



15th Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

Standing Committee on Social Programs

Report on the 2006-2007
Pre-Budget Review Process

Chair: Ms. Sandy Lee

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Northwest
Territories

Legislative Assembly
Standing Committee on Governance and Economic Development

February 3, 2006

SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Speaker:

Your Standing Committee on Social Programs is pleased to provide its Report on the 2006-2007 Pre-Budget Review Process and commends it to the House.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sandy Lee".

Sandy Lee, MLA
Chairperson

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL PROGRAMS

REPORT ON THE 2006-2007 PRE-BUDGET REVIEW PROCESS

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNANCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**REPORT ON THE 2006-2007
PRE-BUDGET REVIEW PROCESS**

NWT HOUSING CORPORATION

Introduction

Members of the Standing Committee on Social Programs, as Members of the Accountability and Oversight Committee, were involved in the new pre-budget consultation process with the people of the Northwest Territories in late August of 2005. Hearings were held north and south of the Lake, and gave ordinary northerners and non-governmental organizations the opportunity to provide input to MLAs on the priorities that the budget should focus on.

The Committee then met with the Minister and his officials on Wednesday, September 21, 2005 to review the Draft Business Plan of the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation.

Members also received a briefing from the Minister of Finance on January 17, 2006 outlining the changes to the budget of the NWT Housing Corporation since the Committee reviewed the Business Plan in September.

Committee noted the total operating budget for the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation for 2006-2007 is planned at \$122,486,000 million. Of this total amount, the Corporation proposes \$85,658,000 million in revenues or non-cash items, and a GNWT contribution of \$36,828,000 million.

The following outlines Committee Members' issues from their review of the 2006-2007 Draft Main Estimates for the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation and the new budget-planning cycle.

Pre-Budget Consultations

The one consistent concern heard in all communities, was the need for more housing. The majority of presenters felt that if we could reduce overcrowding and provide suitable and affordable housing in the communities, many of the pervading social problems that exist would be relieved.

The Standing Committee has heard this concern and will be working with our Cabinet Colleagues to formulate a plan to address the long-term housing and attendant social problems in the North during the final two years of our Assembly.

New Mandate and Structure for the Delivery of Housing in the NWT

Much of the discussion at the Committee level over the budget planning cycle has focused on the need for a new mandate and structure for the NWT Housing Corporation.

With the transfer of responsibility for existing social housing to the Department of Education, Culture and Employment there is an opportunity to revitalize housing programs to meet the housing needs of all northerners.

Over the next year, the Committee will be working with its Cabinet colleagues to come to a consensus on the how government can best address the housing shortage in the NWT.

Once roles have been defined, work can begin on developing a government-wide business plan that will secure community and aboriginal governments' cooperation in developing the building lots our communities require to build the houses that we need.

Focus for Capital Spending

During the pre-budget consultations we heard many stories of people living in housing units that lack adequate water and sanitary systems and heating sources.

Many of these units were built for people who have subsequently aged and are now having trouble in keeping up with the chores that a house with minimum services demands.

During the Review of the Business Plans in September, the Committee made a recommendation that the Housing Corporation focus on those units that lack adequate water and sanitation systems and heating sources. The Corporation has agreed with this recommendation.

Renewable Energy Sources

During the Review of the Business Plans in September, the Committee made a recommendation that the Housing Corporation incorporate the option of installing woodstoves in all housing packages sold to northerners. The Corporation has agreed with this recommendation.

Federal Funding for Social Housing and Non-Market Communities

Much of the money for new social housing and housing in non-market communities is predicated on the Federal Government providing a significant portion of the required funding.

With the recent change in government at the federal level, it is unclear when, or even if, the funding for northern aboriginal housing contained in the Kelowna Agreement or the Novel Housing Proposal will come to the Territories.

Members of the Committee are concerned with the plans of the Corporation should the potential federal funding for these new initiatives not materialize. There does not appear to be any plan on the part of this government to address the housing needs of northerners within the context of our present financial reality.

