



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

Chairperson
Mr. Logan Oxenham
Constituency of Kirkfield Park



Vol. LXXIX No. 3 - 6 p.m., Wednesday, May 7, 2025

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 |
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| BYRAM, Jodie | Agassiz | PC |
| CABLE, Renée, Hon. | Southdale | NDP |
| CHEN, Jennifer | Fort Richmond | NDP |
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| LATHLIN, Amanda | The Pas-Kameesak | NDP |
| LINDSEY, Tom, Hon. | Flin Flon | NDP |
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| MALOWAY, Jim | Elmwood | NDP |
| MARCELINO, Malaya, Hon. | Notre Dame | NDP |
| MOROZ, Mike, Hon. | River Heights | NDP |
| MOSES, Jamie, Hon. | St. Vital | NDP |
| MOYES, Mike, Hon. | Riel | NDP |
| NARTH, Konrad | La Vérendrye | PC |
| NAYLOR, Lisa, Hon. | Wolseley | NDP |
| NESBITT, Greg | Riding Mountain | PC |
| OXENHAM, Logan | Kirkfield Park | NDP |
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| SIMARD, Glen, Hon. | Brandon East | NDP |
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| <i>Vacant</i> | Spruce Woods | |

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA
THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
Wednesday, May 7, 2025

TIME – 6 p.m.

LOCATION – Winnipeg, Manitoba

CHAIRPERSON – Mr. Logan Oxenham
(Kirkfield Park)

VICE-CHAIRPERSON – MLA David Pankratz
(Waverley)

ATTENDANCE – 6 QUORUM – 4

Members of the committee present:

Hon. Min. Fontaine, Hon. Min. Schmidt

*MLA Lagassé, Messrs. Narth, Oxenham,
 MLA Pankratz*

Substitutions:

*Hon. Min. Kennedy for Hon. Min. Fontaine
 at 8:32 p.m.*

*Hon. Min. Marcelino for Hon. Min. Kennedy at
 8:39 p.m.*

*Hon. Min. Fontaine for Hon. Min. Marcelino at
 8:53 p.m.*

Ms. Byram for MLA Lagassé at 8:53 p.m.

APPEARING:

Hon. Malaya Marcelino, MLA for Notre Dame

Hon. Nellie Kennedy, MLA for Assiniboia

Jodie Byram, MLA for Agassiz

PUBLIC PRESENTERS:

Bill 24 – The Workers Compensation Amendment Act

Kevin Rebeck, Manitoba Federation of Labour

John Christian Barrion, private citizen

Paul Moist, Manitoba Federation of Union Retirees

*Bill 29 – The Workplace Safety and Health
 Amendment Act*

Kevin Rebeck, Manitoba Federation of Labour

Shannon Hancock, private citizen

Paul Moist, Manitoba Federation of Union Retirees

Maria Fernanda Vallejo, Latinas Manitoba

David Grant, private citizen

Ingrid Mushinski, private citizen

*Blaine Duncan, Manitoba Government and General
 Employees' Union*

*Nick Kasper, United Fire Fighters of Winnipeg,
 IAFF Local 867*

Laura Duncan, private citizen

Bill 21 – The Protecting Youth in Sports Act

David Grant, private citizen

*Bill 44 – The Matriarch Circle Act and Amendments
 to The Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months
 Act (Ribbon Skirt Day)*

Sandra DeLaronde, Giganawenimaanaanig

*Dawn Olivence, Winnipeg Indigenous Executive
 Circle–Strengthening Families*

WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS:

*Bill 29 – The Workplace Safety and Health
 Amendment Act*

*Chris Perry, Manitoba Professional Fire Fighters
 Association*

Scott Atchison, private citizen

MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION:

Bill 21 – The Protecting Youth in Sports Act

Bill 24 – The Workers Compensation Amendment Act

*Bill 29 – The Workplace Safety and Health
 Amendment Act*

*Bill 44 – The Matriarch Circle Act and Amendments
 to The Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months
 Act (Ribbon Skirt Day)*

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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?

MLA David Pankratz (Waverley): I nominate Logan Oxenham.

Clerk Assistant: Mr. Oxenham has been nominated.

Are there any other nominations?

Hearing no other nominations, Mr. Oxenham, will you please take the Chair.

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

Are there any nominations?

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

The Chairperson: MLA Pankratz has been nominated.

Are there any other nominations?

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

This meeting has been called to consider the following bills: Bill 21, The Protecting Youth in Sports Act; Bill 24, The Workers Compensation Amendment Act; Bill 29, The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act; Bill 44, The Matriarch Circle Act and Amendments to The Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act (Ribbon Skirt Day).

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.

Written submissions from the following persons have been received and distributed to committee members: Chris Perry, Manitoba Professional Fire Fighters Association, on Bill 29; and Scott Atchison, private citizen, on Bill 29.

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

Prior to proceeding with public presentations, I'd 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 of 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 meeting 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.

On the topic of determining the order of public presentations, I will also note that we have out-of-town presenters in attendance. They are marked with an asterisk on the list.

With these considerations in mind then, in what order does the committee wish to hear the presentations?

Minister Fontaine?

MLA Fontaine: Sorry, say that again.

The Chairperson: With the considerations in mind on the topic of determining the order of public presentations, we have out-of-town presenters marked with an asterisk.

In what order does the committee wish to hear the presentations?

An Honourable Member: With out-of-town presenters.

The Chairperson: With out-of-town presenters, is that agreed? *[Agreed]*

Thank you for your patience.

We will now proceed with the public presentations.

Bill 24—The Workers Compensation Amendment Act

The Chairperson: On Bill 24, our first presenter is Mr. Kevin Rebeck from the Manitoba Federation of Labour.

Mr. Rebeck, when you are ready, you can present.

Kevin Rebeck (Manitoba Federation of Labour): Great, and I do have copies that are available for distribution. Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you for that.

K. Rebeck: The Manitoba Federation of Labour, or MFL, is the province's central labour body. It's made up of more than 30 affiliated unions representing

130,000 unionized workers from the public sector, private sector and building trades. Stronger workplace health and safety protections and fair workers compensation for workers when they are injured are key priorities for the MFL and our affiliated unions.

The MFL conducts health and safety research, provides health and safety education and training to our members, and lobbies and advocates for stronger laws, stricter enforcement, greater investment in injury and illness prevention and better supports for workers who are injured on the job and for their dependent and surviving families.

We're pleased to be here in support of Bill 24 and the two measures it includes to improve the workers compensation system, although we would have preferred that the bill also addresses many other urgently needed system reforms.

We're very happy that the bill proposes that, in cases of a workplace fatality where there is not a surviving spouse or common-law partner to receive the lump sum fatality payment, it can be paid to the worker's estate or to another person as determined by the WCB. We believe that it is important and proper that those inheriting a worker's estate receive this benefit and not be barred from it simply because they didn't have a spousal or common-law relationship with the worker. This fixes a gap in current coverage and provides fairness for families of all types.

The second positive measure included in Bill 24 includes a benefit of the doubt principle for the claims adjudication process that has the potential to facilitate workers' access to the WCB benefits they're entitled to, in a more timely way, in eliminating needless delays in the adjudication process. Under Bill 24, in cases where the balance of evidence on a worker's WCB assessment is assessed to be balanced, equal on both sides, the benefit of the doubt will be given to the worker. While we understand such cases are rare, we certainly support the principle of benefit of the doubt.

As mentioned earlier, we would have preferred an opportunity to have worker and employer representatives engaged with the government in a consensus-building process to recommend the inclusion of other urgently needed WCB system reforms in the bill. We hope that the upcoming act review will be comprehensive and government will act swiftly to implement recommendations.

The Manitoba Federation of Labour believes that government should move forward with a number of urgent issues, such as removing current arbitrary

restrictions on WCB coverage from any psychological injuries that do not apply to physical workplace injuries and which may result in claims being denied, ramping up injury prevention activities and clamping down on employer claim suppression and vexatious appeals.

We think they should eliminate current reliance on WCB-contracted health-care advisers whose opinions and advice often override those of the injured worker's treating physician about matters such as when a work is—worker is safe to go back to work.

We should eliminate the ability of employers to access injured workers' medical information, so they can't go on a fishing expedition to find reasons to appeal the acceptance of a claim.

*(18:10)

And we should eliminate the dominant-cause provision that continues to put the onus on workers with occupational diseases to prove their work is the dominant cause of their disease, thereby barring many from having their claims accepted.

And while I'm here speaking about WCB, I want to take this opportunity as well to speak to how WCB surpluses are being used in light of last week's disappointing announcement that \$122 million is being paid out to employers irrespective of their commitment to workplace safety and the quality of their injury prevention programs.

To put this in context, our WCB already has the lowest employer premiums in the country, so we are already the most affordable, bar none. However, rather than taking advantage of the fact to really step up Manitoba's commitment to injury prevention and worker safety, the WCB has once again made the decision to status quo its prevention work and is instead providing a massive financial payout to all employers, including not those—not just those who made meaningful investments in prevention programming, but also to those who've done the exact opposite: failed to invest in safety, caused worker injuries, illnesses and even worker fatalities.

WCB already has a prevention rebate program which provides a financial incentive to employers who have created top-notch safety programs and who've had these programs formally audited and who've achieved the high official standard of SAFE Work Certified.

So an employer who invests time and energy and demonstrates they believe in prevention gets a rebate. We support this principle.

Under this existing provision—prevention rebate program, if there's a serious worker injury or fatality, the rebate's suspended, which I think we can all agree is reasonable.

When there's a worker death on the job, the employer should not be receiving a pat-on-the-back cheque from WCB. But that's exactly what was announced last week, to our great dismay. In deciding to pay out \$122 million to employers regardless of the quality of their safety programs, the WCB has scoped employers where workers were injured and got sick on the job—or worse, where workers were seriously and sometimes permanently injured on the job. And they've even scoped in eighteen employers where workers were killed on the job last year.

I've always believed that Manitobans are the most fair-minded people in the country, and I have to tell you, as a Manitoban, that offends me. In paying out this rebate the way they are, the WCB is disincentivizing investments in injury prevention by showing employers that they'll get a cheque in the mail whether they make an effort to keep workers safe or not. I'd submit to this committee: that's just wrong.

The MFL's hopeful that future WCB surpluses will be used to build on the legislated mandate of the Crown corporation, to prevent injuries and illnesses and keep workers safe and to support workers and their families with workplace injuries and death. While I recognize WCB has a fair bit of independence, I hope our government will echo our concern and ideas for WCB to prioritize in the future.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate our support for the two measures included in Bill 24 and encourage the government to take a bolder and more holistic approach to WCB system reform in conjunction with the upcoming act review.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation.

Do members of the committee have any questions?

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister responsible for the Workers Compensation Board): Thank you, Mr. Rebeck. I don't have any questions at this time. I just wanted to thank you for your presence here today and for your comments on this bill, and look forward to future collaboration with the Manitoba Federation

of Labour regarding the upcoming legislative review of the WCB.

K. Rebeck: Thank you, Minister. I very much look forward to the review as well and I appreciate the changes this bill makes.

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): Thank you, Mr. Rebeck, for your time here this evening and coming out to share your stance on not this legislation—not just this legislation, but a direction that you wish to see the department move forward on on future legislation.

Specifically to Bill 24, since you're obviously well versed on the legislation and workplace legislation: What is your opinion on WCB having the authority to pay out the lump sum? You know, we've seen that it's clearly stated the worker's estate, but it also includes another person determined by the Workers Compensation Board.

Do you have any opinion on where that could cause potential legal issues or issues in general with an employer in the future?

K. Rebeck: Thanks. Thanks for the question. I know you asked that in the second reading of the bill as well and were seeking some clarity.

I think there's already some language that gives the WCB a bit of discretionary power, and I think that that's proper. For instance, it could be that, you know, I suffer through a workplace tragedy and I have a dependent child but no spouse, and rather than it going to an estate, it could go to whoever the caregiver of my child is, to manage and deal with some of those costs and change they're incurring.

So WCB already has some of that discretionary power. I think it's rarely used; it would typically be to the estate, but there may be situations such as that, that this gives WCB some allowance to make sure that they're looking after the dependents or appropriate family connected to the injured worker—or, deceased worker, sorry.

The Chairperson: Seeing no further questions, thank you very much for your presentation.

Bill 29—The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act

The Chairperson: We will now move on to Bill 29, with out-of-town presenter, and we have, from the Manitoba Federation of Labour, Mr. Kevin Rebeck.

Please proceed with your presentation when you're ready.

Kevin Rebeck (Manitoba Federation of Labour):

As I've said, the Manitoba federation is our largest central labour body, made up of more than 30 affiliated unions and 130,000 union workers from public, private sectors and the building trades, and workplace health and safety is a key priority for the MFL and our affiliated unions.

We conduct training, research, education for our members, and we lobby and advocate for stronger laws, stricter enforcement and greater investment in injury and illness prevention to keep all workers safe and healthy.

Every worker has the right to a safe and healthy workplace, and every family has the right to expect their loved ones will return home safely at the end of every workday. Workplace injuries and illnesses are preventable. When we have the right laws, enforcement strategies and prevention programs, we can ensure that all workers stay safe and healthy on the job.

While employers have the legal duty to ensure safe and healthy workplaces, it's also true that the laws that governments pass, the policies they implement and the investments they make have a major influence on our workplace health and safety system.

Government is also a major employer, with thousands of workers doing a broad range of jobs in all parts of the province. In addition, it's a major funder of agencies and service providers across multiple sectors, including health care.

That's why it is so important that government not only create the legislative and regulatory framework that, combined with strong enforcement measures, ensures all employers meet their obligations. It's also crucial that government lead by example as an employer that strives to protect its own workers and those in the facilities it funds safe from workplace injuries and illness.

While many improvements to workplace health and safety have been won by workers and unions over the course of many decades fighting for workplace health and safety, the fact that at least 25,000 Manitoban workers are injured on the job and more than 20 die each year is a sobering reminder of the need to remain vigilant in our efforts to make workplaces safe and healthy for all Manitobans.

That's why we're pleased to participate—we were pleased to participate in the recent review of The Workplace Safety and Health Act, and to see many of our priorities reflected in Bill 29. One important

addition proposed in this bill is language that highlights the need to ensure our workplaces are safe from psychological hazards, including a definition of what constitutes a psychologically safe workplace. While employers have always had this obligation as part of their overall legal responsibilities to eliminate or reduce hazards, the proposed new language reinforces that obligation with regard to a long-neglected area of workplace health and safety.

It's our hope this new provision serves as the basis for further measures to protect workers from psychological hazards in the workplace, including more specific, robust requirements for identifying and assessing those hazards, and for taking measures to eliminate them.

We also support the new measures in the bill to ensure that employers are held accountable for meeting their obligations under the act. This includes a provision that will prevent an employer from trying to escape their obligations, including with respect to an order issued under the act, simply by changing the name of their business and continuing operations under the same ownership and control.

Closing this loophole will prevent unsafe employers from repeatedly putting workplace health and safety at risk. There's also a new penalty for employers who disregard their obligation to immediately report a serious incident to the workplace safety and health branch.

