

13th Assembly

Standing Committee on Social Programs

REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE 1996-97 MAIN ESTIMATES

Tommy Enuaraq, M.L.A.,
Chair

May 3, 1996

THE HONOURABLE SAM GARGAN, M.L.A.
SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Speaker,

Your Standing Committee on Social Programs has the honour of presenting its Report on the Review of the 1996-97 Main Estimates, and commends it to the House.



Tommy Enuaraq, M.L.A.
Chair



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

Tommy Enuaraq
M.L.A. Baffin Central
Chair

Michael Miltenberger
M.L.A. Thebacha
Deputy Chair

Roy Erasmus
M.L.A. Yellowknife North

John Ningark
M.L.A. Natilikmiot

Floyd Roland
M.L.A. Inuvik

Alternate Members

Levi Barnabas
M.L.A. High Arctic

Jane Groenewegen
M.L.A. Hay River

James Rabesca
M.L.A. North Slave

Staff Members

David Inch
Committee Clerk

Lynn Elkin
Committee Researcher

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL PROGRAMS

REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE 1996-97 MAIN ESTIMATES

GENERAL COMMENTS

The Standing Committee on Social Programs' work is intended to support and complement the efforts of the Ministers. The approach taken by the Social Envelope Ministers was consistent with the consensus style government we have and the efforts of Caucus members to work together to address the difficult financial situation we are in. Although the process of reviewing business plans is new, Standing Committee members feel the meetings were very productive. The business plan review process has been very successful with most departments as an avenue to exchange ideas and identify areas where the Assembly needs to focus extra attention and resources. The process provides a forum where the departmental expertise and the Members' background and community knowledge can be mutually respected and shared.

Across the government, all departments and committees are trying to find ways to deal with the difficult financial situation. The social program departments account for almost 60% of the government's budgets with the largest expenditures being in the areas of Education, Health and Social Services. While the Standing Committee members are committed to dealing with the deficit as quickly as possible, they recognize the drastic impact on NWT residents which would result if all of the cuts to the social programs were to take place in a single year. Therefore, the Standing Committee supports spreading the social program reductions over a two year period. This provides time for changes to social programs to take place in a planned way, with the help of new approaches and transitional programming.

As a caucus, members of the Legislative Assembly set priorities to guide their work. Among these priorities were community wellness and empowerment of communities. During discussions of each department's business plans, the Standing Committee looked for reductions and program innovation that are consistent with these priorities.

The Standing Committee on Social Programs believes that community wellness is crucial to the health and well-being of the people of the NWT. The community wellness strategy's success will also be key to this government's attempts to control its financial situation. The social area and social programs are responsible for a large percentage of the forced growth impacting on our funding.

The Standing Committee wants the government to take swift and clear action to implement a community wellness strategy, consolidate community resources, and empower communities to make decisions and develop programs which will have a positive impact on community residents.

The Standing Committee has asked the government to provide us with a strategic outline before summer. The outline should address how the concept and theory of community wellness will be implemented across the NWT. There are a number of areas which the Standing Committee would like to see specifically addressed in the strategy including community wellness centres, community committees, community justice, and income reform.

The initial plans the government provided for developing the Community Wellness Framework are very encouraging. The Standing Committee believes that this is the key to dealing with the range of social problems impacting northerners. The Standing Committee looks forward to the plans being provided on June 1, 1996 and intends to play an active role in ensuring that this framework becomes a reality.

In the community wellness strategy and as part of many of the initiatives the departments proposed, the Standing Committee expects there will be pilot projects required in different program areas (income reform, community wellness centres, community justice). While members recognize that different communities are at differing stages of readiness to take on programs, the social envelope should ensure that there is a fair and equitable sharing of pilot project opportunities between all communities.

In most regions, there are a number of boards and departments delivering services in the social program area. Many of these boards and departments have their own administrative staff, performing similar tasks. There is a strong potential to reduce resources or free up valuable funding for front-line programs and staff. This would require Boards and departments to work cooperatively in identifying potential for economies of scale by combining resources. The Standing Committee hopes to see this area addressed as departments and regions identify new ways of doing business.

The largest Board structures supported by the Government are in Health and Education. The Standing Committee thinks that the Board members are best placed to determine the needs of the communities in the region. The Boards are also the most appropriate level to determine program modifications or changes which will meet these needs while addressing financial realities. The Standing Committee has encouraged the departments to provide general direction that allows Boards and other regional management to determine what will work for the region or community.

It is the Standing Committee's opinion that gone is the day when this government can afford to wait for communities to come forward and ask to participate in the delivery of a service or program. The government must aggressively pursue opportunities to empower communities and have control of program delivery at the community level. At the same time, we must make sure communities are ready and able to assume these responsibilities. A number of the new initiatives in the social envelope are directed at supporting communities to take over more programs. The government must work with communities to prepare them to ensure community driven programs are successfully implemented.

