



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

Chairperson
Carla Compton
Constituency of Tuxedo



Vol. LXXX No. 4 - 6 p.m., Thursday, May 7, 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
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GUENTER, Josh	Borderland	PC
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KHAN, Obby	Fort Whyte	PC
KINEW, Wab, Hon.	Fort Rouge	NDP
KING, Trevor	Lakeside	PC
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LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	Ind.
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Tyndall Park	Lib.
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
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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
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WHARTON, Jeff	Red River North	PC
WIEBE, Matt, Hon.	Concordia	NDP
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	The Pas-Kameesak	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA
THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Thursday, May 7, 2026

TIME – 6 p.m.

LOCATION – Winnipeg, Manitoba

CHAIRPERSON – MLA Carla Compton (Tuxedo)

**VICE-CHAIRPERSON – MLA Robert Loiselle
(St. Boniface)**

ATTENDANCE – 6 QUORUM – 4

Members of the committee present:

Hon. Min. Fontaine

*Ms. Byram, MLA Compton, Mr. Goertzen,
MLAs Loiselle, Redhead*

Substitutions:

MLA Maloway for MLA Redhead at 6:53 p.m.

APPEARING:

Ron Schuler, MLA for Springfield-Ritchot

PUBLIC PRESENTERS:

Bill 6 – The Sign Languages Recognition Act

Richard Zimmer, private citizen

Andrew Stadnicki, private citizen

Tricia Amaro, Canada Deaf Grassroots Movement

Doug Momotiuk, Manitoba Deaf Association

*Erika Duguay, Resource Centre for Manitobans
who are Deafblind*

Fernanda Vallejo, Latinas Manitoba Inc.

*Bill 36 – The Child and Family Services Amend-
ment Act*

Bert Crocker, private citizen

WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS:

Bill 6 – The Sign Languages Recognition Act

*Cheryl Smukowich, Manitoba School Boards
Association*

*Bill 36 – The Child and Family Services Amend-
ment Act*

*Colin Kinsella, Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak
Inc.*

MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION:

Bill 6 – The Sign Languages Recognition Act

*Bill 36 – The Child and Family Services Amend-
ment Act*

* * *

Clerk Assistant (Ms. Melanie Ching): 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 elect MLA Carla Compton.

Clerk Assistant: MLA Compton has been nominated.

Are there any other nominations?

Hearing no other nominations, MLA Compton, will you please take the Chair.

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

Are there any nominations?

MLA Eric Redhead (Thompson): I nominate MLA Loiselle.

The Chairperson: So MLA Loiselle has been nominated.

Are there any other nominations?

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

This meeting has been called to consider the following bills: Bill 6, The Sign Languages Recognition Act; Bill 36, The Child and Family Services Amendment Act.

The Legislative Assembly received requests for there to be American Sign Language–ASL–interpreters at committee this evening. The Assembly has arranged for there to be two ASL interpreters physically in the room to provide in-person simultaneous interpretation for presenters who have

requested interpretation for their presentation and the subsequent question period.

In addition, we will have live, simultaneous ASL interpretation on our public broadcast for the duration of the whole meeting. This will be shown on the screen in the public gallery.

Once the presentations have concluded, the interpreters present in the room will be leaving. Interpretation will still be available on the public broadcast.

This is the first time the Legislative Assembly has provided ASL interpretation in this way. If there are any comments or feedback, our Deputy Clerk, Tim Abbott, will be pleased to hear from you.

With this in mind, I have a leave request for the committee. Is there leave to begin public presentations with those who have requested ASL interpretation? *[Agreed]*

Also, we have had a request from one of the registered presenters, who has requested ASL interpretation, Richard Zimmer, who is unable to stay late and is asking to present first.

Is there leave for Richard Zimmer to be the first public presenter? *[Agreed]*

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.

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.

The proceedings of our meetings are recorded in order to provide a verbatim transcript. 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.

Written submissions from the following persons have been received and distributed to committee members: Cheryl Smukowich, Manitoba School Boards Association, on Bill 6; and Colin Kinsella, Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc., on Bill 36.

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

On the topic of determining the order of public presentations, I will note that we have out-of-town presenters registered and they are marked with an asterisk on the list. Taking into account the leave requests earlier to allow Richard Zimmer to present first, followed by the remaining people who have requested ASL interpretation for their presentations, in what order does the committee wish to hear the remainder of the presentations?

MLA Robert Loiselle (St. Boniface): Out-of-town presenters first.

The Chairperson: So I've heard—so we will have Richard Zimmer first and then out-of-town presenters and then in-person presenters. Okay, so that is the plan.

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

Bill 6—The Sign Languages Recognition Act

The Chairperson: Okay, so I will now call on Mr. Zimmer, and he is attending virtually.

So, Mr. Zimmer, if you could turn on your microphone in your video, please. There we go. Okay, so, Mr. Zimmer, please proceed with your presentation.

* (18:20)

Richard Zimmer, through ASL interpretation (Private Citizen): Hello. First of all, I would like to say thank you for allowing me this opportunity to participate. Unfortunately I can't see the interpreter, so—because it's only one inch by one inch—so that might pose a challenge.

My name is Richard Zimmer. I have been Deaf since birth. I have 11 siblings and I am the youngest; six are hearing, five are Deaf, but all use sign language. And I feel very fortunate to have grown up in that environment. Both of my parents can hear. However, they never perceived their Deaf children as being anything different. They just treated them equally, as they would all of their children.

I went to a Deaf school and graduated from there and then went on to post-secondary education at Gallaudet University and I graduated with a B.A., and then I worked as an instructor. So in terms of the recognition of ASL, LSQ and Indigenous sign languages in this bill, the reason I've chosen to speak to it tonight is, in terms of recognizing the languages, I think it gives some credence to the fact that these are bona fide languages, and I'll speak to that a bit later.

I want to just now talk about Martha's Vineyard. In the 1600s—it's interesting, maybe some of you don't know this—but that community, everybody used sign language, whether they were deaf or they could hear.

So sign language was considered a complete language that everybody used for communication. So that was Martha's Vineyard 1.0, and I'll come back to that. So that recognition of sign language as a bona fide language—not a tool for communication—is an important distinction.

Next, I'd like to speak about the recognition of culture. By recognizing signed languages, it also recognizes the culture of the sign-language community. There has been a lot—the linguistic community has obviously expanded, and with that comes identity, education, participation in society. And I believe that cultural component is an important part of the recognition.

So, if we look back in history, a lot of policies that were made had a medical view towards people who are Deaf, and because of that, Deaf people—or the sign-language community—was not recognized as a unique linguistic community.

So in this recognition, I see the commitment from the Manitoba government. However, I would like to see more in terms of access to communication in signed languages. By doing so, it would promote an

awareness of our culture and the use of sign language in education settings and in public service.

Next, I'd like to speak to how policies can impact people. So, as I've said, recognition of signed languages is only part of what we would like to see, because, ultimately, we are looking for better education for Deaf children and more access to interpreting services in ASL, LSQ and Indigenous signed languages.

And I want to really emphasize the importance of having Deaf-led programs. Recognition of signed languages may lead to future funding and that will give the sign language community or Deaf community the independence that they need in order to make decisions on their behalf.

Now, in speaking specifically about Manitoba, if a sign-language policy were to be implemented, then Manitoba would be a leader in terms of Deaf people's rights. So if it is enacted in legislation, it has this broader impact. So I want to go back to my comment about this medical perspective of deafness or sign language use. So if the awareness is broadened, then that view also changes, and it allows people to exercise their rights as citizens.

So, in summary, speaking to Bill 6, if it is passed, Manitoba will officially recognize sign languages and the Deaf community, and that will have a trickle-down effect on policies and ultimately education and public service and access to government communication. And I foresee a much broader impact of inclusion of Deaf people in society.

Now, going back to Martha's Vineyard, version 1.0, I believe this would be Martha's—pardon me, that was an interpreter error—I was recounting a historical perspective of Martha's Vineyard. However, if this bill is passed, then this will be Martha's Vineyard 2.0.

The Chairperson: So thank you for your presentation, Mr. Zimmer.

Do members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister responsible for Accessibility): I just want to say miigwech and thank you to Mr. Zimmer for his really important contribution to this evening's standing committee, and I appreciate the opportunities that we've had to work together in respect of greater recognition of Deaf and hard of hearing culture and I appreciate the expertise and the teachings that you have shared with us.

And I just want to say miigwech for your presentation this evening.

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

R. Zimmer, through ASL interpretation: I'm now seeing two different screens and I don't see an interpreter, so I'm not actually sure what's going on right now. Where is the interpreter? How can I access the interpreter? Oh, this is unfortunate.

The Chairperson: So, Mr. Zimmer, apologies—we're trying to clarify. Are you able to see the online ASL interpreter, Mr. Zimmer? We've currently paused your time.

R. Zimmer, through ASL interpretation: As I said, I can only see the interpreter in a very, very small frame. I need to see the interpreter in a larger frame—so if I can make it go full screen? I don't know. It's just a one-inch picture-in-picture here.

Oh, that's much better. Oh, that's much better, yes.

The Chairperson: Okay. Should we restart?

Committee, is it okay if we just restart that Q & A part? *[Agreed]*

Okay, thanks.

Okay, take two.

* (18:30)

So, mister—or Minister Fontaine, we'll give you opportunity to share your response.

R. Zimmer, through ASL interpretation: I can't see the interpreter again.

Oh, I can see the interpreter now. Yes, now that the interpreter is full screen, I can—and can you please keep the interpreter in this view.

The Chairperson: Okay. So, Minister Fontaine.

