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[Translation]

CHILD PROTECTION

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Good morning.

[Original]

Madam Speaker, this morning, I will start with the NB Advocate's report on the loss of Bobby. This is something that has affected this entire Legislature for the entirety of this week. We've been working with the government and with the minister on how we can move forward and try to act on this.

This morning, I've learned that there will be a motion coming forward, but I want to know the details of what that motion is going to look like. I'd like to hear from the Premier. Are there any restrictions on that committee? For how long will it meet? What is it going to look like? Will the opposition have equal ability to call witnesses, or will it all be filtered through government? This was an opportunity for the government to work with us, but we're having this downloaded on us at the last second. We could have had a bipartisan motion, and we could have been signatories, but the government decided to do it this way. So, I'm left having to ask these questions. I'm asking the Premier for answers. Thank you.

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. This is indeed a really important conversation to have. The Advocate has done really important work to shine a light on something that I know the Minister of Social Development has been working on since the first day of her mandate. Details of how the committee will operate are being worked out with House Leaders and will be established as soon as those decisions are made.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): No. That is not acceptable. We need to know now whether there will be any restrictions by this government. We need to know whether we, as an opposition, will also have the ability to include people. It's going to be important to have family members involved. It's going to be important to have community members involved. It's going to be important to have people from Social Development involved. It's going to be important to have people from the nonprofit sector involved. I want a guarantee from the Premier that this is going to be an open process that will not be dictated by the government.

We have only one chance to get this right. This young man lived an awful existence and met a horrible end. We have one chance to get this right. We're not going to blame the government for what's happened, but we need to hold it to account for how we act as a Legislature. As a Legislature, we need to be part of that action. This has to be our never-

again moment. I want those concrete answers from the Premier so that we can go forward collaboratively on this. Thank you.

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The member opposite has just described how committees work in this province and in this Legislature, and he also finished with a note about the need to work collaboratively. That is how our government approaches things. We will be collaborating with House Leaders on how this goes forward.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): That's not what was done here, Madam Speaker. That's not what was done. From the get-go, government members could have said: How do we make sure this committee actually functions as it's intended to and in a way where we work together to formulate this law? They could have done that, but, instead, everything is coming from one direction—from the government. I want to hear that we're going to have the Advocate involved. I want to hear that anybody who wants to come and present will have the ability to do so.

The Premier can give that consent right now. She has her Government House Leader here. She has her minister here. They can do that right now. I want security and certainty that we're going to be engaged in a real way on this file, Madam Speaker. This is not something that we're playing with. We just want to make sure that the entire story comes out so that we can fix this and ensure that it never happens again.

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. We absolutely agree that this is extremely important and not the kind of thing that you rush or do sloppily. This is the kind of thing that needs to be done in collaboration and done carefully. We heard the Advocate's request to come and engage with a committee of government to discuss the findings of his report. We've accepted that request. We will be putting forward a motion that lays out the direction being given to a committee of this House to do that work. So, as that motion comes forward, it will be debated, worked through, and voted on by the members of this House, as it should be.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): This is the fourth time, Madam Speaker. This will not be a debatable motion. The government will put it forward, and it will be passed without debate. We need to know, before we give any consent, that there is not going to be a unidirectional decision by the government on who gets to appear and who doesn't. All the Premier has to do is say, right now: We're not ready. We're going to give you some time. We're going to talk about this until Tuesday, and we will make sure that you will be part of this.

This is very simple, Madam Speaker. This is not something that needs to be rammed down throats. Of course, this motion has to have unanimous consent. We will give unanimous consent as long as we know that there will be no restrictions and that government

members will not say who can or cannot appear in committee. The Premier simply has to get on her feet and give us that assurance so we can start this work right now.

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Well, that's exactly right, Madam Speaker. We need to start this work right now if we are going to do the work that committees do and are going to direct the Chair to invite the Advocate and presenters. We do not have very much time left in this Legislature, and we have to move motions like this forward. I trust that the member opposite supports the move to bring this to the committee and supports the Advocate's request to bring this information to the committee. That is why House Leaders have been discussing this topic and working on it together. We need to create the space for this information to be shared by the Advocate and others, with the support of the minister and the members of that policy committee. That's what this motion is doing. It's taking advantage of the time we have left to do the important work of making Bobby's story and its implications visible and making the required changes to ensure this never happens again.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Well, we can very easily extend the legislative session, Madam Speaker. Is the Advocate okay with this motion? Has the government reached out to the Advocate and given him a copy of this motion? Is he supportive of it? Does he have any concerns about this motion? Does he have a different idea of how this could be done? Has he had input on this?