The Committee is not saying we abandon pushing the Federal Government for more funding to take advantage of the Novel Housing Proposal and to address the shortage of housing in many of our smaller communities – but we, as a government and territory, should be prepared to react to our housing crisis on our own.

The Committee looks forward to further information on the economic viability of the Novel Housing Proposal and other options on financing much-needed housing in our communities.

For now, the NWT Housing Corporation needs to focus on what it can do today, not what it may be able to do five years from now if the Federal Government comes up the money.

Policy Issue – One House in a Lifetime

Many of the first clients of the NWT Housing Corporation's programs are now senior citizens. They no longer require the three or four-bedroom houses they had built for their young families. However, these people now find themselves unable to access any of the services of the Corporation, because of the One House in a Lifetime Policy.

The Committee is of the opinion that the Corporation would be able to free up houses for the private market if it were to provide smaller housing packages/construction services or possible bridge financing for those elders who no longer require such a large home, but still wish to live in their own stand-alone house.

Committee will be pursuing this with the Minister Responsible for the NWT Housing Corporation.

NWTHC and School Trades Programming

The Standing Committee on Social Programs is pleased with the support that the Corporation has been providing to school trades programming.

Exposing young adults to the trades and letting them work on real-world applications is the only way that they would be able to make intelligent career choices that take into account the opportunities in the trades.

Members are concerned that in providing housing packages to the schools, the Housing Corporation has thus far concentrated on larger communities. The Committee is not saying this is the fault of the Housing Corporation and suspect that it is more a result of the Corporation taking advantage of the opportunities that are presented to them.

However, the Committee would like to see the Housing Corporation, in cooperation with the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, make a concentrated effort to expand into smaller communities and work on developing partnerships with industry and other levels of Government.

Land Issues

Should the Corporation be successful in securing federal financing under the Aboriginal Housing Initiative and for the Novel Housing project, they will be faced with the problem of a lack of suitable, developed land in virtually every community in the Northwest Territories.

Our discussions indicate that the Corporation is alive to this issue, but Members were concerned that there was no specific mention in the Business Plan narrative about the need to cooperate with other Departments and levels of government.

When the Committee looks at the problems the Corporation had and is having in securing land for the 45 units under the Market Housing Initiative, we cannot help but have feelings of trepidation when the Corporation is proposing building or placing 1600 units in the communities over the next ten or so years.

It is very important the Housing Corporation makes sure that communities and governments understand the magnitude, and expectations that will be placed on them, should the Corporation secure federal funding. At minimum this would require concentrated and coordinated partnerships and firm agreements with municipal and Aboriginal governments to be reached before hand.

As previously mentioned, once government roles are defined, we can proceed in developing a business plan to engage our aboriginal and community government partners in developing the building lots we need.

Financial Counselling Services

Members are concerned with financial counseling services being delivered by the District Offices in the smaller communities. The Committee was especially

surprised with the RFP looking for a contractor to develop this program since the Committee's expectation was that the work would be done in-house. Will there be adequate follow-up after the initial meeting to ensure that people stay on track in saving for their first home, or will people be left to sink or swim on their own?

This is the primary concern that the Committee will be looking to be addressed in the program.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

Introduction

Members of the Standing Committee on Social Programs, as Members of the Accountability and Oversight Committee, were involved in the new pre-budget consultation process with the people of the Northwest Territories in late August of 2005. Hearings were held north and south of the Lake, and gave northerners and non-governmental organizations the opportunity to provide input to MLAs on the priorities that the budget should focus on.

The Committee then met with the Minister and his officials on Friday, September 23, 2005 to review the Draft Business Plan of the Department of Health and Social Services.

Members also received a briefing from the Minister of Finance on January 17, 2006 outlining the changes to the budget of the Department of Health and Social Services since the Committee reviewed the Business Plan in September.

