



News Release

For Immediate Release

July 8, 2020

Minister Provided with Overstated Costs Associated with Irregular Border Crossers

(TORONTO) A special audit of the costs associated with irregular border crossers found that an estimate of \$200 million provided to a former Minister of Children, Community and Social Services was overstated. The Office of the Auditor General determined that the \$200 million publicly communicated was, in most cases, the cost of providing services for all refugee claimants, not just irregular border crossers.

“The accuracy of information provided by the Ministry to the Minister for the public announcement was far off the mark,” Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk said. “Senior government officials need to ensure the accuracy of the information provided to government for public announcements and decision-making.”

The Minister of Children, Community and Social Services announced on August 13, 2018, that \$200 million in costs had been incurred by Ontario and its municipalities, providing services to irregular border crossers up to that point in time. In October 2018, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts requested our Office to audit these costs

“Our Office estimated that Ontario spent about \$81 million providing services to irregular border crossers between April 1, 2017, and July 31, 2018,” Lysyk noted. “Because the federal government did not begin tracking the arrival of irregular border crossers until April 1, 2017, our work was limited to assessing the reasonableness of the \$200 million in announced costs from that point in time.”

Of the estimated \$81 million incurred, only \$15.6 million has been compensated by the federal government to the cities of Toronto and Ottawa and Peel region. Although Ontario has an immigration agreement with the federal government, the agreement does not specifically cover funding for providing services to refugee claimants, including irregular border crossers. In comparison, Quebec incurred \$300 million in costs and has been compensated \$286 million by the federal government through a separate cost sharing agreement.

We recommended that Ontario should seek an agreement with the federal government to compensate it for providing services to refugee claimants, including irregular border crossers. Since the time frame of our audit, additional costs continued to be incurred until the border was closed due to COVID-19.

Irregular border crossers coming to Canada from the US increased significantly beginning in the spring of 2017. They enter Canada through unofficial points of entry, such as a road or forest path. Most are intercepted right away and those who pass security and other checks can make a claim for refugee status. The vast majority of irregular border crossers to Canada initially crossed into Quebec.

About 36% of total refugee claimants to Ontario in recent years were irregular border crossers. The province provides support, such as temporary housing, newcomer settlement services, education, adult language training and, for those who cannot work, financial assistance.

-30-

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