The regulation defines a serious incident as a fatality or any of a number of very severe injuries, as well as extremely hazardous events such as structural collapse, an explosion or a spill of a hazardous substance.

* (18:20)

I think we can all agree that reporting such incidents is a basic measure in identifying and preventing serious hazards; and while it's unfortunate that some employers would neglect this fundamental obligation, we're pleased there's an additional measure compelling them to fill it.

Similarly, it's shameful and totally unacceptable that some employers will actually punish workers for exercising their rights under the act, such as raising a safety and health issue or invoking the right to refuse unsafe work. In these situations, employers will sometimes punish workers in various ways, including through termination. This kind of reprisal is prohibited under the act.

However, in the past, if an employer was found guilty of such reprisal, there was little recourse for the worker to recover anything owed—owed to them, such as lost wages. It's bad enough to be subjected to reprisal for exercising a basic right. Losing pay because it only—of it only adds to the injustice.

For that reason, we're pleased to see a new provision to provide for the recovery and payment of lost wages in these situations. And on the topic of reprisals, we're glad that the act now makes clear what recourse a worker has in these situations.

Owing to a Supreme Court ruling issued back in 2021, commonly called the Horrocks decision, there's been some question about whether the Workplace Safety and Health branch had jurisdiction to decide on allegations of reprisal where a worker was covered by a collective agreement, or whether such matters could only be addressed through the grievance arbitration process.

The MFL has been consistent in its position that the act gives the branch clear jurisdiction in matters of reprisal for all workers, unionized or not, and that any change in this regard would be unnecessary and would deny workers a statutory right to have an allegation heard and decided upon simply because they're covered by a collective agreement.

Therefore we're pleased that the act now contains language clarifying that all workers who believe they are victims of a reprisal have a right to this basic avenue of recourse.

All workers have a right to know about hazards at their workplace, as well as whether identified hazards are addressed and how they're addressed. Previously, when an improvement work order or stop work order was issued in response to an identified hazard, the act was unclear how long that relevant information had to be made available.

Bill 29 helps clarify this issue by requiring that orders—when orders are posted in a workplace, they must remain posted for seven days or until compliance with the order has been achieved, whichever is longer. Similarly, the act will now require that a report on measures taken in response to an improvement order be posted for seven days or until compliance, whichever is longer.

'Meserge'—measures such as this facilitate workers' rights to know and to participate in health and safety in the workplace, as well as provide an additional incentive for employers to comply with orders.

Another measure in the bill clarifies what constitutes dangerous work in the context of a worker exercising their right to refuse dangerous work. While the worker's belief that a given situation or activity is dangerous remains central to the process, the new provision makes clear the factors to be considered, including the aspects of imminent risk and the lack of measures to eliminate or control the risk.

This should help facilitate a resolution in many right-to-refuse cases and thus ensure that workers are better able to exercise this basic right and have their health and safety concerns addressed.

There's multiple places in the act and regulations where an assessment of a particular risk is required. This includes assessments of risk associated with violence, confined space entry, ergonomic hazards and many others.

The question of who could perform such assessments is inconsistent across this different circumstances. That means that sometimes assessments can be performed by a person with no particular knowledge or experience in the matter.

Bill 29 requires the risk assessments be performed by a person who is competent, which under the regulation means that person has knowledge, skills and training to properly do the assessment.

This bill also contains new measures with the potential to help identify and prevent occupational diseases. This is an issue of fundamental importance to the MFL. Occupational diseases have long been the main cause of workplace fatalities in Manitoba. We know that many occupational diseases go unrecognized for various reasons, including difficulty in establishing a 'cauzual' connection between the disease and the workplace.

As the processes and materials people are exposed to in our workplace change, so too can harmful effects of work, which can go unnoticed for far too long. That's why it's important that Bill 29 will now allow the chief occupational medical officer, when they believe a worker's been overexposed to a harmful substance, to require the worker's employer to implement and maintain a health surveillance program for their workers. Such programs have long been successful in the mining industry.

Finally, we applaud the proposal to replace the word accident in the act with the word incident. While this may appear to be a simple matter of terminology, it actually speaks to an important principle: that workplace injuries and illnesses are preventable; that they

are not result of random circumstances, but of failures within the prevention system that can be identified and corrected.

In fact, we don't use the term accident on the MFL, and we'd like to see it also eliminated from the Workplace Safety and Health regulations and The Workers Compensation Act regulations.

While we are pleased with many positive changes within the bill, I also want to draw some attention to need for action on a few other outstanding concerns. As noted earlier, occupational diseases are the number one killer, and the number one killer by far is exposure to asbestos. We believe we should have mandatory training standards in place for anyone who's going to do asbestos abatement and removal. We were glad to hear that commitment in the Throne Speech and looking forward to regulations that achieve that goal.

We also need measures to stop the epidemic of violence in our workplaces. Even the number of accepted WBC claims tell part of that story, and we've seen a quadrupling over the last four years. Much more needs to be done on this front.

And we need to see that there are—sorry, lost my place here. There are several areas where the regulation for assessing workplace violence could be improved, including where our risk assessment is conducted and include Workplace Safety and Health committee representation. So violence, asbestos are two main areas.

Over the last decade, health care has had the single highest rate of time loss injuries among all sectors in the Manitoba economy, followed in second place by the public sector. That means workers in Manitoba's health-care and public sectors are suffering higher injury rates when—than workers who are in construction, manufacturing, mining or other sectors considered to be more dangerous.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Mr. Rebeck. The time for presentation has expired.

Would members of the committee have any questions for the presenter?

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Thank you, Mr. Rebeck.

I don't have any questions from your presentation, but I would like to thank your members for their participation in that legislative review of The Workplace Safety and Health Act and those resulting 144 recommendations that our government has committed to implementing, as well as, you know, the

ask that your members participate in ongoing work to update the regulations, especially as relates to including the psychological health and safety part and fully defining what that could mean for the different sectors, and ongoing work on the minister's Advisory Council on Workplace Safety and Health.

This is really, really important work that our government takes seriously, and I thank members from MFL for their participation in making Manitoba workplaces safer.

K. Rebeck: Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that, and we've really appreciated being part of the consultation process.

I apologize, my report ran a little long, and I hope that the written submission can be included as part of the submission, even though I ran out of time in explaining the importance of this act, the changes it makes and the impact it'll have on Manitoba workers.

I very much appreciate government moving swiftly on implementing these changes.

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): I'd like to thank Mr. Rebeck again for your time here tonight and the research that your organization and yourself have done on this legislation.

Since you were part of the consultation—or, since Mr. Rebeck was part of the consultation, and he's obviously well aware of not only the legislation as it stands but the drafting of the regulation, my only question would be around the clause on psychologically safe workplaces.

Since we realize that not all employers are intentionally negligent and that we also realize that not all employees are often—

The Chairperson: Thank you, Mr. Narth. Your time for a question has expired.

K. Rebeck: Yes, I think what you're driving at is some questions around the psychologic—implementation of psychological health, and I think the act should lay out some clear definition. Even well intended employers often aren't sure what's expected of them, and by making a definition clear in the act, it will give them an added necessary tool on how to do that.

As well, I think you may have been going in the realm of small employers and the impact on them, and I think regulations and kind of how that applies as they come forward following these act changes will help address some of those areas and concerns.

I 'maylieve' many employers want to do the right thing. This act will—act change will help describe what that means and what they can do.

The Chairperson: Any further questions?

Seeing none, thank you very much for your presentation, Mr. Rebeck.

I will now call on Shannon Hancock. Okay, Shannon is on Zoom.

* (18:30)

Shannon, if you could please unmute yourself and turn your video on. Okay, Shannon, please proceed when you are ready.

Shannon Hancock (Private Citizen): Okay, thank you very much and good evening.

My name is Shannon Hancock. I'm here to speak to Bill 29, The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act. I have personal and lived experience with reporting health and safety issues to the provincial government of Manitoba's Workplace Safety and Health division.

As a registered nurse from 1993 until 2019, my experiences weren't positive, and I'm not alone. I was one of two nurses, regulated nursing professionals, both of us women in our 50s, civilly sued during statutory appeals after reporting to Workplace Safety and Health. In my case, the appeal resolved in my favour; didn't stop the reprisals. And I'm still dealing with the consequences despite the prohibition against reprisals all these years later.

So to say that the reporting and peal—appeal processes were lengthy, intimidating, expensive and life-altering would be understatement. I would like to speak specifically to three things. Number one is the change from—or, hearing to oral hearing for appeal—or no, oral or written, sorry. The board can determine whether there's going to be an oral hearing or it'll just be written submissions. I think in fairness, most people who go to Workplace Safety and Health aren't lawyers, don't have lawyers, can't afford lawyers, may be marginalized groups, they're traumatized, they're afraid of reporting, but they try to do the right thing.

They're not going to have a lawyer; they're going to encounter lawyers there. And if their report is dismissed or denied, they have the right of appeal; or the board, Workplace Safety and Health, can refer the matter to the Manitoba Labour Board for a hearing. If the board has the power to decide that the appeal is going to be based solely on written submissions, that

seems fundamentally and procedurally unfair to laypersons who are not lawyers, who already are in an adversarial and kind of an intimidating process.

They're not going to get legal assistance at the board, and they're going to be dealing with probably lawyers for the employer, maybe the union, at the board for sure. So they're really—in fairness, there should always be oral hearings if that is what the individual requests, in the matter of somebody who's not represented.

The second thing is the reasonable person test. And I'm sorry, I meant to write down the articles or the provisions and I can't recall. That is an unfortunate term that really should be removed from the legislation. Who decides what's reasonable? There's a legal test. There's a standard of review for what is reasonable, and it's more than just, I think that's person unreasonable. They may be traumatized, they're unrepresented, they've—you know, they were retaliated against for reporting.

And what's reasonable to a labour employment lawyer or insider or union member or somebody from the Federation of Labour or whoever: that information and what's reasonable is going to be very different for a marginalized worker who has the courage to come forward and say, I've been harmed; there's something going on at work; I need help.

So either that definition should be removed, because the board—the Labour Board is all lawyers, and they are lawyers affiliated with dominant private firms and Manitoba judges, and that is just a statement of fact. So I can't under—or, overstate how intimidating their process is. There are no—proceedings aren't recorded, there's no transcript, you don't get a lawyer and if the standard is simply, that person's unreasonable so we're going to dismiss whatever their concern was, that's fundamentally unfair to that individual. There should be some sort of definition about what reasonable means.

And the last thing is costs. I think the Labour Board—I'd previously tried to—that sort of was slid in with other legislation. Cost if somebody is being unreasonable. That, again, is unfair. These are government agencies, boards, commissions, with very experienced labour lawyers.

For example, the Labour Board long-time board vice—or, chairperson, is now a vice-chairperson. Colin Robinson is now sitting on the board at WCB. So it's a very small community, very tight-knit. People know people, they sit on committees together, and if

somebody is going—I know people who've gone to work—the Labour Board for hearings and faced six lawyers, and they are unrepresented.

So costs, with great respect to the committee, should be removed. That would be—that would send a chill—it would have a chilling effect on individuals; it would result in complaint suppression, fear, intimidation and a perpetuation of the culture of silence that prevents people from reporting.

I don't know if you've seen the recent reporting. APTN Investigates just did an excellent piece about two Indigenous men who were retaliated against. It's called APTN Investigates: Unmuted, and these two fellows are retaliated against—they work in the public sector, in the government, and there was coercion, suppression, a discussion about NDAs, which is an ongoing issue.

So to add costs on top of that will make it impossible for people to come forward.

And I think with that, those were the points I wanted to cover. I appreciate your time, and thank you very much.

The Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation, Shannon.

Do members of the committee have any questions for the presenter?

MLA Marcelino: I don't have any questions, Ms. Hancock, but I just wanted to thank you for your presentation today, and taking time to do so, especially with your lived experience in going through these processes. I appreciate your putting in your two cents here for the different parts of this bill for workers in our province.

Thank you very much.

S. Hancock: Yes, I thank you very much. I appreciate your time, and I appreciate the time taken to consider this very important issue, because I can't overstate—*[interjection]* Sorry about that. Somebody's home.

With that I should probably stop talking now, because the dogs are barking, but thank you very much for hearing me out this evening.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Shannon.

Seeing no further questions, we will move on to our next presenter.

Bill 21—The Protecting Youth in Sports Act

The Chairperson: Moving to Bill 21, The Protecting Youth in Sports Act.

I will now call on David Grant, private citizen.

Mr. Grant, you may proceed with your presentation.

David Grant (Private Citizen): My name is David Grant. I think that's a formality. And this, it's—one of the things I wanted to congratulate all of you here is that this has been a very busy session. There's a lot that needed doing, and it seems that you're doing it, so congratulations on that.

And on this one, obviously, I was never in conflict with any of the people running my—helping my kids when they were young, but I—we're all aware that there are problems happen there: both abuse of kids, yelling at them and worse, and it's good to see this in place.

It does remind me of organizations which have had—whatever you call it, disciplinary processes, and I've seen those go horribly wrong. In the one that—I was an engineer, and I've known of cases of complaints against lawyers and engineers which were not handled appropriately. And I would suggest that this one, since the Sport Manitoba stuff is going to get into disciplinary stuff, that we not make the mistakes that they did.

In that case, because professionals don't want to be slandered, everything is kept top secret, which means that if the complaint is tossed for no reason, if it was a valid complaint and it's tossed, nobody knows.

* (18:40)

And I would suggest that a system where the complaints all have to result in a report, the report could be redacted so it doesn't have any people's names, but at least you know the sort of thing that was being complained about, and then a detailed reason why it was dismissed, because the people who hold these hearings—disciplinary hearings over coaches or lawyers—have great power; because there are people out there who make mistakes or do bad things, and if the person—the gatekeeper of the discipline is not as rigorous as he should be—he or she should be—things could be dismissed that shouldn't be.

And as I say, if every complaint—every complaint that met the rules—required a report, then we would know the sort of things that are upsetting people, and if they're dismissed, a good reason why it was dismissed, because in a lot of cases we can say that an

angry parent is going to complain about an official all the time.

I'm an official at sportscar racing, and we generally don't face that, because the people who have paid thousands to come and race, they don't want to argue with us. But I'm aware that it does happen.

So I would make those two significant suggestions. That every complaint result in a report. That you redact the complaints heavily enough if they're not found—if there is no reason to go further with discipline. At least let everybody know and have it published, the sort of thing that was complained about and the good reasons—unsubstantiated, whatever reasons are suitable—for dismissal.

So those are the two things I wanted to say, because having seen examples of other organizations, which routinely, like when I dug into my own engineering one, we find that everybody who has been punished works on their own.

Well, 90 per cent of the engineers in Manitoba work for a big company, or the government, and it is just a random strangeness that, you know, Mohamed [*phonetic*], who does stair designs, is got a complaint against him and it was found valid and he had to pay a fine.

