



15th Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

Standing Committee on Social Programs

Report on the Review
of the Draft 2005-2006
Main Estimates

Chair: Ms. Sandy Lee



Legislative Assembly
Standing Committee on Social Programs

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SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Speaker:

Your Standing Committee on Social Programs is pleased to provide its Report on the Review of the Draft 2005-2006 Main Estimates and commends it to the House.

Sandy Lee, MLA
Chairperson

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
SOCIAL PROGRAMS
REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE DRAFT 2005-2006
MAIN ESTIMATES**

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NORTHWEST TERRITORIES HOUSING CORPORATION

Introduction

The Standing Committee on Social Programs met with the Minister and his officials on Thursday, January 13, 2005 to review the Draft Main Estimates of the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation.

Committee noted the total operating budget for the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation for 2005-2006 is planned at \$105,996,000. Of this total amount, the Corporation proposes to generate \$70,010,000 in revenues and a GNWT contribution of \$35,956,000. The substantial difference from last year's Main Estimates is the transfer of Social Housing Program dollars to the Department of Education, Culture and Employment in the amount of \$15,870,000.

The following outlines Committee Members' issues during their review of the 2005-2006 Draft Main Estimates for the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation.

Market Housing Initiative (MHI)

The Committee believes the Market Housing Initiative to be a complete failure. Since the beginning, Committee has expressed concerns about how this program came into being. The waiver of the Business Incentive Policy; the rushed nature of the program to meet shipping deadlines and the lack of available serviced lots in some communities appear to have contributed to the overall failure of the MHI. Further, the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation failed to undertake the proper consultation to determine whether the use of mobile homes met the needs of the target rental market and whether rental rates charged to recover investment costs were acceptable to the target market.

Out of the 22 units delivered in 2004-2005, 14 units are presently unoccupied and the professionals who were the target market occupy only five units. The total cost of the project was \$2.5 million. The Northwest Territories Housing Corporation believes it can dispose of these vacant units as either public housing units or for sale to interested parties. Committee is not impressed with such a proposal. The Market Housing Initiative was approved for a specific purpose to house and to attract professionals, like nurses and teachers, into small communities and not for social or market housing.

Meanwhile, the cost of financing, heating and maintaining the empty units is eating a big hole in the Corporation's expectation that the entire MHI would be 100% self-financing.

Time and time again the Committee has requested a post-mortem on the 2004-2005 activities under the Market Housing Initiative. In a December 3, 2004 response to the Committee, the Corporation committed to providing this post-mortem later that month. In an e-mail dated December 8th, it further revised the delivery date to mid-January and then again, during the Main Estimates review, revised it to mid-February. The NWT HC is awaiting feedback from the Departments of Justice and Health and Social Services to complete the post-mortem on the first phase of the Market Housing Initiative. The Plan is then to take it to Cabinet to decide on whether to continue the delivery of 22 more units, the second phase of the Market Housing Initiative project.

Committee has advised the Corporation and the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight of its serious concerns over the Corporation's handling of the Market Housing Initiative and of Committee's reluctance to support \$2.2 million in borrowing for Phase 2 in 2005-2006.

Members await the outcome of the assessment report and the Cabinet's decision and anticipate further discussion on the MHI during Committee of the Whole.

Federal Funding of Housing Programs

Members were made aware that the Minister is meeting with Housing Ministers from across the country, the Federal Housing Minister and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) officials to discuss potential CMHC initiatives and the inequalities of current formula financing. The discussions were specifically on base and per capita funding and other CMHC programs primarily focusing on aboriginal housing and whether it meets the needs of the NWT and smaller jurisdictions across the country. The resulting communiqué identifies problems associated with the rural and remote parts of Canada and includes funding inequalities and the lack of and condition of housing for First Nations People.

The Minister stated he has had the opportunity for private meetings with the Federal Housing Minister on at least two occasions. The Minister of the NWT HC believes the Federal Government is in support of distributing federal funding and program access on a more equitable basis across the country. They are currently discussing formula financing that includes a base minimum plus per capita funding.

The Committee acknowledges the Minister and his officials' efforts in lobbying the Federal Housing Minister but note that as of yet nothing is in writing. Committee wholeheartedly encourages the Minister to press for an agreement in writing during his next meeting with the Federal Housing Minister, sometime in the spring.

Budget Reporting for NWT HC

The Standing Committee on Social Programs is concerned with the Corporation's budget reporting process. The Corporation, because of its unique structure, is not guided by the same principles as the Departments. Being a Corporation, they have different statutory authority and budget for results. This causes fluctuations between proposed mains and actuals.

Committee is concerned this diminishes the Committee's oversight function and proposes that before the next Business Plan Review, the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation, the Financial Management Board Secretariat and the Standing Committee establish a bureaucratic working group to ensure the needs of the Standing Committee are met while allowing the NWT HC the flexibility to carry out its mandate.