ADMINISTRATIVE AND OTHER ISSUES

The Standing Committee recognizes that the 1996/97 business plan process took place under severe time constraints. These timing problems were the result of the date of the territorial election in relation to the government's fiscal year. The Standing Committee knows departments worked long hours to provide the business plans and appreciate the efforts of the many staff involved. However, in the future when the process returns to a normal budget cycle, the Standing Committee would like to have documents provided farther in advance. Receiving material just prior to meetings does not allow members to adequately review the work prepared by departments.

The Standing Committee has noted that some of the Social Program departments such as Health and Social Services offer scholarships. These scholarships encourage northerners to pursue post-secondary schooling. The Standing Committee would like to see some consistency in the eligibility criteria for these scholarships. For example, government funded scholarships should be aimed at northerners (possible minimum five years residency). One of the conditions of the scholarship should be a return to the north to work applying the knowledge. If the person did not return, the scholarship should be considered a loan and fully repayable.

EDUCATION, CULTURE AND EMPLOYMENT

The Standing Committee recognizes that implementing all of the department's proposed reductions in a single year would have a significant impact on the education system. Members also acknowledge the complications that arise from the difference between the government's fiscal year and the education boards and colleges' financial year. However, members are concerned that next year there may be additional reductions necessary. Spreading cuts over an extended period may mean reductions on top of prior year reductions. While the Standing Committee supports investing in people to reduce their dependence on social assistance, members believe that investment must be within the limitations of our financial situation.

At this time, the Standing Committee reluctantly accepts the department's three year phase-in plan for the reductions to schools, colleges and income reform. However, the Standing Committee expects the Minister to be aggressive in encouraging changes which may allow the 1997/98 business plans and budgets to reflect a shorter implementation period for these reductions.

The Standing Committee agrees with the Minister that we need a new and more innovative approach to income reform. As program reductions are made, there must be corresponding changes which open the boundaries of the program and blend it with other resources at the community level. There seem to be many pools of funding which should be brought together so they can be used more effectively in the community. The Standing Committee asked the Minister to consider a variety of options under income reform, including work for pay to provide much needed services in the community. The Standing Committee is not proposing regular 9 to 5 work but suggests people could assist with jobs that need to be done such as assisting elders or helping with snow removal. Standing Committee members believe strongly that people need the opportunity to contribute to their community and to have pride in work done rather than just receive a handout from the government. There also needs to be consideration of creating an income support system which encourages individuals to try to earn as much of their own way as possible rather than penalizing people. The Standing Committee also believes that income reform should include a review of those other programs which impact on its effectiveness. In particular, the Standing Committee is concerned about the relationship between income support and the rent scale for social housing. The Minister has committed to bringing forward a potential model for income reform to the Standing Committee by June 1, 1996. The Standing Committee looks forward to reviewing the model.

The Standing Committee feels the student services process needs to be improved and service provided closer to the community level where possible. There should also be closer contact with social assistance to ensure people are receiving support from the appropriate program. The department is currently reviewing the Student Financial Assistance program. The Standing Committee looks forward to the results of this review.

The Standing Committee believes that offering the first two years of an Education degree through the Teacher Education Program has been very valuable. However it is often difficult for those mature students who have completed the two year program to leave the north to complete their degrees. The Standing Committee encourages the government to offer the 3rd year of a B.Ed and begin work to offer 4th year as well.

The department is currently reviewing how it provides language services. The Standing Committee has concerns with the way services are provided by the Language Bureau and looks forward to reviewing the results of this review.

The Standing Committee thinks school and education boards should determine for themselves how to meet the budget targets. The Standing Committee requested that the department provide general guidelines to the boards which would include suggestions to:

- reduce administration before programs;
- pursue other avenues for reducing costs by combining resources with other boards in the region;
- exhaust all other possible areas for reductions before cuts are considered in the formula areas Territorial Schools, Inclusive Schooling and Aboriginal Languages and Cultural Programs.

With fewer dollars and an ever-increasing number of students, space in schools will continue to be a concern for the government. In the past, the department reviewed the need for classroom space on a school by school basis. However, in order to make more efficient use of our limited resources, the department is now approaching the need for space from a community-wide perspective. The Standing Committee is very supportive of this approach. If a community has one school which is under-utilized and another which is over-utilized, the Standing Committee agrees that better ways of sharing the space available should be the solution rather than new schools.

The Standing Committee reviewed the new initiatives the department proposed. Members believe that these initiatives are examples of the philosophy of investing now for greater rewards (and possible savings) later. The Standing Committee supports this philosophy and therefore supports the proposed new initiatives.