MLA Fontaine: I just wanted to say miigwech and thank you to Mr. Zimmer for your presentation this evening. And, as you can see, you know, in the last many months, the Legislative Assembly has put into place ASL interpretation, picture-in-picture. Sometimes there's still some hiccups. I think it's really important to understand—those folks that are online and watching this—this is actually the first time that we're doing this in the history of the Manitoba Legislature.

And so I do want to just thank our legislative 'kerks'—clerks who have put a lot of effort and time to make sure. Sometimes there's hiccups, but it really is

a testament—hiccups and all—it really is a testament to how hard the government and the Legislative Assembly are trying to do things right, to respect all Manitobans. So I just want to say miigwech, Mr. Zimmer, for your presentation today.

The Chairperson: Mr. Zimmer, would you like to respond to Minister Fontaine?

R. Zimmer, through ASL interpretation: Yes, I would.

If I could make a suggestion for the future, perhaps you should consult with Deaf people prior to setting up accessibility measures, because if Deaf people were involved, they would be able to give you the advice that you need. We are often an afterthought, and so I think that, with consultation with the Deaf community, any future meetings that you have in this format would be much more effective with consultation from the community.

So I'm happy to take any other questions.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Thank you, Mr. Zimmer, for presenting here tonight and also being patient as we move through some of these hiccups. Sharing some of your insight into what your challenges are and barriers is welcomed. And also, just your experience here tonight as we're working through this—I think that helps with future planning.

I also want to just say a shout-out to our interpreters who are here with us tonight—the ASL interpreters who do a great job in providing the service so that you can—and so that we can all be working towards getting this legislation put forward, and your input on this.

So thank you very much for taking the time and sharing with us here tonight.

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

R. Zimmer, through ASL interpretation: I have had some experience with the Canada accessibility act, and one thing: even since that act was passed, we don't see captioning on the CBC News.

And so it's disappointing that an accessibility act is passed, but then there's still not accessibility features. So my concern is that Bill 6 might just be a token representation of what actually really needs to happen. So Deaf people have rights; we pay taxes. And we believe that we should have equal access.

And, again, as I mentioned, I think Manitoba has an opportunity to be a leader and if provisions are put

in place, then Manitoba will actually exceed what the Canada accessibility act is doing.

MLA Fontaine: So I just want to provide some information for Mr. Zimmer, some direct contact information for the Deputy Clerk of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. His name is Tim Abbott. He is the lead for the Manitoba Legislative Assembly and has been doing a very good job in respect of making sure that we've got the ASL picture-in-picture infrastructure for the Manitoba Legislature, but he would be more than willing to chat with you directly. His number is 204-945-0796. We can—or the Legislative Assembly—the clerks can also send you his—

R. Zimmer, through ASL interpretation: Could I get you to repeat that number again, please.

MLA Fontaine: —contact information.

R. Zimmer, through ASL interpretation: Okay, if you're going to send me that information, that's fine.

MLA Fontaine: He agrees, yes.

The Chairperson: Mr. Zimmer, would you like to respond a little bit more?

R. Zimmer, through ASL interpretation: Okay, I see that my time is up, so I just wanted to say thank you very much for this opportunity to convey the points that I have shared with you tonight. And I think that Bill 6 is good, but it can be better.

Thank you very much.

The Chairperson: All right, thank you for your presentation.

So we are moving to the next out-of-town presenter, so that actually takes us to Bill 36—

Clerk Assistant: Oh, no. We do all the ASL first.

The Chairperson: Oh, my mistake, go back.

Okay, so next I will now call on Mr. Andrew Stadnicki, private citizen. He is also joining us from online.

And so, Mr. Stadnicki, if you could turn on your camera. Okay, hello, and please proceed with your presentation.

Andrew Stadnicki, through ASL interpretation (Private Citizen): Before I proceed, I did email and—I sent an email in and let the moderator know that I would have my own interpreter with me tonight. And can you please allow them into the Zoom room. *[interjection]*

The Chairperson: Yes, this will be fine. We're just getting your interpreter on as well.

ASL Interpreter: Can the room hear me?

The Chairperson: Yes.

ASL Interpreter: And I'm going to turn my camera off.

The Chairperson: Yes, that's great. And so please proceed with your presentation.

A. Stadnicki, through ASL interpretation: Before the time begins, there are some things I'd like to say about the frustrations we are having around access for this particular session. As was mentioned, the interpreter was very small and that was not accessible. I'm glad that Mr. Zimmer has mentioned that and there has been changes made. I did bring my own interpreter and I will begin my presentation now.

My name is Andrew Stadnicki and I am a third-generation Deaf person. I attended Deaf schools my entire life, and I graduated with a bachelor's and a master's in business administration from Rochester Institute of Technology.

The World Federation of the Deaf calls on governments and event organizers to recognize that Deaf people have a right to choose their interpretation services. ASL is not the native language of most interpreters, and I feel—in order to feel confident that my message will be interpreted accurately, I brought my own interpreter at my own expense.

Every Deaf person should have the right to choose accessibility that works best for them. I am here to speak to Bill 6. I am not against recognition, but recognition alone does not change lives. I read the bill in the—in its entirety, all of it. It is one sentence. Section 1 says, sign languages are the primary languages of the Deaf community in Manitoba. And section 2 is a citation reference. And section 3 says, it comes into force on royal assent.

* (18:40)

That is not the entire bill. There is no funding in this bill. There is no enforcement in this bill. There are no timelines, no expectations, no consequences if nothing changes.

When a language is called official, government has obligations. And this bill uses one word that I need you to understand: the word primary. It must—when languages are official, government must fund that language, it must provide services in that language and citizens have the right to use it. When a language

is called primary, it means nothing changes. The government is not required to do anything differently. Primary is a compliment. Official is a commitment. I can show you exactly what the word primary means in practice right now, today.

In November 2025, the Manitoba government posted a job for an ASL interpreter. It was not classified as a translator. It was classified as an educational assistant. Why? Because translator classification in this government only applies to official languages, English and French. ASL is not official, so it does not qualify and it never has. That misclassification means lower pay, roughly half the industry rate. It means qualified interpreters do not apply. It means Deaf people in government settings get inadequate interpretation.

If Bill 6 passes with the word primary, that job posting does not change, that pay does not change and that classification does not change. Nothing is fixed. That is what the word primary looks like in practice. That gap, this bill fails to close.

I want to show you what happens when recognition has no teeth: New Zealand recognized New Zealand Sign Language as an official language in 2006. That is 20 years ago. They use the word official, stronger than what Manitoba is proposing. A Deaf Maori woman by the name of Cha'nel Kaa Luke, who currently sits on the World Federation of the Deaf Youth Section board, shared this statement just this week during their New Zealand Sign Language Week, and I quote: There were no promises made towards access in education, health or public service. Full access cannot be given unless something changes.

New Zealand used stronger words and still got nothing binding. Manitoba is proposing the weaker word. I am telling you today, we cannot repeat that mistake. We cannot pass this bill and wait 20 years to find out it changed nothing.

The ground reality in Manitoba: Deaf children in school divisions are placed with signing educational assistants, not qualified ASL interpreters. Those are not the same thing. An EA who knows some sign is not an interpreter. Some school divisions keep Deaf students in their system, not because it's best for the child, but because it brings in funding.

Manitoba has one Deaf school. It has 17 Deaf staff and 18 hearing staff, which on the face of it sounds balanced, but look at the breakdown. There are nine hearing teachers and only three Deaf teachers. There are five hearing staff in the support and resource

team and zero Deaf staff. Educational assistants—10 of them are Deaf; two are hearing. Custodians, two are Deaf, zero are hearing.

Do you see the pattern? Deaf people fill the lowest paid roles. Hearing people fill the professional roles. This is our Deaf school. Our children should see Deaf adults in leadership roles. Instead, they see Deaf adults mostly in entry-level jobs. That sends a message, and that message is damaging.

On October 7, the government held a consultation. Interpreters missed a key Deaf input. They called it a success. An interpreter organization sent in a letter in December and got a meeting within five days. Deaf people ask for meetings about our needs and we wait far longer.

Bill 6, the first reading, December 3; second reading happened April 21. That is 139 days. The Autism Strategy Act, first to second reading, happened in three days. Three days versus 139 days; that tells you how much this bill was prioritized.

These are the 10 of the many unanswered questions I have. All are submitted in writing for the record:

(1) Will Deaf infants have access to ASL early intervention, funded and required by law?

(2) Will families who choose cochlear implants still be required to give their child access to sign language?

(3) Will Central Speech and Hearing Clinic be directed to stop deprioritizing ASL for Deaf children?

(4) Will schools be required to use qualified ASL interpreters instead of signing EAs?

(5) Will Manitoba School for the Deaf be open to all Deaf children in Manitoba, not just those in Winnipeg? When does the dormitory reopen?

(6) Will school divisions be required to tell families that Manitoba School for the Deaf is an option instead of keeping Deaf children in their system for funding?

(7) Will there be funding for Deaf students to attend Gallaudet University, Rochester Institute of Technology, Boston University and California State University, Northridge: the schools that actually produce Deaf professionals?

(8) Will Manitoba school of the Deaf be required to hire more Deaf teachers, Deaf educational assistants and Deaf administrators at all levels?

(9) Will there be a concrete plan to end language deprivation in Manitoba?

(10) Will public settings be required to use Deaf interpreters as British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario and many United States do in the United States?

Ten questions, but there are more, and every single one of them are unanswered by this bill. I am not here to reject this bill. I am here because I want it to be worth something.