Committee Members made note that the Department is proposing to spend \$265,186,000 in Operations Expense and \$9,301,000 on Capital Projects in fiscal year 2006-2007.

Committee Members offer the following comments on issues arising out of the review of the 2006-2007 Draft Main Estimates and budget-planning cycle.

Pre-Budget Consultations

During the community visits, several common themes became apparent to Committee Members. People want to see health services delivered at a local or regional level.

There is a general recognition that existing addiction programs are not close enough to the community and require a holistic approach that involves the addict's family and reintegration into community life.

Many comments were also received on the need to support the non-governmental organizations that deliver health and social programs on behalf of the Department of Health and Social Services, with stable, multi-year funding agreements. It was also noted that government departments build forced-growth funding into their budgets and yet expect NGO's to make do with the same amount of money, and deliver the same level of programming, year after year.

Finally, Committee heard many comments on the need to support front-line workers at the community level. We heard that these workers are doing an excellent job but are hampered in some cases by inadequate funding, large caseloads and micro-management from the department and regional authorities.

Non-Governmental Organization Funding

During the Business Plan Review and following feedback received from the Pre-Budget consultations and other concerned constituents, the Committee recommended that the Department of Health and Social Services issue a directive to the Health and Social Service Authorities on the use and preference for multi-year funding agreements with non-governmental organizations with proven track records.

The Department did not commit to a directive but did commit to advising the Health and Social Services Authorities that they can use multi-year funding arrangements where it is determined such an agreement is in the best interest of the Authority and the service provider. In addition, Minister Miltenberger encouraged NGOs to work with their Health And Social Services Authority to enter into multi-year funding arrangements during the October Session. Whether this will translate into concrete action on the part of the Department and its authorities remains to be seen.

Multi-year funding agreements may be inconvenient for the health and social services authorities to administer and track, however, it is important to remember than the reasons for multi-year funding agreements are to provide financial stability to the non-governmental organizations that deliver services to the residents of the NWT on our behalf.

Within the context of a proper reporting and accountability structure, we should, as a government, be trying to make things as administratively easy for NGOs as possible.

The Committee will be tracking the use of multi-year funding arrangements during the Business Planning Process and will be expecting an increase in the number of such arrangements by September 2006.

Treatment Centres for Troubled Youth

During the Business Plan review the Committee made a recommendation that the Department examine any and all possibilities to increase capacity in the NWT to deal with those children and adolescents with addictions and emotional and mental problems.

This recommendation was made because of the significant amount of money presently spent on southern placements and the infrastructure that is in place in Yellowknife that will be underutilized once the Territorial Treatment Centre is transferred to Hay River in 2007-2008.

The Department's response indicates that, given the amount of money being spent on southern placements for youth addiction and mental health treatments, it is economically viable to deliver these types of services in the NWT. The Department is in the process of examining its options, and although they have not provided Committee with any firm timelines, the Committee will follow up during the review of the 2007-2008 Business Plans in September of 2006.

Rehabilitations Teams

The Standing Committee on Social Programs is very excited about the concept behind the roll out of the Rehabilitation Teams. Getting important services closer to the people they are intended to serve is the hallmark of a responsive healthcare system and responds to many of the concerns that we heard during our pre-budget consultations.

Members strongly encourage the Department to be aggressive in staffing these positions. Recent media reports seem to indicate that audiologists are in high demand and that the NWT's pay scale may no longer be realistic or a sufficient incentive to attract experienced and qualified candidates. The Department, within the context of the collective agreement, will have to look for solutions to this dilemma.

Once the Teams are in place it is expected that wait times for rehabilitation services should be dramatically reduced and that services to children in the school system will improve. It is extremely important that the Rehabilitation Teams establish a close working relationship with schools, educators and child psychologists.

The one area of concern for the Committee was the workload that the Yellowknife-based Team would have in meeting the needs of the residents of the Tlicho, Sahtu and Deh Cho regions. Some Members of the Committee believe there should be regularly scheduled visits to each community within these regions, while others would prefer the workload to determine the service patterns. The Department is encouraged to monitor the workload of all the

Rehabilitation Teams to ensure there is a proper distribution of resources and that extra help is provided to those teams that require it.

