from the committee, the Chair will call clauses in blocks that conform to pages, with the understanding that we will stop at any particular clause or clauses where members may have comments, questions or amendments to propose.

Is that agreed? [*Agreed*]

Clauses 1 through 3—pass; schedule A, clauses 1 through 3—pass; schedule A, class—clauses 4 through 6—pass; schedule A, clauses 7 through 9—pass; schedule B, clauses 1 and 2—pass; schedule B, clause 3—pass; enacting clause—pass; title—pass. Bill be reported.

**Bill 17—The Adult Abuse Registry
Amendment Act**
(Continued)

The Chairperson: Does the minister responsible for Bill 17 have an opening statement?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): Bill 17 streamlines the Adult Abuse Registry Committee's hearing process by eliminating the need for the first panel hearings.

This legislative change supports recommendations in Justice Burnett's report on The Adult Abuse Registry Act and the PPCO. The change from two panels to a single panel will reduce the length of time for an AARC referral to move through the process, helping the committee manage increasing numbers of reports that are referred to it annually and resulting in faster and more efficient assessment of AARC referrals to help keep vulnerable adults safe.

Eliminating first panel hearings does not compromise the fairness of the procedure—proceedings. Alleged offenders will continue to be provided notice of the allegations and an opportunity to respond, with the committee continuing to make its decision based on information from both the alleged offender and the investigation report. The department is working with the Adult Abuse Registry Committee and the investigative units to address Justice Burnett's other recommendations and make further improvements such as

exploring ways to expand the means of serving notice to alleged offenders.

I am pleased to see support for Bill 17 during second reading, and I say miigwech to the member for Agassiz for her remarks on the importance of ensuring patients and persons living with an intellectual disability are protected from abuse and neglect. I look forward to this passing committee.

The Chairperson: We thank the minister.

Does the critic from the official opposition have an opening statement?

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Bill 17, The Adult Abuse Registry Amendment Act, this bill speaks to the responsibility that we all share here in this province, and that is protecting vulnerable adults in our communities while also ensuring fairness and due process for those that are accused.

The Adult Abuse Registry is an essential safeguard in our system, helping prevent further harm to individuals who rely on care and support. We've seen in recent times in the last number of years where there have been situations arise in specifically, maybe, our health-care system and in places of our most vulnerable where the registry could play or does play an important role in protecting people in our province.

Bill 17 proposes to streamline the process by which decisions are made, with the goal of reducing delays and hopefully improving efficiencies. When allegations of abuse or neglect arise, timely decisions are critical to ensuring that—the safety of vulnerable adults. And it is our role to carefully consider not only the intent of the bill, but also how it functions in practice.

There's important considerations we must bear in mind. When we move toward a more streamlined single-hearing process, one must still provide individuals with meaningful opportunity to respond to allegations and access to information in order to prepare a case. Clear and reliable notice procedures will be essential to ensure that no one is excluded from the process simply because they were unaware of it. This is a system where decisions have significant consequences, and there must be a way to address potential errors or even if new information arises.

In addition, there is critical—it is critical and important that there's availability of a fair and accessible review or appeal mechanism in place. And, again, we just all want to ensure that the system is responsive

and effective in protecting our vulnerable adults while also being fair, transparent and accountable for that.

So that's everything.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: We thank the member.

During the consideration of a bill, the enacting clause and the title are postponed until all other clauses have been considered in their proper order.

Clause 1—pass; clause 2—pass; clause 3—pass; clause 4—pass; clause 5—pass; clause 6—pass; clause 7—pass; enacting clause—pass; title—pass. Bill be reported.

* (19:30)

Bill 23—The Advocate for Children and Youth Amendment Act

(Continued)

The Chairperson: Okay. Does the minister responsible for Bill 23 have an opening statement?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): Bill 23 makes targeted clarifying amendments to strengthen the legislative foundation of the Office of the Advocate for Children and Youth. These proposed amendments arise from the 2024 all-party review of the act, including hearings and subsequent consultations with the advocate's office.

This bill modernizes the act to better reflect the realities of the children and youth being served and the systems that serve them. It does not change the core mandate of the advocate's office.

Bill 23 updates the preamble to more clearly recognize children and youth of all gender identities, emphasizing the right to services that respect their dignity and support them in living fully and authentically. It also broadens the human rights framework guiding the act by expressively referencing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, alongside the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The bill also provides the advocate with explicit authority to enter into agreements with government departments and service providers. This is intended to support collaboration, information sharing and the effective carrying out of the advocate's responsibilities while also maintaining the advocate's independence.

In addition, Bill 23 clarifies the advocate may actively advocate for the principles in the Convention

on the Rights of the Child while carrying out their duties under the act.

Finally, the bill introduces a requirement for a comprehensive legislative review of the act every seven years, ensuring ongoing accountability and an opportunity for the Legislature to consider whether the act continues to meet the needs of children, youth and young adults in Manitoba.

As I have said many, many times, the landscape of child welfare in Manitoba is changing. As our government pursues legislative measures to support Indigenous child and family services jurisdiction as First Nations and Métis assert jurisdiction over child welfare, we remain committed to working with MACY to collaborate in respect of children's rights and the provincial services they are entitled to receive in Manitoba.

I do want to clarify, once again, the Advocate for Children and Youth is a provincial body. While the advocate provides oversight and advice on many provincial services, they do not have authority under Indigenous law to review the services provided under Indigenous law. Even though MACY does not review services outside their scope as a provincial body, these amendments will provide the legislative framework for MACY to enter into agreements if approached by an Indigenous governing body to review provincial services they access.