And that doesn't seem fair when other mistakes are dismissed. So we'd like to reform all the—I've discussed it with Mr. Wiebe with some of his matters—we would like to reform all the disciplinary stuff in Manitoba so that no complaint disappears for—completely. Redact them if you need. And that every one that is dismissed has a good reason given for dismissal and that be published as well.

So I would say the same for your Sport Manitoba issue, that it is good that you're doing this, and I just don't want it to become hollow legislation. We want to see that if somebody feels strongly enough about something to fill out a complaint form, let's have it properly investigated.

And like Mr. Rebeck said, if you're going to investigate something, make sure the person doing it is skilled enough to know what is going on, because it is too easy to take Bob [*phonetic*] that just started working here and have him investigate why that backhoe flipped over.

You know, he is not an expert in that sort of thing. You need to either provide an in-house estimate—expert, or hire one, but that is the other thing with these complaints.

So I will leave it at that, and thank you very much for the opportunity.

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

Do members of the committee have any questions?

Hon. Nellie Kennedy (Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism): Good evening, Mr. Grant. I just wanted to thank you so much for coming in person and presenting here at committee this evening, and I appreciate you taking the time to give your feedback on this bill.

It is very appreciated, and certainly we will take these things into consideration, so thank you.

D. Grant: Yes, and I appreciate that it is second reading stage—it is a little late to throw in new paragraphs, but it would still be my sincere hope that if they're not too hard to compose, that a couple of paragraphs could be added in that direction.

I was surprised a few weeks ago when, after the—during the second committee—after the second reading committee, the standing committee, a bunch of changes were made to a bill or two.

So that is the first—I've been coming here for decades, and that is the first time I've ever seen a significant improvement to a bill made after the standing committee, but thank you for your time.

The Chairperson: Seeing no further questions, thank you very much for your presentation, Mr. Grant.

Bill 24—The Workers Compensation Amendment Act (Continued)

The Chairperson: Okay, we will now move to Bill 24, The Workers Compensation Amendment Act.

Mr. Paul Moist.

All right, Mr. Moist will be dropped to the bottom of the list.

I will now call on John Christian Barrion, private citizen.

Do you have any written materials to distribute to the committee? [*interjection*] No, okay. Please proceed with your presentation when you are ready.

John Christian Barrion (Private Citizen): I am here today to talk about Bill 24 and why it's going to be very significant, especially with what happened to my brother, who passed—sorry, especially with what happened to my brother who passed away at work and

how WCB affected me and my family. This also my first standing committee, so I'm excited to just share.

So first of all, Workers Compensation Board, or WCB, has made my life a living hell here on earth. WCB prevents me from ever successfully grieving my brother, John Lloyd. I should never have needed to read the fine print of their documents about the death of someone at work.

Workers Compensation Board basically gave my family a cheque of \$14,000, and the fine print said, oh, by the way, you can't sue Travelodge hotel beer vendor because the employer pays WCB insurance. It doesn't matter if your 19-year-old brother was working alone late in the night, at 2 a.m., without a bulletproof vest. It doesn't matter if Travelodge left John Lloyd dying after he was shot by Sampson. It doesn't matter if Travelodge didn't call 911 right away, since no one was looking at the security cameras. You can't sue Travelodge. Their employer paid WCB insurance, and we're here to protect them. We protect the rich. Here's a \$14,000 cheque, now shut up.

Meanwhile, you know your application for the Manitoba Compensation for Victims of Crime program application that you have applied for, it's denied. You are not eligible for compensation because your brother died while he was working. WCB deals with workplace-related deaths; any compensation for victims of crime applications will automatically be voided.

As a result, I feel stuck, I feel chained up and I feel locked up. There's a boulder the size of mountains that is weighing me down, and I can't move. I feel helpless. I feel hopeless. I am stuck in a small room, and it feels like the walls are continuing to close in on me. But most 'importantly' and unfortunately, I can't seem to grieve.

Let me be clear: this is not about money. John Lloyd would never want me to make this all about money. This is about Workers Compensation Board rubbing it in my face and my family's face that John Lloyd's life is a \$14,000 cheque. I'd be thousands of kilometres deep into a successful grieving process had they not given anything at all. A \$14,000 cheque is a slap in the face. The CEOs that pay for WCB protection make that in a day.

I cannot sue because of WCB, and it makes me angry. It makes me furious. I am filled with excruciating agony with what I cannot control.

Although I dread being angry at WCB's bureaucracy and lines of fine print, I truly want to grieve. I want to accept my brother's death. I want to have him in my heart forever, to love him unconditionally, whether he is alive or not. But I can't think of him because it makes me remember what I had to go through with WCB. It makes me think about how my brother's life is a \$14,000 cheque. I dread how easily WCB makes me think about—makes me think it's all about money, when in reality it's not. I hate how I'd rather not think about my brother because of the painful anguish I get. I hate how I'm suffering and agonizing delay in my ability to grieve my brother as a result of trying to push away the sadness and hurt.

* (18:50)

WCB is like the darkest, tallest, thickest, most bureaucrat capitalist wall that I've ever seen. On the other side is a green pasture of acceptance and a blue sky that says successful grieving process. But no matter how much I try to scale and climb this dark wall, no matter how much energy I put trying to climb this wall to get to the other side, I cannot. I am not able to heal from this pain.

I dread how my memories of my brother are fading because I'd rather not think about the anger that WCB gives me when I try to grieve John Lloyd. And it makes me suffer because I still want to—I still want those beautiful cherished memories of him when we were young, when we were close, when we were—when we would fight over video games, when we made pranks on each other. Those memories are fading away.

Again, this is not about money. John Lloyd gave us something of a form more valuable than any amount of money, gold or the shiniest jewels would offer. John Lloyd's value was in the form of his bright smile on his face, his laughter from our jokes, his kindness, his ambitions, his unconditional love for his family. John Lloyd always wanted to be a father and have his own family. I suffer in sorrow in realization that I will never see him grow up into a middle-aged adult, to see his dreams come true, to see him experience what life has to offer, to see him have his own family and kids. That is no longer a possibility. Those future years and decades with him are gone too soon like his ashes in the wind.

WCB has blown out the flame of the hearth that keeps my family warm in the darkest nights. My family is destroyed. You have left us cold, shivering. We are stuck in an everlasting ice age, a never-ending winter. Two have fallen into addiction, gambling and

alcohol, and one of my brothers stopped attending high school. My family is not rich; we are a traditional Filipino family. We were a seven-person household living in a two-bedroom home in the Winnipeg's inner city.

I am the first in my family to go to university, to study engineering. My family depends on me. When John Lloyd died, I didn't take a break; I kept studying. I needed to make my family proud. Unfortunately, WCB does not reimburse students for the dollars paid for their university courses if they want to withdraw from courses mid-semester when the death of a loved one occurred at work. My parents are not rich; I pay for my opportunity to access education myself through loans. Due to failed grades and gaps, I have gotten an unsatisfactory progress file with Manitoba Student Aid and I am at risk of being ineligible for further student loans. I will let my family down if I can no longer continue studying engineering.

Furthermore, I have been constantly waking up in the middle of the night, at 2 a.m., and I can't fall back asleep. I constantly wake up in night sweats and my bed is routinely drenched in sweat and it is difficult for me to get proper sleep and to have normal energy. As much as I try to hide it, I am frequently tired during the day and that negatively impacts my ability for my day-to-day tasks, my ability to study, and my ability to have a normal life. It has never been the same since then.

To the WCB: stop rubbing it in my face that my brother's life is equal to a cheque worth \$14,000. Your power over us is negatively affecting my mental health. I want to grieve, but you make it so hard to do so. Workers Compensation Board is a giant, constricting python, suffocating my body as it wraps its grip around me. It constricts my neck, choking me. It tries to drag me under a murky lake, drowning me. I can't breathe; I can't speak; I can't grieve.

But if my brother was still with me, he would tell me to focus on what's important: don't worry about the WCB, don't worry about money, but focus on using your gifts, your voice, to fight for what truly matters for you and the inner-city community. It is through remembering John Lloyd that I am able to set myself free from the grip of the python. It is through speaking in front of you that I can keep my head above water. It is through hearing my own voice being echoed in this room that I can finally breathe. I am finally able to heal from my pain that has lingered in me for two years. I am set free.

And now that I am free, I can use my voice for what John Lloyd really wanted: his life, his sacrifice, his legacy will be for nothing. He may no longer have a tomorrow, but I still do. I am still alive. I can still use my voice to uplift Winnipeg's inner city.

I have years ahead of me to find real solutions that tackle real problems. I will fight beer vendor robberies through the root causes, root causes such as poverty, mental health, intergenerational trauma, addictions, job discrimination of those with previous convictions, and racism.

I will fight against the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer; the lack of empathy from suburbanites towards the most vulnerable people in my inner-city community and, finally, the lack of support of the homeless and those with addictions.

To the Workers Compensation Board, I hope that in the future, when a young person loses a loved one at work, I hope they won't struggle to grieve like I did because you reduced their brother's life to a \$14,000 cheque.

Thank you for your time.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much for your presentation. I'm very sorry for your loss.

And we're going to open it up to questions from the committee.

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister responsible for the Workers Compensation Board): Thank you so much, John Christian, for your very first appearance at a standing committee here at the Manitoba Legislature.

I think, on behalf of all of the members in the Legislature, we'd just like to give you our condolences for what has happened to your family: your brother's tragic killing while he was at work and also what happened with the WCB not giving your family the death benefit because your brother did not have a spouse or dependents at that time.

We are trying to rectify that with this bill, as you know. It's not going to make what happened better, but this is a small step that we're hoping to say that your brother's life wasn't in vain. There—nobody will ever in the future have to go through what your brother and your family did, with not being able to access that death benefit again.

So thank you for standing up for workers and their families, all over Manitoba.

J. Barrion: Thank you so much for the time and effort that the Legislative Assembly—I know making bills is a lot of hard work, and it means a lot to me that no other family who goes through what I have to go through will feel that same pain and hopefully that if it does happen in the future that their grief will be much more maneuverable and less painful for them.

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): I'd like to thank John Christian for your time here this evening, and I'd like to extend my deepest condolences for your loss and your family's loss. You've experienced something that no family or brother should ever need to experience, and that—I'm sorry for that.

In regards to Bill 24, we obviously know that there's nothing that could make a situation that you've had to live better, but the changes that Bill 24 bring forward, do you feel that would help in the process of your loss and the grieving that you've expressed as being difficult as a result of your treatment through the WCB settlement process?

J. Barrion: I think that it would provide closure for me and my family knowing that future families won't have to go through what I had to go through. And it will absolutely help with my healing process that my brother, John Lloyd's, death wasn't in vain and that his legacy—and will help families wherever in Manitoba to not have to feel the same way I did when they lost someone at work.

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): Miigwech for your presentation, and I know that my colleague has already said it, but—and again, I'm sure that everybody in this room tonight, really, honestly—our deepest, deepest condolences to the lost of your brother and your parents' son.

* (19:00)

It is incredibly powerful to see you here tonight to represent your brother and your family and to be here to witness this bill that is really, you know, your brother's legacy. It's quite extraordinary, so I just want to say miigwech for you being here, and it's quite powerful for, I'm sure, all of us here this evening to hear you speak.

J. Barrion: Thank you, Minister.

The Chairperson: Okay. Seeing no further questions, thank you very much again for your presentation.

Bill 29—The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act

(Continued)

The Chairperson: Okay, we were moving to Bill 29, The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act.

We will call Mr. Paul Moist, who is on Zoom.

Mr. Moist, if you could please unmute yourself and turn your video on. And you are presenting to Bill 29. Okay, Mr. Moist. You may proceed with your presentation.

Paul Moist (Manitoba Federation of Union Retirees): It's a great privilege to speak tonight on behalf of the Manitoba Federation of Union Retirees. We are retired union members and the Manitoba affiliate of the 500,000-member Congress of Union Retirees of Canada. CURC is affiliated with the Canadian Labour Congress, and our organization is affiliated with the Manitoba Federation of Labour.

Just last week, across the street from where you're meeting right now, I attended the annual Day of Mourning ceremony in Memorial Park, where we observed a moment of silence, again, in remembrance of workers killed over the past year. On average, we have about 20 Manitoba workers who die on the job or from ailments related to workplace exposures to hazardous substances.

In addition, about 25,000 workers in Manitoba are injured on the job annually. And we have a collective responsibility—those working, those retired like myself, and you as legislators—to do the best we can to improve on those numbers.

Bill 29 contains some really important new provisions which we support: language to ensure that workplaces are safe from psychological hazards, including the new definition of what constitutes a psychologically safe workplace. We support the new penalty for employers who disregard their obligation to immediately report a serious incident to the Workplace Safety and Health branch. We also support the new definition of what constitutes a serious incident.

We support the expanded legislated protection for workers to recover payment of lost wages in situations of reprisal. Bill 29 also clarifies that when workplace improvement orders are posted in the workplace, they must remain posted for seven days or until compliance with the order has been achieved, whichever is longer. And this is an important new provision which we fully support.

The bill before you also helps to clarify what constitutes, quote: dangerous work, in the context of a worker exercising their right to refuse dangerous work, an important clarification we think that further protects workers. It's important—in the important area of risk assessments, Bill 29 requires that such assessments be performed by a person who is competent, which under the regulations means the person has, quote: knowledge, skills and training, close quote, to properly do such risk assessments, and we support this.

The expansion of the chief occupational medical officer's authority to require employers to implement and maintain a health surveillance program in instances where workers have been overexposed to a harmful substance is an important amendment that we support.

We also support the proposal to replace the word accident with incident, and I know the Federation of Labour spoke to that earlier this evening. Bill 29 is a positive piece of legislation and we commend the government for bringing it forward.

We join with the Federation of Labour in calling for further consideration and study and, in due course, bringing forward future legislation to deal with other health and safety issues, including safety training on asbestos, workplace violence incidents and competencies to investigate these, measures to recognize and address the unacceptable high rate of workplace injury and—in health-care workplaces and in the public sector as a whole—and, lastly, improvement—improved, pardon me, protections for workers working in extreme temperatures.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, we support Bill 29, and we thank you for bringing it forward. And we're happy to answer any questions you may have.

The Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation.

Do members of the committee have any questions for the presenter?

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Thank you very much for your presence here and for your comments, Mr. Moist.

Just, unrelatedly, I'd just like to say that one of the most favourite events that I went to this past year and last year was going to visit with the federation of retirees and talking about our bills, and I would love to be able to do that again in the future.

You would be pleased to know that some of those things that you just listed for future development is

part of some of the work that we are engaging in right now, and hope to be able to introduce in the coming year.

So thank you very much.

P. Moist: Well, thank you, through the Chair, to the minister.

I do appreciate the dialogue with the Federation of Union Retirees, we enjoyed our session together last, I think it was, November, and we are retired from work but we're not retired from supporting all workers, organized and unorganized.

And I can't think of a more important issue than folks going to work, wherever they work in Manitoba, and going home to their families every night. And that's what having legislation, and a legislated framework for workplace safety and health, is about: ensuring that folks go to work and they go home to their families. So thank you.