We need this committee to push for six things: (1) Change the word primary to official; (2) add real commitments, funding timelines and accountability; (3) require qualified ASL interpreters in schools, not signing EAs, (4) open Manitoba school of the Deaf to all Deaf children across Manitoba—restore the dormitory; (5) fund early intervention, post-secondary access and Deaf interpreter training; (6) ensure that all future consultations are led by and fully representative of the Deaf community.

Recognition without accountability is not enough. We have waited long enough. This is our chance to do it right.

Thank you. And thank you for the time to come and make my comments today.

The Chairperson: So thank you for your presentation.

Do members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

MLA Fontaine: Thank you for your presentation and your feedback on Bill 6 and everything that you shared this evening.

I also just want to share for folks that are watching and in the gallery as well. As I said earlier, our Deputy Clerk, Tim Abbott, will be sending out an email to folks tonight, just to provide, if you would like, your feedback on how this evening went. Again, the Deputy Clerk is with the Legislative Assembly and they are responsible for all of the ASL interpretation and also for the ASL interpretation for standing committees. So he will be sending out an email to all of the presenters.

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

A. Stadnicki, through ASL interpretation: Yes, so I—that wasn't actually a question. But I do want to emphasize, again—as one of my earlier comments about Deaf professionals—we have very limited access to Deaf professionals. And yet the burden to provide

access and to make sure this all happens still falls to a hearing person.

So again, it's another opportunity where it's important to include Deaf people in every step, whether it is policy making, administration—Deaf people should be included. And I want to make it clear, too, by the way this is set up, I can't tell who is speaking to me. Everything is so small. I have no idea who is making comments or asking questions. It's very disappointing.

Ms. Byram: Thank you, Mr. Stadnicki, for your presentation here tonight, gain—providing insight into what could further provide substance to this bill and calling on accountability once things are moving forward here.

* (18:50)

I do want to just ask: Was the minister—did the minister—or were you consulted in any way in the design of this bill or in the wording of this bill? Did anybody reach out and consult with you on that?

A. Stadnicki, through ASL interpretation: I will send a supplementary package because I had a time limit of 10 minutes. I will add some additional information. But to answer your question, unfortunately, the minister accessibility officer was very selective. I happened to get a link and join that particular meeting, but that meeting was also a disaster with technology. This isn't the first time that we're seeing that, this is actually the second.

And so it really cut into the meeting time by half of the time. And in that session, there was not really a discussion about the bill itself; it was very vague. It was more focused on terminology of small capital letter deaf or lowercase deaf—D in deaf—or uppercase. So there was no discussion about what the expectation—it was really very ambiguous. And so we—know, it was like we can't have a lot of discussion before it comes to legislation and to the Legislature.

So I don't think that it was really an advisory opportunity. It was very selective and does not speak to the representation of all Deaf Manitobans at all.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield-Ritchot): Good evening, Andrew, and thank you very much for your presentation; it was very passionate. And for some of us who have been here for over 27 years, we came to committee and you taught us quite a bit.

I appreciate, in particular, that you came forward with the 10 points and then more synthesized six points. And I know that we, as the Progressive

Conservative opposition, will take that back; a lot further conversations on what needs to be done with this legislation.

So thank you for your spirited and passionate presentation.

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

A. Stadnicki, through ASL interpretation: So just, I know this was the opposition speaking. I appreciate knowing that.

Can you tell me who the previous person who spoke to me prior to him, and what their role was?

The Chairperson: The previous person was Ms. Byram. She is also opposition member and critic.

Mr. Stadnicki? Any—I don't see any further questions or time for response, so thank you very much for your presentation, and we will continue on.

And actually before I call the next presenter, I just need order, please.

Committee Substitution

The Chairperson: I would like to inform the committee that under rule 84(2), the following membership substitution has been made for this committee, effective immediately: MLA Maloway for MLA Redhead.

Thank you.

* * *

The Chairperson: All right. I will now call on Mr. Jordan Sangalang, private citizen. And if I mispronounced your name, please correct me.

Not seeing that—we're just checking online. I don't think we're—*[interjection]*

Okay, so he's not currently online and I don't think he's currently here in person, so he will drop to the bottom of the list.

We will move on to Tricia Amaro from Canada Deaf Grassroots Movement. She is online. *[interjection]*

The Chairperson: Oh, I just need—sorry, I haven't recognized you, apologies.

So Tricia Amaro, please proceed with your presentation.

Tricia Amaro, through ASL interpretation (Canada Deaf Grassroots Movement): If I could give a little bit

of background of who I am and my prior experience. I was born and raised here in Manitoba, been here now for 50 years. I am the only Deaf person from a hearing family; my parents were both not deaf.

In that year, around '90-97, there were a lot of programs that were very oral-based in 1997, and that kind of continued on until about—sorry—1979 until 1981. I was later taken and transferred to a different program for my education, but was really deprived of the access to American Sign Language by about 75 per cent.

Generationally, there is a 50 per cent where I would have sign language, but also have been exposed to home sign which was very home-based; 10 per cent of my language being that I was born to hearing parents was impacted by how I could relate to my family.

It was just signs that were—I was exposed to was really just, you know, showing different concepts, showing different objects, very basic, not incredibly in-depth or abstract concepts and very different from the experience of other Deaf people growing up in a Deaf family.

And later on, a research by the name of William Stokoe, who was a linguist and did further research into American Sign Language—he is also considered the father of ASL—and by the year of—1960s was when a lot of his research came out. And as that research was put out, people started recognizing, thinking about ASL as a language with various parameters. In the 1950s—*[interjection]*—the interpreter is not sure about the year on that—there was further advocacy towards sign languages and American Sign Language.

So I want to emphasize the point about how this impacts the bill. Here in Manitoba, there are roughly 13,000 users of American Sign Language and across Canada, there are roughly 357,000 Deaf and hard of hearing who use sign language as a primary language.

Of that group, about 85 per cent—or roughly 75 per cent—are faced with many barriers with employment, access to various services, limited captioning, for example, like the news not having captioning. Literacy skills are also varied within the group. And due to the fact that their primary language is ASL, their English literary skills are also often compromised because it is not their primary language.

So, for example, when we see sign language, it is important to have picture-in-picture, but that needs to be clear, so that we can understand the language that is being presented to us. And at this point I'm happy to answer any questions the committee might have.

I'm not able to see the interpreter.

The Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation. I think they're able to change the screen so you can see the interpreter. There.

Okay, so do members of committee have questions for the presenter?

MLA Fontaine: I just want to thank you so much for your presentation this evening and sharing all of that information; that's really important information. And I appreciate you being here this evening at the standing committee on Bill 6.

Miigwech.

* (19:00)

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

T. Amaro, through ASL interpretation: I'm happy to respond if there's any particular questions that want to come from the opposition—be it various parties, Independents, Liberal, Conservative—I'm happy to always answer those questions. But I also hope that you're able to work together and make this non-partisan so that you can go ahead and pass this bill—past the standing committee for the benefit of the community.

Ms. Byram: Good evening. I, too, wanted to say thank you, Tricia, for taking the time tonight and coming to present and share some of your concerns and maybe some of the challenges that you have seen as well and for presenting here tonight.

So thank you very much.

The Chairperson: Ms. Amaro, you can respond, if you would like, to Ms. Byram.

T. Amaro, through ASL interpretation: I know that now that it's progressed to the standing committee, I'm hoping that this bill proceeds further in the legislative process, and I look forward to seeing how that turns out. And I hope that it is installed and it can be efficient.

MLA Fontaine: I just wanted to let you know that it will pass standing committee this evening, and it will pass third reading and concurrence and it will receive royal assent on June 1. So as of June 1, it will become law in Manitoba.

The Chairperson: Ms. Amaro, if you would like to respond.

T. Amaro, through ASL interpretation: I am very appreciative of that, thank you so much. And I want to just say thank you for your patience and giving me the opportunity to put some words on the record and providing interpreters and also just allowing me to speak to the experience that I have had in the past.

The Chairperson: No further questions? Okay, I see no further questions, so thank you very much, Ms. Amaro, for your presentation.

I will now call on Ms. Cynthia Duboff, private citizen.

Is she online? I don't believe she's online. Okay, and she's not here right now, so she will drop to the bottom of the list.

So I will now call on Mr. Doug Momotiuk from Manitoba Deaf Association. So, Mr. Motiuk [*phonetic*], please proceed with your presentation.

Doug Momotiuk, through ASL interpretation (Manitoba Deaf Association): Good evening, everyone, Honourable Minister Fontaine and the MLAs that are here and the staff as well.

Before I go through my formal presentation, I would just like to take a moment to introduce myself. My name is Doug Momotiuk, and I was born and raised in Manitoba, graduated from the School for the Deaf—or the deaf school, pardon me—and I have been in Winnipeg my whole life.

I joined the Manitoba Deaf Association—I've been on the board now for a number of years. So the comments that I bring tonight are feedback from Deaf community members, from town hall events that we have hosted. So it's a compilation of all of that feedback that I'm here to share with you.

The Deaf community's preference, shall I say, for American Sign Language is not a preference; it is their language of choice. Now, since 1988, there was a set of parents who had a son named Brandon, and they lobbied to have their son attend school—the deaf school. So there was a lot of discussion about how that would happen. Ultimately, the school was established and at that time there were only eight Deaf students, which was great.

Now, in terms of staffing; the school, the principal, teachers, they ended up getting staff from the deaf school in Minnesota because they used ASL there. They thought, good job opportunity here in Winnipeg. They came here to teach those children. And since that time, the school has continued to grow and the

Province has supported the deaf school ever since then, so thank you for that.

