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of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
Standing Committee
on
Legislative Affairs

Chairperson
Mr. Tyler Blashko
Constituency of Lagimodière



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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Third Legislature

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**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA
THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS**

Tuesday, January 27, 2026

TIME – 9 a.m.

LOCATION – Winnipeg, Manitoba

CHAIRPERSON – Mr. Tyler Blashko (Lagimodière)

VICE-CHAIRPERSON – MLA David Pankratz (Waverley)

ATTENDANCE – 6 QUORUM – 4

Members of the committee present:

Hon. Min. Asagwara

*Mr. Blashko, Mrs. Cook, MLAs Corbett, Pankratz,
Mr. Wowchuk*

APPEARING:

Leigh Anne Caron, Seniors' Advocate

MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION:

*Annual Report of the Manitoba Seniors' Advocate,
dated November 28, 2025*

* * *

Clerk Assistant (Ms. Katerina Tefft): Good morning. Will the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs please come to order.

Before we begin with our business today, I would like to inform the committee that a resignation letter from MLA Corbett as Chairperson of this committee was received. Therefore, before the committee can proceed with the business before it, it must elect a new Chairperson.

Are there any nominations?

MLA Shannon Corbett (Transcona): I nominate MLA Blashko.

Clerk Assistant: MLA Blashko has been nominated.

Are there any other nominations?

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

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

Are there any nominations?

MLA Corbett: I nominate MLA Pankratz.

The Chairperson: MLA Pankratz has been nominated.

Are there any other nominations?

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

This meeting has been called to consider the Annual Report of the Manitoba senior advocate—Seniors' Advocate, dated November 28, 2025.

Before we begin, I would like to remind everyone that questions and comments must be put through the Chair using third person as opposed to directly to members and representatives.

Are there any suggestions from the committee as to how long we should sit this morning?

MLA Corbett: I propose two hours.

The Chairperson: Two hours has been proposed.

Is it agreed that we sit for two hours? *[Agreed]*

Does the honourable minister wish to make an opening statement, and would they please introduce the officials in attendance.

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): Yes, please. I'll have some opening remarks. Thank you so much.

We'll have some opening remarks, and joining me today is Tino, who's my special assistant.

The Chairperson: Awesome. Well, we thank the minister.

Does the—*[interjection]* Oh, yes. Yes. Sorry.

The Honourable Minister Asagwara, with opening remarks.

MLA Asagwara: Thank you and good morning, everyone. I'm so glad to be here today. I'm looking forward to speaking with everybody who's here for committee on the Seniors' Advocate report before the committee.

I want to acknowledge the work that went into the report that we are considering today. This report was developed as a plan for establishing an independent Office of the Seniors' Advocate after they had been in

the role for just a few weeks, and I think that is very worthy of recognizing.

I have—this opportunity that we have to hear directly from Manitoba's very first Seniors' Advocate is an important one. This is a really big deal for our province. Many folks advocated for a long time to have an independent office for the Seniors' Advocate established in our province. It is wonderful that we not only have someone who is officially leading this office but will be putting a team together to make sure that Manitobans have advocates that are working on their behalf and the behalf of their families every single day, and moving our province in a better direction in terms of the needs of seniors and older adults.

* (09:10)

Seniors and elders have helped build and shape our province. They deserve to have their voices heard and their rights respected. And during the pandemic, unfortunately, we saw what can happen when seniors are not given the respect, care and attention they deserve. Our government has been very clear that we are committed to making sure seniors are safe, healthy and supported so that they can live well as they age. Establishing this independent office was an election commitment that we made following years of advocacy and listening, sitting down with seniors and older adults and their families and community organizations across Manitoba.

Our government heard these calls loud and clear and we recognize the urgency of the moment, which is why we introduced legislation to establish this office very early on in our government's first year of administration. I have to note that I was deeply disappointed, as was our caucus, to see the legislation being delayed for months and months because the PCs chose to hold up that legislation, delaying the legislative process. This, even when there were seniors and advocates gathered with us in the Legislature, in the gallery, who had waited for so long for that legislation to be introduced.

I'm really happy that we can reflect on that, knowing that, despite those delays, the legislation was introduced and ultimately passed and proclaimed on November 1, that the Office of the Seniors' Advocate would be established. I'm encouraged to see the values of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion being—be sort of the pillars of the office. If you've read the report—which, as I stated, was put together in short order, but it's very thorough in terms of what the mandates are—these pillars are going to help guide and

inform what Manitobans can expect from the office moving forward. It will guide the continued development of the office as the work is undertaken to establish it.

The advocate's office will reflect the diversity of seniors across Manitoba. And I was particularly pleased to learn that the advocate will work closely with First Nations and Indigenous communities on program planning and development. I was also very encouraged to learn that the advocate will prioritize championing the unique needs of seniors in rural and northern Manitoba whose experiences and challenges can look very different depending on where they live.

It's a real win for Manitoba seniors that the advocate brings experience that includes hands-on work in our communities, in community health and service delivery. Having that experience with seniors and in our community will be critical to the work of this office. It helps ensure the advocate's work is informed by lived experience, not just policy.

Our government set to create this office with a number of very clear responsibilities. The advocate has the responsibility of identifying, reviewing and analyzing systemic issues affecting seniors in Manitoba. The advocate will collaborate with seniors' organizations and service providers to address those issues. They will make recommendations to government on senior services and overall quality of life. This office will also receive, track and refer individual matters to the appropriate body for complaint or investigation. And finally, they will carry this work out with particular attention to seniors, older adults who experience racism or discrimination as well as the ways that senior services can advance reconciliation.