This is something we need to make sure we get right, Madam Speaker. I don't want to see this committee be a unidirectional entity. I don't want the government to say: We have the majority, and we are going to push this through based on who we decide we want to have show up before this committee. The Premier needs to come clean. She needs to be real about what is happening right now. Tell us whether we will be able to invite people or whether government members will shut down anybody we invite. Let us really be part of this process so that we can get this right.

Hon. Ms. Miles (Hanwell-New Maryland, Minister of Social Development; Minister responsible for the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation, L): Madam Speaker, through you to the member opposite, Bobby's story needs to never be repeated. Every citizen in this province needs to read about and know Bobby's story. His story needs to become part of all our stories so that we all understand it and so that we all can find those opportunities where we could have done better. We could have done better. I am the Minister of Social Development. I've committed to doing all I can to make sure that Bobby's story is not repeated. This is a path forward that we worked on together. Today, we are tabling a motion for this committee to be able to bring people together, for it to be able to bring in the Advocate, presenters, and others who need to share their experiences. This has to be a collaborative approach. That is the only way this is going to move forward. I messaged the Advocate today to tell him that today we would be tabling a motion in the Legislature to form this committee. He said thank you.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): The Advocate said thank you. That doesn't indicate whether he understands whether this motion is adequate. I'm trying not to get frustrated. This is a very simple thing. When the Act was coming through under the previous government, the opposition asked that intervenors be able to come as witnesses. That was an odd way to do it, but as a government, we acquiesced because we wanted to get the best possible outcome. All we are looking for here is the best possible outcome. Why will the Premier not just say that, yes, we can invite people and that they will not be screened out by government members? We will have to manage the time frames, absolutely. We can't have this thing go on and on. However, we have to make sure that the key people who want to be here are able to be here, and we need to be part of that process. Why will the government not just say that, yes, we can invite people and that we all will manage this as a group so that we can get the right thing done for people who need help?

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that the member is trying to manage his frustration. I will do the same. What he is describing is how committees work. When we hold committee meetings and bring in guests, every party around the committee table is invited to submit presenters and is included and allowed to have their representatives participate. What the member is asking for is the standard operating procedure of committees in this Legislature. I'm not sure whether he needs reassurance that committees will continue to operate as committees continue to operate.

This is an important committee. The Advocate requested to come. The minister and our government have supported that request and are going to create the space for it. My colleagues will continue to work with the members opposite to make this happen in the ways it needs to happen.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): That's a little bit closer, Madam Speaker. I understand how committees work and that they have the ability to call witnesses. What I'm looking for is a guarantee from the government members that they're not going to filter people out because they aren't who the government members want to come. Originally, this motion, as I understood it, was only going to have the Advocate, but it has changed. All I want to hear is that the government is not going to put a situation in place where the committee will have a mandate to say: Yes to this person, no to that group, and because we have the majority, that's what we're going to do.

All we're looking for is the surety that if organization X gets called and happens to be from one of the opposition parties' lists, it will actually be able to appear and will not be filtered out because the government does not want to hear from that organization, because it doesn't want to hear what it has to say, or for any other reason. That's all we're looking for. Give us that so we can have confidence that this committee will work the way it's supposed to, and we'll be fine.

Oral Questions

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that this might be an opportunity to describe how committees work, since it appears that we have students here from Riverview, I believe. It's great to see you. That is what committees do. Committees meet when there is a topic to tackle. Together, the committee members determine how much time to allocate to that and how many presenters and witnesses they can make space for. Each group brings forward a list of intervenors and people to speak. Most often, we have many more people than we have time to manage.

We have done this. This government has done this, even allowing for witnesses in committees, allowing people to come and present to this Legislature in ways we hadn't seen before. We have demonstrated time and time again that we are open and encouraging of all perspectives and all participants. We even did that on the energy file, with gas prices. We will continue to listen to the Advocate and to the requests of the people who have lived what Bobby lived, and we will put this committee together in a way that will do him justice.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Well, Madam Speaker. We have time before this motion actually hits the floor, and we have some business that has to take place first. Would the government members be willing to give the opposition parties a chance to speak with the Advocate to find out his level of comfort with the motion? They will not tell us. They said that he said thank you. However, is he comfortable with this? Is he confident that we will have the right people in the room to do this?