The Standing Committee on Social Programs looks forward to establishing this working group and seeing the results during the next business planning cycle.

Selling Off Public Housing Units

Committee supports the plan to sell off 450 Public Housing Units over the next eight years and replace them with 250 new multi-family units. The Corporation will be replacing older inefficient units with newer cost-efficient units and thus will reduce operating costs in its public housing portfolio.

Committee was particularly concerned with the negative press generated by the media who appeared unaware of the intent behind the sale of Public Housing Units. Members informed the Minister that a communications strategy should be implemented to alleviate any community or client concerns.

The Standing Committee on Social Programs' support for the sale of public housing stock is conditional on the continued adherence to the replacement plan and revenues generated from the sale of Public Housing Units not being used to support administration costs.

Committee recognizes that housing needs change from time to time, and from community to community. In this context, we support the strategy of selling older, high-cost units or those units surplus to a community's foreseeable social housing needs.

The Committee will be monitoring this issue and following up at the next available opportunity with the Minister of the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation.

Maintenance Management Operating System (MMOS)

The Standing Committee on Social Programs has previously recommended the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation respect its mandate and turn over the marketing and support function for the MMOS program to the private sector or to a more appropriate government department or agency.

The Corporation has been charged with redefining its mandate to better meet the housing needs of northerners. It appears from the tone of their December 20th response that the MMOS System may very well be a part of any new mandate. In addition, the Information Systems/Information Technology Plan, presented as part of the Business Plan, clearly states that Information Services will be working with business development personnel within the Corporation to develop a Corporation Marketing Plan.

During the Main Estimates Review the Standing Committee on Social Programs was reassured the NWT HC was not presently marketing this software. It will strictly be used as an in-house tool to manage their assets.

Committee is still concerned that in their new mandate the MMOS software application program may appear as a new marketing initiative to generate revenues.

Local Housing Authority Versus Headquarters Funding

In a time when housing needs are growing in virtually every community, and when the government overall is looking to reduce internal expenses, it would be anticipated that spending on housing programs would be increasing while costs for overhead and administration would be going down. Sadly, the NWT Housing Corporation has demonstrated its ability to defeat logic.

The District Offices and the Local Housing Authorities will see budget cuts of some \$1.1 million this year, while the four headquarters functions will see increases of \$1.17 million.

Committee is troubled by its observation that the Corporation is maintaining the same number of person years (PYs) at the Headquarters level as last year. Across the GNWT, Departments have reduced Headquarters staffing to meet some of the targeted, government-wide fiscal reduction requirements. The Minister and his officials were adamant that Headquarters staff is essential with the focus of transferring Social Housing Program funding to the Department of Education, Culture and Employment (EC&E) and with the redefining of the NWT HC's mandate.

Committee will monitor any further financial reductions and changes to the NWT Housing Corporation to ensure that financial restraints are met at the headquarter level and not by the Local Housing Authorities. In addition, with the transfer of Social Housing to EC&E, the NWT HC will have to examine decreasing staff at Headquarters and Regional levels.

New Mandate for the NWT Housing Corporation

The Northwest Territories Housing Corporation is in the initial phase of redefining its mandate to better provide affordable housing for the residents of the Northwest Territories. The Minister and his officials are currently working on a Paper outlining the new mandate that is scheduled for Cabinet review and possible approval by April 1, 2005.

Committee Members would like to encourage the Minister to improve stakeholder involvement in determining the new mandate for the NWT Housing Corporation. It appears there is limited stakeholder involvement which Committee believes is a crucial element in developing an effective mandate.

In addition, the Committee proposes a limitation on the percentage of the budget that can be spent on administration, policy development and finance. This should ensure the bulk of the Corporation's money is utilized building or repairing housing units rather than on administration costs. Members believe the Corporation's priority should be program delivery rather than administration.

Committee looks forward to participating in defining the new mandate for the NWT HC and would appreciate the opportunity to be involved in setting the performance measures once the mandate is established.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

Introduction

The Standing Committee on Social Programs met with the Minister and his officials on January 14, 2005 to discuss the Draft Main Estimates for the Department of Health and Social Services. Committee Members made note that the Department is proposing to spend \$250,649,000 in Operations Expense and \$6,875,000 on Capital Projects in fiscal year 2005-2006.

Committee Members offer the following comments on issues arising out of the review of the 2005-2006 Draft Main Estimates.

Preface

It is important for the public to note that the new federal funding for healthcare announced in the fall of 2004 is not included in 2005-2006 Draft Main Estimates, and as such the Committee did not have opportunity to comment on the final disposition of the funds. This is a one-time anomaly that clouded our discussion with the Minister and his officials.

The Department has a handle on how much money is expected to flow from these new funding arrangements. What is not clear are the conditions the Federal Government will place on the usage of the new funding. Until such time as the allowed usages for the funding can be established, the Department is unable to include in the Main Estimates funding to restore programming or pay for new initiatives.