So now, I'd like to go through my formal submission. I'm sure all of you are familiar with the Accessible Canada Act, and it recognizes American Sign Language, listening to—Québécoise and Indigenous sign languages and provinces are responsible for providing training in terms of use of sign language and providing interpreters. And so that is becoming more prevalent.

For example, if somebody is interested in getting a passport, they have a virtual interpreter. It's what we call video relay interpreters. They can go into the passport office and connect with interpreters. So that's one initiative of the Accessible Canada Act.

Now, I believe that we are here to talk about amendments to this act and I think the primary amendment should be regulations in terms of employment standards, communication, et cetera. With the Manitoba Accessibility Office, there have been discussions and some of these recommendations align with the Manitoba Accessibility Office.

So one of the things we'd like to speak to is who is responsible for providing interpreters. Now, here we have a good example of the department who has arranged interpreters. So—just a moment for the interpretation. The interpreter is clarifying here.

So for the Legislative Assembly, I've seen that there is much improved access. I have actually watched some of the sessions and I've seen the interpreters there, so thank you for that. Emergency announcements and any announcements that the Premier (Mr. Kinew) makes are also very important to consider accessibility. And I know a few years ago, during COVID, interpreters were present on screen because it was important. This was life or death—death for people and hiring an interpreter in order to provide access was crucial.

Another example of where access is definitely needed is during elections. Often Deaf people try to contact candidates and they wait, they have to go through the red tape of getting an interpreter. I think that could be improved, hopefully in the future when members of the signing community make contact, that an interpreter is provided immediately.

Next I'd like to speak to the value of providing access in education and making American Sign Language available for Deaf children and, by doing so, that enhances their literacy levels and ultimately their success later on in life.

Universities and colleges also need to be providing American Sign Language interpreters, because if they do so, they have an opportunity to have more gainful employment if they attend post-secondary institutions. So a high percentage of Deaf people, around 60 per cent, are underemployed and undereducated, and so providing access in those institutions will support the overall quality of life of Deaf people.

* (19:10)

Another concern is in terms of health care. When a Deaf person needs to go to the hospital, they end up waiting until an interpreter can arrive, and so medical professionals need to be trained in how to triage best and how to get interpreters in there when they're needed. So, basically to mitigate health risks. And I think that, ultimately, that would save money in the long term if health care is provided early on rather than later. And, ultimately, access to communication is what I'm suggesting.

And for children to learn sign language—most of them don't learn from their parents, and so they need an avenue to be able to learn sign language, and their parents also need that as well.

Education needs to be provided to businesses, to public service, in terms of how to communicate with a Deaf person. If a Deaf person shows up at their door, how do they interact with them? Just providing that sort of education so there's opportunities and people can grow from that.

Emergency preparedness is key—ambulance, police services, EMS—providing some training about how they can communicate with Deaf people. So you may or may not know, but Canada has a video-relay service, and so what you can—what a Deaf person can do is connect with the video-relay service or video remote interpreting, and they would have an interpreter available immediately when there's accessing those services, which then relieves the stress for accessing communication.

So public libraries, the selection of books is important. When selecting books, it's important that consideration be given to books that feature American Sign Language. And staff need training, they need workshops, they need information about how to work with Deaf people, how to communicate with them. And, again, if they're using video remote-interpreting services, how to access that. And providing an interpreter is the best access, always.

So these are all suggestions that we believe should be made as amendments to this bill or to

become regulations later on. I don't know if that is the work of this committee or not. ASL and LSQ are valued in the community. Whether there are folks from Quebec or New Brunswick, which also has a large LSQ community, we have to fly interpreters in, in order to provide access for them. So we need to consider both ASL and LSQ when providing access.

So that is the sum of my comments.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: So thank you for your presentation.

Do members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

MLA Fontaine: Thank you so much for your presentation today, and it's lovely to see you again. I'm really glad to hear that you've been in contact with our office, the MAO, and some of the good conversations with Darren, who's here tonight, and his team.

So we really do appreciate everything—all of the insights and recommendations that you've shared with us in my office and then, obviously, with Darren in his office at MAO. So it has been taken to heart and I appreciate you—and I really do appreciate the Manitoba Deaf Association. You folks do really important and phenomenal work all across Manitoba and for Manitoba citizens. So miigwech so much.

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

D. Momotiuk, through ASL interpretation: You may be familiar with Jennifer Howard, who was a former minister and she was responsible for accessibility for six years, I believe. That was from 2009 to 2015, and so we had a lot of conversations with her and with the Accessibility Office at that time. So a lot of this has stemmed from that time and going forward.

Ms. Byram: Thank you, Mr. Momotiuk.

My name is Jodie Byram. I am representing the opposition critic for Families and Accessibility, and I just want to thank you for being here tonight and making your presentation. And I also want to say thank you for touching on the emergency services component and the challenges that your community face in that. That's not the first time we've heard that, as well as some of the other challenges that you shared with us here tonight.

And for taking the time to come and be here for—and present.

Thank you.

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

D. Momotiuk, through ASL interpretation: No, thank you. I will just keep up with the—keep in touch with MAO and we'll go from there.

The Chairperson: Any further questions?

I'm not seeing any further questions, so thank you very much.

All right, so I will now call on Mrs. Erika Duguay, Resource Centre for Manitobans who are Deafblind, and please correct me if I mispronounced your last name. So please proceed with your presentation, Mrs. Duguay.

Erika Duguay (Resource Centre for Manitobans who are Deafblind): My name is Erika Duguay. I am one of the co-ordinators at the Resource Centre for Manitobans who are Deafblind, RCMDB. This evening, I will actually be presenting for two organizations.

I am representing our own, RCMDB, but also the Manitoba Deafblind Association, MDBA. We will be discussing the importance of ASL and TASL, or tactile ASL, in the deafblind community.

RCMDB is a non-profit organization that offers accessibility services and resources to Manitobans who have a combination of vision and hearing loss. MDBA is an advocacy group made up of deafblind adults that advocate, support and affiliate with RCMDB.

I will begin first with the presentation by Jane Sayer, the chairperson of MDBA.

Jane says, I am sorry I cannot be there tonight to present myself, but MDBA works closely with RCMDB, and I have asked Erika Duguay to present my paper, and I'm sure she can answer any questions that you may have. I would like to be assured that deafblind communication is part of Bill 6.

I personally use tactile American Sign Language, which means putting my hands over top of the interpreter's hands and feeling them sign to me. Many people think that as long as an interpreter knows ASL, they can do TASL, and that is a wrong way of thinking. To be an interpreter that knows how to work with deafblind people very well, it takes a lot of practise to be good at TASL.

ASL is more than just signing because it takes in facial expressions, for example. The facial expressions along with the sign can mean different things. Many signs feel the same and so an interpreter needs to learn a way to communicate the mood or incorporate the facial expression used with that sign for blind people.

That is just one example, but there are many examples about TASL that need to be incorporated into the interpretation that people with vision can see. If the interpreter did not include the visuals as well as the sign itself, I would be left out. It takes a lot of practice and knowledge about deafblind people to become a skilled interpreter.

I would also like to mention I personally have Usher syndrome, so previously I did have vision, however, very limited. Many people in the deafblind community still have usable vision, but it may be the same as myself, very limited.

Legal blindness can be caused by many, many different diseases, head and brain traumas and various conditions. This may mean that the deafblind person requires one-on-one interpreters. They need them possibly very close, or they need to sign in their hands. Maybe they have fuzzy vision and a limited field, and trying to follow a platform interpreter is too difficult because they're not close enough.

* (19:20)

One form deafblind people may use is to place their hand on the interpreter's arm and to feel the movements when they're signing. This is called tracking, but the interpreter needs to be close enough for them to do that. I would also like to mention the terminology in Bill 6. When speaking of a medical condition, the one word deafblind, lowercase, small d, small b, is often appropriate. However, when you are talking about the actual people, we have our own culture and community, and we use capital D hyphen capital B for blind.

Across Canada, every area has their own terminology of how they refer to their deafblindness, such as some say they have ushers. But here, I'm only speaking of the terminology used by the deaf-Manitoba deafblind community. Being that this is a Manitoba bill, the correct terminology for—of accessibility to be used should be what the Manitoba deafblind community uses. I feel it is important to use Manitoba terms because the deafblind people made the decision of the terminology and how they wish to be described.

Many places, agencies or hearing-sighted people pick the terms that they used instead of the people who are deafblind. I am proud that in Manitoba—that Manitoba listens to the consumers. I am proud that our agency does not force their terminology but instead accepts what we, the deafblind, wish to be called, and I hope that the government has the same respect for our community.

In Manitoba, we no longer use the word interveners as our service providers. The word intervener is a classic example of a word picked by a hearing-sighted person for our service providers. Many people in the deafblind community didn't even like that title, but it is a word their agencies used and some even used the term intervention services.

This made us feel like we were drug or alcohol abusers. Manitoba did use that term for many years and many people didn't understand what it meant. If you said this was my intervener, they had no clue what that meant or what their role was.

I personally worked with the deafblind community interpreters and other members in our community to find a new term for our services. The new terms we use in Manitoba are deafblind accessibility interpreter, DBAI, deafblind accessibility support, DBAS.

The DBASs are support staff, often with knowledge of ASL, that provide quality of life support such as helping with everyday banking, shopping, hair appointments, et cetera, while meetings, presentations, workshops and medical appointments are interpreted by DBAIs, who are academically trained and graduated.