Addiction Services

During the community pre-budget consultations it became apparent to Committee Members that there is not a lot of buy-in at the local level for the Mental Health and Addictions Strategy. Anecdotally, Members have been told there is a real disconnect between residents and the primarily southern-hired mental health workers. Many people told Committee that if the Government would give them the money they would be able to deliver addictions programming at the local level for much less than what the Government is currently spending.

Members suspect that the answers and solutions lay somewhere in between the current model and involving communities and regions more directly in the delivery of addiction programming.

Committee also heard that the spectrum of addiction services is failing, not because there is a lack for funding or infrastructure, but because there is a lack of coordination between the Department, Authorities and non-governmental organizations that are delivering addictions programming on behalf of the GNWT.

There is clearly a need for a coordinated approach at the community and regional level between governments and NGOs. The Department is encouraged to take the lead in fostering and maintaining such an approach, and it is hoped that the second Chalmers Report will provide the Department with the strategic direction it needs to improve addictions services at the community level.

Members of the Committee are also concerned that there does not seem to be an adequate focus on addictions in the school curriculum. Many people have told Committee Members that the school system, in concert with parents and the community, has to do a better job of communicating the consequences of alcohol and drug abuse to our children.

Capital Planning and Health Infrastructure in the Smaller Communities

There is concern at the Committee level that there is sometimes a leaning towards protecting government assets, such as health centres, in the larger communities, over ensuring that all NWT Residents have access to the same level of health care at the community level.

It is noted there are several communities without adequate health centres and/or healthcare professionals.

The Committee asks that the Department be cognizant of this fact when determining their capital requirements for upcoming years.

Nurse Practitioners in the Northwest Territories

The Standing Committee would like to commend the Department on their ambitious program to expand the use of Nurse Practitioners throughout the Northwest Territories.

Increased Funding for Dialysis and Cancer Treatments

The Committee supports the repatriation of patients to the Northwest Territories from southern facilities and the provision of dialysis at a local or regional level wherever a sound business-case can be made for offering such services.

Aboriginal Wellness Program at Stanton Territorial Hospital

The Committee supports the Department and Stanton in taking these first proactive steps in incorporating aboriginal traditional healing, values and beliefs into the healthcare system.

It is hoped that the physical component of this commitment will be seen once the Committee has an opportunity to review the Stanton Master Plan.

Members would like to reiterate that they believe the Community Health Representatives (CHRs) have an important role to play in the success of an Aboriginal Wellness Program, and the Department and Stanton are encouraged to tap into this valuable human resource.

Dementia Facility and Other Territorial Long-Term Care Facilities

Members support the building of a dedicated territorial dementia facility in Yellowknife as well as renovations to long-term care facilities in the communities. The Committee believes it is important to keep patients in long-term care as close as possible to their families for as long as possible.

Funding for Foster Care

Over the last number of years there has been a marked increase in the number of children being taken into care and placed in foster homes. Increased uptake has meant an increase in required funding to deliver the program.

It is noted that this budget proposes to spend an additional \$469,000 on foster care placements in 2006-2007. The Committee is concerned this amount will not be enough and that more work needs to be done in addressing the root causes of why children are taken into care and placed in the foster care system.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, CULTURE AND EMPLOYMENT

Introduction

Members of the Standing Committee on Social Programs, as Members of the Accountability and Oversight Committee, were involved in the new pre-budget consultation process with the people of the Northwest Territories in late August of 2005. Hearings were held north and south of the Lake and gave northerners and non-governmental organizations the opportunity to provide input to MLAs on the priorities that the budget should focus on.

The Committee then met with the Minister and his officials on Monday, September 26, 2005 to review the Draft Business Plan of the Department of Health and Social Services.