Committee noted that some reductions, proposed delays of program implementation and facility closures that were discussed during the Business Plan would not be taking place.

The areas where the Committee would like the Department to target new or increased spending are discussed within the rest of our report.

Mental Health and Addictions Strategy

The Committee was pleased the Department was able secure funding to roll out the last year of the Mental Health and Addictions Strategy. In this time of restraint, the Government was able to see the need to hire the nine mental health workers and three clinical supervisors.

Committee is still concerned that the Department will have difficulty in recruiting for these positions given the requirement to have either a bachelor or master's degree in social work. Alcohol abuse remains the most important issue facing many of our communities and strategies that cannot put mental health/addiction workers in the communities are of no use to them.

The abuse of drugs is becoming more and more prevalent, as increases in disposable incomes have led many northerners to make poor life choices. This is readily apparent in Yellowknife's downtown core but is also becoming a problem in smaller communities. More resources will have to be directed towards drug addictions.

The concern that there are not enough treatment facilities to meet the needs of northerners in dealing with their addictions remain. Any reprofiling of the Mental Health and Addictions Strategy by using the new federal money should address the issue of facilities, in addition to staffing concerns.

Gambling is a problem for many northerners and does not seem to be adequately addressed or at the very least given a meaningful profile within the context of the Mental Health and Addictions Strategy. Beating an addiction like alcohol dependency is a laudable feat. Replacing an alcohol addiction with a gambling addiction does not put a person any further ahead.

Members will look for evidence of increased programming for gambling addicts in future Business Plans.

Professional Development Opportunities

Members were concerned with the reduction to the professional development funds available for health care workers. Although it is apparent that the Department did not expend the total funding available over the last two years and that this would be a logical activity to consider for cost-cutting measures, Committee Members have heard anecdotal evidence that one of the reasons for poor uptake was the inability of the Department and the Authorities to provide the short-term relief necessary for nurses to take advantage of the program.

One solution that was discussed at Committee was the possibility of allowing health professionals to accrue their professional development funds for two years. More money would allow the health professionals a wider choice in training opportunities and having some professionals attending every two years could make it easier to schedule replacement coverage.

The Department has made it clear to Members that nurses' salaries in the Northwest Territories are competitive with other Canadian jurisdictions. While this is an important component of any Recruitment and Retention Plan, it has become important to include items such as professional development opportunities, which allow nurses to upgrade their skills and interact with their peers, to ensure retention of valued employees.

The onus is on senior management at the Departmental and Authority level to ensure there is sufficient staff on hand to cover off those nurses who want to take advantage of relevant professional development opportunities.

Members are concerned that the use of contract nurses is contributing to the turnover of nurses in the NWT. Why would a nurse take a permanent position and pay rent and travel costs, when he or she could take a contract position and have rent and removal costs paid for?

Committee Members will be tracking these issues through the next Business Planning cycle.

Homelessness

The Committee supports the new position proposed in the Main Estimate to develop a long-term strategy to deal with the Homelessness issue. This two-year term position is important in coordinating information and programs within the social envelope to ensure a consistent government-wide approach in working with our NGO partners to develop a new long-term strategy.

In recognition of the fact that NGOs are, and probably will be, doing most of the program delivery related to homelessness on behalf of the Government, Committee Members expressed concerns that this new position would become a first step in the development of a bureaucracy to work on the homelessness file. Members want to see spending on programs rather than on bureaucracy.

Supplementary Health Benefit Programs

As more and more of their time is spent helping constituents access Supplementary Health Benefits, Committee Members look forward to further briefings and discussions on the redesign of this program.

The issue of third party coverage for the small segment of our population without private healthcare insurance or coverage under the federal Non-Insured Health Benefit program is of concern to Members. As it stands now, the coverage available through the Supplementary Health Benefit program is insufficient to meet basic needs in some circumstances and does not adequately deal with the use of medical escorts. These issues must be addressed in any program redesign.

Some of the complaints that MLAs have heard through constituents deal with the problems they have experienced in trying to determine the level of benefits they are entitled to. Members have heard of decisions taking up to five weeks. This is unacceptable in this time of instant communications and clearly points to the need to establish concise program eligibility guidelines for staff to follow as part of any program redesign. Program delivery staff must be sensitive and diligent in helping clients access the benefits to which they are entitled.

Members also look forward to reviewing the criteria for the inclusion or exclusion of any disease or condition under the Supplementary Health Benefit Program. How we determine and apply any such criteria can have a profound effect on the well being of a family with a loved one suffering from a chronic condition or disease.

As previously stated, Members look forward to further discussions with the Minister in the spring.