All we want is to get it right. If we can't get this right, right now, and if we can't get straight answers to indicate that, yes, there will be no restrictions here, then we want to talk to the Advocate and understand his comfort level. If we can get hold of the Advocate, fine. If we can, is the government willing to wait until Tuesday so that we can determine the Advocate's comfort level and make sure that this is exactly what he envisioned when he asked for the committee to be struck? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Mr. McKee, K.C. (Moncton Centre, Minister of Justice; Attorney General; Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services; L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to get on my feet today as Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services to share with the Minister of Social Development full acceptance of accountability for situations like Bobby's. We need to do better as a government, and we are working hard on improving services across the province.

I just want to take the opportunity... I chair the law amendments committee. We've met a few times since we formed government. The process is always open for discussion. The committee meets. We have a pre-hearing meeting. We look at the stipulations. We come to an agreement with all parties at the table. We decide... There might be a situation where each party can invite three stakeholders to come and answer questions and make presentations. It's the same type of work that will be done in this committee. We'll work

together, we'll come up with a formula, and everybody will get their say at the committee stage to develop a plan for this committee's work. Thank you very much.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): There. That's all it took. We will have a voice on that committee so we can make sure witnesses can come. As I said, we understand that there is a finite number of people you can put forward. These questions are to make sure that we have a voice, that people are not going to be refused, and that government members are going to be flexible enough that, if this thing needs more air or more time, it will actually get it. That's all I'm looking for.

For days, we have been waiting for government members to come up with a plan. Rather than just being up front with us right from the get-go—saying, yes, we're going to strike a committee, we're going to make sure that we do this the right way, here's how we're going to do it, and, by the way, you're going to be part of it—they downloaded it on us at the last minute. I'm just making sure that all the fine details will be covered. I'm satisfied that this will be the case, Madam Speaker. If the government members bring this motion forward, we will agree with it and make sure we start our work. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Translation]

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The motion and resolution describe exactly what the Child and Youth Advocate was asking for. They've been communicated to the opposition members. They are aware of the facts. In my first answer, I said it would operate like a legislative committee. Opposition members will be able to invite witnesses. That's exactly what the motion we presented to them describes. The Advocate will be there. Community groups can be invited. Departmental officials can be invited.

I'm aware that the situation is serious. We have dedicated 15 or 16 minutes of our question period to the situation. In my opinion, that demonstrates the importance of the file and the importance of doing things the right way.

However, we must act quickly. Every minute counts. We must act in a way that respects Bobby's life and everyone else's. I know our minister wants to act quickly...

[Original]

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Good. Let's talk about action. The Advocate made 12 recommendations. Are there any that the government members will not follow? Are there any that they disagree with? Will they follow all 12 of the Advocate's recommendations?

Hon. Ms. Miles (Hanwell-New Maryland, Minister of Social Development; Minister responsible for the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation, L): Madam Speaker, through you to the member opposite, first, I want to express gratitude to the House for

those questions and answers. It took us a minute to get here and determine where this committee would be, where it would land, and what it would look like. Thank you to everyone for taking that on.

Yes, I can't hold up a prop, but I carry the recommendations. I look at them. We accept every single one of those recommendations. As for what it looks like going through them, we are working with our team right now. Some of the work is already under way, and we are looking at doing some of the work in the future. For some of the recommendations, we're sitting down with our team and asking: Is this the path forward for this recommendation? Have we changed one of these programs?

Bobby's story spanned a decade and a half. Since then, we've extended supports and services to 26-year-olds. Do the supports and services we have in place now meet the recommendations of the Advocate? We're doing that work right now, and I look forward to having a further conversation with the Advocate.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Madam Speaker, it's obvious from Bobby's situation that this is not happening. The Advocate made these 12 specific recommendations to show the shortfall in what happened over Bobby's short life. I understand that the government members will say: Well, you know, we have to make sure that we can do this, and it's going to take time. All I was asking was whether the recommendations will be implemented, yes or no. That's all I was asking.

Again, we're not looking to blame the government here, but we need to make sure that we, as a Legislature, are all taking responsibility and that this is our never-again moment.

In terms of what happened inside the department, we have professionals who worked on this and had connections with this child all the way through the process. I know we were talking about the Advocate's report, but now I want to switch and ask: What has the government done to this point to deal with any consequences required for the people who failed miserably in their responsibilities to help this child? What has the government done to this point?