One of the new initiatives, Alternative Government Structures, caused the Standing Committee some concern. When the Standing Committee recommended that boards and departments need to explore options for combined administrations and other efficiencies at the community and regional level, it was assumed this would be driven from the local level. In discussing the initiative, the department indicated that they were going to phase this in and try to develop a model which might work. The Standing Committee believes that the solutions may be different in every region. Members would like to see this initiative take place in one year rather than spread over two or more years.

NWT HOUSING CORPORATION

During the review of the Main Estimates, the Minister alerted the Standing Committee to a potential reduction in Federal government funding for housing. The Standing Committee encourages the Minister to continue his efforts to work with the Federal Minister of Housing to minimize the reductions necessary. As well, members will be looking for ongoing briefings from the Minister on this situation and on possible options if some or all of the reductions cannot be averted.

When the NWT Housing Corporation first appeared before the Standing Committee in January, members felt there were additional areas which could be considered for reductions or as new ways of doing business in the Housing Corporation. Suggestions were made in the first review of the business plan. These recommendations were all accepted by the Corporation. The Standing Committee appreciates the corporation's work to address our suggestions.

After reviewing the NWT Housing Corporation's mandate and organization, the Standing Committee believes the Corporation may need to be restructured. Members are pleased to see that the Minister will report to the Standing Committee on this area by June.

In the Standing Committee's January report on the business plans, there was an error. The Standing Committee had only intended to request that the corporation provide options for restructuring and/or dismantling the corporation by June 1, 1996. The Standing Committee is pleased to see that this is the kind of plan the corporation will bring forward.

The Standing Committee expressed concern over reductions in areas where cost-shared Federal dollars would be lost. The Corporation has been asked to identify other options to reducing cost-shared funds.

One of the Housing Corporation's major costs is paying utilities. The corporation indicated that this was not an area where there had been much success in reducing client use. The Standing Committee believes more can and should be done to reduce this controllable expense. In response, the corporation has agreed to work with Local Housing Organizations and the Department of Education, Culture and Employment to try to address utilities expenditures.

The corporation has indicated it can deliver the same number of housing units as in the previous year for a lower cost. The Standing Committee supports the capital amount the Corporation requested and encourages the corporation to continue to find ways to deliver more units for the same cost through new programs.

The upcoming housing needs study was discussed by the Standing Committee. Members feel the survey should capture housing needs as opposed to people's wants. As well, the needs survey should capture income information which would be useful in planning for home ownership potential as well as in assessing the viability of the proposed Mortgage Investment Corporation.

The Standing Committee was concerned with the level of detail provided by the corporation. In the future, the Standing Committee would like to receive the corporate plan in advance if this is to replace the business plan. As well, the Standing Committee would like to have budget information to the division/department levels as well as position breakdowns by region.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

The concept of community wellness has been well promoted during the past year. The Standing Committee strongly believes that community wellness is the right approach to addressing the myriad of social problems in our communities. However, the Standing Committee would now like to see action. The Standing Committee would like the government to move quickly and aggressively on making community wellness a reality, not just a theory. The Department of Health and Social Services is clearly the lead on this.

The Standing Committee supports the idea of community wellness centres as a gathering place for resources. This would accomplish three important objectives. First, it would make it easier for residents to access services since they would be located in the same place. Second, it would provide a natural support group for the front-line workers. These workers (nurses, CSSWs, teachers, alcohol and drug workers) currently often work in isolation, which increases the risk and rate of burnout. Finally, community wellness centres would facilitate sharing ideas and resources and would make it easier for a community to focus the limited resources where that community needs them most. The Standing Committee hopes to see these centres included in the community wellness framework.

Within the past decade, the department created a number of regional specialist positions. These are in areas such as family violence specialist, child sexual abuse specialist, and alcohol and drug specialist. While the idea was to provide these services closer to the communities, these specialists are still distant from the day to day problems. The Standing Committee looks forward to additional information on potential new direction in this area as part of the wellness framework.

The department proposed a very ambitious slate of reductions and program changes. A number of these reductions are interrelated and will require a planned approach, particularly in the areas of repatriation of clients in southern institutions/foster care, alcohol and drug treatment and medical travel.

The department proposed a number of initiatives which have a direct or indirect impact on foster parents. In most communities, there is a limited supply of foster parents. Some of the proposals from the department indicate a need not only for more foster parents but for foster parents who will need specialized training. The department plans to develop the foster care base to repatriate clients in southern institutions. The Standing Committee supports the repatriation efforts of the department. There must be a clear plan outlining how this will be accomplished and how competent trained foster families or other placements will be located for

these children. The Standing Committee also encourages the department to limit short term referrals to southern institutions.