I am so proud to be a member of a listening government, a government that is delivering on its mission to serve the people of Manitoba, and that is all people of Manitoba. The establishment of the Office of the Seniors' Advocate reflects our commitment to accountability, dignity and respect for seniors.

To close, I want to say again how pleased I am to be here with the Seniors' Advocate in place, a strong leader who will be guiding this work moving forward. It's encouraging to see the work of establishing the office is continuing in this manner, and I look forward to discussion today and the work of moving together and moving forward on this really important effort, this really important office for all Manitobans.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: We thank the honourable minister.

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

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): First of all, I'd like to thank the advocate for joining us here today and welcome them to the new role.

And we all understand the critical role that seniors play in Manitoba and in our society. They are one of the fastest growing demographics in our province and will continue to be so for a number of years. And I think all of us who are elected here, often from the seniors in our constituencies, from their families, from their caregivers and all of us have seniors in our lives that we care about. And if we're lucky, all of us will become seniors one day as well. And we want to ensure that Manitoba is a safe and healthy place where seniors can thrive and have their needs met as those needs change.

And I know the advocate brings significant community health experience to this role which I'm sure will serve them well. Certainly as Manitobans live longer, community-based care and services like primary care, home care and supportive housing are increasingly important.

We recognize that this office is very new to Manitoba, so our meeting today may not be as extensive as it will be the next time this committee meets to consider the advocate's report. And I appreciate that the advocate has said publicly they want to ensure that there are good processes in place to ensure that the office is not merely listening to seniors but also taking action on their concerns; that is critical. Some of our questions today will touch on those processes and how the advocate envisions their role going forward.

I do want to respond to a couple of comments made by the minister in their opening statement. The minister, as is typical, prefers to politicize every matter that comes before this Legislature. They like to take jabs; we certainly could take jabs back about how the current NDP government has failed seniors time and time again during its two years in office. But, on this side of the House, we believe that this is a brand new, non-partisan office of the Legislature. Perhaps the minister could be persuaded to leave the partisan jabs and political theatre at the door for just a couple of hours and focus on the work we're here to do on behalf of Manitoba seniors.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: We thank the member.

Does the Seniors' Advocate wish to make an opening statement?

Ms. Leigh Anne Caron (Seniors' Advocate): Thank you to the honourable Chair, Honourable Minister and the honourable members.

I just want to take a minute to express my gratitude and—for being in this position and being able to be here today. I feel like it is an honour to be able to amplify the voices of seniors in Manitoba. And I am not going to be the voice, but, like I've said previously, I will amplify the voices, and that takes listening and spending time with seniors.

The annual report that's tabled today covers a very short period of time of just over two weeks of work from November 12 to 28. My focus was learning very quickly some of the policies and processes related to the role of the independent officer, and then starting on the first day I had to already think about budget and office structure and what that could look like for a budget submission on December 1.

So in addition to immersing myself in learning and planning for the office team and budget, I started receiving calls on the very first day from the public to talk about their concerns as seniors. In a small window of time, I continued to receive daily calls, emails and letters from seniors and their loved ones who expressed gratitude for the position, but also shared their concerns and hopes that the advocate would make quick change and improvements.

While this role does not do individual advocacy, the impression that this role is an ombudsman for seniors was shared with me recently by a community advocate and senior, and I have experienced that myself. Having staff and the ability to distribute communication material about the role of the advocate and how we can serve seniors in Manitoba will be essential, and that is under way. Although the report is short and the service plan included in the report details my vision for the Seniors' Advocate office and how to meet each of the responsibilities in The Seniors' Advocate Act—yes, so I think I'll maybe just leave it there.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you for that.

Before I open up the floor to questions, I'll just let folks know, as Chair I'd really appreciate if you give me a little signal when—to let me know who's asking

questions, but also when you're prepared to answer a question.

So now the floor is open for questions.

Mrs. Cook: Could the advocate just clarify their preferred pronouns? I don't want to misgender anyone.

Ms. Caron: Thank you to the member: she/her.

Mrs. Cook: Thank you for that.

Again, recognizing the newness of the advocate's office, the report noted staffing needs going forward. Can I just ask how many staff are being hired or have been hired already?

* (09:20)

Ms. Caron: Thank you to the honourable member for the question.

So I proposed staffing for eight additional people, nine including myself, and that was approved. The first four positions were drafted and submitted for classification in mid-December. So those first positions are the administrative co-ordinator, deputy advocate, communications co-ordinator and intake and system navigator.

The next four positions that will be submitted soon for classification is an evaluation—or research and evaluation co-ordinator, two research and evaluation specialists and an administrative assistant. So those will be gradual hirings throughout the next fiscal year, the last four, but these first four aren't yet classified. Once they are, they will be posted with the hope that they'll be filled, or at least half of them filled before the end of this fiscal year.

Mrs. Cook: So those first four positions that you mentioned, have they been posted and filled yet, or have they just been approved so far?

Ms. Caron: Thank you for the question.

They put—they have not been classified yet. So they were submitted to be classified in mid-December, and I have not received a notification that they're ready for posting. So once the department that classifies them has done them, we'll post them.

MLA Asagwara: Can you—having read the report, and, you know, understanding sort of what the objective is in terms of hiring—can you share with us just a little bit about what your hope is in terms of representation of the folks who are working in the office, and why you've taken the approach that you have in that regard?

The Chairperson: Sorry, Minister Asagwara, you're in a position to answer questions from the opposition.

MLA Asagwara: Oh, sorry. Habit, sorry. My goodness, geez. Bad habit, I apologize.