The Chairperson: Okay, seeing no further questions, thank you again for your presentation, Mr. Moist.

We will now move to Mrs. Fernanda Vallejo, from Latinas Manitoba.

And please proceed with your presentation when you are ready.

Maria Fernanda Vallejo (Latinas Manitoba): Okay, so, good evening.

My name is Maria Fernanda Vallejo, I am the founder of Latinas Manitoba, a non-profit organization that supports Latin American women and families across Manitoba.

I am here to share the concerns of many in my community, especially women who work in jobs like cleaning, caregiving, food service and construction. Many have experienced unsafe conditions, harassment or emotional distress at work—a lot of anxiety—but they don't speak up. Why? Because they are afraid—afraid of losing their job, being punished, especially pregnant women, yes.

The numbers show this is real. One in four racialized workers in Canada feel unsafe or disrespect at work. We support the goals of Bill 29, but we ask for more: real protection against retaliation when workers report problems; current information about rights in multiple languages—so, English is not their first language, obviously; workplace safety means more than helmets and gloves, it means being respected, heard and safe.

So I asked my people to answer a couple of questions.

The first one, if they have been in these situations, like, feel unsafe at work? So from 14 people, 10 said yes. Okay.

If they feel mentally affected? All of them said yes. If they will try to report this, if yes, or why not? Most of them said no because they don't want to lose their job or being deported because of their immigration status. What will change about these situations?

* (19:10)

So there is a lot of preference in these job works. Most of them, we—I'm not going to mention nationalities. Yes, but some people prefer to have only people from a specific country at these job places, and they are discriminating other people. Okay. And all of them would like to get more information in our language, Spanish.

Yes, that's all that I have to say.

The Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation.

I'm going to open it up to questions from the committee. Anyone have any questions for Mrs. Vallejo?

MLA Marcelino: Thank you so much, Ms. Vallejo, for coming today to the Legislature, to the people's building and for representing your fellow workers and women in your community. It really means a lot to hear directly from you and from workers like you. Your voice is very much needed as we make these types of policies and decisions and laws.

And maybe you'd be happy to know that in conjunction with these workplace safety and health bills, our department is also very interested in making improvements in the worker's rights and protections act that specifically deal with vulnerable workers with immigration status issues.

Thank you.

M. Vallejo: Yes, so, yes, if we can provide, I don't know, more resources in our languages, that would be really, really helpful.

Hon. Nellie Kennedy (Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism): Hi, I just wanted to thank you, Ms. Vallejo, for being here. It was a pleasure to meet with you yesterday on a different matter, and I'm delighted to see you here, using your voice and advocating and I second what Minister Marcelino said, that your voice is incredibly important. And so I just commend you for being here and using that to advocate.

Thank you.

M. Vallejo: Thank you so much. Yes, I'll keep speaking on behalf of my community.

The Chairperson: Seeing no further questions, thank you again for your presentation.

We will now move to David Grant, private citizen. Please proceed with your presentation.

David Grant (Private Citizen): Thank you. My name's David Grant, just to meet that requirement. I will say that while I heard the first speaker to Bill 29, I agreed with everything he said, so I won't say those things again—almost everything.

And the second speaker was by Zoom, and one of her points struck me, that a verbal appeal is much more meaningful and less intimidating than a written one. As she pointed out, lawyers may be happy with written documents and they make something they're happy with and they know what they're doing.

And if it is one of us and we're trying to do a—I had one recently—an appeal, and it was going to be verbal, prepared my notes, and suddenly a few days before they said, oh, we've decided not to do the verbal, just send us something. And that's months ago. So it's also disappointing because the timelines, but that's something else.

But, just that for ordinary people, I think a verbal presentation is meaningful—like being here. That's why I'm here, is because I think this is meaningful, I get to see your smiling faces and if I just sent you an email I wouldn't have that assurance.

Anyway—and again, one of the things that was stressed by earlier speakers was that workplace investigations of incidents—and I agree with the use of that word—should involve an expert. And I think everybody has said that enough that—I'm not sure if it's in there, haven't read the details of it, but that's certainly advisable.

I was an expert in—as an engineer—in various industrial things with Crown corps and with factories in Ontario and I think we did a really good job of investigating things that were real mysteries. There are other cases where the root cause of the accident was somebody just not following the rules. And if it's just a contractor and two employees are the only people within miles and they break a rule, generally they get away with it.

In this one case, the helicopter pilot was supposed to drop two workers in a field near a tower, and they

were supposed climb to the top of the tower; straightforward, been doing it for forever. But somebody had the idea that why don't we just drop them off the helicopter to the top of the tower? And, horribly dangerous thing, and nobody noticed how many years that had been going on, until they crashed their helicopter because they hooked it on the tower and the guy didn't realize he was hooked. He just applied the throttle and tipped and crashed.

So in that case, then we had other references today, under Bill 29 and other bills, to whistleblowers because, as I understand it, whistleblowers—if your paycheque has Manitoba at the top of it, you know, Province of Manitoba, you're protected as a whistleblower. But if it's any other employee or citizen, you're not protected. And I think that's something, if we're getting into safety, and we want to make a big improvement, I think offering some—I think it's in one of the bills this year, the idea of do-gooders are going to be not prosecuted.

But I think that's an important part of safety, because if somebody had seen this helicopter craziness a year before that wouldn't have happened. They would've reported it; would've been not allowed, you know, would've been enforced. And the fact that the insiders stayed quiet led to a fatality.

And so that's the one thing, you know, about that: whistleblowers are so essential for discovering because the Manitoba workplace inspector can't see everything, the boss certainly can't see everything and the people who know, and who know it's dangerous and bad, are the ones who should be coming forward.

So anyway, the other is the idea of doing a report on incidents, even if they're not fatal, even if nobody goes to the hospital. And I'm thinking specifically of a—there was a workplace collapse. They'd dug a big hole in the ground, fell in. Sherbrook had to be closed because the road was in the hole and as far as I know, nobody ever wrote it up as an incident.

Now, my way of thinking is, if there'd been people there, if we'd had three people killed, you would've had an incident, it would've been written up. But the fact that it was scary, it was on front pages of newspapers across the country, it definitely should've been written up as a dangerous incident and because it involved an engineering drawing, it should've been investigated. I've been through it and all the authorities didn't do anything.

So I think in workplaces where you have an incident that makes the papers, I would say that we

should have a couple of sentences that make a report and an investigation mandatory.

Anything that could've killed somebody or could've destroyed a building or a vehicle should have some kind of report. And right now, all our legislation that's there to—our workplace and our engineering regulation and reporting stuff doesn't require a mandatory report. So that one, with Sherbrook falling in a hole, managed to escape having anybody do a report because they're not required.

So those are just a couple of things. There was one case that made the newspapers. It's if you—I guess you—I think you could call it workplace thing. There was an article in the Free Press several years ago about a university staffer who'd done inappropriate things with the women working with him and they complained. It was front page of a back section in the Free Press. There were a couple of articles over a period of time and the university managed to sweep that under the carpet.

The official position from the university ethics investigators was, oh, they didn't want to take action. Well, my way of thinking is that if that's an inappropriate thing and they've taken the brave step of going to the paper and explaining with names and everything, that's probably somebody who would sign a complaint form. Just a thought, but that's again, where you get with the mandatory reporting.

If you got bad stuff happening, a university or a government or a company shouldn't get away with talking them out of reporting if they've gone public with it, let's have an investigation because that's—as Mr. Rebeck said, you prevent accidents by investigating the ones that don't hurt anybody.

And that's again what I'd like to say. So thank you very much for your time and I'm hoping that if the Bill 29 doesn't have this stuff in it then the next revision—because you always go back and revisit this stuff—will have some of these ideas in it.

So thank you.

* (19:20)

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

Do any members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

Seeing none, thank you again for your presentation.

We will now call on Mrs. Ingrid Mushinski, private citizen.

You may proceed with your presentation.

Ingrid Mushinski (Private Citizen): This is my first time here so—I'm speaking to Bill 29, but it's going to mention other, like, workplace—Workers Compensation Board as well.

My name is Ingrid Mushinski. I am a Christian Jamaican Black Canadian woman who's 49 years old. I'm also a local singer-songwriter and published poet and speaker who believes in being a strong voice for the voiceless.

As a former alumnus from Child and Family Services—a kid in care—I went back into the system to work with kids in order to make a positive difference in their lives. This, what I'm sharing with you today, is my lived experience after working in the system for almost 16 years.

I want to speak to Bill 29 and other relevant bills about adequately protecting marginalized workers, Black women mainly, because I am one.

For over 13 years, I endured a very violent, racist and hostile work environment where I was told constantly that I couldn't take racial slurs personally by white co-ordinators from 2008 to 2021. I tried to do my job as best as I could and my psychological injuries were ignored and my mental health suffered.

Under the guise of management rates, every time I spoke up about workplace health and safety issues or any incident at work that needed to be addressed like 'shordis'—a shortage and finances to buy supplies during the pandemic for kids or their food, I was threatened with the reprisal of being moved.

Why movement mattered to me is because I had managed to create a safe space at work with a partner who I worked with for over 12 years. She didn't look like me; she was white. But she took time to understand what I faced on the job, having to put up with someone calling you the N-word for 15 minutes straight on a shift, and you still trying to have empathy and still trying to be present and help someone who is being racist toward you because of their trauma or what they learned that was not healthy.

I had no support from management. I firmly believe every time I went to my union, which I went to my union at the beginning of this happening in 2009, also when I asked for reasonable 'commodations' because I was a Seventh-day Adventist and needed Fridays off in order to honour that, and I didn't receive

it. Instead, when I applied for guaranteed hours from casual, I got one less shift than everybody else and told that I—they couldn't change the configuration.

When I brought it up with my union, my union told me that it would be seen as sour grapes if I tried to pursue a grievance. So I went on and did my job, and I found a place where I could do my job despite all of the violence and the racial slurs that staff wrote out in verbatim and that I would read so I'd be harmed twice, hearing it from the clients and then having to read it.

Thirteen years I put up with that, and 13 years I put up with reprisals constantly from management any-time I raised any concerns about workplace health and safety issues, whether it was taking kids that were not at our shelter in our vehicle to pick them up from a situation that wasn't safe for any of us, I was always the one speaking out.

I had a great partner, but I was the one who was always speaking out.

In 2021, after I was assaulted at work by a client and wrote an incident report with my partner and send it in like we usually do, my supervisor called me and we spoke about the incident. And immediately, she went to blame and said that I must have not been trauma-informed, that I must have done something to warrant the client hitting me in the back with a unpacked—a un-popped bag of popcorn really hard so it felt like a whip.

And she went on and on, and I listened until I couldn't take it anymore and I said, you don't care about me. And I ended up going on leave shortly after but I stayed and worked for a few more days with that client. She told me she needed to see me because of the incident report that she had concerns about, but I had a sense that it wasn't about that, so I contacted my union for assistance, hoping that because we have a change of union from the one who had told me not to push for a grievance, years later, that things would be different.

This union member told me it was not policy to attend meetings because it didn't seem like it was going to be disciplinary, so I had to go on my own, but with that lady to take notes because I explained who the supervisor was and that she had a reputation for bullying other staff, mainly marginalized communities, Black workers, African workers.

I went to the meeting. She wouldn't write anything down. She decided that I was—I had some skills better suited elsewhere, that I couldn't take racial

slurs personally and that I would be a better fit. So she moved me to a supervisor who I had had years before and who had blamed me when a male staff locked me in a bathroom because we couldn't agree on something he felt strongly about.

We were in the bathroom during our shift change, he was standing against the door and because we wouldn't agree, he wouldn't move. And so I started to yell and then I went home and he called and he told his rendition of the story. We met at Tim Hortons with the supervisor and I was told, what do you think you could've done differently in that situation?

I'm a kid who went through being sexually abused. So being locked in that bathroom for me brought up being sexually abused in a bathroom. But because I never felt safe at that workplace, I can never share things like that with my supervisor. But as a woman, I thought she would understand why I would start yelling about moving, so I could leave. And because I didn't agree with him, I was kept in that bathroom and blamed and offered non-violent intervention training.

So now there's a Bill 29, and you guys have written this bill out and I read it and there's some great things in there, but what I notice about the reprisal definition, there is no psychological well-being put in that definition.

When I went on leave and I tried to reach out to workplace self-safety and health, thank you, and I reached out to the Ombudsman, the Human Rights Commission, I reached out to everybody. I could even—CUPE anti-racism. Nobody paid attention, nobody cared. I went to the labour board. I was blamed for leaving my job and claiming constructive dismissal because although I'd written I was seriously considering leaving my job twice in an email to my union, I didn't take time to discuss that more in detail with my union, so I'm just dismissed. I'm not constructively dismissed.

This bill needs to have clarity. Definitions matter and when definitions are not clear, they destroy lives. I can't get a job because I don't have a reference. Any job I apply for, when it comes to the business reference, I have 16 years at a job with government and I can't get a job. I work with my husband. I claim that and suddenly, because I ask for antedated EI benefits my husband's now being audited.

My life is falling apart. I'm—anxiety. I've been to the hospital with heart palpitations. I never signed up

for this. I signed up to help kids. I was a kid in this system and this system doesn't care about anybody.

And I'm in court with for judicial review with a judge that says, Yes, I hear systemic discrimination is a thing. I stand with the Crown attorney wanting to add workplace safety and health to my complaints and he's fighting it, so he sends me an email with case law with a child from care—I don't know she was in care, but she went through sexual abuse with her step-dad. I had a step-dad. She's suing the government. I'm not suing, but I have a judicial review.

Sorry, I have the handout and the email because that's what Workplace Health and Safety thinks about psychological injuries. That's why it's not in the reprisal definition because if the legal tactic is to do a psychological injury or to cause psychological harm, how much do you really care about psychological injury? I sat there, I read that case law and I know what it is to bully someone psychologically. That was my work environment for 13 years. You don't say it, but you send things to let the person know that they've barked up the wrong tree.

I want bills that are clear and definitions that are clear. I'm not a lawyer. I'm in court against five Crown attorneys. The Attorney General of Manitoba (Mr. Wiebe) made it his business to be the one that's in opposition against me. I don't know why. I called him for a constitutional question to examine The Human Rights Code that suddenly has a cap on damages for \$25,000. I didn't really see who spoke up to that bill. And it happened during COVID, during George Floyd.

* (19:30)

I see, like, all these systemic things that are designed to keep people who have been harmed from getting the compensation that they deserve. Workers compensation is supposed to be something that helps you.

I'm—I've been waiting since last July for them to adjudicate my claim. I keep getting these letters about: We'll come to your decision in due course. Today, I got a letter and it's always strategic that I'm denied my EI antedated claims because I suffered from anxiety and I didn't know that you could backdate your claims and that they accepted constructive dismissal claims. I didn't learn that until February of last year for my judicial review.

Everywhere I go, I get the same voice. I get, from workers—Workplace Health and Safety: Sorry, it's not a reprisal. Your pay, your benefits, your seniority

wasn't affected, so not a reprisal. That's the problem; it is a reprisal. A reprisal rooted in discrimination happens very subtly, and having a history of it is the only way you're able to prove it.