Hon. Ms. Miles (Hanwell-New Maryland, Minister of Social Development; Minister responsible for the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation, L): Madam Speaker, through you, I want to thank the member opposite for wanting to see that accountability. It is so important that Bobby's, Maddie's, and Leah's stories do not go without recognition or honour. These stories have to mean something as we move forward so that this does not happen to anybody else. Families, parents, and citizens of New Brunswick need to know that our kids are safe, that our kids will be looked after, and that they will get the help they need when they need it.

Right now, our team is asking what points we missed throughout Bobby's story and what the Act could have done had it been implemented at that time. The Act is only words on

paper. What matters is the implementation and how we do that. We have to ask whether that is being communicated down to our front-line staff to make sure that they know that they have the power and that their number one focus is the well-being of every child who comes through their door. That is what we are working on right now. We've implemented work through early help. We have an announcement coming up this afternoon.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Madam Speaker, from the Advocate's report, we know what happened. We know that this child had died, and paperwork was still being worked on after the fact. This has been a complete and total failure. These are professional people with professional designations, and there has to be some accountability.

I am sure that the Department of Social Development has gone through a gut check in the past few days. Some action needs to be taken. There has to be something concrete that the department can say right now. Yes, we have work to do as a committee to hear everything and come up with a solution. However, there has to be something in the short term that gives the system the kick or the jolt that it needs. Something needs to be done in the short term to try to rebuild the confidence that the minister talks about. To this point, what has the department done to deal with any internal consequences?

Hon. Ms. Miles (Hanwell-New Maryland, Minister of Social Development; Minister responsible for the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation, L): Madam Speaker, through you to the member opposite, I will use a quote from one of the members opposite because I think it sums up how pretty much everyone in New Brunswick felt reading Bobby's, Maddie's, and Leah's stories: It felt like a gut punch.

It really did. Sorry, I didn't think the tears would come, but here they come.

We have a team of folks at the Department of Social Development who care deeply and passionately. I understand what the member opposite is asking. We are having some internal conversations right now. I will not discuss human resources conversations here on the floor of the Legislature. Internally, we are looking into our department right now to see what we didn't do, what we should have done, what we will do, and what we will never let happen again. Thank you.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): That's important, Madam Speaker. I don't disagree that the look is important, but it's the action that is required. The longer we gaze at our navels and try to figure out the path forward, the less severe this seems. I'm just trying to push the minister to act with a little bit of urgency so that something happens very quickly and so that the department understands that we can't let this go on for one more minute. That is all I'm pushing for.

CONTRACTS

Madam Speaker, I want to turn to something that is completely the responsibility and fault of this government, and that is the situation with the Foundever contract. We have seen, through the media, that there are nurse practitioners who absolutely will not work for this company. This government has completely botched this entire file.

We have patients who will now be at risk because of the decisions of this government. New Brunswickers will pay more and get less, and patient health will be put at risk. Who will take responsibility for this boondoggle? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Madam Speaker, I can't let the previous comments of the member opposite go unaddressed. No one is working harder on this file than the Minister of Social Development. For the member opposite to suggest that she hasn't operated with the utmost urgency, pushing this department to change from her first moment in the seat, isn't appropriate. For the member opposite to go on a witch hunt and ask to hold the head of a department or a civil servant responsible is also inappropriate and does not honour Bobby, Maddie, or Leah.

What we need to do is change, and the members opposite need to recognize that this is something systemic. It is not appropriate for the member opposite to suggest that the person driving change in the department is not working with sufficient urgency at a time when she and her team are rapidly addressing this. Actually, they had already started doing the work prior to the Advocate's report.

I think the minister deserves respect and recognition for everything that she has put into this. The people on the ground at Social Development, the front-line social workers who see some of the worst things in this province and who do that work every day, deserve to be shown respect.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): That was quite a performance, Madam Speaker. The Minister of Social Development has all kinds of credibility with everybody here—all kinds of credibility. She does work hard, and she does care. But this was a horrible thing to happen. Over 15 years, this child did not have very many good days. That message needs to be received within the system. For the Premier to grandstand and try to avoid the Foundever situation just goes to show exactly who she is.