The Chairperson: All good, all good.

Mrs. Cook: This is a question for the minister. Is there a timeline for those positions being classified and posted?

MLA Asagwara: I was hoping to see the opposition ask what I think is a great question that I put before inappropriately. I apologize for that, Chair. Hopefully she'll find it within her heart to pose that really important question to our wonderful guest in committee today.

But in terms of the postings of those rules, I think the critic knows that this is an independent office, right? So, you know, Ms. Caron has worked really hard to bring forward an approach here, and an outline in terms of what the office will be doing in terms of serving our communities across the province, and has worked very quickly, my understanding, to get these postings, or sort of the outline of what these roles need to look like and the number of roles that are needed to establish this office, done; has brought them forward through the appropriate process.

So there is a committee that is responsible for reviewing all of the roles that she's bringing forward. You know, making a decision as to whether or not those will be approved, as the critic has already heard. The roles that were brought forward were approved, and now it's going to be a matter of following that process.

So this is an independent office. The government, we made a decision to bring forward legislation that would establish this as an independent office because the public made very clear this is the approach that they wanted to see.

And so in terms of how these roles get filled, in terms of how this proceeds—as much as in some ways, you know, I would love to be involved; this is a really cool opportunity for the Province—it is not my responsibility or purview to execute those next steps. It's an independent office that works with the mechanics of the Legislative Assembly, government, in terms of committees that support that work.

The advocate understands that and has brought forward the roles, you know, and the next steps of this process appropriately and accordingly. And so, like you, like the critic, I look forward to those roles being

filled and seeing which Manitobans are going to take up the really, really important work of serving older adults, seniors, elders and their families in this province, working with a wonderful leader that is guiding the path forward for the advocate and seeing what that team can do. And then ultimately what they bring forward for us to consider here in government in making communities better for older adults.

Mrs. Cook: The reason I posed the question was because the advocate indicated that those positions have been submitted to the department for classification. The minister is, of course, in charge of the department.

But moving on, the service plan notes that the advocate has met or is meeting with the three other provincial seniors' advocates across Canada. Can the advocate provide an overview of those meetings and what they learned and what from those meetings has been incorporated into this service plan?

Ms. Caron: Yes, so I started having individual meetings with each of the advocates; started in Newfoundland and Labrador with Susan Walsh, who's the advocate there, and then British Columbia with Dan Levitt, and then New Brunswick and the advocate is the advocate of seniors, children and youth and vulnerable adults, Kelly Lamrock. Met with them individually to kind of understand their processes, how they—what type of staff complements they have, how they outreach to communities, just kind of learning and anything that they thought I should know.

And those were really helpful meetings. They provided support in terms of just being able to bounce ideas off of—and that kind of thing as well. But then we met as a group, all four of us, last week and set some priorities of common issues in all the provinces that we wanted to look at regarding seniors, talk about whether there's anything of federal jurisdiction that we eventually want to take as a group and discuss at the federal level. And we have a commitment to meet quarterly as a group with the terms of reference that I've created and submitted in draft form to the group. And so we'll be meeting two times a year in person and two times a year online.

Mrs. Cook: Is the advocate at liberty to discuss what some of those common issues across Canada are, or what some of the federal issues that advocates are concerned about might be?

Ms. Caron: Since it was a preliminary meeting and it was for one hour, we had a long list on a piece of paper

and didn't really barely scratch the surface. We talked about how we'd work together and how often we'd meet. I'm trying to think back to the meeting. I don't know if we landed on anything that we—there was going to be a briefing note created by one of the offices for consideration at the next meeting. So the next committee meeting, I'll be able to share more in that regard.

Mrs. Cook: That's entirely fair.

In the service plan, the advocate notes that she's had a meeting with asset management regarding space and office needs. Has a physical office been established and opened yet?

Ms. Caron: No, there's no permanent office. I'm temporarily located in the Legislative Assembly administrative branch office, so in the old Ethics Commissioner's office. And once that position is hired, I'll be moving, and so it'll be temporary space for some time.

Asset management and I connected yesterday; they have a plan for meeting with me and talking about space. But the first estimate when I met with them in, I think it was shortly after I started at the end of November, the estimate of having a space would be 18 months from the initial meeting, so I haven't had the initial meeting yet with the person that will be working on the functional analysis.

So it'll be some time before a permanent office space is found.

Mrs. Cook: Does the advocate have any sense yet of what type of space, how big might be required or where an office should be located to best serve Manitobans?

Ms. Caron: The—when we met to develop the budget, I met with asset management to get a sense of how big the space would need to be to fit the needs of the office. So one of the requirements was accessibility, being able to have accessible doors, offices inside and outside, accessible bathrooms. So that will take some time.

* (09:30)

The square footage I can't recall, but the space would be big enough to accommodate staff as well as resources and people to visit the office. And so the waiting area would be big enough and there would be a common space as well as offices and cubicles. And the location: not yet known; still have to have that meeting.

Mrs. Cook: Can the temporary space that the advocate is in currently accommodate the four additional staff that they're hoping to hire over the next fiscal year?

Ms. Caron: No. This temporary space is one that I will have to be out of before the next Ethics Commissioner is hired, so out of by March. That has been flagged to asset management, that a temporary space is needed. I've requested a temporary space for the full complement of staff, but that we can share offices. It doesn't need to be a fancy space, just a functional one. So that is on their radar to look into and hopefully find something in the next month.

Mrs. Cook: One of the activities that was highlighted in the service plan was assessing team needs for a proposal to LAMC.

Can the advocate just clarify what that means, what team needs are? I have some assumptions; I just—I don't want to assume incorrectly.