RCMDB is the only organization in Manitoba to provide full deafblind accessibility services. Other agencies may solely provide interpreters, but as explained previously, that does not mean full accessible communication for the deafblind person unless they are skilled and have remained involved in the deafblind community.

I feel it is very important to acknowledge that RCMDB is the only agency in Manitoba that has knowledge of what the deafblind community's needs are. As previously mentioned, I have Usher's and had vision, but that changed over time.

So, unless the agency is aware of the person's needs, such as RCMDB is, it would be hard to send an appropriate person to interpret for us. Reality is that each deafblind person is unique. None of us have the same communication method. What may work for me with TASL may not work for another person.

We are a very unique group. However, I strongly believe we have the right to clear communication, the same as Deaf and hard-of-hearing people do. Deafblind people need to strongly be included in this bill.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: So thank you for your presentation.

And do members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

MLA Fontaine: I want to thank you for your presentation this evening. It was incredibly informative. And I just have to say that we have hosted folks in my office, and I think that was very, very early on, when I first became a minister. And my chief of staff can attest that that was actually one of my favourite meetings that I've ever had in my office.

And I learned so much that day, and it really was—I don't know how to—it was just a beautiful meeting. It was really beautiful to witness the way folks communicate, and I just want to say miigwech. I really do appreciate your presentation and all of the work that you do.

The Chairperson: Would—oh. Just a moment for the mic to turn on.

Ms. Duguay.

E. Duguay: I have the RCMDB portion of the presentation as well. That was for Jane Sayer. She was the chairperson for the MDBA.

Can I continue with my presentation?

The Chairperson: I'm sorry, there is a little bit of a mix-up here. Just one moment.

All right. So we will go back to the presentation. There is—is it okay with the committee meeting—or the committee members—it'll be three minutes remaining, back to the presentation phase for Mrs. Duguay? *[Agreed]*

So, Mrs. Duguay, please proceed with your presentation. Three minutes remaining.

E. Duguay: Myself, as one of the co-ordinators of RCMDB and as a deafblind accessibility interpreter myself, I understand why it is imperative that the deafblind community and the language that they use is expressed clearly in Bill 6.

So many people, professionals and organizations don't understand or even know about the deafblind community, let alone their accessibility needs.

Accessibility begins with recognition, and it needs to be recognized that sign language is also used by the deafblind community. Therefore, the following should be considered in Bill 6, where it says, sign languages are distinct languages that are integral to the culture of the Deaf community, should also include, deafblind community as well. Whereas many members of the Deaf community as—use sign language as their first language, should also include, deafblind community as well. And, whereas people learn sign languages to communicate with members of the Deaf community, including family, friends and colleagues and students, should also include, deafblind community as well.

Inclusive language is important, and I hope that the information that MDBA and RCMDB has shared with you today—this evening—outlines the impact that Bill 6 and the language used to formalize this act is considered.

I hope that you leave here today with a better understanding of deafblind people, their disability, their abilities, their language and their accessibility needs. I hope we have provided you with the insight needed to ensure that further inclusion to this unique community is recognized and also the importance and impact sign language has to deafblind people.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: That was very impressive at the speed at which you finished your presentation there.

So we're doing a little bit of jumping around, but to the subcommittee, there was three minutes and 52 seconds remaining in the Q & A.

Are we okay to resume? *[Agreed]*

Okay, so I'll just put—yes.

* (19:30)

MLA Fontaine: I just want to let you know that we will make those changes that you've just suggested. So our Leg. Counsel is working on it right now, and we will do those amendments here tonight.

The Chairperson: Mrs. Duguay.

E. Duguay: Thank you very much.

Ms. Byram: I want to thank you, Erika, for being present here tonight and sharing further insight to what this bill means to you and also providing the feedback that you did that clearly was important.

And so, again, thank you for taking the time and making your presentation.

The Chairperson: Okay, so I see no further questions, so thank you very much for your presentation.

Okay. So I see we're at—currently at the end of the ASL, the first round through the ASL list, so we're just going to go back and do another call and see if the previous presenters that weren't here—see if they're present now.

So I will now call on Mr. Jordan Sangalang, private citizen.

Okay, so we will be striking Mr. Jordan Sangalang from the list. He is not online nor present.

And now—I will now call on Ms. Cynthia Duboff, private citizen. And she is not online, and I do not see her present, so she will also be struck off the list.

Is there anyone else present in the room, who is not registered, that wishes to present to the committee with ASL interpretation?

Okay, I do not see anyone, so thank you to the ASL interpreters for their hard work this evening.

The interpreters who are currently in the room may now leave. ASL interpretation will continue for the rest of the meeting on the public broadcast.

Okay. So now we are going to move to out-of-town presenters.

Bill 36—The Child and Family Services Amendment Act

The Chairperson: So that will take us to Bill 36.

And I call—I will now call on Bert Crocker, private citizen.

So, Mr. Crocker, please proceed with your presentation, and just a friendly reminder, you have 10 minutes.

Bert Crocker (Private Citizen): I'm sorry. I'm a bit hard of hearing and I'm having trouble hearing what you're saying. Can you turn up the volume, please?

The Chairperson: I said, please proceed with your presentation, and just a reminder, you have 10 minutes.

B. Crocker: Okay. Thank you very much.

Good evening, honourable members and government staff. I'm here this evening as a private individual who's been involved in child welfare in Manitoba in one way or another since 1969.

Since 1981, that involvement has been with Indigenous child-welfare organizations. I have a master of social work degree and was formerly a

registered social worker. I can explain why my registration lapsed during questions if there is an interest.

I want to begin by making it clear that I support the intent of just about everything in Bill 36 and particularly the additional supports in section 50.1. I do have some concerns, though. One of them is the lack of procedural safeguards in the proposed division 5 of part 6. In the proposed new division 5, there are no procedural safeguards that would trigger a closer second look at the viability of such a termination.

As per the provisions of subsection 76.21(4), a child 12 or older, the agency, the parents, would only be notified after the fact. This makes it impossible for the affected child to have any say in the arrangement, which is a violation of the due process provisions of section 7 of Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms and probably by the human rights—Canadian Human Rights Act, both of which have precedence in these types of situations.

That conflict is not ameliorated by the proposed continued existence of section 45, which covers the normal court process for the earlier termination of an agency's order. There is a double standard that would deprive the Indigenous child of due process.

The notification after the fact conflicts with subsection 9(3)(b) of the federal legislation, An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families, which provides for substantive equality. That clause (b) is: a child must be able to exercise his or her rights under this act, including the right to have his or her views and preferences considered in decisions that affect him or her, and he or she must be able to do so without discrimination, including discrimination based on sex or gender identity or expression.

This provision in Bill 36 deprives a mature child of the opportunity for input into the decision and a small or incapacitated child from the benefit of advocacy. It must be recognized that those operating under certain pressures will not always make the correct decisions. One example is contained in the 2004 inquest report into the death of a teenage girl who, against her wishes, was reunified with her family of origin, given that her abusive stepfather was still in the home.

Judge K.M. Curtis, who wrote the inquest report, stated the following at paragraph 26—and I took out the names: At the start of this inquest, the agency took responsibility for failing SR while she was in their

care. The agency's philosophy behind the focus on reunification of families is one that is understandable, given the history of the name of the isolated community, and it is not inappropriate. Unfortunately, that focus can sometimes lead to tunnel vision, to the detriment of many members of a family.

Another example of this tunnel vision can be found in the tragic death of Gage Guimond, a toddler who was placed into the culturally appropriate home of a great-aunt, who was apparently deemed the most suitable relative. The great-aunt was convicted of failing to provide the necessities of life and received house arrest. The details are contained in a section 4 report that was formerly found on the website of the Southern First Nations Network of Care. I looked recently; I could not find it.

The other concern I have is the lack of grandfathering the eligibility for the benefits under the new section 50.1 for those children that have spent significant portions of their lives in CFS care. It would be contrary to their best interest if those children that have spent significant portions of their lives in CFS care and are then discharged, if they cannot also benefit from the supports provided by section 50.1. I believe the government has a fiduciary obligation toward those children.

While there are differences between the—between this and a children's special allowances situation, there are sufficient similarities that make it likely that there will be litigation if section 50.1 is passed in its present form.

In terms of my recommendations, first of all, I would recommend putting Bill 36 on hold, improve it over the summer and bring back an improved version in the fall, after appropriate consultations. Failing that, I would suggest passing a motion this evening directing that grandfathering provisions be added to section 50.1, and secondly, pass a motion this evening directing that section 76.21 be amended to include advanced notification to those originally served or entitled to service regarding the intended cancellation of the order or VSG in question, and that all those so served or notified are entitled to have input into the decision.

* (19:40)

And, finally, and more generally, it is important for this current Legislature to be aware of one of the reasons for the failure of the 1994 Framework Agreement Initiative that was supposed to be a 10-year plan between Canada and the Assembly of

Manitoba Chiefs. And the goals that were included in that were: the dismantling of the Department of Indian Affairs; repealing or amendment—or amending the Indian Act and developing First Nations' authorities for self-government, restoring the jurisdiction to First Nations in the areas of executive, legislative, administrative and judicial powers.

The details of what happened to the F-I-I in the first three years were captured in a report released in 1999 by Mang [*phonetic*] associates. It stated, in part, that: the AMC position included that as part of the inherent right to self-government, the Charter of Rights would not apply to the exercising of jurisdiction by First Nations people. That's a direct quote from the Mang [*phonetic*] report.

The position of the Government of Canada included that the Charter of Rights must apply. That can be found on PDF, pages 54 and 55 of that report. The URL has been distributed to you or will be distributed shortly, so you can do your own research to verify that. Awareness of the history of multiple aspects of these complex situations is important if we are not to repeat the mistakes of others but instead learn from those mistakes.