The misuse of alcohol and drugs is directly related to the other social problems the NWT faces, from sexual abuse and other violent crimes to rates of STDs to absentee problems. The Standing Committee wants to see a new approach to alcohol and drug treatment which is more consistent with community wellness.

Given the very large expenditures for medical travel, the Standing Committee is pleased to see a number of initiatives within the department to try to get these costs under control.

The Standing Committee is also satisfied with the new approach to funding for Non-Government Organizations. This approach seemed to be consistent with the principle of community empowerment/community wellness and supporting local organizations.

The department has committed to a number of reduction initiatives with very tight timeframes. The Standing Committee is concerned about the potential for slippage in the deadlines required to achieve the reductions identified. With the current financial situation facing this government, departments must achieve the reductions they have proposed in the business plans and budget. The Standing Committee will be watching the progress of this department, along with the other departments in the social envelope, in meeting the budget targets. In part, this will be done through a review of the quarterly variance reports.

JUSTICE

Standing Committee members feel there is a significant difference between community wellness and community corrections approaches. Building more facilities, whether they are in large centres or in each community is not consistent with addressing the root of the problem. It is time for a different approach - one which will allow the communities to identify other options which will have more impact on the offenders and be more effective in reducing crime.

The Standing Committee would like the department to provide a plan for tying community justice into the overall community wellness strategy. This plan should include concrete implementation options and details of how the department will identify the funding. It should also address the failure of the current system of corrections and how community justice/community corrections will change this. If the Minister believes the community correctional facilities are a necessary part of community justice, they should be specifically addressed in the plan. The Standing Committee would like this plan no later than June 1, 1996 since this is clearly a component of an overall community wellness strategy. In the areas of community corrections, the department is encouraged to become more aggressive about what can happen in each community and to work with the other departments in the Social Envelope on blending resources to meet community needs.

The Standing Committee recognizes that there are statutory obligations to provide legal aid. However, there are opportunities to do business in a different way. As a way of supporting the legal aid system and reducing the costs, the Standing Committee recommends that the Minister explore an increased role for northern court workers and legal aid lawyers in assisting more of their clients. It may also be appropriate to consider giving legal aid clients the choice of which lawyer to use.

The Standing Committee agrees with the Minister that the members of any community have the right to personal safety. Currently the majority of NWT policing needs are met through the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). Members are concerned with the potential closure of the smallest detachments.

The Standing Committee strongly believes that there is much more that can be done to develop policing resources within the communities. The Standing Committee encourages efforts to train local residents either as tribal police, community constables or working in other ways with the RCMP. The Standing Committee would like to see this initiative tied in with income reform and presented in the model coming to the Standing Committee by June 1, 1996. Training people to take on more responsibility for the safety of the community will provide greater security for local residents, will provide additional backup for one and two member RCMP

detachments, and will create opportunities for residents to be productive members of the community. The Standing Committee also suggests the department contact band offices and tribal councils, many of whom have already done work on the potential for developing local policing.

The Standing Committee recommends that the department attempt to have firearms registration and safety courses done at the community level as much as possible, for example through the band or hamlet office. This would minimize the inconvenience to gun owners.

The Standing Committee supports maintaining a strong coroner's program. The coroner's program is consistent with community wellness and individuals contributing to the community in which they live.

During the business plan review process, there was considerable discussion about the possible need to close a correctional facility in order to meet the budget targets. The Standing Committee was very concerned about closing a facility. The Minister has committed to working closely with the Standing Committee to identifying alternate ways to meet the department's budget.

WITNESSES ¹

Department of Health and Social Services

Hon. Kelvin Ng, Minister
Mr. Ken Lovely, Deputy Minister
Mr. Dave Ramsden, Deputy Minister
Mr. Don Ellis, Assistant Deputy Minister
Mr. Warren St. Germaine, Director of Financial & Management Services

Department of Education, Culture and Employment

Hon. Charles Dent, Minister
Mr. Eric Colbourne, Acting Deputy Minister
Mr. Conrad Pilon, Assistant Deputy Minister
Mr. Mark Cleveland, Assistant Deputy Minister
Mr. Paul Devitt, Director of Financial & Management Services
Mrs. Gail Joyce, Director of Policy & Planning

Department of Justice

Hon. Stephen Kakfwi, Minister
Hon. Ng, Minister
Mr. Don Cooper, Deputy Minister
Ms. Nora Sanders, Acting Deputy Minister
Ms. Louise Dundas Matthews, Director of Financial & Management Services
Mr. Gerry Sutton, Policy & Planning

NWT Housing Corporation

Hon. Kelvin Ng, Minister
Hon. Goo Arlooktoo, Minister
Penny Ballantyne, President
Joe Handley, President
Dave Murray, Vice-President
Jim Nelson, Vice-President

¹ Please note that a Cabinet and Senior Management shuffle took place during the Committee's review.