Ms. Caron: Thank you for the question. I'm just looking for where that is.

But I think the—taking the request for what is needed to make the team at the Seniors' Advocate office has been brought to LAMC and that's what I was referring to in terms of the staff complement. Thinking about the work that needs to be done based on the legislation, each of the roles was determined on the work that would complement those objectives and be able to meet those.

So the staff positions mentioned earlier kind of reflect those needs of what the team will look like and what we need to do the work in the Seniors' Advocate office.

Mrs. Cook: The report makes reference to media requests which, of course, are very important for ensuring that Manitobans have an awareness of the existence of the office and its role, and I imagine that most of those media requests have been, thus far, focused on your—the advocate's hiring and the start-up of the office.

Can the advocate share how often they're contacted by the media and if they've seen any themes developing in those media requests?

Ms. Caron: So thank you to the honourable member.

You're correct. At the beginning, the media requests were about the role and starting. However, after a couple—a week in, maybe, and some stories were on the news around seniors, I had been contacted to

comment. Being new in the role, I did express to media that I would comment in the future, but while I am establishing the role and establishing relationships, one of the principles that I like to follow is I don't want anyone surprised by things I say in the media; that I'd like to be able to have conversations, they can hear it from me first.

So that has stopped media for now. I know that will happen again when issues come up. But I would like to continue to have relationship-building meetings with different groups and stakeholders so that they know my position and, kind of, what has come up before they hear about it in the media.

I'm just trying to think if there's anything additional that's—there—so there hasn't been a barrage of requests from media.

Mrs. Cook: I thank the advocate for that, although I would just state that I think it's really important the advocate feels empowered to speak publicly about any issue that they are concerned about without shoulder-checking it with government first or—

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Point of Order

The Chairperson: A point of order from the Honourable Minister Asagwara.

MLA Asagwara: I just want to flag that I think it's very problematic and inappropriate for the critic to quite literally put words in the mouth of the advocate. The advocate did not make any comments about shoulder-checking with government, and I will quote that verbatim that the critic used that language. It is an independent office. The advocate is working on behalf of all Manitobans.

I would encourage the member for Roblin (Mrs. Cook), if she wants to take political shots at me directly, she's welcome to; I'm elected. But I would ask that she not put the words—her words—in the mouth of the independent advocate while she's graciously at committee answering her questions.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: On the same point of order, Mrs. Cook.

Mrs. Cook: The minister does not have a point of order. I clearly stated that I was stating my opinion, not putting words in the mouth of the advocate. And in any event, even if I was, that's not a point of order.

The Chairperson: So a point of order is a flag of breach of practices of the committee, and in this case no point of order—no breach has been made. So the point of order does not have standing.

* * *

The Chairperson: We'll move on to the next question.

Mrs. Cook: One of the most important things for the advocate's office to do as it gets going will be to communicate to Manitobans that the office exists and what its mandate is. Does the advocate have an advertising or public awareness budget or plan for the next fiscal year?

Ms. Caron: Thank you for that question.

Yes, that's why I am eager to have a communications co-ordinator start. There is a substantial budget that was put aside for having a campaign, an awareness-building campaign, branding campaign, but also to get website up and running, different social media channels, and for Manitobans to be able to know what the office is doing.

So yes, there's a budget for a campaign and then also a budget for different outreach materials. So while website and social media will be effective for reaching some, it won't be effective for reaching everyone, so having paper resources, pamphlets and then a travel budget so that there can be tours out into communities and just meeting with seniors and having opportunities to talk, and talk about the office and what we do.

Mrs. Cook: That may have answered one of my other questions, which was that, as we know, a lot of seniors are living in supportive housing or personal-care homes or in assisted living. They aren't necessarily online or on social media.

And I was going to ask—although I suspect I now know the answer—if the advocate will be travelling to the places where seniors are and proactively going to them rather than simply relying on a passive intake process.

Ms. Caron: Yes, so that was the plan. When I was envisioning this role before I started, I was thinking that the—one of the ways I would like to do it is to start in the corners of the province and work my way into Winnipeg because Winnipeg voices are strong and I want to hear them.

But I think in the perimeters of the province, the awareness of the Seniors' Advocate isn't as high as it is here. And so travel is important, having that in the

budget, being able to go out into communities and listen and be present is really important. And in order to be able to do that in the relationship-building phase right now, connecting with different RHAs, including the northern and RHA and then different communities so that we could talk about what it would look like for me to come into their communities.

So I want to do that in a way that feels like they're ready for me and that's respectful and deliberate and intentional.

So yes. It's—there's this good travel budget for that.

* (09:40)

Mrs. Cook: And what about visiting personal-care homes specifically? Is that part of the advocate's plan?

Ms. Caron: Yes. Visiting seniors in different locations is part of my plan, so, yes—long-term care, but also supportive housing and assisted housing. I'm—and so, yes, it's part of the plan.

What that looks like and how it looks like: it'll take some time before I figure out where that will be and how I will start, but I've had invitations to go mostly in Winnipeg to come and visit and I have listed all of those.

But, yes, where seniors are at is where I'll be going to visit; so, yes.

Mrs. Cook: Thank you for that.

And what is—I imagine that if there are specific concerns that are brought to the advocate's attention, it's mentioned in the plan and in the act that those concerns, if they require investigation, will be sent to the appropriate body.

Has the advocate met with anyone yet or do they intend to meet with anyone from the Protection for Persons in Care Office?

Ms. Caron: Thank you for that question.