When you go to the labour board, they take your history that you collect painstakingly and you prove to them, and they cut it down to, well, within the last six months or year, that's all you can complain about. So then you're—what you're trying to share doesn't matter. You share your heart, and I always know when somebody's gone from listening to not listening; they do the same thing: Is there anything else? Is there anything more? And when it's done, I know the answer before they tell me—denied, dismiss, deny, dismiss. You want to appeal?

I've gone through processes. I'm not someone who's very smart. I read and read and read and that is my only thing, but I feel bad for anyone who this is not their first language—English. I was raised here; I came here when I was four. I lived in CFS from 12 all the way until adulthood. I went to school, I took child care, I looked out for kids and made sure that they didn't die by suicide because I paid attention. When people were not doing their jobs, I spoke up.

I did everything I could, and at the end of this day, what do I get for all that dedication? Nothing. I'm garbage. My voice doesn't matter. As a Black woman, it doesn't matter. My experience doesn't matter. And telling someone that you hear them and that you understand and that you know that they honestly believe what happened to them happened to them, doesn't help.

Everyone at that labour board are lawyers. I couldn't get a lawyer if I tried, because everyone works with everyone. Even here in this court system, everyone is somehow connected, and when you bring up conflicts, nobody listens to you. They act as if you're, you know, speaking another language or if you're crazy. And then you have to be careful because no one wants to be ruled vexatious.

So again, court costs—no. When you go to the labour board, that shouldn't be a part of it, because that is something they're weaponizing. They weaponize it so that you can't go further in your processes, even in the court. I know I can't get a job; it's hard to get a job, and all these things are happening so that I can stop going to court. I know when someone's trying to wait you out, bleed you out because they have all the resources, all the power and I have none.

So if you're going to pass this bill, please make sure reprisal includes in the definition psychological well-being. Everything needs to have a definition. It needs to be clear, or else I listen to people all day long give me weasel words and not answer to things. I'm in court against the government—not that I want to be—just to get an examination of laws to see why people are saying things are not the way they are, and I can't even get that. I can't get through my judicial review.

I filed the appeal, I file factums and appeal books, and they're being held up. And tomorrow I have to go argue why I should be allowed to proceed with appeal to recuse a judge that tells me racism is a thing, that tells me his reputation is more important.

So I—honestly, I just need for laws to be clear and have definitions that are clear, especially for someone who is powerless and someone who is of colour and someone that is living their lives every day, trying to navigate systems that are against them. So if you could do that for me, I would really appreciate it.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation, Mrs. Mushinski.

Going to open up the floor to questions.

We'll begin with Minister Marcelino.

MLA Marcelino: Thank you very, very much, Ms. Mushinski, for coming here today to the Legislature and for doing your part as a citizen and as a worker who has had a difficult time with these systems, and putting in your opinion and your experience on the written record for our province. It really means a lot that you've done this and that you've come forward today to do that.

I do want to clarify that this is the very first time and that Manitoba is the very first jurisdiction that will be putting in any kind of provisions regarding requiring employers to have psychologically safe workplaces. So right now, it's just a definition that we are adopting from the CSA 2013 standard and more work will have to be done down the road to kind of really fully explain what this definition means.

We don't know yet exactly what it means because we still have to take in a consultation phase with different people from different sectors, because depending what kind of worker you are, what that will look like will be different.

So it's just an early definition right now. You can look it up. It's the 2013 CSA standard—

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister Marcelino. Thank you for your answer.

Any more questions from the committee?
[interjection]

Oh, my apologies. You have an opportunity to reply.

I. Mushinski: You mentioned that you guys are just learning about this and taking in opinions. I hope that what I've said today will be really, deeply considered and not just be something that's pushed to the side because I don't know how many people who are Black people or people of colour are coming forward and talking about this, or having the public knowledge to know.

Like, I never knew you guys held committee meetings to pass laws. Until this affected my life, I didn't know how laws were made here. So having that public education is really important, especially for marginalized communities, in order to know, okay, these laws, how they're going to affect my life.

So I just think that that is important and yes, you guys are learning and it's growing for you guys to make these laws, but definitely please speak to people who are from marginalized communities that this is going to impact, especially at the labour board.

Thank you.

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): Thank you, Mrs. Mushinski, for your time here this evening. I appreciate the words that you were able to put on the record this evening, as someone who's experienced, obviously, a psychologically unsafe workplace. So I appreciate the recommendations on future amendments to legislation around The Workplace Health and Safety Act.

And I appreciate your time here today in clarifying that. *[interjection]*

The Chairperson: Mrs. Mushinski.

I. Mushinski: Thank you.

The Chairperson: Minister Fontaine.

Floor Comment: Sorry. Sorry, I couldn't—it's very muffled. Were you saying something else to me?

The Chairperson: Yes, I'm going to acknowledge—Minister Fontaine would like to say something.

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): Hello. I just wanted to thank you for your presentation. I know that that was incredibly raw and incredibly courageous for you to share all of that. And

I know that it brings up a lot of emotions and rightly so.

As the Minister of Families, the new Minister of Families for the last 20 months, I just want to say, if nobody has said it to you, I want to say *miigwech*, thank you for the work that you did to help protect children and the care that you've shown and the love that you've shown, and the compassion that you've shown. If nobody has said it to you, in all of the years that you did that work, I want you to know that I thank you for that.

Floor Comment: Thank you. That was the hardest part of my—

The Chairperson: Mrs. Mushinski.

I. Mushinski: That feeling a lack of thanks and leaving the way that I did, because I never wanted to leave that way.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Seeing no further questions or comments, thank you again for your presentation.

We will now move to Blaine Duncan from the Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union.

Please begin your presentation when you are ready.

Blaine Duncan (Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union): Good evening and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I wasn't expecting this to be such an emotional experience tonight, quite frankly. It felt more like it was going to be a bit of administrative opportunity to share with you my feelings about the act and regulations and my ability to participate in those things.

But, obviously, the three very personal stories there were tonight emphasize the importance of what you're attempting to do by changing the legislation, making improvements for workers to be protected from these kinds of things that they've spoken to tonight.

So my day job: I'm a safety and health specialist with the Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union. I've been doing that kind of work for about 30 years, the last 25 years or so with the union. I've been dealing with legislation and regulatory review for the last 20 years—25 years since about 2000.

I've worked, previously, as an enforcement officer in the late 1990s. I've done some consulting work and I've worked with the union for the last 25 years.

* (19:40)

I also have the privilege—and thank you, Minister Marcelino, for allowing me the opportunity and the privilege to be part of the minister's advisory council and their review of the act and regulations most recently. It is very difficult work to do in that we are trying to capture all of the varying situations that workers find themselves in across the variety of jobs and workplaces where workers find themselves working in Manitoba.

I do want to state, quite clearly, that MGEU does support Bill 29. We have been part of the process along the way and as certainly have appreciated the opportunity to speak to the things that concern us most about the members that we represent, but also speak on behalf of all Manitoban—Manitoba workers.

We appreciate the legislation takes meaningful steps to strengthen workplace safety, health protections for all workers. We at MGEU represent about 32,000 workers across Manitoba in the provincial civil service, health care, social services, post-secondary education and many other types of work.

Our members, especially those in health care and the public sector, know all too well the importance of the types of protections that we're trying to put in place. They are the two highest injury sectors currently in Manitoba.

Each year, as was mentioned by a few of the other folks, we have many injuries in the province—a fairly consistent number: 25,000 or so workers injured every year in Manitoba, and about 20 people die from work-related causes every year, as well.

These numbers are staggering, they are sobering and for many members and people who are experiencing those things, obviously, a very personal and deeply moving experience, unfortunately.

We're encouraged to see Bill 29 respond to the realities that workers face and to hear government recognizes that everyone deserves a safe and healthy workplace, both physically and psychologically. One of the most welcome changes in this bill is the recognition of the things that were spoken to by a couple of the previous presenters, and that's the psychological hazards that people are exposed to in workplaces.

We have focused on the physical harm to workers, quite frankly, over the last 40 or so years—not spoken very much about psychological harm, so we are very pleased to see Bill 29 introduce language that clearly defines what a psychologically safe workplace looks like.

We are grappling with the types of things that employers need to be looking for in terms of addressing in the workplace to make psychologically safe workplaces, but we are helping set expectations for employers and give workers, I think, some clear understandings of their rights with respect to their protections for those types of exposures.

It is a step in the right direction, and it is long overdue.

We also support the measures in the bill that hold employers more accountable when they don't meet their obligations under the act. In particular, we welcome the penalty for failing to immediately report a serious incident to the Workplace Safety and Health branch.

Quick reporting isn't just a bureaucratic step, it's an essential step in preventing further harm and ensuring that incidents are properly investigated. Employers need to know that they can't delay or ignore their responsibilities, and this bill sends a strong message in that regard.

Another major area where this bill improves things is in addressing reprisals against workers, and we've heard a couple of those stories tonight; unfortunately, still too common for workers to be punished for raising safety concerns or refusing unsafe work. Some are demoted, some are fired. Many other mistreatments occur as well.

This is already illegal under the act, but until now, if an employer was found guilty of a reprisal, the worker often had no real way to recover what was lost. That's why we're very pleased to see a new provision allowing for the recovery of lost wages. If a worker is punished for exercising their legal right to speak up about safety, they should not also suffer financially, or any other form of reprisal, quite frankly. This change is about fairness and justice for those.

We're also encouraged to see the bill address an issue that caused a lot of uncertainty in 2001 with respect to the Supreme Court decision, commonly referred to as the Horrocks decision. That ruling raised the question as to whether unionized workers could still use the Workplace Safety and Health branch and their process with respect to reprisals, or whether they would have to go through a grievance process with the union that represents them.

So we strongly support the bill's clarification that all workers, unionized or not, have the legal right to file a complaint with the Workplace Safety and Health branch if they believe they've been the victim of a reprisal. It's a basic right that should be available to

everyone, and we're glad to see that it's protected in this coming change to the legislation.

The bill also brings useful clarity of the right to refuse process by defining the concept of dangerous work. While the worker's belief in the danger remains central, and rightly so, the bill now outlines additional factors to consider, like the level of risk, how immediate it is and whether anything is in place to control or eliminate it.

This clarification should make it easier for workers to assert this right confidently, and for all parties to resolve these situations more efficiently. Workers should never feel unsure as to whether they are allowed to say, this isn't safe.

While we support Bill 29, the improvements it makes, we remain concerned about a growing crisis in Manitoba workplaces—in particular, that's workplace violence. In health care, especially, violence is becoming an all too regular part of the job.

We recently surveyed Manitoba paramedics and asked if they had experienced violence at work. An overwhelming 94 per cent said yes. They're being kicked, punched, spat on, verbally threatened, sexually harassed and sometimes even faced with weapons.

It's not just paramedics. Health-care aides, security staff, other front-line workers are facing these threats too. In fact, injuries from workplace violence in health care have quadrupled in the past 10 years. That's unacceptable.

Our members and all workers deserve to be safe from violence at work, and we urge government to take this issue seriously. We believe there is more work to be done on this issue, and that's perhaps with the regulatory recommendations that are in front of the minister now.

We know we can make a tangible impact when we work together. For example, when it came to aggressive and violent thefts in liquor stores, MGEU's suggestion about the use of controlled entrances has resulted in 90 per cent reduction in violent crimes against workers and the public.

MGEU supports Bill 29. It strengthens protections for Manitoba workers, clarifies important legal rights, helps ensure that employers take workplace safety and health seriously. We appreciate the government's effort in bringing these changes forward.

I want to leave you with a very important bit of information about the injury rates in public sector as well. It's the second highest sector for time loss injury

next to health care, which is the sector we hear about often.

Each year in the three years from 2021 to 2023, an average of 1,800 public sector workers were injured badly enough to miss at least one day of work and in many cases for longer periods. An average of about 800 of these injuries each year were to employees of the government of Manitoba.

That's both shocking and disappointing and demands urgent action. The government needs to lead by example as the regulator. Right now, the private sector is making progress in reducing injuries while the regulator is not.

We thank the committee for the opportunity to speak today. Labour appreciates the collaborative approach recently taken to review the act and the regulations and also the reinstatement of the minister's Advisory Council. Let's keep working together to ensure that every worker in the province can—who goes to work safely can return safely, both physically and psychologically.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation.

Do members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

MLA Marcelino: I just wanted to thank you, Mr. Duncan, for your presentation today, for your presence here today and also for your work on the advisory council.

We are—I've got a few questions in front of you for the advisory council too, and the one top of mind for me is regarding how we're going to be doing a better job of preventing violence in the workplace.

So that work that you guys are doing is very, very important for all Manitobans, and I thank you for that.

B. Duncan: Thank you for the opportunity. As I say, there is a core group of folks who work quite closely together, both on the review of the act and the regulations and on the minister's advisory council.

Employers, technical experts, labour representatives—I think everybody is committed to seeing improvements and finding goals and ways to get there. So we appreciate the ongoing opportunity to be a little part of that.

The Chairperson: Okay, seeing no further questions. Thank you, again, for your presentation.

We will now move online, where we have Mr. Nick Kasper from the United Fire Fighters of Winnipeg, IAFF Local 867. Please unmute yourself and turn your video on.

You may proceed with your presentation.

Nick Kasper (United Fire Fighters of Winnipeg, IAFF Local 867): Good evening, honourable Chair Oxenham, Honourable Minister Marcelino, Vice-Chair Pankratz and honourable members of the committee. I want to thank you for the challenging work you do and your efforts in serving others.

I want to say thanks, as well, to my colleagues, fellow workers and members of the public who took the time to attend this evening and had the courage to share your deeply personal and moving experiences.

I'd like to apologize to the committee for not being able to attend in person. I'm out of country on business related to health and welfare of public safety personnel. But with that said, I'm very thankful for the opportunity to attend virtually to speak strongly in favour of Bill 29.

Also want to express my sincere gratitude to Minister Marcelino for introducing this critical legislation and to all members of the Legislature for your unanimous support of Bill 29.

Minister, your leadership in advancing psychological safety in Manitoba's workplaces, especially for public safety personnel, is deeply personal, commendable and appreciated.

* (19:50)

My name is Nick Kasper. I'm the president of the United Fire Fighters of Winnipeg. I have the honour of representing over 1,500 active and retired professional firefighters who serve our capital city around the clock. I'm also proud to serve as UFFW's Mental Health Committee chair and former co-chair of the WFPS joint safety and health committee.

I consider myself incredibly fortunate to have worked in various roles as a firefighter and paramedic in Winnipeg and across Manitoba for the last 18 years, and looking back now, I realize that each of those years were a gift—a gift affording me the privilege of working alongside the finest men and women of our province, many of whom who have tragically been lost to psychological injuries sustained in the line of duty.

For firefighters, psychological health has become the defining workplace safety crisis of our generation.

Each day, our members are dispatched to overdoses, violent, unnatural incidents, mass casualty scenes and structure fires at unprecedented volumes. Many of these calls involve traumatic events that leave lasting psychological scars; a normal human reaction to some of the most inhumane exposures imaginable.

