

QP Briefing: January 11, 2018

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Articles

1). The Funding Portal – Week of January 8

By: Christopher Reynolds

Overall Disbursements: Funding for the weeks of Dec. 18 and 25, 2017 and Jan. 1, 2018 under Canadian federal and provincial grants and business incentive programs reached \$1.67B, down from \$1.25B during the week of Dec. 11, 2017.

Top Sector: Energy is the top sector for the three-week period, attracting \$300.5M, 26% of total incentives.

Top Region: Alberta is the top region, securing \$507.7M, accounting for 44% of total national disbursements.

Top Recipients in Ontario:

- Rapid Access Clinics in Ontario receive \$37M over three years from the Province to expand their reach across the region.
- The Stratford Festival receives \$20M from the Building Canada Fund to construct the

new Tom Patterson Theatre Centre.

- FIO Automotive Canada Corp. receives \$980k from the Southwestern Ontario Development Fund to create 35 new jobs and retain another 310.

Sectors:

<https://fundingportal.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/chart-35.png>

Provinces:

<https://fundingportal.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/chart-36.png>

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2). Province tries to track segregation more accurately with new

By: Christopher Reynolds

The province is moving to address what Ontario's ombudsman deemed "serious problems" with the way the government tracks and reviews prison segregation, posting an online request for information on an "inmate tracking solution."

The procurement post comes nine months after an investigation by Ontario ombudsman Paul Dubé highlighted major holes in information and data collection, among other problems, in the correctional system. His investigation, titled "Out of Oversight, Out of Mind," said "unreliable" data — due in part to paper records, human error and a patchwork bureaucratic approach — made it "impossible to know who is in segregation and for how long."

The request for information (RFI) states: "This RFI will help the Ministry to determine if an inmate tracking solution could improve the efficiency and effectiveness of tracking the time every inmate spends in each area or location within a correctional institution."

Much of prison record-keeping remains mired in the 20th century. "This is taking that to the 21st century, and using more technology to continue to track inmates and make it consistent across the correctional system across Ontario," said Andrew Morrison, a Correctional Services Ministry spokesperson.

The move won't dabble in tracking bracelets or biometrics. "It's computers. It's just moving some of the systems that are now paper-based forward to keeping more electronic records," he said, noting automated alerts and scheduling goals could be part of the upgrade.

In his report last April, Dubé called for a clearer definition of segregation. "However, even with clear definitions, the manual nature of data entry – especially when that data must be entered multiple ways in multiple places – increases the risk of human error," he wrote.

Hence his recommendation that the ministry "should research technological solutions that would streamline or automate tracking inmate movement and reduce the possibility of human error, with the goal of implementing a solution within the next 12 months."

An independent prison system review last May by Howard Sapers, the former federal correctional investigator, noted that prisons rely on "cumbersome, labour-intensive and largely paper-based systems." The ministry only began to centrally collect basic data on segregation in 2015, hampering efforts to identify broader trends in segregation, he said. Institutions that "start the clock" again when inmates are taken to court or briefly transferred to alternate housing add to the problem.

"To the ministry's credit, these issues have clearly been identified and there is a firm commitment to implementing a system that would allow for robust, data-driven analysis and evidence-based practice," he added, calling the developments promising.

Monte Vieselmeyer, corrections chair of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU), said he generally supports the move away from pulp and toward processors.

"Paper gets lost," he said.

Vieselmeyer nonetheless expressed reservations about interim government measures around segregation, announced last April, that include a 15-day limit (down from 30) on the number of consecutive days an inmate can spend in segregation.

"In the Sapers report, they always reference alternatives to segregation. One of the things I've been pushing: What are those alternatives?" he asked, pointing to a rise in assaults on correctional staff.

Alternative, or specialized, housing refers to a space where inmates are securely separated from the general prison population, and may include a small number of other inmates.

"Alternative housing is great at new institutions like the one in Thunder Bay," he added, but older ones can't accommodate it as readily.

Dubé launched his investigation in December 2016 following public furor over the story of Adam Capay. The 24-year-old inmate incarcerated at the Thunder Bay jail was held in isolation for four years in a Plexiglas cell with the lights on 24 hours a day while awaiting trial. He is alleged to have killed another inmate.

"Adam's story made the news last fall because four years in segregation is shocking in itself – it's almost unimaginable. But what was even more shocking was that the ministry responsible for safeguarding the human rights of the incarcerated did not know about it," Dubé said last May.

In Capay's case, ministry computer records showed he had been in isolation for 50 days, when he was actually held in isolation for 1,591 days. Officials were not aware the error was made until the ombudsman's investigator pointed it out to a senior correctional staff member, who then made the correction by hand to reflect that Capay was in "seg" and not "general population."

"As far as the ministry was concerned, he was out of sight and out of mind," Dubé said.

One ministry official put it thusly to the ombudsman: "We probably tracked livestock better than we do human beings."

-With files from Sabrina Nanji

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3). NDP calls out Hydro One for \$15-million request to improve

By: David Hains

The NDP are calling out Hydro One for what the party considers \$15 million in wasteful spending in a re-design of ratepayer bills.

"Kathleen Wynne seems to think the problem with hydro bills is that people don't understand them," said NDP energy critic Peter Tabuns in a press conference. "I think the problem with hydro bills is that they're too high."

As part of Hydro One's 2,076-page ratepayer increase request to the Ontario Energy Board (OEB), one section deals with "customer service billing investments," citing funds required to improve "customer focus" and "operational effectiveness."