Thank you very much.

The Chairperson: So thank you for your presentation.

Do members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): Thank you for your presentation. I appreciate your words and you being here this evening to add some commentary on Bill 36.

As you know, Manitoba is on the path to jurisdiction for First Nations and Métis asserting jurisdiction over child welfare. It is a very unique historical moment that we're in—not only here in Manitoba but certainly across Canada because of bill C-92, and so I'll share with you that we're actually working with 22 First Nations and the Métis right now on asserting jurisdiction.

So child welfare in Manitoba is going to look very different in the next five, 10 and 20 years as more First Nations assert jurisdiction over their children, and Bill 36 is about supporting that pathway towards jurisdiction so that our children as Indigenous people remain with our families in our communities and in our nation.

So I appreciate the words that you put on the record. Miigwech, thank you so much.

The Chairperson: Mr. Crocker, you can respond if you would like.

B. Crocker: I'm sorry. Say again, please.

The Chairperson: If you would like to respond to what the minister said, you can.

B. Crocker: No.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Thank you, Mr. Crocker [*phonetic*], for taking the time tonight and being part of the committee and making your presentation, sharing your knowledge, experiences and also bringing forward your recommendations to help strengthen this bill. I, again, just appreciate you being here and taking the time.

Thank you.

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

B. Crocker: Thank you and good evening.

The Chairperson: Thank you. Thank you for your presentation.

Bill 6—The Sign Languages Recognition Act (*Continued*)

The Chairperson: All right, so we will go back to Bill 6 presenters.

And we will go to—I will now call on Ms. Lou Roberts, private citizen. And this person is not online. I don't see them in here. So they will drop to the bottom of the list.

I will now call on Mrs. Fernanda Vallejo of Latinas Manitoba Incorporated, and she is online. So, Mrs. Vallejo, please proceed with your 10-minute presentation.

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

Good evening, honourable Chair and committee members. My name is Fernanda Vallejo, and I'm the founder of Latinas Manitoba. Thank you very much for allowing me to speak today. I also want to thank Minister Nahanni Fontaine and the Manitoba Legislative Assembly for taking this important step through Bill 6 and the recognition of sign languages in Manitoba.

Okay. So that means that nobody should be left behind because of the way they communicate, and that's fantastic. As an immigrant, as a Latina woman, it means a lot to me and to my community. In immigrant communities, we already understand what

language barriers feel like. Many families arrive in Canada feeling lost and disconnected because they don't fully understand the system or the language.

Now imagine being in a family where the parents—they can be refugees or just newcomers—they speak only Spanish. And the child is deaf. They don't know where to go. So many newcomer families arrive already overwhelmed, trying to survive day by day.

That is why I believe we should also focus on preparing families with information and resources even before they arrive to Manitoba or to Canada. We need stronger strategies that help mothers, parents, caregivers and people living with disabilities feel supported from the beginning. This can include accessible information in different languages, interpretation support, community guidance and stronger connections between organizations and family.

I would love to connect with people from the other organizations that presented today so I can learn a bit more about their job and when—what we can do for communities.

Okay, so no parents should feel alone while trying to understand how to support their child. This topic is also personal for me. I have an aunt who lost her hearing when she was a baby. Growing up, I saw how difficult communication could become. I saw moments where she felt excluded, 'misunderstood'—misunderstood or invisible for people. That experience stayed with me for my entire life. And today, as a community leader, I understand even more how important communication is for dignity, independence, education, health care, employment and mental health.

Sign language is not simply gestures or hand movements; it is a real language. It has culture, identity, grammar, history and community. When society does not provide access, deaf people are excluded from opportunities that many of us take for granted. This recognition matters because it sends a message of respect. It says, your voice matters; your language matters; your community matters.

Through my work with Latinas Manitoba, I meet newcomer women and families every week. Many are trying to navigate health-care systems, schools, child care, immigration and employment. Sometimes the problem is not a lack of services; the problem is that people do not know what resources exist or how to access them.

I believe the same thing happens with sign language accessibility. We are making progress with laws and recognition, but we still need education,

awareness and real community access. I would also love to see more support for families with deaf children inside the school and community spaces. Many parents do not understand how the education system works for children with hearing loss. Some children may need interpreters, speech support, technology, educational assistance or special communications accommodations in school. Families should not have to discover everything alone.

I know there are a lot of supports and when newcomers come here, they start navigating the system, and there are resources in the school. But for families that English is not the first language, I'm trying to think how we can support them from the very beginning, okay? It's also about making sure families understand the system, feel supported, and are not isolated while trying to help their children—or isolate their children, right?

I also believe we should continue improving technology and training opportunities for people living with disabilities, not only for the Deaf community, but for many others as well. For example, people who are blind or visually impaired, many need accessible to technology, audio tools, screen readers, transportation, support or assistance and others.

* (19:50)

Technology today can open many doors, but only if people know how to use it and have access to it. That is why investigating in accessibility training is so important. We should continue training teachers, health-care workers, community staff, interpreters, and also teaching at the schools—at public schools—sign language. So our kids, they are fewer, they will be able to communicate with other children with disabilities.

Inclusion should not depend only on the individual trying harder. Society must also adapt, learn and become more accessible for everyone. I believe Manitoba has an opportunity to become a leader in accessibility, innovation and inclusive community support. It is about creating opportunities for people to fully participate in society with dignity and independence.

That is why I would like to share a few simple ideas. First, we need to—we need accessible information in multiple languages, including Spanish. Families should easily understand what interpretation services exist in Manitoba and how to request them.

Second, we need more community workshops and partnerships. Organizations, schools and

community centres could work together to teach basic sign language communication. I'm not talking about becoming professional interpreters. I mean simple communication that can help in daily life. Greeting someone, asking if they are okay, understanding if there's an emergency, helping a child feel included.

And, finally, we need to continue investigating and training more interpreters here in Manitoba and making these opportunities more accessible to diverse communities. Inclusion becomes stronger when everyone is invited to participate. I'm not asking Manitoba to reinvent—reinvent the wheel. I'm simply asking us to continue building a province where accessibility, diversity and dignity are truly for everyone.

To finish, I want to leave one final thought. Recognition of sign languages is not charity. It's about respect, it's about human dignity, it's about inclusion and this is the kind of leadership that helps build a stronger Manitoba for everyone.

Thank you so much.

The Chairperson: So thank you for your presentation.

Do members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister responsible for Accessibility): I just want to say miigwech for your presentation. It's always lovely to see you at standing committee, taking the time out of your evening from your children and to spend some time with a bunch of politicians.

So I do really appreciate you, and I want to just say miigwech for sharing the story of your aunt and all of the recommendations and, you know, the vision that you have for essentially one Manitoba. So I appreciate you. Miigwech so much.

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

F. Vallejo: You are welcome.

I was hoping to be one of the first ones because I have my kids here around, but, yes, thank you so much for listening. And I hope—I want to remind you of this, if you need ever to translate a document or something into Spanish, Latinas Manitoba is here. I know that I'm always mentioning that, but thank you.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Thank you, and lovely to see you again.

And I just want to say thank you for making—or taking the time to make your presentation here

tonight. And I also want to say thank you for the work that you do in your community to welcome newcomers and to help individuals navigate through some of the challenges that they face here in your Spanish community.

So, again, thank you and—for making your presentation here.

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

F. Vallejo: Yes, I would like to explore the idea that I mentioned of preparing people and community before they move to the province or even to Canada.

The Chairperson: All right, I see no further questions, so thank you very much for your presentation.

I will now call on Mr. Rachamim Enoch-Coad, a private citizen—he's not online?

All right, he is not online. I don't believe I see him in the room, so he will drop down to the bottom of the list.

I will now call on Mrs. Natasha Tuck, private citizen. And that person is also not online.

Okay, so I think we are going to go back to the top of the list. I will now call on Ms. Lou Roberts, private citizen. Not online? Okay, that person is not online and they are not here. They are being struck from the list.

I will now call on Mr. Rachamim Enoch Coad, private citizen. Still not online. Okay, he's not here. He will be crossed off the list.

And I will now call on Mrs. Natasha Tuck. Still not online? Okay, and not in person, so they will be—she will be crossed off the list.

Okay, so 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?

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I would propose in numerical order, if it's in agreement with this esteemed committee.

The Chairperson: It has been proposed to go in numerical order. How—is that agreed? *[Agreed]*

Okay, so legal counsel has requested a 10-minute recess.

An Honourable Member: Well, can we—sorry.

The Chairperson: Oh, Minister Fontaine.

MLA Fontaine: Can we go on to Bill 36—we—and then come back to Bill 6?

The Chairperson: It has been proposed to go with Bill 36 and then come back.

Is that agreed? *[Agreed]*

Bill 36—The Child and Family Services Amendment Act (Continued)

The Chairperson: So we will go to Bill 36.

Does the minister responsible for Bill 36 have an opening statement?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): Bill 36 supports Indigenous governments in reassuming and asserting their inherent jurisdiction over Child and Family Services by removing administrative and procedural barriers that currently slow or complicate transitions.

Bill 36 expands the definition of Indigenous law to include laws enacted under provincially ratified self-government agreements. This ensures Indigenous Child and Family Services laws are fully recognized in Manitoba legislation, regardless of how the pathway of jurisdiction interacts with the federal legislative framework.

Bill 36 also enables the statutory director to terminate provincial supervision or guardianship orders at the request of an Indigenous service provider, where Indigenous laws apply and both parties agree. This creates a clear and efficient transition process while maintaining notice and awareness in the provincial system.