Members also received a briefing from the Minister of Finance on January 17, 2006 outlining the changes to the budget of the Department of Education, Culture and Employment since the Committee reviewed the Business Plan in September.

Committee Members made note that the Department is proposing to spend \$259,205,000 in Operations Expense and \$29,972,000 on Capital Projects in fiscal year 2006-2007.

Committee Members offer the following comments on issues arising out of the review of the 2006-2007 Draft Main Estimates and budget-planning cycle.

Pre-Budget Consultations

During the pre-budget consultations, Committee Members took note of the following issues that were mentioned in a majority of the communities we visited: Early Childhood or Daycare programs, Special Needs Funding for students in Kindergarten to Grade 12, funding for literacy programs aimed at youth who are not in school and, finally, under post-secondary education, the need to increase Student Financial Assistance for tuition and living expenses and increase the number of NWT Residents in apprenticeships.

These issues will be commented on later in this report.

Aboriginal Languages

The Committee found the discussion during the Business Plan Review surrounding the revitalization of aboriginal languages to be very interesting. The possibility of the Federal Government creating a central agency for the revitalization of aboriginal languages is also of concern to the Committee.

Members agree with the Department's position that it is important to maintain a government-to-government relationship on funding for aboriginal languages. Being lumped in under a central agency could impact on the amount of funding available for each language group, as territorial aboriginal language groups would be outnumbered by larger southern First Nations.

The Standing Committee also supports the renegotiation of the languages agreement with the Federal Government and the linkage of Aboriginal Languages and French Language under one agreement.

Early Childhood Development (Daycare)

The Committee had supported the Minister in negotiating base funding in addition to any per capita funding that might flow out of a federal Early Childhood Development Framework Agreement.

However, with the recent change in government, and the uncertainty of federal funding to improve regulated daycare in the NWT, it may be necessary to shift focus on our current early childhood programming.

As Committee Members heard during our pre-budget consultation process, residents are very concerned with the state of Early Childhood programs in the NWT. The lack of suitable infrastructure in smaller communities coupled with unstable funding and a piecemeal approach to programming is meaning that children are not getting the head start they should, and parents are being forced to use caregivers that may not be able to provide for their children's intellectual stimulation.

Committee Members are of the opinion that the current programming related to daycare in the Northwest Territories is geared towards larger communities that have the necessary volunteers and infrastructure to get a daycare off of the ground.

The Committee is aware there is extra funding available for smaller communities to get daycare programs up and running but are, nonetheless, of the opinion that this extra funding does not go far enough in addressing the infrastructure needs and shortfalls at the community level. Committee would like to see the Department bring forward a plan to improve and revitalize the current program. The Committee is also very interested in seeing the outcome of the review of the

daycare program being undertaken by Alternatives North and would encourage the Department to participate in the review process.

It is realized we do not have the funding to deal with the infrastructure needs of a universal daycare program in the Northwest Territories regardless of the amount of funding secured from the Federal Government in the future.

Subsequent to the Review of the Business Plan, the Committee did ask that the Department consider dedicating one of the Early Childhood Development positions to assisting communities/daycare operators in finding suitable, long-term daycare facilities in communities. Constituents have told Committee Members that the Daycare Consultants seem to place a greater emphasis on the regulation of existing daycare operators than on helping new operations get started or helping existing operations to survive and prosper. It was thought by the Committee that reprofiling one of the positions to help new operators could be a positive step in increasing the number of licensed daycare spaces in the Northwest Territories.

The Department's response to this request was that the four Regional Early Childhood Education Specialists were expected to offer this kind of assistance as part of their regular duties and that any new position or reprofiling would be redundant. Residents are encouraged to utilize the regional early childhood education specialists in setting up regulated daycares in their communities.

Members would be very interested in discussing any new ideas or initiatives that could address these issues during the review of income security programs and in the next Business Planning cycle.