Medical Travel and Stanton Territorial Hospital

Committee Members are pleased that Stanton will be taking a central, coordinating role in determining which patients require primary care in Alberta. The Department's own consultants have estimated that during one sample year, anywhere from 1,000 to 1,800 bed days were paid for in Alberta for patients who could have been treated at Stanton.

We are paying to staff a hospital to operate at or near capacity. It makes no sense to send patients from Inuvik directly to Edmonton, when the bed space, required, specialists and level of nursing care are readily available at Stanton.

Except in the most extreme life-threatening conditions, sending all patients to Stanton for advanced diagnosis and treatment makes good economic sense.

Members see a need to involve the specialists and other medical professionals to determine whether the capacity and skill set exist at Stanton Territorial Hospital to deal with referred patients' medical conditions

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)

Members are concerned that the issue of FASD may not have the profile within the Government's Business Plans and Main Estimates that its devastating effects on the North demand.

There is good work going on in this Department. It is actively involved with the Pacific Northwest Partnership in establishing best practices and centres of excellence for research. Social workers and frontline health care workers provide treatment and programs to northerners who may be suffering from the effects of FASD as part of our continuum of care.

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment provides funding and support to the Authorities to help all northerners, including those who may suffer from FASD, to get the most out of their educational opportunities. Early Childhood Development programs can also do a lot to mitigate the long-term consequences of FASD.

The Department of Justice has done groundbreaking work in dealing with cognitively impaired inmates.

A significant portion of our budget is spent dealing with the long-term effects of alcohol abuse as it relates to FASD. Educational programs are raising awareness, and expectant mothers are much less likely to drink than they were just twenty years ago.

Members have taken this concern to their counterparts on the Accountability and Oversight Committee, and there is general support for increasing the profile of FASD in the next Business Planning cycle.

Territorial Dementia Facility and Long-Term Care Facilities

Recent statistical population projections for the Northwest Territories have indicated a doubling in the number of seniors by the year 2018. The Department has acknowledged this will mean an increase in the number of northerners requiring long-term care in facilities like the Joe Greenland Centre in Aklavik, or placement in a dedicated dementia facility.

The Yellowknife Association of Concerned Citizens for Seniors (YACCS) has done an excellent job in preparing the business case showing the need for a territorial dementia facility as well as doing some preliminary design work. The Members of the Standing Committee appreciate the work of these dedicated volunteers, and all other people who volunteer at long-term care facilities across the NWT, in addressing the needs of elders.

Members look forward to reviewing the results of the facility review currently underway and note that there may be an opportunity to use some of the new federal funding to address the infrastructure requirements of our long-term care program, including the building of a dedicated dementia facility in the NWT.

Respite Care

As part of any plan to deal with the issue of long-term care in the NWT, Committee Members see a need to develop respite programs for those caregivers who decide to look after their loved ones at home.

There is a clear need for medical and non-medical respite care. If we cannot offer respite programs, there is a significant possibility that we will end up with these people in our long-term care facilities as the caregivers burn out. For Committee Members it is a simple matter of pay now – or pay more later.

The Committee would be interested in the results of the pilot project on respite care that ended in 2004.

There is an opportunity to ramp up a respite care program in the NWT to respond to the needs of our aging population, as well as dealing with the immediate needs of other northern caregivers who may require respite relief.

Committee Members will be looking for evidence of such an approach in the next Business Planning cycle.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, CULTURE AND EMPLOYMENT

Introduction

The Standing Committee on Social Programs met with the Minister and his officials on January 17, 2005 to review the Draft Main Estimates for the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. The Committee made note of \$245,003,000 in spending related to operations and \$18,190,000 to be spent on capital projects.

Major changes since the last year's Main Estimates are related to the transfer of funding for social housing subsidies from the NWT Housing Corporation in the amount of \$30,950,000 and \$610,000 related to the transfer of Labour programs from the Department of Justice.

A wide-ranging discussion was held on a number of issues, which are summarized in this report.

Reform to Income Security Programs

One of the major government initiatives underway in this Assembly is the Reform of Income Security Programs. As it stands right now, there are 17 income security programs, administered by seven separate departments who use four different delivery systems. It is obvious that there needs to be a rationalization of these programs and delivery systems to ensure fairness, equity and ease of access for those people who require income security programs.

This process is just beginning, and as such the Committee is reluctant to comment until such time as the Department has had time to formulate a course of action. Comments on the work accomplished thus far and suggestions on possible future directions have been forwarded to the Minister under separate cover.

The Committee looks forward to working with the Minister over the life of this Assembly to overhaul income security programs and delivery mechanisms to ensure these programs meet the needs of northerners and are delivered in a fair and equitable manner.

Youth Employment, Apprenticeship and Training on the Job Programs

Members of the Committee are disappointed that the Youth Employment Program, which provided subsidies to employers to hire young people to give them work experience, has been reduced by \$480,000 over what was available

in 2004-2005. This means there is only \$300,000 left to subsidize employers willing to give youth work experience.