In 2024 alone, Winnipeg firefighters responded to more than 150,000 calls. That's a 1150 per cent increase since 1981. Our staffing has not kept pace. There are fewer firefighters on duty in Winnipeg today than there were 40 years ago.

Our workforce is stretched, exhausted and facing the mental health impacts of a system in crisis. UFFW recently completed a Guarding Minds at Work survey and it painted a disturbing picture: 98 per cent of respondents reported that job-related burnout and stress are seriously threatening their psychological health, and an equal number said that work-related stress is harming their home and personal lives.

Let me be clear: these results are not normal, they're not sustainable and they are a warning. This is not just anecdotal. A national study conducted in 2018, published in the Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, found that 44.5 per cent of public safety personnel in Canada screened positive for symptoms of at least one mental disorder. Compare that to just 10 per cent for the general population; it's over a four-fold increase, and that increase is the real cost of doing nothing.

In 2024, the City of Winnipeg recorded over 17,000 hours of time loss due to psychological injury across the WFPS. Of this, only 2,500 hours were from firefighters, meaning that psychological injury numbers are vastly under-reported within W-F-D's ranks.

Those absences forced remaining firefighters to backfill with overtime, contributing to over \$9 million in overtime expenditures last year alone—those millions of taxpayer dollars spent reacting to the crisis, not preventing it. To put that into perspective, those overtime costs could have funded 70 full-time firefighting positions, and instead of expanding capacity, we are repeatedly burning out the very people we rely upon.

The measure of doing nothing—the cost of doing nothing, pardon me—is being measured in human toll, measured by those whose names are inscribed upon the granite memorial walls just steps from our provincial Legislature; a memorial where we gathered barely more than a week ago to mourn the loss of Manitoba workers, including my friend and colleague, Preston Heinbigner, a Winnipeg firefighter who lost his life to psychological injury, an injury that he

and others lost in years prior sustained serving our community.

This evening, prior to coming up to my room to meet with you, a colleague from another department shared with me that they have experienced over a dozen suicides in their department in the past 8 months alone.

These are more than just names; they're co-workers, my friends, my family members whose loss leaves an everlasting scar on the world of loved ones that they leave behind.

Bill 29, by embedding the CSA definition of psychological safety into law, is going to give Manitoba the legal framework we need to change this trajectory. It recognizes that psychological harm is real, measurable and preventable, and that all workers have the right to feel safe, respected and supported at work.

I also want to take a moment to thank the provincial government for its 2024 commitment to investing in three full-time mental health clinicians, dedicating to supporting first responders. It's an encouraging and meaningful step toward building the dedicated infrastructure our members so urgently need, but we must continue. We need a comprehensive investment in mental health services and protections for public safety personnel, and Bill 29 is an excellent foundation to build upon.

Firefighters and public safety personnel are always there when Manitobans need our help and it's time for the system to be there for them.

In closing, thanks again to Minister Marcelino and every member of this committee. Bill 29 is a necessary and courageous step forward providing a solid base to build upon and sending a clear message. Psychological safety matters. People sacrificing pieces of themselves to their work matter. Firefighters matter. Together as leaders, we must continue working to build a safer, healthier communities for all those we are entrusted to protect. We have no greater calling.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation.

Do members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

MLA Marcelino: I just wanted to thank you, Mr. Kasper, for all the work that you do for our city. Thank you for being here today and for your words to present to the committee on this bill.

I also wanted to thank you for the organization work that you and your members did to get us to this point with this bill and for the input that you gave us to help with this bill as well.

And I'll thank you in advance for the work that you're going to do to help us make sure that we get the regulations right.

Thank you.

N. Kasper: Of course; thank you. We'll be there, shoulder to shoulder, working together on this, and we appreciate your efforts.

The Chairperson: Okay, seeing no further questions, thank you again—oh.

MLA David Pankratz (Waverley): I just wanted to say, Mr. Kasper, thank you so much for taking the time this evening to be with us and sharing your experiences as a firefighter and paramedic over the last 18 years. I know how committed you've been to that work and how much you've experienced as you went through that working for the citizens of Manitoba.

And I also commend you on the work that you continue to do now with UFFW and supporting the many members that I know you've worked for and care for and will continue to do that good work for.

And we also look forward to working with you on that moving forward, including Minister Marcelino and our whole team.

So thank you.

N. Kasper: Thanks for those kind words, MLA Pankratz, and of course the feeling is mutual.

The Chairperson: Okay, seeing no further questions, thank you again for your presentation.

We're now going to move to Ms. Laura Duncan, private citizen.

Please proceed with your presentation.

Laura Duncan (Private Citizen): Hello and thank you for the opportunity to share my knowledge and experience as a firefighter here in Winnipeg, with almost 27 years of experience. It's crazy; standing up here actually makes me more nervous than a fully involved house fire right now, so.

My name is Laura Duncan and I'm a captain with the Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service. I'm stationed at the fire hall on McGregor and Partridge, and along with my work as a firefighter, lieutenant and now captain, I have spent over a decade as a volunteer peer

support team member and I was the peer team co-ordinator for roughly five years. I have two years' experience working in our fire rescue academy, teaching and developing material for our fire officer programs and district chief development courses.

While working in this capacity, I advocated for psychological training for our members in these programs and in the field. I have experience teaching the R2MR, or the Road to Mental Readiness, Resilient Minds, and I helped to create a program specifically designed for our WFPS members, currently being taught to all of our recruit classes.

I have been a passionate advocate for mental health for over a decade within my organization and I have worked tirelessly alongside many others to eventually establish funding, which allowed our behavioural health unit to be born. We are very fortunate that our hard work and advocating led us to establishing a unit that is now being talked about in other departments across the country. Our resources are leading edge, exceptional and, most importantly, accessible.

* (20:00)

The unfortunate reality that lives in emergency services is this ugly thing called stigma, a simple six-letter word that cripples our members and is the biggest barrier to care. Stigma is the reason we lost our cherished brother, Preston Heinbigner, in April of last year.

Preston was an amazing partner to his wife Shayda and father to his son Oslo. Preston was an exceptional leader, mentor and friend to his work family at WFPS. Recently, at an event held for families of public surface personnel, Shayda bravely spoke about how Preston had expressed to her his fear of how others would perceive his self-proclaimed shortcomings, psychological injuries endured while serving the citizens of Winnipeg.

Preston was an inner-city soldier, shouldering the pain of witnessing other people's trauma and loss for years, chaos on the streets with threats of physical violence amidst a drug crisis and homelessness, the mental anguish of not understanding his own thoughts: there must be something wrong with us; after all, we are supposed to be bulletproof, right?

Preston was, and all of us currently, have the potential to be impacted psychologically because of the work we do on a daily basis. We are operating without any continuous training to assist us in understanding or recognizing the shift that happens ever so slowly in our minds, a feeling that creates a fear that

somehow we're broken, incapable and washed up. As firefighters, dispatchers and paramedics, we receive specialized training that allows us to perform our duties when we respond to a citizen's worst day. We acquire the skills with specific safe work procedures to help guide us to effectively perform our duties. This includes processes right down to occupational hygiene to prevent cancer, cancer that will likely show up once you're retired.

Education is the first line of defence, and to have the requirements made possible by Bill 29 for a workplace to be proactive about psychological safety is essential, not optional. Emotional fatigue, burnout, apathy and a gradual shift towards isolating oneself—and these are merely a few examples—are some of the red flags that people who work in emergency services should be educated about throughout their careers. Public safety personnel require a career-spanning education about signs and symptoms of a potential occupational stress injury, managing trauma responses after critical incidents, sleep deprivation, coping strategies and a plethora of other important and ever-changing ways to survive a career of saving others.

It is often the cumulative impact of the work we do that results in a diagnosable mental health injury. These gradual insults happen so subtly that most of us don't realize it until addiction, divorce or worse have taken place. Normalizing these inevitable outcomes through continual education is a step toward resolving stigma and preventing individuals from sliding into destructive behaviours. Awareness is the key.

The number of staff that we have lost due to psychological injuries is staggering. I have seen co-workers leave a profession they love due to psychological injuries. Sustaining a 30-year career in emergency services without a commitment to education about psychological health is unsustainable, and WCB numbers will verify that. The Canadian Mental Health Commission has reported that in any given year, one in five people in Canada will experience a mental health problem or illness with a cost to the economy well in excess of \$50 billion. This number isn't a reflection of public safety personnel, which, for obvious reasons, will have a number much greater than the general population. The impact of overtime, sick time usage, turnover, disability claims and WCB usage is staggering and growing.

The reality is that you can't change what you don't understand. Education helps leaders and front-line staff recognize what psychological safety looks like. Education allows us to step into a knowledge base and

requires a commitment to proactive advancements so our staff can retire healthy and happy. We are burning out a generation of unbelievable public safety personnel who have dedicated their lives to being there for others on their worst day. Manitoba has the opportunity to be a trailblazer to embed psychological safety as a legal duty under workplace safety legislation.

The Westray bill forced employers to protect workers from physical harm. This is the Westray moment for mental health in front of us now. I hope we can be on the right side of history for our public safety personnel and every person who deserves to be psychologically safe in the workplace.

The Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation.

Do members of the committee have any questions for the presenter?

MLA Marcelino: Captain Duncan, I just want to thank you for your presence here, for your words and for your years of advocacy on this issue. Your steps and steps and steps ahead of us already for what we need to do, and we just need to follow your example is my feeling. I think this is going to be our Preston moment.

Thank you.

L. Duncan: Thank you for taking it on.

MLA Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): So I'm more going to thank you for your presentation on the mental health aspect; this is something that's clearly near and dear to you, and I appreciate that you're trailblazing in this. We are doing a great job in—well not really doing a great job, but we're trying to remove that stigma. I know it's—well, speaking from personal experience, it's difficult to talk about this, and conversations like this help remove that stigma, so thank you so much.

L. Duncan: I'm just very fortunate to be here to speak to it, with all the years of experience that I've had as a peer team member, trying to push forward education, try to create the conversation, you know, to remove that—the cloud that kind of hangs over all of us.

So I think, with education, that we will be able to help normalize that and make those conversations so much easier and more often.

MLA Pankratz: Thanks so much, Captain Duncan. I feel like I should call you Cap, because that makes us feel a little bit more comfortable.

I just wanted to very quickly say on the record, you're the type of personnel department that I think when you speak to colleagues and friends, you have

made remarkable and really transformational changes in the lives of a lot of people.

And so I just want to thank you for that publicly here in this committee and thank you for having the courage to come and speak on a really difficult issue. And, as I told Mr. Kasper, we look forward to continuing to work on some good things together to make sure that we're moving this issue forward. So thank you so much.

L. Duncan: I would love to be a part of whatever conversations are needed to help create a psychologically safe workplace for everybody.

The Chairperson: Okay, seeing no more questions or comments, thank you again for your presentation.

Bill 44—The Matriarch Circle Act and Amendments to The Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act (Ribbon Skirt Day)

The Chairperson: We are now moving to Bill 44, The Matriarch Circle Act and Amendments to The Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act.

Our first presenter is Sandra DeLaronde.

You may begin your presentation when you are ready.

Sandra DeLaronde (Giganawenimaanaanig): So good evening. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to Bill 44, and I just greet you all as my relatives. In our language we say:

Indigenous language spoken. Translation unavailable.

So we come here as one, you know, really. While people have titles and responsibilities, in the end we're just all doing the work, right, putting our hands on the work to make a better place for all of our relations.

So Giganawenimaanaanig is a collective table that is hosted by the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre. They've provided administrative support for us for the last number of years. Also on our committee is Ka Ni Kanichihk, Winnipeg Indigenous Executive Circle, the Indigenous Friendship Centre, Tangasigate [*phonetic*], The Pas Family Resource Centre, Wabangnabunije [*phonetic*], and representative political organizations, such as the Infinity Women Secretariat of the Red River Métis government, the MMF, MKO, MMIWG Liaison Unit, Southern Chiefs' Organization. And we also have representation from the City of Winnipeg and the Province of Manitoba.

* (20:10)

We have family members—directly impacted family members—of MMIWG2S+, and elders and knowledge keepers who sit with us.

So we come to you this evening fully in support of this bill and—to note, you know, that this bill really comes at a critical time in Manitoba's history and its relationship particularly with Indigenous women, girls and our gender-diverse relatives. We are still, many of us—and our children and our girls—impacted by the last political election where, you know, where the Conservative Party fully traumatized our community by the big billboard saying that we will not dig, you know, not having value for Indigenous women's lives, and how we, as community, had been so negatively impacted by such a hurtful campaign.

So—and we continue to, you know, try to support our particularly young women to find a place of grace and presence and strength despite what was a real concerted campaign of elimination and misogyny. And we have, in the history of this country, have always minimized the role of Indigenous women, their wisdom and what they bring to the table, and have minimized the way Indigenous women have governed their communities and families.

And I want to note that it was under the provisional government of the Métis in Manitoba that there was movement to recognize the diversity of the province—or, of the government at the time. That was, you know, eliminated, but had some measure of impact in the creation of the Manitoba Act, so I'll say that was—because the Métis were able to protect the language rights, now Manitobans all benefit from that.

So—but moving forward to women and gender-diverse relatives, there has never been an acknowledgement of the harms—either in the last two years or the last 150 years—of the harms done to the governing processes of our families in communities that kept them strong. In fact, under the UN convention, our families could be appropriately termed domestically displaced persons or internally displaced persons.

And the reason why I mention all of that history is because this legislation is monumental in creating change. Not just in Manitoba, but I think in any democracy in the world where there's a recognition of the role of the patriarchy in creating change, in ensuring that governments uplift all of its people. And so I really want to commend Minister Fontaine for introducing this piece of legislation and knowing that the role of Indigenous women and gender-diverse people, the role of women is recognized and affirmed. It's critical in moving forward.

And so, with that, I just want to say congratulations. And I do hope that this bill receives all-party support.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation.

Do members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity): Miigwech, Sandra.

First off, you know that I have—I absolutely love and have profound respect for you every single day. But I have to say that I really love the way that you framed this conversation tonight, right, that historical piece and why, you know, Bill 44 is so monumental in the totality of this space and all of the harms that have been done in this space over generations.

And I absolutely agree that it's not only for Manitoba, but it paves the way or it highlights for other jurisdictions across Canada what can be done when you recognize the humanity and sacredness of Indigenous women, girls, two-spirit and gender-diverse folks.

So I really appreciate the way that you framed your presentation in respect of Bill 44.

I would ask you if there was anything else that you thought in respect of the ribbon skirt day and entrenching that in law here in Manitoba.

S. DeLaronde: When it was first raised by Senator McCallum, we, of course, thought, you know, that we should do that because I think that we found over the past few years that ribbon skirts are not just meant to be worn in ceremony, but they're to be worn wherever Indigenous women have place and reclaim power.