"Hydro One is introducing a redesigned bill in 2017," stated the submission that was filed in late March. "Additional capital funding will be required in 2022 to introduce further enhancements to ensure customers remain satisfied and understand their bill."

Hydro One states that the proposed 2022 bill redesign aligns with the company's objectives of "improving its relationship with its customers," encouraging conservation, and revamping its non-energy billing process for vendors, contractors and other parties.

Tabuns slammed Hydro One for its \$15-million request, arguing the company isn't focused on what matters to ratepayers. The Toronto—Danforth MPP equated the spending request to paying for 250 nurses for one year and promoted the NDP energy plan to buy back Hydro One and ban pre-paid billing.

Hydro One did not take kindly to Tabuns's analysis of the proposal.

"I think it's a very uninformed opinion," stated Hydro One executive vice-president Ferio Pugliese in an interview with QP Briefing. He also characterized Tabuns's comments as "inaccurate," and added he would be happy to sit down with party members to walk them through the plan.

Pugliese defended the request on the grounds that ratepayers told the company in focus groups and surveys that a more comprehensible bill was a top priority, with almost 40 per cent saying they couldn't understand the bill.

While Tabuns said there are plenty of graphic designers in Ontario who could do Hydro One's billing work at a more affordable price, Pugliese characterized that as a misunderstanding of what goes into revamping the process.

Until December 2017, the Hydro One billing system had not been updated in 15 years. The company spent \$9 million improving this system for residential hydro billing, which is part of the \$15-million OEB request. Hydro One would like to spend a further \$6 million in 2021 and 2022. Of the \$9 million that has been spent, about 5 per cent was allocated to graphic design. A further 20 per cent was spent on user-experience testing and other front-end improvements. But the bulk of the spending was on back-end functionality, because old computer systems had to be updated or developed, and tested.

A proposed \$4 million to \$4.5 million will deal with applying the same improvements to business billing, and another \$1 million or so would deal with specialized contractors and vendors for non-energy services, such as invoicing entities for service upgrades, damage claims, forestry clearing, joint-use pole rentals and other categories.

Pugliese says this work isn't cheap, but the results speak for themselves. He cited a reduction in customer service calls related to bills of 25 per cent from December 2016 to 2017. Billing-related customer service calls are the largest category that Hydro One deals with, accounting for 35 per cent of their half-million annual calls.

All savings related to reduced call volume and mailing expenses would be re-invested in the company, he said.

The bill re-designs would be made available to other Ontario hydro companies.

Tabuns wasn't buying the Hydro One explanation at the presser.

"If they want to reduce their call centre volume, then reducing the cost of the bills is the number one solution."

Pugliese said that when he travels the province ratepayers tell him revamped bills are a priority for them. "They have outright told me they want improvements to customer service."

Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault told QP Briefing in a statement that he backs Hydro One's initiative to improve its billing, although it's ultimately up to the independent OEB.

"With Ontarians wanting clearer bills that are easier to understand, Hydro One's bill redesign project is a necessary improvement that will help customers," he wrote.

But he cautioned it's premature to evaluate everything that the company has asked for. "Utilities rarely get all they ask for – in the last eight years, the Board has reviewed over 100 major rate applications, including proposals from Hydro One, and reduced requested rate

increases by an average of about 40 per cent."

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4). In Brief: A Wynne town hall, overdose prevention site application construction begins

By: David Hains

The premier will be headed to Bytown on Jan. 18 to take questions from the public. It's the third such town hall that Kathleen Wynne has attended over the past two months, with the first two having taken place in Toronto and Brampton. The event is being organized by the province, not the Liberal party, and anyone can attend and present their queries. Wynne focused her responses in the first two town halls on her political message of "fairness," and could hear more from Ontarians about the effects of the minimum wage in the Ottawa town hall, the first one to take place since Bill 148 was implemented on Jan. 1.

The town hall will take place at the Chamber at Ben Franklin Place, 101 CentrepoinTE Dr., in Ottawa. The doors will open at 6 p.m. and the event will start at 7 p.m.

The province is accepting applications from health-care and community organizations that would like to operate overdose prevention sites — also known as supervised injection sites — to help combat the opioid crisis.

Sites will be approved to operate for three to six months, with the possibility of extension, the province said in a news release Thursday.

"Every life lost to this opioid crisis is an avoidable tragedy and our government is committed to doing everything in our power to combat this public health crisis. Overdose prevention sites have proven to save lives by offering necessary health services to some of the most vulnerable and marginalized populations," Health Minister Eric Hoskins said in the release.

Late last year, the province secured approval from the federal government to oversee and approve supervised injection sites. It came as the province found the number of recent opioid-related deaths has skyrocketed in Ontario. New numbers from the coroner show that from May to July 2017, there were 336 opioid-related deaths in Ontario, compared with 201 during the same time period in 2016.

Construction began today on the \$65-million Cherry Street Stormwater and Lakefilling project, which kicks off the larger Port Lands flood protection project east of downtown Toronto. The long-awaited major infrastructure project received funding from the federal government in 2017, allowing the \$1.25-billion project to go forward.

The flood protection will ultimately create a renaturalized river mouth for the Don River, which was tweaked by industry several times in the 19th and 20th centuries, mostly to negative results. The flood protection will also unlock large swaths of previously unusable real estate.

"This project will lead, over time, to increased access to the waterfront and successful new communities where families can thrive and businesses can grow and create new jobs," Infrastructure Minister Bob Chiarelli said in a release.

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