In light of the fact that the Northwest Territories economy is outperforming every other jurisdiction in Canada, the Committee is forced to admit there is not as much as a need for a targeted program designed to give young people their first job experiences. However, there is a hidden cost to eliminating the Youth Employment Program in that Aboriginal Organizations and Community Government will lose access to this source of funding to hire people to deliver programming and services.

This is where Committee's concerns lay and where discussion during the Main Estimates Review on whether or not to reinstate full funding to the Youth Employment Program will focus.

Members were pleased to see that the Training on the Job (TOJ) and Apprenticeship Training on the Job (ATOJ) were both spared cuts though this latest round of government belt-tightening. It should be noted that these two programs are different in that they actually ensure that a person has marketable skills in a trade or occupation upon completion of a training program. This program provides a subsidy to employers to hire trainees or apprenticeships and recognizes there is a cost to training skilled employees.

With the increased need for trades people and other skilled employees as a result of increased activity in the non-renewable resource sector, Committee cannot condone or support the erosion of training programs for northerners that can lead to long-term meaningful employment.

Committee was pleased to note that an additional \$480,000 was added to the Apprenticeship Training on the Job Program as a result of our discussion with the Minister.

The Northwest Territories has the best apprenticeship program in Canada, from both the employers' and apprentices' perspectives. The Standing Committee is pleased that this statement will remain true for 2005-2006.

Social Worker Program at Aurora College

Members of the Standing Committee are concerned with the difficulties Aurora College has had in attracting students to the Social Workers Program. There seems to be a lack of understanding as to the root cause of the lack of uptake by students.

There were only six applicants for the first year of the Social Work program last year, despite Aurora College heavily advertising the program prior to the start of

the 2004-2005 academic year. It makes no economic sense to run a program with only six students.

The Committee recommends that the Department of Education, Culture and Employment and Aurora College must, in conjunction with the Department of Health and Social Services and the Territorial Association of Social Workers, be more proactive in trying to figure out why the Social Worker program is not operating at capacity.

The need and ability of the Health and Social Services system to hire all graduates clearly exists. We need to address the problem and move on.

Student Residence at Aurora College in Inuvik

The Committee has been made aware of the need for a dedicated singles' student residence in Inuvik. The current model of modified townhouses in the "Blueberry Patch", with locks on the individual bedroom doors, is not acceptable as a long-term solution.

Members of the Committee have been told of students who have dropped out of school because of problems with the roommates with whom they were put in the Blueberry Patch Townhouses, or because of the lack of available singles' housing in Inuvik.

The situation for singles accommodations, or for any accommodations for that matter, will only get worse in Inuvik as pipeline development and oil and gas exploration continues.

The Committee endorses single student housing for the Inuvik college campus and would be interested in examining the business case outlining the need and costs of such a facility.

Student Success Centres at Aurora College Campuses

As part of the targeted cost-reduction exercise, Aurora College was expected to bear its share of the cuts. The decision was made by the College to eliminate the funding associated with the Student Success Centres at each of the three campuses of Aurora College. The college believed this cut would have the least impact on the programs and services that the College offers.

The Members see the need for the Student Success Centres as the support they offer students can mean the difference between success and failure.

Considering the College's total budget of approximately \$25,000,000 and the reduction of \$150,000 that will be achieved by closing the centres, Members see no reason that other cost efficiencies could not be realized over the course of the year that will allow the College to continue funding the Student Success Centres.

Aurora College is strongly encouraged to fund the Student Success Centres from within their existing expropriation.

Volume of Income Support Cases in Yellowknife

The majority of MLAs' time working on constituency issues is spent in helping people access programs like income support. Members have heard of delays in accessing income support in Yellowknife because of the workload in the Yellowknife Income Support Office.

In discussions with the Minister, it became apparent that it was not a matter of an increased number of persons applying for income support but rather a matter of the complexity of the cases of the persons applying for income support.

The more complex the case, the more time an Income Support Worker must spend in dealing with the file. This makes sense to Members, given Yellowknife's tendency to be a magnet community for NWT residents with health or social problems.

The Yellowknife Income Support Office is presently conducting a review of its operations, and the Standing Committee would appreciate being made aware of its findings and recommendations prior to consideration of the Business Plans in September of 2005.

Aurora College Lease at the Northern United Place in Yellowknife

With the lease set to expire in August of 2007, there is a need to determine the adequacy of the Northern United Place as the home of Aurora College in Yellowknife. The Department is presently reviewing its options and will have a report on Aurora College operations in Yellowknife ready in the spring of 2005.

Members of the Committee would appreciate being briefed on this report when it is available.

The Committee also believes that it is time to examine the role of Aurora College in Northern society and hopes that the strategic planning exercise that is underway will take this into consideration.

Committee Members look forward to further discussions on future directions of the Aurora College.