And so I think that this—the acknowledgement of that within this act also, you know, creates that power and place, particularly for young girls. Like, I think of my granddaughter who—they have ribbon skirt day once a month at school, so they all can wear their ribbon skirts. And she's very proud of that, and she's proud of who she is. Those are things that we didn't have growing up.

So it gives her that strength, and it will give strength to the generations to come, because what this does is not just lay the foundation today, but, you know, when we talk about seven generations, the decisions that we make today will impact seven generations into the future. And that's positive, too, like, our strength will—is captured in our ribbon skirts.

And so thank you for that.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Thank you for your presentation here tonight, Ms. DeLaronde. And I want to thank you for sharing a little bit of that history with us here.

I also want to just touch a little bit—I know we just briefly discussed the ribbon skirt, and I had the opportunity recently to go to an area where they provide workshops on that and learn a little bit about what ribbon skirt is all about and the importance it is for young girls and women to be a part of that cultural experience and that history and the significance that it has in their lives and the meaning behind it.

So I really have no question. I just want to say, again, thank you for the presentation here tonight.

S. DeLaronde: I just want to, again, you know, thank you all for this opportunity, and I know we should be wearing white. Go, Jets, go.

The Chairperson: Seeing no further questions, thank you, again, for your presentation.

We're now going to move to online presentations, where we have Mrs. Dawn Olivence from the Winnipeg Indigenous Executive Circle-Strengthening Families.

All right. Please unmute yourself and turn your video on, and proceed when you are ready.

Dawn Olivence (Winnipeg Indigenous Executive Circle-Strengthening Families): Thank you.

Hello, everyone. My name is Dawn Olivence.

Aaniin. *[Hello.]*

Ojibwe spoken. Translation unavailable.

I'm very happy to be here today.

Good evening. Thank you to each and every one of you for being here today as well. I want to begin by acknowledging the powerful leadership of the Matriarch Circle and the sacred responsibility you carry. I also honour the families, survivors and community voices that have continued to guide this work even in the face of deep pain.

Today I'm here on behalf of the Winnipeg Indigenous Executive Circle, specifically our Strengthening Families working group. WIEC is a 32-member collective of Indigenous-led non-profits working here in Winnipeg to support this bill and also acknowledge the importance of the work being done.

The Winnipeg Indigenous Executive Circle fully supports the establishment of the Matriarch Circle and the recognition of ribbon skirt day through Bill 44.

* (20:20)

These initiatives reflect a growing commitment to centre the voices, leadership and lived experience of Indigenous women, girls, two-spirit and gender-diverse people in policy development and cultural recognition.

WIEC created our MMIWG2S+ report with a clear intention to ensure that urban Indigenous voices, especially those of women, girls and 2SLGBT+ people, are at the heart of decision making. And today, we had a meeting about it; we're in the process of completing an implementation document on that initial report, and hence why I was asked to come to this meeting as well.

Because we talked about it and how it already—is already aligning with our plan by the creation of the Matriarch Circle because that was one of the pillars of that report, which was to form a provincial Cabinet committee on MMIWG2S+.

This deliverable wasn't written behind closed doors; it was shaped by community consultation, lived experiences and direct engagement with those most impacted by violence. The message was consistent and urgent: a response must be grounded in Indigenous leadership. Our work reflects the lived experiences of those who have faced violence and loss. It is a reminder that these issues are not abstract; they are part of our daily lives. And our communities deserve a response that is accountable, meaningful and led by those most affected.

Our vision is rooted in transformation, not just reform. We need systems that prevent harm, invest in safety and healing and respect Indigenous governance and voices. We imagined a government that responds with the same strength and unity that our families and communities show every day. The formation of the Matriarch Circle is central to this, to ensure long-term, interdepartmental commitment to the sacred work. We need a collective effort that ensures that Indigenous leadership, wisdom and priorities are truly at the table.

The Matriarch Circle matters because systemic issues require community-based solutions. No single department can tackle the depth of violence we are facing, but together, when ministers work across portfolios and with a sure commitment, we can create meaningful change. The Matriarch Circle represents the first time this level of co-ordinated leadership has

been made possible. It's a model rooted in Indigenous strength, collective responsibility and unity. It is not just a response to violence; it is an act of recognition and respect for leadership and wisdom that Indigenous women and gender-diverse people bring to the table.

As we look ahead, we want to ensure the Matriarch Circle is supported to succeed, and that means resourcing the circle to do its work, ensuring timelines and measurable outcomes and establishing formal ways to engage with community partners like WIEC. We at WIEC are ready to continue supporting the work of the circle in any way we can as advisers, collaborators and advocates, as it aligns with the work we are doing as well.

WIEC believes this legislation is an important step towards reconciliation, healing and resurgence of Indigenous identity. We recognize the Matriarch Circle as a vital space for empowerment and we celebrate ribbon skirt day as a powerful act of cultural pride. These efforts signal not just a shift in policy, but a reaffirmation of our shared values and commitment to long-term healing.

Chi-miigwech. *[Thank you very much.]*

The Chairperson: Thank you very much for your presentation.

Do members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

MLA Fontaine: Just to take a quick moment to say miigwech to Dawn for participating in tonight's standing committee and putting your words on the formal record of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly, and also for the work that you do in the Indigenous collective; it's really important work, the community coming together to tackle the issues that face our people and our communities.

I also just wanted to share that one of the first things, besides the Matriarch Circle that we did, and I did as minister, was we established the MMIWG2S GBV committee of Cabinet which hadn't been in existent for a little while under the previous government. And I think it's really important to know that that's also where we've got our ministers that all work together interdepartmentally to tackle the issue of violence against Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit—

The Chairperson: The time for a question has expired. Thank you.

D. Olivence: Thank you, Nahanni, for reminding me of that too; that's important, as well, in doing this work. So thank you very much.

Ms. Byram: I just want to say to Mrs. Olivence—I hope I said that right—thank you for the work that you do and thank you again for taking the time to make your presentation here tonight.

D. Olivence: Thank you very much.

The Chairperson: Seeing no further questions from the floor, thank you again for your presentation.

Bill 24—The Workers Compensation Amendment Act *(Continued)*

The Chairperson: We are now going to move online to our final presenter, Mr. Paul Moist.

Please unmute yourself and turn your video on, and you may begin your presentation when you are ready.

Paul Moist (Manitoba Federation of Union Retirees): Okay, we're on, Mr. Chairman?

The Chairperson: Yes, you are on. Go ahead, Mr. Moist.

P. Moist: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. It's a privilege on behalf of the Manitoba Federation of Union Retirees to speak to Bill 24, The Workers Compensation Amendment Act. I won't introduce our organization again; I did so earlier.

We support fully the proposed changes where, in instances of a workplace fatality where there was no surviving spouse or common-law partner to receive a lump sum fatality payment, that it can be paid to the worker's estate or to another person as determined by the WCB. This change remedy's a gap in current coverage and provides fairness and fair treatment for families of all types.

And, secondly, Bill 24 introduces a, quote, benefit of doubt, closed quote, principle for a Workers Compensation claim adjudication. This change will, we believe, allow workers to access benefits they are entitled to in a timelier fashion. We understand that circumstances where this will occur may be rare, where the balance of evidence on a claim is assessed to be balanced or equal on both sides. But the principle is what's important: that in such circumstances, the benefit of doubt will be given to the worker, as it should be.

The Manitoba Federation of Union Retirees also supports words spoken earlier by the Manitoba Federation of Labour, calling for legislative action on other key WCB areas not currently in this bill. Increased injury prevention activities and clamping down on employer claim suppression; removal of current restrictions on W-C-P-WCB coverage for many psychological injuries that do not apply to physical workplace injuries, which often results in such claims being denied; ending the reliance on WCB contracted health-care advisers; eliminating the ability of employers to access injured workers' medical information to facilitate speculative journeys to appeal an accepted claim; and lastly, eliminating the dominant clause provision that continues to put the onus on workers with occupational diseases to prove their work is the dominant cause of their disease thereby barring many from having their claims accepted.

But we want to close by saying we support Bill 24 before you tonight, and we thank the government for bringing it forward, and if there's any questions we'll do our best to answer them.

The Chairperson: We thank you for your presentation.

Do members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister responsible for the Workers Compensation Board): Thank you, Mr. Moist, for your comments regarding Bill 24, for your presence here today.

P. Moist: Thank you very much. I won't keep you any longer; the game's about to start.

The Chairperson: Seeing no further questions or comments, thank you again for your presentation, Mr. Moist.

* (20:30)

That concludes the list of presenters I have before me.

* * *

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

An Honourable Member: Numerical.

The Chairperson: Minister Schmidt.

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): Numerically.

The Chairperson: We will now proceed—is it—*[interjection]* Okay.

It has been proposed that we go through clause by clause in numerical order.

Is that agreed to by the committee? *[Agreed]*

Committee Substitution

The Chairperson: I would like to inform the committee that, under rule 84(2), the following membership substitutions have been made for this committee, effective immediately: Honourable Minister Kennedy for Honourable Minister Fontaine.

Thank you.

Bill 21—The Protecting Youth in Sports Act (Continued)

The Chairperson: Does the minister responsible for Bill 21 have an opening statement?

Hon. Nellie Kennedy (Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism): I do.

The Chairperson: Go ahead, Minister Kennedy.

MLA Kennedy: Good after—or, good evening, I should say. I'm pleased to be here today to present Bill 21 to the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development.

Bill 21, The Protecting Youth in Sports Act, will strengthen the safety of youth in sport by requiring Sport Manitoba to establish safe sport policies, education and training that provincial sport organizations will be required to adopt.

Sport Manitoba is the leader in promoting and fostering a safe amateur sport system in our province. Their collaboration on this bill has been essential, and their leadership will continue to shape a safe sport environment for all young athletes as well as parents, coaches, officials and other sport participants.

The Manitoba government is committed to supporting a safe and equitable sport system free from racism, where every child knows they have the right to play.

This bill will 'reinforce' 'passways' to prevent and address maltreatment in sport, strengthen sport communities and help to keep our kids safe.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: We thank the minister.

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 this agreed? *[Agreed]*

Shall clause 1 pass? *[interjection]* Oh, my bad.

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

An Honourable Member: Yes.

The Chairperson: MLA Lagassé.

MLA Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): So—absolutely important, the safety of kids in sport and teens and so on and so forth.

During the second reading of this bill, I had a few questions that are still unanswered and remain concerns, particularly as to who's going to be doing the kind of investigations that are involved, because when you come to any type of investigation—I believe law enforcement—especially when it's in a matter of either sexual, physical or whatever would be the best solution to that. But that's, again, I'm still waiting for the answers on this. And if we are going with a third party it's still not quite clear as to who that third party is going to be and how much that third party would cost, and if that cost would better be spent necessarily in prevention of these kinds of things.

But, otherwise, one hundred per cent behind the fact that protecting kids in sport.

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 to 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]*

Clause 1—pass; clauses 2 and 3—pass; clauses 4 and 5—pass.

Shall clauses 6 and 7 pass?

An Honourable Member: No.

The Chairperson: I hear a no.

MLA Lagassé: So really this just goes back to my preamble in my—when I spoke earlier. Just, again, there's not a lot of clarity as to who these independent, you know, adjudicators are going to be, whether the organization is going to be self-policing. Those are concerns that I know we have on this particular side of the House. So that is the reason why I'm saying no to that particular clause.

The Chairperson: Any other members wishing to speak?

MLA Kennedy: So I'm just curious if there's, like, a specific question that you wanted to ask in order to move past this clause.

MLA Lagassé: So just in the interest of continuing to move this on, I can bring this outside. I have asked this in the Chamber and I've asked here. I'm not too clear on exactly what the independent adjudicator's going to be, but, again, we'll get past this, just with my 'opposition' to this particular clause.

The Chairperson: Clause 6—pass; clause 7—pass; clauses 8 and 9—pass; clauses 10 and 11—pass; clauses 12 and 13—pass; clauses 14 through 16—pass; clauses 17 and 18—pass; enacting clause—pass; title—pass. Bill be reported.

Committee Substitution

The Chairperson: I would like to inform the committee that under our rule 84(2), the following membership substitution has been made for this committee effective immediately: Honourable Minister Marcelino for Honourable Minister Kennedy.

* (20:40)

Bill 24—The Workers Compensation Amendment Act (Continued)

The Chairperson: Does the minister responsible for Bill 24 have an opening statement?

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister responsible for the Workers Compensation Board): Yes.

The Chairperson: Minister Marcelino.

MLA Marcelino: I want to welcome everyone joining us today to discuss the proposed amendments to The Workers Compensation Act on fatality benefits, benefit of the doubt and the appeal commission's annual reporting date. I want to thank all the presenters who took time tonight to be part of this process.

This bill expands the eligibility for the Workers Compensation Board's lump sum fatality benefit.

Currently, the Workers Compensation Board pays this benefit to a spouse or common-law partner, or a former spouse or common-law partner who is entitled to benefits. Where a spouse or entitled former spouse is not identified, the deceased worker's estate cannot access the significant benefit that most often pays for costs associated with a worker's death, such as funeral costs and outstanding debt, as well as to provide some financial stability to loved ones left behind. The amendment requires the Workers Compensation Board to pay the lump sum fatality benefit to the deceased worker's estate when there is no entitled current or former spouse or common-law partner. This change recognizes the diversity of family relationships and ensures access to critical benefits following the tragic loss of a loved one.

The bill also supports balanced decision making at the Workers Compensation Board. New benefit-of-the-doubt clauses provide consistency to decision making in circumstances where evidence is equally balanced. With the proposed amendments, when decisions are made related to a claim for compensation, the benefit of the doubt will be given to injured workers when the evidence is evenly balanced. This is balanced with an equal benefit-of-the-doubt clause for employers on issues that impact an employer's assessment. Overall, these changes better support injured workers through the claims process and will simplify adjudication and decision making by providing definitive guidance.

Finally, this bill aligns the annual report deadline for the appeal commission with the deadline for reports submitted by the Workers Compensation Board. This change streamlines approval processes and ensures data is consistent across reports.

And with these short remarks, I look forward to hearing and getting the committee for their consideration.

The Chairperson: We thank the minister.

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

An Honourable Member: Yes.

The Chairperson: Mr. Narth.

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): I'd like to start by thanking the presenters tonight that were able to provide input, and it also provided consultation to the minister during the development and drafting of this legislation, especially to John Christian who had

provided a personal life-lived experience with the failures of the workers compensation process.

I'd like to state my support and my party's support with—for safe workplaces, safety for all Manitobans to fulfill roles in all workplaces, then come home safe to their families. I also support a fair process in compensation for the workplace compensation board. I feel that—strongly that that is the purpose of the committee.

So with that, I'd also like to thank the minister for providing extensive briefing on the legislation and clarification.

As I've stated in the House, and I will again, my largest, my most significant concern is giving workers—the Workers Compensation Board discretion to provide the lump sum payment to a person other than the estate and the significant—or the significant other, as in current legislation. Without further clarification on who that other person may be, I am concerned that it opens this legislation up to Workers Compensation entering into potentially long litigations around disputes.

But that is currently my only concern and my stance on this legislation, so I'd like to thank the minister.