I'm going to ask this again. Are the government members going to answer the question on Foundever? They are putting people in this province at risk because they signed a contract irresponsibly. They are driving toward the cliff, Madam Speaker. They have an opportunity to avoid this entire situation and go back to eVisitNB. So I want to know whether they are going to be responsible. Are they going to make sure that they protect the health care of New Brunswickers, do the right thing, and cancel—

Oral Questions

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): It's extremely rich to hear the Leader of the Official Opposition talk about grandstanding on this subject. This is from a government that didn't allow nurse practitioners to practice to their full scope. This is from a government that couldn't deliver primary health care to New Brunswickers. Our government has partnered with an organization that has been serving New Brunswickers for more than 20 years. The people delivering this health care are employed in this province and are doing work in this province, caring for New Brunswickers virtually.

Our government has done more to improve access to health care for New Brunswickers than those members did in their six years in government. This change to virtual care in New Brunswick is going to mean better access in both official languages. It's going to use the nurses that our government has successfully recruited.

(Interjections.)

Madam Speaker (Hon. Ms. Landry): Member.

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): We signed an incredible contract with the nurses. We have attracted more nurses to this province and have made it attractive for nurses to stay in their jobs. Those nurses are going to be doing the work of caring for New Brunswickers in ways that let them connect with other doctors, make appointments, and connect with the rest of the system—

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Madam Speaker, this is unreal. We have a Premier who will not admit to the fact that the government has added 40 000 people to the rolls of people waiting for primary care. This Foundever contract is actually going to slow down the number of people who get care. Foundever has said that it is not responsible for any sort of follow-up, but the current contract with eVisitNB indicates that eVisitNB has the responsibility to do that follow-up. This is going to put people at risk. We have a Health Minister whom we give credibility to because he is a professional in the system. These are professionals in the system who are saying that this is wrong. It's going to go badly. It's not going to work. People are not going to get follow-ups. They're not going to get the coverage they need.

This government has an opportunity to turn away from this, but it is not. It is doubling down on it. The government will pay more, New Brunswickers will get less, and health care will get worse. Is the government going to step back from this contract, yes or no?

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Our government is doing everything it can to deliver better health care to New Brunswickers because they experienced six years of neglect. We are improving our virtual care system so that it can serve more New Brunswickers in a better and more integrated way. We are doing that with employees in

New Brunswick and with local New Brunswickers. That is why we have better retention of our nurses now than ever before, certainly better than when leadership told them to move away. We have better relationships with our physicians than ever before, and we are recruiting more nurses and more physicians to this province than we have ever seen. That's why people are coming off the wait list for care. That's why we have people like Kathy and Junior, whose doors I knocked on in Silverwood last weekend. They said that they're now attached to the Northside clinic. They're being seen by a pharmacist and a dietitian. We're building the teams of care that are going to get New Brunswickers better results. That means improving our virtual care system and integrating it with the rest of the system in ways that it hasn't been integrated before so that New Brunswickers are—

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): If you are born on the side of the road, are you getting better care, Madam Speaker? Is closing down obstetrics better care? If CT scanners are unavailable because staff are stretched thin and there are no staff to work them, is that better care? Professionals within their scope of practice are saying that this contract is going to cause people to fall through the cracks. Is that better care?

This Premier wants to say all her talking points. All I'm asking for is... The government members are being told they're driving into a wall. They're being told by the people working in this system that the people working in the system will not take a contract with these people and that there will be less service.

The members opposite can step away from this thing. They can avoid the crash. They're making health care worse. Does the Minister of Health agree with this strategy? Does he believe they should continue with this contract? Does he believe we should step back from it and avoid the catastrophe that's happening with this contract? He's the one who knows. Maybe he can give us a better answer than the Premier, who has nothing but talking points.

[Translation]

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Our government takes New Brunswickers' health and the services that are provided to them very seriously. That's why we're here. New Brunswickers chose our team to improve their lives and pay particular attention to primary health care provision close to where they live. This is a team that will help them. Our government was able to make this vision a reality. The former government couldn't do it. It tried to do it, but it didn't get any results.

[Original]

Our government got to work, and, in the first 18 months of our mandate, we have opened 16 collaborative care clinics, taking people off the waiting list. New Brunswickers have been waiting for years. People have spent six, seven, eight, or nine years waiting for care,

and they are now being attached to clinics in Perth-Andover, in Saint Andrews, in Fredericton Northside, in Lamèque, and beyond. New Brunswickers are going to get primary care, integrated—

[*Translation*]

Madam Speaker (Hon. Ms. Landry): Question period is now over.