Teacher Education Program (TEP) Hiring

Members of the Committee have heard complaints from constituents who have graduated from the TEP program or from the University of Saskatchewan and have been unable to secure meaningful employment as teachers upon their return to the Northwest Territories.

Committee Members are aware that some Education Authorities refuse to consider hiring any graduates from the TEP program, and that other school boards have hired southern students straight out of university over graduates of the TEP program and the University of Saskatchewan.

This raises questions of whether there is a bias against graduates of our TEP program and whether the program is adequate.

Members understand that Education Authorities and Boards have some measure of autonomy in deciding which teachers they should hire but strongly believe that this "autonomy" must be tempered by adherence to their funding partner's policies and procedures.

The Standing Committee on Social Programs would welcome further information from graduates of the Teacher Education Program on their successes and failures in getting a teaching position.

The Committee will also be following up with the Department and the District and Local Education Authorities, including the Yellowknife Boards, to try to determine whether there are any systemic barriers to hiring the graduates of the Teacher Education Program to teach and to hopefully find some sort of resolution.

We strongly encourage all Education Authorities in the NWT to hire graduates of the TEP program to ensure that northerners are teaching northerners and to reduce teacher turnover.

Métis and the University College Entrance Program (UCEP)

Members of the Standing Committee remain concerned that Métis are not eligible for funding under this program. It is understood by the Committee that this is a federal program administered by the GNWT on their behalf and that it is the federal government that determines the eligibility requirements.

The Committee agrees that returning the program to the federal government is not a viable option, as it is doubtful that the program would continue without the

GNWT's participation. At least in its present form, some Treaty beneficiaries have access and can benefit from the program. It should be noted that the present funding is insufficient to meet the demand from qualified applicants.

Métis rights have been recognized in the Northwest Territories, and the Federal Government has also acknowledged their rights. What the federal government seems reluctant to do is acknowledge that Métis people should be eligible for the same or similar programs as Treaty Indians.

The Premier and all Government Ministers are encouraged to raise this issue with all of their federal counterparts to ensure that Métis aboriginal rights are enhanced rather than ignored.

Student Financial Assistance Remission Rates

The Standing Committee on Social Programs noted that the Department has shown a steady increase in the amount of money booked for Student Loans that are forgiven.

This is a good news story as it means more northerners are returning or choosing to stay in the north once they have completed their post-secondary studies.

The Committee will be watching to see if the Department's projections bear out.

Full-time Kindergarten in the Northwest Territories

There is more and more evidence that children enrolled in quality early childhood education programs do better in their future schooling. Those Education Authorities that have decided to fund full-time kindergarten out of their existing appropriation, have shown marked improvement in their student's academic performance in future years.

The Committee supports this approach and believes it would be a strategic investment on the part of this government to fund Educational Authorities to deliver full-time kindergarten.

The Minister also supports this approach and is directing work on developing programming standards for a full-time kindergarten program.

Members look forward to reviewing the new goals and expectations that would be attached to a full-time kindergarten program and hope to see it included in the 2006-2007 Business Plan.

Western Arctic Leadership Program (WALP)

Members were pleased to note that WALP survived the cost-cutting exercise. The majority of Committee Members believe the program provides a valuable outlet for promising students to reach beyond the opportunities available to them through grade extensions in our smaller communities.

It is important to note that the Department of Education, Culture and Employment is not responsible for the delivery or operation of the Western Arctic Leadership Program. In fact, it is run by an independent society, based in Fort Smith, and operates a supervised residence for students attending P> W. Kaeser School. There are several other Departments and private industry partners that provide funding or services in kind to ensure the continued viability of the program.

The Committee will continue to advocate for the Western Arctic Leadership Program's core funding from the Department of Education, Culture and Employment to remain the same but notes it has little influence on the decisions made by other Departments and industry partners.

Daycare in the Northwest Territories

Every community in the Northwest Territories has issues with the quality, quantity or availability of daycare. In smaller communities, there is need for daycare programs that will allow parents to take advantage of resource development employment opportunities. Single parents cannot contemplate taking a job if there is no quality daycare available they can trust.

The fly-in / fly-out nature of some employment and shift work has created a need for 24-hour daycare in some of our larger centres. The level of pay that can be offered to childcare workers and early childhood educational specialists often pales when compared to the money that is being paid in other sectors of our economy. Consequently, the retention of quality staff is an issue affecting the viability of many daycare centres across the NWT.

Members understand that there is an internal review of our daycare programming in the Northwest Territories presently underway. This is important given the developments on the Federal front, and Members look forward to being kept apprised of the results of the review.

There has been much made in recent weeks of the increased Federal funding that will be available for daycares in 2005-2006. When \$5 billion over five years is spread out over an entire country, the likelihood the Northwest Territories will receive enough funding to meet our immediate daycare needs is unlikely if it is based on any per-capita formula.