Funding for Student Support Services (Special Needs Funding)

During the pre-budget consultations we heard from parents and the NWT Teacher's Federation on the need to increase funding for special needs students, and, in particular, for disabled students who require one-on-one assistance to function in a classroom.

The Committee notes the Department will be increasing funding for student support services to 20% from 15% of the base funding over the next three school years, starting with an increase to 17% in this budget at a cost of \$1,764,000.

The Committee is in support of this increased funding for Student Support Services and of the strict enforcement of the Ministerial Directive on the usage of the funding for the purposes for which it was intended and voted on by the Assembly. Members will be looking for evidence that this funding increase will make a difference in the lives of children who need special supports to succeed.

Members were also pleased to see a mechanism for the involvement of parents in determining the required supports for their children is being developed. Members have spent too much time in the past helping parents access services for their child that should have been provided by the School as a matter of course. It is hoped that the increase to 20% of Base Funding for Student Support Services will result in more children be supported to reach their full potential.

It was also noted that the new Health and Social Services Rehabilitation Teams will be an important component of a revitalization of the Student Support Services available in our schools. It is important that there be close linkages and cooperation between educational and health care professionals. The Committee will be looking for evidence of such cooperation once the Rehabilitation Teams are staffed and up and running.

Pupil/Teacher Ratios

One of the significant accomplishments of the 14th Assembly was the reduction of the Pupil to Teacher Ratio (PTR). During the pre-budget consultation we heard from parents and the NWT Teacher's Association on the need to reduce the PTR even further so that we can ensure that each student gets the individual attention and courses that they require to succeed in school.

With all of the opportunities that come with resource development, there is a clear need to expand the exposure of students (particularly at the high school level) to the trades.

Many schools in the NWT lack dedicated Physical Education Teachers and, in the context of the Healthy Living Strategy, this needs to be addressed.

The Standing Committee will be looking for evidence of a focus on the trades and physical education during the next business planning cycle.

Adult Training and Development and Aurora College

There were concerns expressed about the lack of a Career Counselor in the Tlicho region. Members understand that the area is currently served by the North Slave Career Centre in Yellowknife and that Counselors travel to the region on an infrequent basis.

Given the fact that the Tlicho region has been accorded regional status, by virtue of the land claim and self-government agreement, and the successes that Tlicho residents have achieved in post-secondary education, the Committee is of the opinion that it would be appropriate to staff a career counselor position in the Region. This does not necessarily have to be a new position - a position could be staffed through attrition at the North Slave Career Centre. The Department

has agreed to examine this request in the 2007-2010 Business Planning exercise.

Members would also appreciate the opportunity to review and offer comment on the Aurora College Corporate Plan that is currently under development. The College is very important to the future of all northerners, and Members are anxiously awaiting the results of the College's consultation and the formulation of a Corporate Plan.

Income Security Programs

The Standing Committee on Social Programs supports the increases to the Student Financial Assistance Program. Students have been hit hard by tuition increases in the last number of years and our program has not kept pace. The planned increase will allow students to spend more of the money they receive for living expenses on just that, instead of tuition costs.

It is important to note that the \$573,000 increase to the Student Financial Assistance budget will only mean a maximum of \$1925 per semester for tuition and \$400 for books. Current tuition and fee costs per semester at the University of Alberta range between \$2,647.86 for a simple undergraduate program to \$9,340.46 for the Dentistry program. While we continue to have the best Student Financial Assistance Program in the country, it is clear that we do not cover all costs for tuition and books. These increases will mean that students will have an extra \$325.00 in their pockets each semester.

The Committee also supports increasing the Senior Citizens' Supplementary Benefit to \$160.00 per month from \$135.00. Seniors, for the most part, are on fixed incomes, those who rely on the Canada Pension Plan for the bulk of their income are hard pressed to make ends meet in the supercharged economy that is the Northwest Territories today and this increased support is a welcome measure.