In addition, Bill 36 addresses a long-standing gap for young people aging out of care. Currently, only permanent wards are eligible for supports past the age of majority.

The introduction of new agreement types without supporting legislative amendments means youth in temporary, voluntary, kinship or customary care agreements would have been excluded. Bill 36 extends eligibility for these 'volunteery'—voluntary supports to young adults who are aging out of care under a broader range of care agreements, without requiring the severing of family or community ties.

These amendments remove barriers, close gaps and better align Manitoba's Child and Family Services

system with its commitment to reconciliation and Indigenous jurisdiction. They also help support improved outcomes for children and youth involved in Child and Family Services.

* (20:00)

I also just want to take a moment to acknowledge my team who is here this evening from our jurisdiction transition office and our ADM for doing incredible work in child welfare and, you know, really appreciating and taking hold of this path of decolonizing child welfare and this path of reconciliation and supporting nations on where they are at on this path of jurisdiction.

And I've said it many, many times: child welfare in Manitoba is going to look very, very different in a—in—hopefully this year, and then in five years and 10 years and 20 years. And Manitoba can be proud of the work that we're doing to decolonize this system and work with and support First Nations and Métis in asserting jurisdiction, because after so many years of a colonial provincial system and federal system, Indigenous children will be with their families, with their communities, surrounded by their kin, immersed in their language, on their lands and in their nations.

So I appreciate all the work that goes into all of the legislative amendments that we've been doing in the last two and a half years, three years, to support jurisdiction. There's a lot of work that goes into it, a lot of heart work as well, and so I appreciate all of our team and I look forward to Bill 36 receiving royal assent very, very soon.

The Chairperson: We thank the minister.

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

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): I do.

I want to start off by saying that this is important legislation, just like any effort to make Manitoba's young people safer and more supported. There are areas where our Progressive Conservative team will continue to ask questions and seek accountability from this government on the broader child-welfare system.

We recognize that this bill does contain some important measures. Indigenous youth have been separated from their families, their culture and their communities. We've seen the results and the impacts of this across the province and broader than that. The over-representation of Indigenous youth in care

remains one of the most serious social challenges that we are facing here in the province and in the country.

We understand that Bill 36 seeks to address some of these challenges by expanding the definition, Indigenous law, to include laws that are enacted by Indigenous governing bodies. This is an important step. It also expands on the supports for young adults transitioning out of care so they are not simply cut off from care the moment that they turn 18 years old. We all know that this is a very important and vulnerable age for young adults, and it's important that we help to support as they age out of the system, as they may be trying to finish school, secure stable housing and find employment, all while navigating an emotional and stressful time in their life.

Most Manitobans would agree that turning 18 doesn't suddenly mean that we don't need someone in our lives who will support us and prepare us to live on our own and navigate the world independently; those are all important steps. Moving forward, it's important that we have detailed agreements, clear timelines and strong co-ordination to ensure that no child falls through the cracks during the transition.

Based on some of the information we have received here in a written submission, it was clear that there wasn't a full and wholesome consultation done in drafting this legislation and I—disappointed to learn in that part of it consultation with some of those providers and seeing that some of the resources would be available and accessible to all. We know that every child in Manitoba deserves safety, stability and the chance to succeed and young adults leaving care deserve the support as they transition into independence.

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.

Also, if there is 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; clause 6—pass; clause 7—pass; clauses 8 and 9—pass; clause 10—pass; enacting clause—pass; title—pass. Bill be reported.

Bill 6—The Sign Languages Recognition Act

(Continued)

The Chairperson: All right, we will now move to Bill 6.

Does the minister responsible for Bill 6 have an opening statement?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister responsible for Accessibility): Bill 6 creates a new legislation to recognize American Sign Language, Quebec Sign Language, Indigenous and tactile sign languages in Manitoba. It recognizes the linguistic and cultural uniqueness of sign languages and affirms their vital role these languages play in identity, community and culture of Deaf, hard-of-hearing and deafblind Manitobans.

A sign language is the first language for many Deaf, hard-of-hearing and deafblind Manitobans. American Sign Language, Quebec Sign Language, Indigenous and tactile sign languages are distinct languages with their own grammar, structure and cultural heritage.

This bill recognizes the unique position of sign languages as primary languages, not merely as an accessibility tool. We were guided by this work from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities frameworks, which affirm the inherent right to use sign languages and recognizes them as part of cultural heritage.

Planning for this bill began in 2024, and it reflects almost two years of careful work and meaningful collaboration with Deaf, hard-of-hearing and deafblind Manitobans, their families and community leaders who have worked tirelessly to ensure sign languages are respected and recognized.

* (20:10)

I want to say miigwech to the members of the Deaf, hard-of-hearing and deafblind community who participated in consultations on this legislation, including Manitoba Deaf Association president, Shawna Joynt and board member, Doug Momotiuk; Deaf Centre Manitoba chairperson, Sheila Montney and other members of Deaf Centre Manitoba; members of the Resource Centre for Manitobans who are Deafblind; the Manitoba Deaf Sports Association; Manitoba Possible; Red River College; the University of Winnipeg; and the Manitoba School for the Deaf and many more. We incorporated their feedback to shape this bill. The Deaf, hard-of-hearing, and

deafblind communities have had a direct hand in what will become law in Manitoba.

And I also just want to share that—we were trying to do it this evening, but we want to just make sure that we're taking our time—so there will be some of the recommendations that came from presenters this evening to make sure that we have all of the language for Deaf, deafblind and hard-of-hearing all throughout Bill 6. So we will make be making those amendments at report stage amendments. So I want to assure Manitobans that came to present that those changes will be made as well.

And so I want to thank all of our communities who have worked with us in ensuring Bill 6 will become law on June 1.

Miigwech.

The Chairperson: We thank the minister.

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

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): I want to begin, first of all, doing a shout-out to the ASL interpreters again that were here tonight to perform—or to interpret for those that were presenting here. They do a great job here, not just tonight but during our sessions when they sign our daily House proceedings.

And I also want to begin by indicating that our caucus will be supporting this legislation. I agree with the presenters that we heard from here tonight: Much more is needed to support the Deaf and deafblind Manitobans. There is—some indicated, you know, more resources are needed as well as funding to support some of their needs.

For many Manitobans, sign language is their first language. It is how they communicate at home, at work, at school and in their communities. This legislation acknowledges that reality into provincial law. The bill also recognizes that there's not just one sign language used in Manitoba. Different communities use different forms of sign language including Indigenous sign languages and tactile sign languages used by members of the deafblind community. This bill recognizes the sign languages including ASL, Quebec Sign Language, Indigenous sign languages and tactile sign languages as the primary languages of communication for Deaf and deafblind communities in Manitoba.

Our caucus believes this is a reasonable and positive step forward, but recognition alone is not enough, and we heard that from presenters here as well.

Actions speak louder, and those actions matter. Accessibility must also exist in practice. Manitobans still face barriers when it comes to accessing interpretation services, government programs, education, health care and public information. And, again, that was very evident here tonight in many of the presentations that we heard from.

Legislation is important, but the government also has a responsibility to ensure that the services are actually accessible and recognition is matched with practical support.

I also want to acknowledge the work of the members of the Deaf and deafblind communities along with the advocates, educators, interpreters and the families who have pushed for greater awareness and accessibility over many years.

As the official opposition, again, I mentioned I support the legislation that improves the inclusion and accessibility for Manitobans. We will continue asking questions about the implementation and whether government services are keeping pace with the principles.

This bill is a positive step forward, but I do have to say that it's unfortunate in how this came to be because I believe this was in reaction to some very disgusting and disrespectful behaviour and hot-mic moment made by the very minister who is responsible for Accessibility in the province of Manitoba, and that's the Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine).

Thank you.

The Chairperson: We thank the member.

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

Shall clause 1 pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

An Honourable Member: No.

The Chairperson: Clause—I—Mr. Goertzen.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I just have one question. Presenter Stanick [*phonetic*] had a number of different questions that I'm sure that the minister and her capable staff will go about answering those questions in due course for Mr. Stanicki [*phonetic*].

But there was one that I wanted the minister to put on the record in terms of what was the rationale for using the word primary languages as opposed to

official languages. I might presume it was to ensure that there are other languages that could be recognized as well, but I would like to hear from the minister why the word primary was used instead of official.

MLA Fontaine: So, just to be clear for the member, that is in line with the UN and federal language that's used. And so we're making sure that we're in line with all of those.

Mr. Goertzen: Thank the minister for the response.

The Chairperson: Clause 1—pass; clause 2—pass; clause 3—pass; preamble—pass; enacting clause—pass; title—pass. Bill be reported.

The hour being 8:18, what is the will of the committee?

Some Honourable Members: Committee rise.

The Chairperson: Committee rise.

COMMITTEE ROSE AT: 8:18 p.m.

WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS

Re: Bill 6

MSBA supports Bill 6 as a significant and overdue step recognizing sign languages as fundamental to communication, identity, and dignity for deaf and hard of hearing Manitobans. However, recognition must extend beyond symbolism. When a language is formally recognized—especially one essential to accessing education—it creates corresponding obligations on public institutions.

For deaf and hard of hearing students, language access is foundational. Without properly resourced education in recognized sign languages, recognition risks being ineffective. This brief focuses on implications for public education, where gaps in resources, especially in early years, must be addressed through investment, workforce development, and policy alignment.