I hope that provides some further clarity.

I also want to share, while the advocate was unable to join us at committee tonight, she asked me to share in these remarks that MACY was pleased to work in partnership with the Department of Families on this bill and supports the amendments it brings forward.

I look forward to this bill passing.

The Chairperson: We thank the minister.

Does the critic from the official opposition have an opening statement?

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): I do want to take a moment to acknowledge the important work being done by the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth. The advocate's office plays a vital role in our province, ensuring that children and youth, particularly those who are most vulnerable, have a voice when navigating through complex government systems.

Whether supporting young people in care or those facing mental health challenges or families searching for answers, the office is often there for youth and

families during those difficult and challenging times in their lives. The work carried out by the office is not easy. It—I know it involves listening to difficult stories, investigating serious incidents and identifying where systems must improve, requiring professionalism, compassion and deep commitment to the well-being of children and youth here in our province.

I would also like to specifically recognize Sherry Gott and her team over at MACY for their dedication to this work. I know under her leadership, the office continues to shine a light on systemic issues and advocate for change and support the young people and families who need it.

And, again, the advocate's office is a critical part of Manitoba's child-serving systems, and we can all agree that we want the best for all our children here across the province and we don't want to see any children fall through the cracks. Thank you.

The Chairperson: We thank the member.

During the consideration of a bill, the enacting clause and the title are postponed until all other clauses have been considered in their proper order.

Clause 1—pass; clause 2—pass; clause 3—pass; clause 4—pass; clause 5—pass; clause 6—pass; enacting clause—pass; title—pass. Bill be reported.

Okay, the hour being 7:37, what is the will of this committee?

Some Honourable Members: Rise.

The Chairperson: Committee rise.

COMMITTEE ROSE AT: 7:37 p.m.

WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS

Re: Bill 5

I am writing, on behalf of my organization, Inclusion Winnipeg, to express serious concern regarding the proposed amendments to The Accessibility for Manitobans Act outlined in Schedule A. While the Act was originally designed to advance accessibility and remove barriers for persons with disabilities across Manitoba, several of these changes represent a clear step backward for the disability community.

One of the most troubling amendments is the reduction in the frequency of reviews for accessibility standards. Previously, standards were to be reviewed every five years on an ongoing basis. The amendment now delays subsequent reviews to at least every ten years after the initial review. This significantly slows the pace at which barriers can be identified and

addressed. Accessibility is not a static issue—it evolves alongside technology, infrastructure, and social expectations. By extending review timelines, Manitoba risks falling behind in addressing emerging barriers and maintaining meaningful progress.

Similarly, the amendment to the comprehensive review of the Act itself extends the review cycle to every ten years. This further weakens accountability and reduces opportunities for timely improvements. For a law that directly impacts the daily lives of persons with disabilities, infrequent review undermines its effectiveness and responsiveness.

Changes to accessibility planning requirements for public sector bodies also raise concern. The shift away from annual planning to multi-year planning periods, with updates required only every four years after 2032, reduces transparency and urgency. Accessibility plans are essential tools for tracking progress and ensuring continuous improvement. Less frequent updates may allow barriers to persist longer without action and limit public oversight.

While the revised language around the composition of the Accessibility Advisory Council includes important considerations such as representation and diversity, the phrasing "as much as possible" weakens what should be a firm requirement—that the majority of members be persons disabled by barriers. Strong representation is critical to ensuring that lived experience meaningfully shapes policy decisions.

Taken together, these amendments signal a shift away from proactive, accountable, and community-driven accessibility policy. They reduce the frequency of review, delay planning cycles, and introduce flexibility where firm commitments are needed. For the disability community in Manitoba, this risks slowing progress, weakening protections, and diminishing the province's leadership in accessibility.

Accessibility legislation should move forward with urgency and commitment, not retreat into longer timelines and reduced accountability. I urge you to reconsider these amendments and to work in partnership with the disability community to strengthen—not weaken—the framework that supports inclusion and equal access for all Manitobans.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Caryn Birch
Inclusion Winnipeg

Re: Bill 5

I wish to provide my written notes/feedback on Accessibility. I personally, along with family members and others live with a disability.

Accessibility is so very important to me and to those I know who face ongoing and challenging barriers in their lives. I am not comfortable with the changes and do not agree that Accessibility Standards drag on for too many additional years. The longer we wait, the less important accessibility becomes and clearly no progress will be made in a timely manner for all Manitobans.

Accessibility plans should be required every 2-3 years, not every 4 years. Four (4) years is a very substantial and unacceptable delay in progress.

Accessibility plans and progress updates should be publicly posted so Manitobans can see what is happening and to hold organizations accountable. Organizations should be required to explain how feedback from persons with disabilities affected their plan. Simple language such as "consultation occurred" is too broad.

It is important that reports be made public—to ensure compliance and progress made across the province.

Accessibility standards and the Act should be reviewed every 5 years—not 10 years. Ten (10) years is not a reasonable timeframe for such an important Act to be left and with little to no progress—for so many years.

We need to make ongoing and tangible changes on accessibility to improve people's lives in an accountable, inclusive, responsible and productive manner.

Thank you and my hope is that this will help in the decision making process.

Regards

Rhonda Svendsen

Re: Bill 5

I want to make sure that this act stays unchanged and beneficial for disabled people.

Randie Locken

The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Debates and Proceedings
are also available on the Internet at the following address:

<http://www.manitoba.ca/legislature/hansard/hansard.html>