Members have also noted that there is a gap that hard-to-house people seem to fall into between the programs that are offered through the NWT Housing Corporation and the Local Housing Authorities and the programs administered by Income Support. Members are aware of people living in substandard, private accommodations paid for by Income Support because they are no longer eligible for Social Housing for one reason or another.

It is hoped with the combining of these two programs under one authority that problems with hard-to-house people can be addressed.

Full-Time Kindergarten

The Committee is pleased to see the inclusion of funding in the amount of \$1,638,000 to deliver funded full-time kindergarten programming in the Northwest Territories.

Many District Education Authorities have already begun offering full-time kindergarten programs and have shown excellent results in preparing a child to learn and succeed in school. It was time to ensure that all kindergarten students in the NWT were afforded the same opportunity to develop the skills to learn.

The Committee provided strong support to the Minister to advance this initiative by helping to ensure that the necessary legislative amendments to the *Education Act* were passed and by making our colleagues aware of the importance, and successes, of full-time kindergarten programs.

The Minister and Department are to be commended in securing the funding to provide full-time kindergarten programming. It is hoped that we will see marked improvements in graduation rates and attendance in years to come.

Funding for Students over the Age of 21 Attending High School

The Standing Committee was made aware of the cuts to funding students over the age of 21 attending high school during the review of the Business Plans in September. At the time, it seemed reasonable to provide sufficient funding to a student for three additional years to complete their graduation requirements, and the Committee had no serious concerns with the proposed cut at that time.

Subsequent to the review of the Business Plan, the Committee held a public hearing on Bills and other matters in the community of Bechoko and heard concerns expressed on the ending of funding for students attending high school over the age of 21 and the efficiency of Adult Basic Education Courses being offered through Aurora College. We heard of parents and grandparents, who have decided to go back to high school at the same time as their children or grandchildren, who have ended up being positive role models, and by their attendance alone, a calming influence on all the children, resulting in a more positive learning environment.

The Committee now believes it erred in not objecting to the proposed cut to funding for students over the age of 21 who chose to attend high school. The fact is, as a government, we would be expending funding on some of these students to attend Adult Basic Education. So does it really matter which pot of funding pays for their education? It's the results that count.

The Committee will be pursuing further discussions with the Minister and affected communities and looking for ways to strike a compromise.

Capital Plan

The Committee is aware that the results of next summer's piling inspections may require either increased funding or a reprofiling or delay of existing capital projects that are in the Infrastructure Acquisition Plan. The first priority for this government and the Department must always be the safety of our children in our schools.

The Committee would appreciate being kept advised of the results of the piling inspections as they come in.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Introduction

Members of the Standing Committee on Social Programs as Members of the Accountability and Oversight Committee were involved in the new pre-budget consultation process with the people of the Northwest Territories in late August of 2005. Hearings were held north and south of the Lake and gave ordinary northerners and non-governmental organizations the opportunity to provide input to MLAs on the priorities that the budget should focus on.

The Committee then met with the Minister and his officials on Monday, September 22, 2005 to review the Draft Business Plan of the Department of Justice.

Members also received a briefing from the Minister of Finance on January 19, 2006 outlining the changes to the budget of the Department of Justice since the Committee reviewed the Business Plan in September.

The Committee noted expenditures of \$83,800,000 for Operations Expense and \$4,029,000 to be spent on Capital Projects.

Committee Members offer the following comments on issues arising out of the review of the 2006-2007 Draft Main Estimates and budget-planning cycle.

Pre-Budget Consultations

During the pre-budget consultations, Committee Members took note of the following issues that were mentioned in a majority of the communities we visited: more support for local Justice Committees; resources for on-the-land programs for people who have committed less serious crimes, especially youth at risk and

young offenders; the need for offenders to reconnect with traditional values; the need for training and education for offenders to make them more employable, and increased RCMP resources in smaller communities.

These issues will be commented on later in this report.

Community Justice Committees

During the Pre-Budget Consultations in the communities we heard that more funding should be directed to the local Justice Committees.