Recognizing sign languages (ASL, LSQ, Indigenous and tactile sign languages) affirms linguistic legitimacy and raises standards for accessible communication under human rights and accessibility law. In education, this requires: Equal and equitable learning opportunities; Developmentally appropriate language access; Practical—not merely theoretical—implementation.

School boards already operate under the Accessibility for Manitobans Act, which requires accessible communication, including sign language supports. However, these standards have only recently been

implemented, and Bill 6 raises expectations further, requiring alignment across education, accessibility, and human rights frameworks.

While school boards are committed to accommodation, they face real limits in funding, workforce capacity, and specialized expertise. Bill 6 builds on existing obligations—but also raises the operational bar. Without additional investment and available capacity, boards risk being unable to meet enhanced expectations.

Manitoba currently has limited capacity to deliver sign-language-based education. The Manitoba School for the Deaf (MSD) provides ASL-based education, but only in ASL and not other sign languages. Public schools must accommodate deaf students across all programs (English, Francophone, French Immersion, Indigenous, Heritage languages) Families can enroll in any school; effective accommodation is therefore required.

Key gaps include: Minimal early-years sign language programming beyond ASL; Severe shortages of trained interpreters; Limited LSQ and near absence of other sign language supports; Overreliance on written language and assistive technology.

For young learners (K-Grade 5), language acquisition is developmental. They require full, consistent exposure to a natural sign language—not just interpretation. Without this, students risk long-term language deprivation with lasting educational and social consequences.

Assistive technologies and written supports cannot replace real-time interaction, social learning, or identity development. Current capacity overwhelmingly supports ASL, leaving other linguistic communities underserved.

Recognition of sign languages must be understood as enabling access to all Manitoba school programs, not limiting choice. Students should not be forced to change schools, relocate, or abandon their language due to system limitations.

Recent recognition of Indigenous spoken languages as languages of instruction reflects an important principle: systems must adapt to students—not the reverse. The same principle must apply to sign languages. This includes participation not only in classrooms, but in all aspects of school life—extracurriculars, athletics, and community activities.

A child who communicates primarily in a recognized sign language should never be constrained in school

choice solely because of capacity. Within this context, the appropriate response cannot fall to public school boards alone. We each remain jointly accountable for the responsibility of building and supporting that capacity, being certain that available resources never result in denial or displacement of opportunity.

To fulfill Bill 6's promise, MSBA recommends:

1. Explicit policy alignment with education, human rights, accessibility and other applicable legislation as well as the existing inclusive education framework;
2. Sustained promotion of, and investment in, interpreter training, recruitment, and retention;
3. Support for remote and hybrid service delivery, not only to serve needs in rural, northern and remote communities, but also to promote universal access to low incidence languages such as LSQ, Indigenous sign languages, as well as the other sign languages that newcomer communities may use to communicate—such as FSL for members of official francophone language minority communities;
4. Early years focused programming that prioritizes intensive sign language acquisition;
5. Clear commitment on the part of the Manitoba Government to public school divisions that recognition of sign languages also entails the obligation, duty and requirement to provide meaningful, effective accommodation in our province's classrooms, playgrounds, gymnasiums and the many other locations both inside and outside of school where education is provided to our students.

Recognition must extend to ensuring that students who rely on sign languages can fully participate in Manitoba's public education system according to the highest and fullest standards of dignity, equity, and opportunity. In this, our students must be kept in focus first and foremost with acknowledgement that the same remains true for parents, guardians and responsible adults from the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities, and also for our staff: from teachers, to educational assistants, administrative staff, custodians, bus drivers, and so many other employees who rely on the human good of communication to build relationships with one another. One can well conceptualize what "parent-teacher" meetings require, so that the meaningful experiences that come from these opportunities are equitable and equal for all.

Public schools in Manitoba are committed to providing this equitable and equal opportunity through the good of public education. Bill 6 affirms that Manitobans from the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities—and the sign languages they rely on—belong fully within that commitment.

Bill 6 represents meaningful progress. To ensure its successful implementation within public schools, recognition of sign languages must be accompanied by clear policy alignment, realistic funding commitments, and shared accountability between Government and school boards.

Public school boards cannot, and should not, be expected to absorb the full system wide implications of raised expectations regarding communication supports under Bill 6, without corresponding legislative and fiscal partnership. Recognition must therefore be understood not as an endpoint, but as a starting point and clarion call for coordinated planning, resourcing, and implementation that ensures Manitoba's public education system is equipped, resourced and able to meet and respond the needs of every student with integrity, equity, and care.

Given the current state of capacity and resources, the question of how a student using each of the sign languages that will be recognized under Bill 6 can best be supported, comes into view. According to every dimension of public education highlighted in this brief.

Investments in education reflect our shared commitment to social justice and ensuring that Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities receive the path to partake in full citizenship. In 2008/09 through to 2011/12, the Government of Manitoba set an important precedent by providing dedicated and extra-ordinary funding to support accommodation for a student who pursued entry into a professional post-secondary faculty in furtherance of their vocational and career aspirations. That investment—approximately \$1 million per year (in today's purchasing power) over the course of the student's full undergraduate post secondary study pathway—was directed toward the provision of full sign language interpretation and other support, recognizing that access to education cannot be achieved without adequate and sustained resources. The student who was fully resourced with this funding overcame every barrier to succeed in their education and in the years since, has applied their profession in service of the most critical and vital needs of members of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities.

The lesson from this precedent is important in context of Bill 6. The post-secondary institution who advocated for special funding to support this student could not have achieved their graduation without the extra-ordinary support received from the Government of Manitoba. The student who aspired to break barriers and realize their aspirations and vision for the future could not have enrolled and taken advantage of the important learning opportunities without that support. The Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities would not have access to a qualified professional capable of communicating with them using their own language, without mediator or interpreter, without that support. That funding support was the catalyst for Manitoba to become a leader and to action the true definition of inclusion, justice, equity and human rights for the first time in Canadian history within that particular profession.

This precedent is instructive. It demonstrates that when access to communication is respected as foundational rather than auxiliary, appropriate accommodation requires intentional funding decisions.

Bill 6 is an important step toward inclusion and equity. Its success, however, depends on whether recognition is matched by resources, planning, and accountability. And true recognition is measured by whether students can grow, learn and flourish in the languages they use to communicate. Manitoba's school boards are committed to this goal, as a great honour. We cannot achieve it alone. Government partnership will be essential to ensuring that every student has equitable access to education and opportunity.

Cheryl Smukowich
Manitoba School Boards Association

Re: Bill 36

On behalf of Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, Inc. (MKO), I am writing to provide a submission on Bill 36 - The Child and Family Services Amendment Act.

Established in 1981, MKO is a non-profit, political advocacy organization representing the interests of 26 sovereign First Nations in northern Manitoba.

In 2000, through the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry—Child Welfare Initiative, MKO entered into an agreement with the Manitoba government to begin the process of

restructuring the child welfare system to better serve Indigenous peoples in response to the recommendations from the Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry in 1991.

In 2003, the First Nations of Northern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority (Northern Authority) was established through the enactment of The Child and Families Services Authorities Act.

The Northern Authority is responsible for managing the provision of child and family services through seven mandated First Nations CFS agencies. The management of the Northern Authority is directed by a board of directors appointed by MKO.

MKO and the Northern Authority continue to have collaborative working relationship on child and family matters. As a political body, it is a priority of MKO to ensure that the best interests of First Nations children are met through any proposed provincial legislative amendments. For this reason, MKO is responding to Bill 36.

MKO acknowledges that Bill 36 is intended to support Indigenous jurisdiction in child welfare and to expand supports to young adults who are establishing independence and transitioning out of the child welfare system.

MKO supports Bill 36, in principle, but we are expressing some concerns about both the process in developing the bill and the actual amendments. As well, we are submitting recommendations for consideration.

In drafting Bill 36 there was a lack of collaboration. Minister Fontaine failed to engage with MKO Grand Chief Garrison Settee prior to introducing Bill 36. As well, her department failed to include technicians from the First Nations political organizations, including MKO, in drafting the amendments. Furthermore, the department did not adequately collaborate with the Northern Authority and its mandated First Nations CFS agencies in developing the bill.

Going forward, it is MKO's firm expectation that the Manitoba government will meaningfully engage with First Nations leadership and organizations in

developing any legislation on child and family matters. It is imperative that the Minister engage with MKO Chiefs prior to introducing legislation.

Regarding the amendment to expand post majority supports for young adults transitioning from care, MKO strongly supports this change, but is recommending that language be included to ensure that adequate funding is provided by the Manitoba government to CFS agencies to support these agreements.

MKO is recommending that Manitoba conduct a cost analysis and, in the future, consider extending the age of eligibility for supports from 21 to 26, to be consistent with the federal post majority policy. The absence of alignment between the provincial and federal policies risks perpetuating inequities and creating confusion and service gaps for young adults transitioning from care.

Regarding the amendment to grant new administrative authority to the statutory Director to terminate supervision or guardianship court orders when First Nations jurisdiction is being implemented, MKO supports it, in principle, but is strongly recommending the following safeguard be inserted into clause 76.21(3)(c): "subject to the Indigenous law applicable to the child, any parental rights and obligations that had been terminated under this Act are revived only if there are no protection concerns".

There is concern about the automatic revival of parental rights through the administrative termination of a court order in cases where a child has already been deemed to be in significant need of protection (such as, in cases concerning abuse). This approach presents significant child safety risks if First Nations leadership and community service providers do not have full transparency and access to complete child protection histories, risk assessments, and contextual information.

For your consideration.

Thank you

Colin Kinsella
Acting Director, MKO Family First Nation Secretariat
Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc

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>