So the Protection for Persons in Care Office is on the list of groups I will meet with and learn more about, and one of the—I'm in a learning phase and a relationship-building phase right now, so the PPCO office definitely will have intersection with what my office does, and then finding kind of those other places that people can go for complaints as well. And so, yes, the PPCO will be—I will be meeting with them, yes.

Thank you.

Mrs. Cook: Can the advocate—recognizing that it's early days—can the advocate elaborate on what the process is, or the flow-through, when a senior contacts the advocate's office? How does that work?

Ms. Caron: Thank you for the question.

Well, right now, since I'm the only staff in the Seniors' Advocate office, I am doing all the jobs, including intake and system navigation. So, knowing that I would be talking directly to seniors, I have met with some people who are skilled in referrals and resources and know the seniors' landscape, and so when a senior contacts me, I'm no longer answering the phone live; I will let the message happen and then call them back. But everyone that calls talks to me, so I've spoken to everybody.

And so—sometimes they will just go right into what's going on and we talk, and then I talk to them about the role of the advocate and how I don't do individual advocacy; I do systemic advocacy. But they're—what they're talking to me about is important and it gets recorded confidentially. Everything that I hear about is not shared, but I do use the caveat that I will share it with staff once they're hired so that we can kind of look at those issues and how they fit into that systemic advocacy landscape. And then I just spend time talking with them about resources and what they've accessed, and some of those calls are hard.

And I—you know, I already knew this, but I'm not—that's not my best role doing intake and system navigation. I think there's going to be people that are going to do really well with that. If somebody needs two hours of my time, I give it to them, and those conversations have helped me, kind of, understand. And it's small groups of people; like I've maybe had 50 calls that I've talked—and so it's, you know, not representative of the whole, but it gives me a snapshot of how hard it is for seniors right now. And when I go to refer them, there isn't a place that I can refer them to that will help them with what they need.

So I don't know if that answers your question, but—speak to everyone; it will feed into systemic advocacy, and I have my tracking—that I track every call. And so once I have a team that can do some robust research and evaluation, we'll use that data and then, you know, develop a much better tracking system.

Mrs. Cook: Thank you, that does answer the question.

I think, you know, our concern there is just making sure that when seniors contact the office that

that data is being tracked so that the advocate can establish what those systemic themes might be, but also that those individuals are put into—in touch with the resources they do need.

But I do think it highlights one potential issue going forward: that there's likely a significant public education component that's going to be required to inform Manitobans that the advocate's office doesn't do individual advocacy, and perhaps some raised awareness for Manitobans about the other resources that might be available to them. Because I think the general impression that—you know, certainly some folks that I've spoken to in my constituency have is that, as a senior, if you've got an issue, now you can call the Seniors' Advocate, and that's maybe not quite the case. But as the advocate has said, I think some of those issues will hopefully iron out when that intake and system navigator is hired and some additional staff to assist them in handling those phone calls.

It may be too soon to say, I was going to ask, and the advocate can just tell me if this is not a fair question yet, but based on the interactions they've had so far and based on their conversations with advocates in other jurisdictions, how many contacts are they anticipating with members of the public going forward?

Ms. Caron: It's a good question. I think it's hard for me to project that, because as the member rightly says, that there is some public awareness that needs to happen around the role of the advocate. Once that is communicated a little more regularly and more broadly, the type of contact might change to the office. So what I am seeing now with individuals calling might not project into the same numbers over time. So I don't have a number to project in terms of contacts right now.

Mrs. Cook: That's entirely fair.

In terms of the operational objectives outlined in the service plan on page 5, under research and evaluation development, there are several sub-objectives noted: developing evaluation models, logic models, guidelines for focus groups, interviews, surveys and implementing frameworks, models and tools. Some of those I understand, some of them I don't.

Can the advocate clarify what these sub-objectives are referring to, whether these are perhaps tools that can be adapted from other jurisdictions or whether they need to be specifically made in Manitoba—just an overview of what these objectives are?

Ms. Caron: Thank you for the question.

As this was made within two, two and a half weeks of starting, my thinking around the research and evaluation team has evolved a bit. So, in addition to this, it's a little more robust as well.

But some of these, when you're working—looking at evaluation and research, just having that framework for what the team is going to do. Somebody that has a background in evaluation and research can develop evaluation plans and logic models just with the co-operation of the team but also in collaboration with community.

If there's going to be focus groups, interviews and surveys, when you're working directly with individuals in interviews, it's just good to know what those ethics of good practice around evaluation and research are and incorporating those into guidelines, so that will be done. These will be developed by the office.

* (09:50)

If the person that's developing them in the role of co-ordinator needs input, they will have the team of the other advocate's office to work with, and they've expressed that, and the three of them do work closely together. So I anticipate that that will be a resource for them as well.

And logic models really just will provide the guideline for the team of, like, why they're doing this, what they need to do, the work if they're taking on a bigger evaluation of a certain service, for example, and then what the outcome is that they want. So it just gives them their own internal guideline of what that is.

Mrs. Cook: Just going back to some budget questions, can the advocate give us an overview of what the main budget lines are and what any of those figures might be? You know, we've talked a little bit about advertising and that there is a budget for that. Can the advocate be a little bit more specific about what some of those numbers look like?

Ms. Caron: I can give you some more detail—or I can give the member more detail on the budget.

So, salaries and benefits are the biggest budget line. I don't have the numbers right in front of me, but visualizing it as I speak. So salaries and benefits in the first fiscal year—so this one and this in-year ask was for the four positions, including myself.

And then, because space development wouldn't happen until the next fiscal year, that wasn't included in this ask, but in the next fiscal year ask. So that's a

combination of capital dollars and operational dollars. So the capital ask was sort of outside of that regular operational budget.

