

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

CHANGES TO INCOME ASSISTANCE REGULATIONS

October 18, 2016

MS GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in August of this year changes came into effect for the Income Assistance Regulations administered by the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. The department changed the amount of both the food and the clothing allowances available to low-income families. Mr. Speaker, the Department refers to the number of people in a household as “units”. Until the end of July a household included each member in the family counted as a unit for the purpose of food and clothing calculations.

At the beginning of August the new Regulations counted only adults and mature children as units, and left children under 18 out. Take the example of a single-parent family living in Yellowknife with one child; only the parent now qualifies for the food and clothing allowance. That means the amount of money the family as a whole receives from Income Assistance has gone down. The amount of money the parent gets for food has been reduced by \$137 a month and for clothing, \$37 a month. In this booklet of exemplars provided by ECE, living in Tulita a single parent with two children over six and one under six, her food allowance has gone from \$1,286 to \$643. For two parents and three children living in Fort Providence, their food allowance has gone from \$1,006 to \$744. I'll table this document so that Members may see additional detail.

So, no matter the example, the end result is the same, the family is getting less money for food and clothing because income assistance doesn't count children anymore. Mr. Speaker, how are low-income families supposed to get by? Why does the department think children are fed and clothed at no cost? Families have to turn to the federal government for help. Families with income under \$80,000 are eligible for the federal government's Child Tax Benefit, paid on a sliding scale. Coincidentally, the federal tax benefit came into effect in July, just a month before the changes to the income assistance regulations. The Minister had made much of the fact that the federal benefit would not be clawed back as income. In reality, the GNWT has offloaded the responsibility for feeding and clothing children onto the federal government.

So what, you may ask? Well, first almost a quarter of NWT children live in poverty, 22 per cent. The Canada Child Tax Benefit is supposed to alleviate poverty for these children and low income families, but NWT families on income assistance are being short-changed. The federal government has given with one hand, and the GNWT has taken away with the other. Poor families are the ones out of pocket. I will have questions. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.