

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

INCOME ASSISTANCE POLICIES

March 3, 2016

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I call Members' attention to the CBC North story of January 11, 2016, titled, "Woman says she was forced to evict two of her kids to keep her rental home." The story details the tragic experiences of a low-income mother. Income support refused to pay her rental allowance for the month because of overcrowding. In order to keep her place, she had to evict a teenage daughter and a son in his early 20s. The mother of nine children was finally able to rent a two-bedroom home in December with support from Education, Culture, and Employment (ECE) and the family was set to be reunited. But wait a minute, come January when staff learned she was sharing a two bedroom home with her three children, Income Assistance told her it could not support overcrowding. They said two of her children would have to go, or no more financial support. To give at least two or three children a room to themselves, she started sleeping on the couch in the living room. Not good enough. Two bedrooms means two people and two kids have to go.

As this mother so accurately put it in the CBC story, "They don't support overcrowding, so in other words, they're promoting homelessness. To avoid losing her home, she faced what she called her worst nightmare. In January, her 22-year-old son began sleeping at the Side Door, a youth homeless shelter, while her 16-year-old daughter was now crashing on a relative's couch. Income Assistance approved her rental assistance the day after these family evictions. The mom is now left to worry about her children's safety. The story contains an email reply from ECE to reporter questions which says, "For the safety of NWT residents, in situations where income assistance clients are living in an overcrowded residence, ECE works with clients, other departments, NGOs, and landlords to address the situation." There doesn't seem to have been, however, much flexibility or common sense in this case. The story of these experiences raises a lot of questions. In the broader sense, we know there isn't near enough housing to accommodate our citizens, so it's a choice between overcrowding and homelessness. You just can't escape the numbers. I'll have questions for the Minister at the appropriate time. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.