And then travel line was a bigger amount for next fiscal year because of travelling throughout the province, and ideally I would like to have a staff member go with me as we're meeting with communities.

And then contracting dollars for the media campaign, website development, so that the communications co-ordinator can work with a firm to be able to do that.

And then another item that I put a good amount of resources into was honorariums, and mostly—kind of overlaps with contracting a bit—but the honorariums are for working with communities where they're providing knowledge keepers or elders or, you know, seniors that are leaders in their communities, to be able to compensate them for their time and contributions.

And then things like security, and those things go into the office space development.

That's what I can think of right now.

Mrs. Cook: Thank you for that. That was a pretty good overview from memory.

I do want to ask a little bit more about the communications strategy. The advocate's mentioned website development, media campaign. What is the status currently? Again, recognizing this is all very new. But because it's mentioned in the report, I'm going to ask the question.

The status of the advocate's branding and marketing plan, is that being developed in-house or has that been contracted out?

Ms. Caron: Thank you for the question.

Currently, there is no branding plan. Well, the plan is really to wait for the co-ordinator and to develop that together. And so there could be a combination of in-house and contracted work. I think being able to develop a website will take some external expertise as well as internal expertise.

And so there—like, I envision that, after the communication co-ordinator starts, that they can be the lead on developing the strategy and making those connections and getting the work accomplished.

Mrs. Cook: Does the advocate anticipate—and I actually don't know if this is a question for the advocate or if this is a more general question, but the budget for the

office and the financial statements for its operation after it's been in operation for a fiscal year, will those be included in the annual report that will be considered by this committee in a year's time, for example? Or when will members of this committee and the public, more generally, be aware of what the budget is for the office?

Ms. Caron: It's a good question.

I see that it could be in the annual report and made public that way. I think currently with—yes, the—I'm still learning some processes and how to distribute that information, but the approval of that budget would be in the committee minutes from LAMC, and then, next year's budget, when I submit the report, there will be some financial statements in there for transparency. And then for added transparency, once there is a website and a way of reporting, we can report on the expenditures of the office as well.

Mrs. Cook: It says in this report that the full functions of the office will likely not be realized until 2027 and '28. That's two full fiscal years after the office was established and the advocate appointed to this role.

And this is a genuine question, not a jab, but can the advocate explain why it will take two years to get up and running?

Ms. Caron: Thank you for the question.

Yes, starting November 12, 2024, you know, over halfway through that fiscal year, and the approval for the budget after December 1 was for gradual hiring of staff. So the first four positions approved for '25-26 and the additional positions gradually through '26-27. And then, with the office projected for 18 months from beginning of process, which hasn't started yet, that would be two years before we have a functioning space with staff in that space.

So the full functions where everybody is doing the job that's in their position description, that our office is running and people are able to come in and, you know, we have our full flow, we can't do that until we have an office and all the staff in those positions.

So that's why that's anticipated to be the case.

Mrs. Cook: Recognizing that these are issues for LAMC, which is, of course, confidential, I guess I just generally want to ask the advocate if they—if she feels that the office has been adequately resourced to get up and running or what they need right now in order to get started and deal with the calls that are already coming in.

Ms. Caron: Thank you for the question.

When I presented the budget ask, I was granted the full budget, and so I was happy that what I had envisioned was granted.

The processes take time, and it would be great if things could happen overnight and then I had staff today, but the processes are there for a reason, and I'm hopeful that I will see staff positions posted in the next month and then be able to move forward with that.

And so I think one of the things that's happening is learning for everybody in the establishment of a new office since—might have been some time since this has happened. And so if those learnings are, you know, reflected on, I think that would be helpful just for thinking ahead.

And I'm reflecting on them, but being—you know, being granted the budget I asked for is a very good start and then being able to see staff hired and move forward will be a very positive next step.

Mrs. Cook: Respectfully, what is the budget that the advocate asked for? *[interjection]*

The Chairperson: Ms. Caron.

Ms. Caron: Sorry. Thank you.

* (10:00)

I asked for \$1.65-million budget with—including nine staff, benefits and then—that is for the next fiscal year. So, understanding that staff will be gradually hired, the budget was approved, but the likelihood of the full dollars being spent in that time is low because it will take some time for all the staff to be hired, and the salary dollars are the biggest part of that budget.

So, currently, this fiscal year, I think it was approved at \$454,000 as pro-rated budget with smaller staff amounts. The forecast that I submitted recently is that we'll be probably spending under half of that for this fiscal, recognizing that staff probably won't start until March and that some of the other activities, because staff to do the work isn't in place, will also be delayed.

So, hopefully, that answers your question.

Mrs. Cook: Noting that the advocate's in temporary office space, and that that space is not sufficient to support all of these hires, where will these staff work physically?

The Chairperson: Honourable Minister Asagwara.

MLA Asagwara: Oh, I was just asking for water. I apologize.

The Chairperson: Sorry.

Ms. Caron.

Ms. Caron: I connected with asset management yesterday. I'm hopeful that we'll be meeting in the next week or two to talk about the temporary space. Temporary space is on their radar. When we met in December, they had flagged some possibilities for temporary space for the staff that will be hired until the permanent space is developed and ready.

So based on the work with them, I'm hopeful that there will be space that's found that's temporary. They have stated that there's—there are temporary spaces available.

Mrs. Cook: This is going back slightly to one of my earlier questions, but would members of the public be able to meet—just recognizing that not all seniors are comfortable with technology or even prefer to have a phone conversation, but want to sit down and talk face to face.

