



Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly

Standing Committee on Social Programs

Report on the Draft Main Estimates Review Process

Chairperson: Mr. Brendan Bell

FEB 26 2003

MR. DAVID KRUTKO
DEPUTY SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Dear Deputy Speaker:

Your Standing Committee on Social Programs has the honour of presenting its Report on the Draft Main Estimates Review Process and commends it to the House.



Brendan Bell, MLA
Chairperson

**MEMBERS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
SOCIAL PROGRAMS**

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MLA Yellowknife South
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MLA North Slave
Deputy Chair

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MLA, Great Slave

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MLA Frame Lake

Jane Groenewegen
MLA Hay River South

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Committee Clerk

Robert Collinson
Committee Researcher

Report on the Draft Main Estimates Review Process

The Standing Committee on Social Programs conducted its review of the draft Main Estimates for the departments of Health and Social Services, Education, Culture and Employment, Justice and the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation between January 14 and January 20, 2003.

As is often the case during these reviews with each of the responsible Ministers and their officials, the Committee made requests for additional information, or sought clarification on items of interest. For information not at hand, the Minister and their officials committed to provide the information to Committee at the earliest possible date.

Very often the Committee's report to the House must include information provided after our meetings in order to be factual, timely and relevant. In most cases the information is provided in a timely manner and the report is completed satisfactorily. The Standing Committee on Social Programs would like to acknowledge the timely manner in which the Department of Health and Social Services and the NWT Housing Corporation provided additional information requested during our review of the Draft Main Estimates this January.

However, there are times when the information is not available prior to the Committee's report to the House for a number of reasons. For example, there are instances where the information may be time sensitive and not available, or it may be difficult to gather and collate. In these cases the Committee proceeds with its report with the understanding that the absence of certain information was unavoidable.

During our review of the draft 2003-2004 Main Estimates the Committee encountered two situations in particular, which had to do with the timely provision of available information, which were very frustrating, and in fact entirely avoidable.

The Department of Justice was only able to provide its additional information on February 12, 2003, two days after the Committee had finalized its report to the House and a full three and a half weeks after our review of the Department. What is even more confounding is that the letter from the Minister was signed on February 7, 2003 – five days before it was received by the Committee. Had this information been delivered promptly, the Committee would have had an opportunity to consider it at our meeting of February 10, 2003, at which time our report to the House was finalized.

With respect to the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, the information was provided to the Committee on February 17, 2003, three days after our report was presented in House, and five weeks after our review of the Department. We were upset to see that the majority of information provided was dated January 17, 2003 and some was even dated as early as May 2002. This certainly indicates that the information was available long before the date it was received.

In making this report to the House, the Standing Committee on Social Programs is hopeful that future reviews are not hampered by poor communication and untimely responses. The government may wish to consider that one may be left with the impression of a department attempting to avoid scrutiny, since all are aware of deadlines and timeframes in this process. While that may not be the case in this circumstance, the timing of responses certainly shows sloppiness in the attention to Committee requests for information.