



November 27, 2020

MR. KEVIN O'REILLY
MLA, FRAME LAKE**Oral Question 157-19(2) Domestic Violence Leave**

This letter is in follow-up to the Oral Question you raised on March 5, 2020 regarding Domestic Violence Leave. Specifically, to bring awareness to Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) staff of the leave provisions available to them, as per the Union of Northern Workers (UNW) Collective Agreement and the *Employment Standards Act*. During our exchange, I committed to reminding GNWT staff and supervisors of the Domestic Violence Leave provisions available to them, including additional information on extending Domestic Violence Leave, if required.

The health and safety of all employees is a primary concern of the GNWT as an employer. This concern extends to any situation where an employee may be at risk -including the home. As a government body, we want to be able to accommodate all employees who may be involved in a domestic violence situation, which includes supporting employees in taking any necessary leave, while maintaining the confidentiality of both employees and their families.

There are resources available to employees regarding leave, including the UNW and Northwest Territories Teachers' Association (NWTTA) Collective Agreements and the Excluded Employees' Handbook. These sources state that Domestic Violence Leave is a special circumstance put in place to support and protect the privacy of employees and their children dealing with domestic violence issues. The three (3) day leave is granted to employees and their children to attend appointments and legal proceedings, or to engage in other activities to support their safety and security. Provisions are also in place to ensure the confidentiality of any employee who requests Domestic Violence Leave. Deputy Ministers can also approve requests for additional Domestic Violence Leave beyond the three (3) paid days outlined in the Collective Agreement, on a case-by-case basis, if required.

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In order to ensure this information is accessible to GNWT staff, the Department of Finance will work on developing a Domestic Leave Workplace Policy, as well as associated training. It is also the Department's intention to have a designated and trained contact person to answer questions regarding specifics on the leave provisions. Members of the Legislative Assembly will be informed on the development of the Policy and training as they progress.

Additionally, the Department of Finance will continue with communication efforts to bring attention to the Domestic Violence Leave provisions available to all GNWT employees. A BearNet article was published on November 3, 2020 and an email to Deputy Ministers was sent on November 4, 2020, each providing information on the Domestic Violence Leave provisions, as well as additional contact information for other support such as the NWT Victim Services office, or how to access confidential counselling and/or legal advice through the GNWT's Employee and Family Assistance Program.



Caroline Wawzonek
Minister of Finance

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