Is the temporary office space such that seniors could come and meet with the advocate in person?

Ms. Caron: Thank you for the question.

I do not know what the temporary space looks like. And so right now, with having an office, I'm going out into communities and meeting with seniors. And so I anticipate that I'll continue to do that.

If there was a request from seniors to meet me in the space—it needs to be appropriate space, so we'll have to see. But, like I had said previously, if the space is functional and not fancy, that's okay. It needs to be functional in terms of having the staff have a place to work and having a meeting space as well.

So, ideally, yes, but also there's flexibility within the office to go into community.

Mrs. Cook: So what we as a committee are considering today is actually the service plan for the office that's provided for in section 15 of the act. And that section of the act stipulates that the Seniors' Advocate must prepare a service plan that describes the goals of the Seniors' Advocate for the year and sets out specific objectives and performance measures.

Now recognizing that this was drafted after the advocate had been on the job for all of two weeks, I do need to note that, while there are a great many

objectives in the service plan, it doesn't include performance measures. So I just wanted to know how the advocate intends to measure their progress over the next year.

What specific metrics will they be looking at and measuring their progress against?

Ms. Caron: Thank you to the member for the question.

Yes, it was noted in the service plan that metrics were not going to be included, as this was something done on my own. And having experience working closely with evaluation and research teams, it doesn't go over great when somebody that doesn't know as well as somebody who does makes measures that can't be measured.

So that is one of the reasons that I left that out. Once there is a team in place that can make, you know, specific measurable objectives with the metrics included, that will happen in the next report.

So how I will measure them will be at a qualitative level and being able to talk about each of those objectives and what had happened rather than providing statistical analysis on that.

So qualitative, I think, is appropriate at this point at the Seniors' Advocate office development and being able to tell that narrative of why that was decided is an objective and what has happened. So, really, it will be, has it been achieved, how much has been achieved and, you know, what is the next step in terms of the qualitative analysis.

Mrs. Cook: Section 10 of the act notes that the advocate has the responsibility to make recommendations to service providers to improve the availability, effectiveness and responsiveness of seniors' services.

I have a couple of questions on this point, but the first question I'll ask is, which service providers are we talking about?

Ms. Caron: Thank you to the member for the question.

So service providers is very broad, and so the action I've been taking so far is to start with the regional health authorities and talk to them about what they envision in terms of service providers, what that looks like in their areas for seniors' services. So far, I've met with two of the five health authorities. The other meetings are scheduled and are taking place in the next two weeks.

And then from those service—those meetings with the RHAs—I've been connected with other service

providers within the regions. So some of them will be connected to the RHAs and some won't. Some have reached out to me, different service providers. And so meeting with them and just kind of understanding and building that relationship right now is where I'm starting, and then I'll have a better sense of the scope of services and how service provider recommendations will be made.

Mrs. Cook: As a clarifying question, when we talk about service providers, does this refer to specifically government service providers or non-profit service providers, community-based? What is the scope of service providers that the advocate has a responsibility for making recommendations about?

Ms. Caron: Thank you for the question.

Right now, determining the scope of service providers, who they are, is where I'm focused. If we think about change on the systemic level, focusing on service providers that are not, you know, that are not connected to a larger system is going to be important in terms of that connection and connection with seniors.

But making a system-level change, like I said, I'm determining right now at what level that's going to look at. But I'll have more to tell you on that at the next report.

So I think it's just—any service provider that wants to talk to me, I'm talking to them right now and then kind of figuring out that systems-level map of how those systems are working, how they're funded, the services they're providing. That'll give me some idea of at what level those recommendations are made.

Mrs. Cook: What is the mechanism by which the advocate would make recommendations to service providers, and would those recommendations be binding upon them? And how would those service providers respond to those recommendations?

Ms. Caron: Thank you for the question.

The framework for making the recommendations will be developed in collaboration with the research and evaluation team and the other team members in the office, including the deputy advocate, and then also in conversation with service providers.

* (10:10)

So, like I had said previously, relationship building is a really big part of the role that I'm in right now. So talking to service providers about, like I said earlier, how I really have an approach of no surprises,

and that goes for everybody that I'm working with that interacts with the Seniors' Advocate. So having those ongoing pathways for communication will be one way that recommendations are made and discussed, and then the recommendations will be made more formal. But the exact framework will be developed once the office is more developed.

Mrs. Cook: The report talks about the necessity of advising the minister responsible for Seniors on matters relating to seniors, and I believe that's referenced in the act as well.

So does the advocate have regular meetings scheduled with the minister, or how is that communication occurring?

The Chairperson: Oh, sorry—Ms. Caron.

Ms. Caron: Thank you for the question.

So I have regular meetings set up with the minister's office at the DM level, so Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care (MLA Asagwara). I also have a meeting coming up with the Department of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness, and we'll be meeting with them at the DM level as well in the coming weeks.

And so having ongoing communication at that level will be established so that there can be that back-and-forth in terms of, you know, requests for information coming from our office and the dialogue around findings and potential recommendations.

Mrs. Cook: I do want to talk a little bit about reconciliation, as is referenced in the report, and it's been an important focus of governments—successive governments for some time.

The report references initiatives that would use the provision of seniors' services to advance reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. So I'm wondering if the advocate could talk about any specific examples of initiatives they see as a priority in terms of facilitating reconciliation.

Ms. Caron: Thank you for the question.

So this will be a priority for the office as well, and being a white lady at the table and the only person in the office, I don't think I'm the right person to decide what that looks like. So it'll be important for me to work with communities about what that looks like. I'm treading carefully in terms of knowing that, you know, significant harm has been done by governments. And although I'm independent office,

I'm seen—you know, I can be seen as being connected and part of that.