The Minister is strongly encouraged to work with his Northern counterparts and the Minister from Prince Edward Island to ensure there is base funding on top of any per-capita formula. This is the only way any Federal funding will make a difference in any of the smaller Canadian jurisdictions.

Labour Standards Board and Enforcement

As part of the 15th Assembly's vision for the future, the issue of a standalone Department of Labour was examined.

At this time, the Committee agrees with the Government's assessment there is insufficient authority and activity to justify the formation of a stand-alone Department.

However, the Members did support the transfer of the Labour Standards Board and Enforcement functions from the Department of Justice to the Department of Education, Culture and Employment as a good interim step. It is important to note that no other Canadian jurisdiction had placed responsibility for Labour in the Department of Justice. Moving departments does remove any perceived conflict in which the Department of Justice could find itself.

Infrastructure Replacement

The Committee made note of this Government's aggressive plan to replace or renovate aging infrastructure within the NWT. The Department has targeted those schools that have outlived their usefulness. There is little choice but to make these crucial investments in replacing these aging schools now.

Over the next three years, this Department alone will spend some \$80 million on capital investment for schools in Tulita, Inuvik, Fort Good Hope, Gameti, Yellowknife and Ndilo. This level of investment is exceeded only by the Department of Transportation's plan to invest \$140 million.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Introduction

The Standing Committee on Social Programs met with the Minister and his officials on January 18, 2005 to review the Main Estimates for the Department of Justice.

The Committee noted expenditures of \$79,803,000 for Operations expenses and \$1,780,000 to be spent on Capital Projects, of which \$1,092,000 is to be spent on preliminary work on a new standalone Courthouse for Yellowknife.

A wide-ranging discussion on a number of issues, including proposed employee layoffs and shutdowns of facilities and services took place. The Committee has the following comments on the 2005-2006 Main Estimates.

NWT Courts Building in Yellowknife

During the review of the Business Plans in September, the Committee was advised that the Department was looking at a partnership and leaseback arrangement with the Workers' Compensation Board of the NWT and Nunavut on a shared building.

This was presented to Committee in the form of an information item and was provided to let Committee know there would be a substantial increase in operations expense related to future years lease costs. The estimate was approximately \$43,000,000 over the lease period.

Since September, and the City's refusal to consider the Gerry Murphy Arena site as a potential location, the Department and the WCB have been unable to find a location that met the needs of both organizations.

The Department has now proposed to build a \$41,000,000 stand-alone NWT Law Courts building on the NWT Capital Site between the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre and the Legislative Assembly.

All of the information provided to Committee to date has indicated that having the Government of the NWT build and pay for the NWT Law Courts Building is the cheapest option that is available. The Department has stated it will cost more to renovate the existing facility and the functionality and ability to expand in the future also call into question whether renovating is a viable option.

There will be considerable backlash in the rest of the Northwest Territories to the construction of a new NWT Law Courts Building in Yellowknife. This is understandable, particularly in light of recent announcements of closures in Hay River.

The Committee has the same reservations as other NWT residents but are forced to look beyond the sentiment of "just another big building for Yellowknife" or "there are people without houses - how can we even consider building a new \$41,000,000 Courthouse?"

The Department has proposed to spend \$1,092,000 on preliminary work related to the construction of a NWT Law Courts Building in Yellowknife in 2005-2006. The decision to build the Courthouse is an unpalatable one for many northerners. These people will be looking for more information on the reasons we need a new courthouse and information on the costing exercise that has led the Government to conclude that building their own standalone NWT Courts Building is the best option. Information will also have to be provided on the scope, size and facilities that will be included in a new standalone courthouse.

The Committee wants to see the Department come up with a solid communication plan on the need for a new courthouse so that interested members of the public have access to the relevant information on which the Government is basing its decisions.

This issue has been referred to the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight for their input.

Court Registries in Hay River and Inuvik

The Standing Committee, upon reexamination of the information presented during the Business Planning process, and in examining information provided to Committee as a result of the public uproar over the planned closures, recommended that both Registries remain open.

The major reason that Committee decided to recommend the Inuvik and Hay River Registries remain open has to do with administration of justice in the Regions.

In the case of Hay River, it makes no sense to have a resident Territorial Court Judge without the necessary support staff to make sure she can function effectively.

In the case of Inuvik, the closure of the Court Registry would eliminate the chance of a resident Territorial Court Judge ever being appointed there. The Committee strongly recommends that the judicial vacancy on the Territorial Court be filled with the understanding and contractual requirement that the new Judge will reside in Inuvik.

Members could not accept the argument that it was difficult to staff the positions in Inuvik as a reason to close the registry and delete the positions. We do not delete nurse or social worker positions we cannot fill, so why would we delete court registry positions?

The Committee cannot argue that it would be cheaper to consolidate all justice activities in Yellowknife. Members are prepared to accept that, in some cases, there is a cost to getting justice closer to the people.