The Chairperson: We thank the member.

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

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

Bill 29—The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act (Continued)

The Chairperson: Does the minister responsible for Bill 29 have an opening statement?

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Yes.

The Chairperson: All right. Go ahead, Minister Marcelino.

MLA Marcelino: I want to thank everyone who joined us tonight to discuss the proposed amendments to The Workplace Safety and Health Act.

This bill implements all 18 act-related recommendations made by The Workplace Safety and Health Act stakeholder review committee, made up of representatives of employers, workers and technical experts with extensive expertise in workplace safety and health issues. I thank all members of the review

committee for their valued expertise and hard work to ensure our laws reflect the current landscape of occupational safety and health.

I also want to acknowledge and thank all who have made time today to make—to be part of this process.

The proposed amendments position Manitoba to promote psychological safety in the workplace, ensure greater accountability for bad actors and allow for appropriate monitoring to be ordered by the chief occupational medical officer if workers are suspected of being overexposed to a hazardous substance at work.

The amendments also bring clarity to several terms and interpretations used in the act and modernize administrative processes. Regular consultation and review ensure our laws reflect the current landscape of occupational safety and health. These changes will ensure that Manitoba's laws keep up to date with the realities of today's workplaces and ensure workers are safe, no matter where they work.

And with these short remarks, I thank all the presenters who came out tonight and the committee for their consideration of this bill.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: We thank the minister.

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

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): I'd like to again thank the minister for her department's willingness to have an extensive bill briefing to go over the many clauses that are new and unique to this legislation for not only Manitoba, now, but our country.

I'd like to state my support and my party's support for, again, safe workplaces and especially psychologically safe workplaces. We know that it's important—just as important as physical safety. Psychological safety in the workplace can be just as impactful on people's lives and it's important that it be protected, so I can appreciate that.

* (20:50)

Some concern that I've stated before is potential impact on employers, and I hope that this legislation,

together with the Workers Compensation Board, does not inflict undue hardship on employers. As I've tried to state earlier to one of the presenters is, as much as not all workplaces are intentionally wanting to conflict harm, and sometimes that is unintentional but needs to be prevented, and it's important that it be prevented.

In the same sense, not all employees are out for the best interests of their employer, and I think it's important that employers are protected as much as employees for undue hardship, and I hope that this legislation does not create additional barriers for employers to provide a safe workplace in a responsible manner.

So I hope to see the smooth transition into the operation of new legislation, and I hope to see that the listed surveillance program does not create additional barriers for the private sector and all employers, whether that be private or the public sector.

So I thank the minister.

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 6—pass; clauses 7 and 8—pass; clause 9—pass; clauses 10 through 12—pass; clauses 13 and 14—pass; clauses 15 through 18—pass; clauses 19 and 20—pass; clauses 21 through 23—pass; clause 24—pass; enacting clause—pass; title—pass. Bill be reported.

Committee Substitutions

The Chairperson: Okay, so we have two substitutions. I would like to inform the committee that under rule 84(2), the following membership substitutions have been made for this committee effective immediately: Honourable Minister Fontaine for Honourable Minister Marcelino; and Ms. Byram for MLA Lagassé.

**Bill 44—The Matriarch Circle Act and
Amendments to The Commemoration of Days,
Weeks and Months Act
(Ribbon Skirt Day)**

(Continued)

The Chairperson: Does the minister responsible for Bill 44 have an opening statement?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity): First I want to begin by thanking all of the presenters who came out this evening in respect of Bill 44. It was said this evening that Bill 44 is historic and transformative for Indigenous women, girls, two-spirit and gender-diverse folks.

But more importantly, Bill 44 is transformative and historic for Manitoba, for our province, and shines a path forward for other jurisdictions on how to enshrine in law the humanity and sacredness and power and courage and beauty and resilience of Indigenous women, girls, two-spirit and gender-diverse folks.

But I think it also has to be understood that, you know, in 2023 something happened in our province that I don't think some members of this Legislative Assembly fully appreciate or understand how harmful and damaging it was in our community, and for Indigenous women, girls, two-spirit and gender-diverse folks, but how incredibly damaging it was for Indigenous—little Indigenous girls. And of course I'm talking about the 2023 provincial campaign, and in that 2023 provincial campaign the idea and the direction to construct a whole provincial campaign targeting Indigenous women murdered by a serial killer who, at that time, lay in a landfill.

And I really don't think—because I see the way that members opposite respond when people talk about it, I really don't think that they understand the harm and the damage that was done in our communities, that still, today, is so raw for our women and our communities.

And an apology, quite honestly, just isn't enough. We don't just get over something so incredibly damaging, to see yourself drive anywhere in the city and to see this message of hate and disdain and dehumanization levelled at your existence, levelled at your very existence. This, in the midst of us already being so unsafe because we are Indigenous women, girls, two-spirit and gender-diverse folks.

We're already so unsafe and dealing with the consequences of colonization of which, no matter where you go in the world, colonization is more often borne on the bodies of women—women and children. And in

this country, in our territories, Indigenous women, girls, two-spirit, and gender-diverse folks borne the consequences of colonization.

So we already deal with that. Just to be alive, just to live is resisting that, but we already deal with all of that. And on top of that, to have a government, the most powerful entity in our province, in our territories, to have a government decide that they're going to execute a political campaign on the murders of Indigenous women that were in a landfill that you cannot get a more quintessential example of how disposable Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirited and gender-diverse folks are thought of. And to construct a whole campaign on that is so incredibly damaging.

And so in constructing Bill 44 and enshrining first off, you know, establishing the Matriarch Circle, we wanted to do government different. We want to decolonize the way that government is—the way that government does business and we wanted to decolonize that space.

And the way in which we did that was to construct the Matriarch Circle, which is made up of diverse matriarchs from across Manitoba that make up every single socioeconomic status, every geographic region. It's made up of Afro-Indigenous, Anishinaabe, Anishininew, Cree, Dakota, Dene, Inuit, Métis and settler members; queer, gender-diverse—we represent everybody in Manitoba. So to establish that was decolonizing this space, but also in response to the 2023 election.

* (21:00)

But then, now, to go a step further and to enshrine it in law, where decisions in this building have been made that have been so incredibly damaging in the lives of Indigenous women, girls and two spirited, it is a historic moment. It's a monumental moment for our province. And I feel that it's really important to put that on the historical record for—and Hansard for all to see, that despite that attack, here we are tonight, putting on the official record and getting one step closer to Bill 44 becoming law, the Matriarch Circle becoming enshrined in law. The—recognizing Ribbon Skirt Day here in Manitoba, ground zero for MMIWG2S to be in law.

What Bill 44 tells our women is that they matter, that they're loved, that their humanity is affirmed, that we see their courage and their strength and their generosity and their resiliency and their beauty and their intelligence and their humour, and everything good that Indigenous women, girls, two-spirit and gender-diverse

folks are. But, more importantly, it tells the next generation of little Indigenous girls that that is not only the path that is before you. The path that is before you is a path of every single opportunity that you want to pursue. The path before you is to live your most joyful, beautiful life. That is what I want for you, that is what Bill 44 is attempting to do. Indigenous women, girls, two-spirit and gender-diverse folks deserve everything good and beautiful.

Finally, I just want to say *miigwech* to all of the members of the Manitoba Women's Advisory Council, and I mean all of them. All of them since the Manitoba Women's Advisory Council had been established I believe in 1989, there have been hundreds of amazing Manitoba women that, you know, provided advice and vision to every government that's been in power. And I lift them up and I say a profound *miigwech* for the work that they did. And, you know, the Matriarch Circle builds on that work.

It builds on how we can do government different, how we can listen to the voices of women and girls and gender-diverse folks, but it also builds on the work of our expanded mandate in WAGE Manitoba. I'm so proud of that expanded mandate, I'm so proud of the work that WAGE do and the team that we have in WAGE. They do phenomenal work and I want to acknowledge them.

Finally, finally, I want to acknowledge the process of actually developing the bill. I want to acknowledge who never gets acknowledged but is our Leg. council, and in this case, I want to acknowledge Phil Samyn and also Jen Chartrand and the three of us, but mainly just Jen and Phil, really sat down and talked about how we could do Bill 44, but how you could take a sacred, cultural, matriarchal structure and put it into legislation. And I feel that it's a good balance, and so I say *miigwech* to Jen and to Phil.

Miigwech.

The Chairperson: We thank the minister.

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

An Honourable Member: Yes.

The Chairperson: Ms. Byram.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): First of all, I want to start off by thanking all the presenters that were here tonight and made a presentation and shared their stories regarding Bill 44, the Matriarch Circle and amendments to the commemoration days, acts—or days, weeks and months act, ribbon skirt.

I recognize our world is a changing place, and I recognize, you know, there's cultural diversity amongst all of us in Canada, but most specifically here in Manitoba in relation to—into this Bill 44.

I understand that it's important that we have an ability to collaborate, to share ideas and be open in our thoughts. And what Bill 44 does is it becomes more inclusive to all people, and I feel that that is very important here in Manitoba, as we do have a very diverse communities here.

I also want to recognize—I know the minister already made reference to those individuals that have been appointed to the Matriarch Circle and recognize their work that they've—I understand they've already had some meetings to discuss initiatives. I just want to recognize their leadership and their role in making change, and I look forward to seeing what the outcomes are and the roles that these individuals play in legislation.

I do have one concern related to Bill 44, and that is that there is no reporting mechanism so that the Assembly is made aware of the great outcomes of the Matriarch Circle and the accountability and transparency. There's just really no clarity or definition in terms of reporting back what the Matriarch Circle has done.

But, otherwise, I just want to, again, say thank you for those that have been appointed to the Matriarch Circle, and I look forward to seeing the outcomes of these roles.

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 clauses in blocks that conform to pages, with the understanding that we will stop at any particular clause or clauses where members may have comments, questions or amendments to propose.

Is that agreed? [*Agreed*]

Clauses 1 through 3—pass; schedule A, clauses 1 through 4—pass; schedule A, clauses 5 through 7—pass.

Shall schedule A, clauses 8 through 13 pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

An Honourable Member: No.

The Chairperson: Oh, I hear a no. Okay.

Schedule A, clause 8–pass; schedule A, clause 9–pass; schedule A, clause 10–pass; schedule A, clause 11–pass; schedule A, clause 12–pass; schedule A, clause 13–pass; schedule B, clauses 1 and 2–pass; schedule B, clause 3–pass; enacting clause–pass; title–pass. Bill be reported.

The hour being 9:10, what is the will of the committee?

Some Honourable Members: Rise.

The Chairperson: Committee rise.

COMMITTEE ROSE AT: 9:10 p.m.

WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS

Re: Bill 29

To: The Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs,
Manitoba Legislative Assembly

Subject: Support for Bill 29 and Its Positive Impact on
the Psychological Health of Firefighters and Frontline
Workers

Honourable Committee Members,

I am writing to express my strong support for Bill 29 – The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act, and to highlight the significant, positive impact it will have on the psychological well-being of firefighters and frontline workers throughout Manitoba.

Firefighters and frontline workers operate in inherently high-risk environments where exposure to trauma, life-threatening situations, and chronic stress is routine. These conditions significantly increase the risk of developing occupational mental health challenges, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and burnout. Despite their critical roles in safeguarding the public, many of these workers have historically encountered systemic barriers when seeking support or recognition for their psychological injuries.

Bill 29 represents a crucial and overdue step in ensuring that psychological health and safety are treated with the same seriousness and legislative support as physical health in the workplace. The amendments proposed in this bill promise the following key benefits:

1. Improved Recognition of Psychological Injuries:

By explicitly addressing psychological hazards and including mental health within the scope of workplace safety obligations, Bill 29 ensures that employers take a proactive role in mitigating

psychological risks. This legislative recognition validates the lived experiences of frontline workers and acknowledges the legitimacy of psychological injury as a workplace concern.

2. Preventative and Supportive Work Environments:

The bill encourages the development of mental health policies, training, and support systems within organizations. For firefighters and frontline personnel, this means earlier intervention, access to mental health education, and a reduction in stigma surrounding the use of psychological supports.

3. Better Outcomes and Retention:

Evidence consistently shows that supportive work environments reduce the incidence and severity of psychological harm. With Bill 29 in effect, fire departments, paramedic services, and healthcare institutions will be better equipped to retain experienced personnel by preventing mental health-related absences and attrition.

4. A Culture Shift Toward Wellness:

Most importantly, Bill 29 signals a cultural shift toward treating psychological safety as integral to overall workplace health. This will empower frontline workers to come forward, seek assistance, and recover without fear of judgement or reprisal.

The need for Bill 29 is not abstract—it is grounded in the lived experiences and sacrifices of our members. Across Manitoba, firefighters have already paid a significant price for the lack of psychological protections in the workplace.

We have lost members to suicide. We have seen careers cut short, families impacted, and lives altered by untreated or unrecognized psychological injuries. These tragedies underscore the urgent necessity of this legislation. We owe it to those we have lost, and to those still serving, to do better.

Passing Bill 29 is a step toward honoring the sacrifices that have already been made and preventing further suffering in the future.

As our province continues to rely on the bravery and professionalism of first responders and healthcare providers, we must also ensure that the systems they work within uphold their dignity, health, and humanity. Bill 29 is a forward-thinking, compassionate, and necessary piece of legislation that aligns Manitoba with national best practices in occupational health.

I urge the committee to support this bill in full and to consider the long-term benefits it will bring not only to the well-being of frontline workers, but to the communities they serve so selflessly.

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Perry
President, Manitoba Professional Fire Fighters Association

Re: Bill 29

Dear Members of our legislation

I am writing to express my strong support for Bill 29, The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act, and to advocate for its swift passage. As a Captain and Primary Care Paramedic and a Coordinator of Peer Support. I have witnessed firsthand the critical need for a comprehensive approach to psychological safety in the workplace.

Every day, I work alongside first responders who are exposed to traumatic incidents that most people can scarcely imagine. But the need for psychological safety extends beyond emergency services. In healthcare, education, social services, and beyond, workers are struggling—many in silence. They are overwhelmed, burning out, and in some tragic cases, suffering mental health crises that could have been prevented.

The implementation of the CSA Z1003 Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace is a pivotal step forward. It is not just a set of guidelines—it is a practical, evidence-based roadmap to creating work environments where people can thrive. When we teach leaders and frontline staff how to recognize psychological risks, manage stress, and support each other, we create a culture of care and resilience.

But without a legal framework, this remains optional—and far too many workplaces will continue to ignore the mental well-being of their employees. Bill 29 is an opportunity for Manitoba to lead the nation in protecting both the minds and bodies of its workers. It is a chance to prevent suffering before it begins, reduce the human and financial costs of mental health claims, and show that we value the people who keep our province running.

I urge you to ensure that this bill passes, supported by clear expectations, accessible education, and accountability for employers. This is our Westray moment for mental health—a moment when we can say, without hesitation, that Manitoba stands for the safety of all workers. Let's lead our nation in this vital area of care.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to this important cause.

Sincerely,

Scott Atchison

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>