So is—meeting with leaders is an important first step and hearing what they have to say and recommendations for how I move forward within their communities and then letting that develop in a collaborative way with the office and the community, I think, is probably the best approach. And so, right now, it's—the space is being held for it. What it looks like is going to be developed.

Mrs. Cook: A lot of what we've talked about so far today has highlighted just how new the office is and how much work there is to do yet to establish processes and, in fact, to just—to establish the infrastructure of the office.

So I wonder if the advocate could talk about what her priorities are for the next—for the remainder of this fiscal year and for the next fiscal year. And I—I'm hoping for some specifics in terms of what—the order of operations, what needs to happen next to enable the advocate to do her job and to serve Manitobans in the way that she feels this role should function.

Ms. Caron: Thank you for the question.

I'd love to give you specifics in exactly how things are going to roll out, and because—although it's an independent office, there are established structures in place that I can't override.

And so when I spoke about the department earlier, I should have clarified, it did not mean the department of Health, but like the department responsible for classifying positions. And so classification services, or Total Rewards—I'm learning names—but they have my positions, and they say 60 days from receipt that they'll be able to tell me what the classifications are and then be able to post. And so, once those are posted, I'm able to hire, and the next phase of that—staff development, will happen—of the training, onboarding, figuring out what our plan is together and then moving forward.

I'm a collaborative leader and a collaborative worker, so I don't like to set what the plan is going to be before the people are in place. I have a framework, but telling them exactly what their role is going to be and how they're going to do it, that they have to determine some of that based on their skill sets and expertise that they're bringing into the position.

And my goal in hiring staff is to have a diverse workforce that represents seniors throughout Manitoba, and so supporting a diverse workforce

means that we also don't come with a predetermined idea of how staff will work and function. And so that will be a focus of mine, is that staff recruitment development and then getting the work done.

So being able to give you specifics—I'd like to, but, unfortunately, because of the—like, dependence on needing other areas to get back to me into where—it's all connected; it's not just me dictating everything, so.

Mrs. Cook: I just want to clarify, you know, my role on this committee is to ask some tough questions on behalf of Manitobans. That's the function of the committee is to ensure accountability, and that's the reason some of my questions may come across as pointed.

When the advocate mentions the need for developing a staff team, I think, you know, they mentioned not having a predetermined idea of how staff will function, but I do want to ask and clarify that there will be job descriptions with objectives and performance measurables for all staff that are hired.

Ms. Caron: Thank you for the question.

Absolutely, and I meant to mention that. It may depart from—so there's position descriptions. In order for a position to get classified there needs to be a position description with qualifications, key responsibilities, who they report to, what their scope of authority is, all of those things. So those are in the position descriptions that have been submitted. So that framework is there in terms of what we're looking for for qualifications and experience, what they will do. So that framework, they'll have that.

But in terms of how specifically they'll do that, you know, you can have somebody with similar qualifications, but based on how they worked with those qualifications, where they've lived, the communities they've worked with, their approach will be different, and so that's what I don't want to say, you're going to do it this way and you're—they'll have ideas I haven't thought of. And that's the beauty of having a team that I'm missing right now is the uniqueness that they bring to that role. And so that's what I meant by dictating the how.

Mrs. Cook: The advocate mentioned the importance of travel in this role and going to communities outside of the city of Winnipeg, and I agree.

Can the advocate tell us where she's planning to go first, and why and when?

Ms. Caron: Thank you for the question.

Can't tell you that yet because I am still developing what that plan is. So the relationship-building phase that I'm in right now and meeting with different communities, and the RHAs meeting with the community—sorry, I'm still learning names—but seniors' resource centres and co-ordinators, they've invited me into communities as well.

And so needing to figure out that plan is—I need to figure it out but also needing to balance the meetings and the hiring and the other responsibilities that are happening.

So travel, I anticipate, will happen in the next couple months, but then increase once staff are on board in the next fiscal year.

* (10:20)

Mrs. Cook: Just a clarifying question on that.

How will the advocate determine where she needs to go? What are the—I can imagine that many communities across the province will want to have the advocate with a presence in their community. I guess, what criteria will the advocate use to determine where it's important to go?

Ms. Caron: Part of how I'll determine that is based on if communities are ready to have me there. I'd love to be in northern Manitoba first. However, I'm sensitive to, you know, not just showing up and expecting a warm welcome, and I want to be able to establish a connection and the willingness for them to have me out there.

I think there's awareness building for the advocate to do in northern Manitoba and other parts of the province as well. So I don't have a predetermined—exactly which community I'm going to go in. I want to do it respectfully with communities. And I respond to invitations, and kind of that—being ready. And when I spoke with the interim CEO of the NRHA, I could get the sense that they're pretty strapped out there, and things are busy. And having an advocate show up on your doorstep might not be the best thing right now. So I'm just sensitive to timing on their end, too.

Mrs. Cook: I appreciate the need to tread respectfully when it comes to entering communities as a representative, an independent representative of the Legislative Assembly.

I did have one other question and now it's entirely slipped my mind. Oh gosh. Well, I guess it can't have been that important.

Okay, I actually don't have any further questions, honourable Chairperson.

The Chairperson: So seeing no further questions, I will now put the question on the report.

Annual Report of the Manitoba Seniors' Advocate, dated November 28, 2025—pass.

The hour being 10:22, what is the will of the committee?

Some Honourable Members: Rise.

The Chairperson: Committee rise.

COMMITTEE ROSE AT: 10:22 a.m.

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