Members of the Committee worked to ensure that the Court Registries in Hay River and Inuvik were not closed. There is a concern that the construction of a new Courts facility in Yellowknife, one that would be overbuilt to meet future requirements, would mean that the Department would consider proposing consolidating Court Registries in Yellowknife again. The Standing Committee on Social Programs would oppose any such move.

RCMP Staffing and Resource Development

The Committee remains concerned the Department of Justice has not prioritized the need for forward planning to meet the resource requirements of the RCMP to deal with the impact of resource development and the construction of the pipeline in the Mackenzie Valley.

Members of the Committee who attended the December 2004 Community Preparedness Workshop in Inuvik noted that even the proponents of the Mackenzie Gas Pipeline acknowledged the need for greater policing in the affected communities.

Committee Members will be looking for evidence of forward planning in cooperation with the RCMP in the 2006-2009 Business Plan review next Fall.

Human Resource Practices and Morale - North Slave Correctional Centre

From all feedback to date, the Members note that the situation at the North Slave Correctional Centre appears to be improving.

The Report on the Human Resource Practices at the Centre clearly showed there was disconnect between senior management and staff. The recommendations and actions to date are steps in the right direction, and the Department is to be commended for accepting and acting on the Report.

Committee looks forward to a further briefing on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Report this spring.

Remand Unit at the South Mackenzie Correctional Centre

Committee has difficulty accepting the Department's rationale and anticipated cost-savings associated with the closure of the remand unit at the South Mackenzie Correctional Centre.

Members could not reconcile how the shifting of the responsibility for remand prisoners to the RCMP Cells in Hay River would result in any significant cost-savings. The RCMP will have to expend resources to guard and transport remand prisoners. Just because this expense will be hidden within the larger overall contribution made to the RCMP to provide Law Enforcement Services to the residents of the Northwest Territories does not mean we will not be on the hook for the expense. It just means the expense will no longer show on the GNWT's books.

Another area of concern for Committee Members was the issue of how much time would the handling of remand prisoners take away from the RCMP's ability to provide community patrol services in the South Slave.

In cases where the RCMP plane was not available to transport prisoners to court dates in Yellowknife, an RCMP officer would have to escort a prisoner on a commercial flight. Is taking RCMP officers out of the community a progressive step considering the considerable investment this Department has made in increasing the number of RCMP in Hay River? Committee Members also see a need for an increased police presence in Hay River once pipeline construction begins and have trouble supporting any actions that could possibly reduce their presence in the community.

The majority of Members of the Standing Committee on Social Programs, with the concurrence of their counterparts on the Accountability and Oversight Committee, recommended to the Department during the Main Estimates review, that the funding for the operation of the Remand Unit at the South Mackenzie Correctional Centre in the amount of \$400,000 be reinstated.

The Financial Management Board has refused to reconsider its position and the Remand Unit remains on the chopping block.

Recommendation

The Standing Committee on Social Programs recommends that funding for the Remand Unit at the South Mackenzie Correctional Centre be reinstated in the 2005-2006 Main Estimates for the Department of Justice

Dene Konia Young Offender Facility in Hay River

The Committee regrets the circumstances that have led to the announced closure of the Dene Konia Young Offenders' Facility in Hay River.

Changes in federal legislation have meant a significant decrease in the number of young offenders who receive custodial sentences. We simply cannot justify keeping two male young offender facilities open in the Northwest Territories. Other jurisdictions in Canada have found themselves in the same circumstances and have come to the same conclusion that facilities must be closed.

The usage of the Dene Konia Facility for Young Offenders is over but that does not mean that the facility cannot be used for another purpose. The Committee understands that the Department of Health and Social Services is examining the facility to see if it could be adapted for its purposes. The Committee has also heard of a number of community-driven proposals of what to do with the facility. A community-driven solution for the long-term usage of the Dene Konia facility would be the preferred option for Committee Members.

Committee Members would appreciate being kept informed as proposals to use the Dene Konia facility work their way through the system.

Investment in Community Justice Programs and Facilities in the Regions

Some Members of the Committee have expressed concerns that the cuts to the justice program adversely affect those living in the regions and that any new funding for Community Justice Programs does not go far enough in dealing with the needs of the community.

For the number of people incarcerated in our justice system to decrease, some Members see the need to involve communities more in the administration and application of Justice. Custodial institutions in larger centres are not the preferred model of justice.

Members will be monitoring whether the lay-offs of Regional Community Justice Coordinators have a negative effect on the operations of Community Justice Committees over the next Business Planning Cycle.

Residential Tenancies Act

The *Residential Tenancies Act* is outdated and totally unable to deal with the realities of a rental market in an overheated economy. It is time for the Department to renew this legislation for the benefit of renters and landlords alike.

The Standing Committee understands that the Minister is nearly ready to begin consultation on the need for new legislation and looks forward to further information and timelines prior to the end of the Budget Session.