During the Business Plan Review in September the Standing Committee on Social Programs was concerned that funding to Community Justice Committees was not keeping pace with their increased workload. The Standing Committee recommended \$50,000 in base funding for each Justice Committee.

Currently the Department of Justice is reviewing how they can revitalize Community Justice Committees. One area they are looking at is their funding structure. The Standing Committee will be looking forward to reviewing the 2007-2010 Business Plans and seeing increased funding for Community Justice Committees and programs.

Policing in Smaller Communities

The Standing Committee on Social Programs is concerned over the \$200,000 reduction in the Police Services Agreement. During the last Budget Session the Committee supported the increase of \$1,489,000 to the Police Services Agreement. Now part of the increase the Committee supported last year is being removed as part of a budget-cutting exercise.

During the Business Plan Review in September the Committee supported the Minister making it a priority to increase police presence in communities without detachments. The Minister of Justice has since informed the Committee that a joint RCMP/Department strategic planning group has been formed, and one of their first priorities is to increase the police presence in smaller communities.

The Committee is concerned that the proposed \$200,000 reduction in the overall Police Services Agreement may make it difficult for the RCMP to increase police presence in communities where there is already minimal police presence, such as Sachs Harbour and Colville Lake.

The Committee finds it difficult to see how the enhancement of police service through more frequent patrols, longer stays, and the support of crime prevention initiatives can be accomplished, when the department is proposing a \$200,000 reduction. As a result the Committee does not support this reduction.

RCMP Orientation Program

During the Business Plan Review in September the Committee was concerned that some RCMP officers have not been able to integrate well into the community where they have been stationed.

The Committee is interested to see progress of the RCMP Orientation program and will be provided with information on the new RCMP orientation program from the Minister of Justice as it becomes available.

Family Law and Legal Aid Files

During the Business Plan Review the Committee had concerns regarding lawyers not taking on family law or legal aid cases in the NWT. In general, there are difficulties in attracting lawyers to the NWT, and attracting lawyers to take on family law matters is of particular concern. The Minister's staff explained that making mediation a prerequisite before using the court system is one alternative to decrease the backlog of family law cases.

Since the Business Plan Review in September, the Department has started a pilot family law mediation program in Yellowknife and Hay River that will run until the end of this fiscal year.

The Committee will be provided with information from that pilot project when available.

The Committee is also very interested to see possible initiatives to recruit more lawyers to the NWT in the 2007-2010 Business Plans.

Wilderness Camps

The Committee was concerned about the substantial reduction of \$425,000 to Youth Wilderness Camp funding.

The justification given by the Department for the cut is the lack of youth receiving custodial sentences, and as a result, there has been minimal use of the Youth Wilderness Camp program. The Committee is concerned that once this funding is cut out of the program, it will be difficult to reinstate this funding.

The Committee is also concerned that minimal use of the Youth Wilderness Camp program is a result of poor program delivery and/or design. The Committee understands the potential benefits of the Youth Wilderness Camp program and recommends that a program redesign may prove better than cutting out \$425,000 from the program.

The Committee would like to see the Department develop new models for the Youth Wilderness Camp program similar to the review the Department is currently completing on the Wilderness Camp program for adult offenders and provide Committee an opportunity for input.

Outdoor Recreation Area for North Slave Correctional Centre

During the Business Plan Reviews in September the Committee was left with the impression that the Outdoor Recreation Area was going to be built as an arena.

However, the Department has clarified that it “has no intention to build a new arena for the North Slave Correctional Centre.” Rather, “the Department has proposed an outdoor recreation area in the capital plan to provide a fenced area for inmate outdoor activity and programs such as healing circles, similar to the grounds of the old Yellowknife Correctional Centre.”

It should be noted that there was an outdoor arena on the grounds of the old Yellowknife Correctional Centre. Given the close proximity of the North Slave Correctional Centre to the new Yellowknife Multiplex arena, the Committee is concerned that an outdoor arena may not be the best use of government funding.

