

## ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

### QUESTION 346-18(2): CHANGES TO INCOME ASSISTANCE REGULATIONS

October 18, 2016

**MS. GREEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are about income assistance, and in order to avoid the kind of misunderstanding that I had with the Minister yesterday, I just want to start by asking a preliminary question: is the Minister up-to-date with the changes that have taken place in the income assistance regulations? Mahsi.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Masi. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

**HON. ALFRED MOSES:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we are up-to-date, in fact, we're actually looking at making changes to our -- further changes to our NWT Income Assistance Act to include the NWT child benefit. So, in reality, from the federal government's introduction of the new Canada Child Benefit and the changes that we initially made, we're going to go one step further and make changes to the Income Tax Act and not include the NWT child benefits, so now families with low income to moderate income will start to receive more dollars in their pockets. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MS. GREEN:** Mr. Speaker, I'd like the Minister to answer this question: why did your department change its income assistance regulations and stop funding food and clothing allowances for children under 18?

**HON. ALFRED MOSES:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The introduction of a new Canada child benefit prompted all provinces and territories to look at their respective social programs. As a territory, what we did was we looked at our social programs, and the outcome was that we wanted to make sure that all income that was intended for children went to the children. So what we did, we made some of those changes. Some of those changes included the introduction of the community cost adjustment. Some of those calculations were based on net family income, as well as the number of children that are in the household and the age of those children. As a result, more families are receiving more money.

We've got to look throughout the Northwest Territories. Each family is unique. They're in different situations. You've got to look at our economy. Some families, some family members might be working, some might not be. So, as we went through the community cost adjustments and looking at this formula to address the income assistance, all families got more dollars.

There have been no concerns that have been brought to the office, no concerns from any of the families with the increases. As I mentioned, more dollars into the pockets of families that are low income. As we make changes to the Income Tax Act, we're going to see even more dollars into these families for low income to moderate income. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MS. GREEN:** Mr. Speaker, my question for the Minister -- and please take this as I'm concerned, and it took a lot of work to get to this point. So I'm not too surprised you haven't heard from people who are on income assistance. My question is: why did your department change its income assistance regulations and stop funding food and clothing allowances for children? So we're talking specifically about NWT income assistance regulations.

**HON. ALFRED MOSES:** As I said, when the federal government introduced the new Canada child benefit dollars and plan, we had to go and make the changes, as well. We came up with some changes like the community cost adjustment, which adjusted a lot of the way we funded families, and we also, one of those things was the food allowance rates for adults and for mature children, at 18.

At the bottom line, Mr. Speaker, is, when we made those adjustments, all the families are getting more money. As I mentioned, we wanted to make sure that everything was going right and smoothly. We did a review of 171 families. Of those 171 families in July, before we introduced the new changes, \$79,000 was being assessed by our government and looked at as income. After the changes were made in September, we looked at it again; \$166,000 was not assessed as income. That went into the pockets of families. We have had no concerns. Now it averages about \$500 per family.

Income assistance, although we did make the changes to assist low income families, families with children, and we've seen increases right across the board, we continue to give high dollars in income assistance and we continue to see that rise. We're projected, for 2015-2016, to give over \$20 million in income assistance to those that need it, throughout the territories.

**MS. GREEN:** Mr. Speaker, the point here is that, had those regulations not been changed, the people on income assistance would have been receiving more money. What the Minister has said is that the Child Tax Benefit is the occasion for reducing those amounts of money. That means that he is making these changes on the backs of the people who most need this money. We're not talking about huge amounts of money here, but it's important to people with low income. I'd like to know whether the Minister will turn back these reductions in income assistance so that children are once again funded for food and clothing.

**HON. ALFRED MOSES:** We went before committee in July. There was no concerns then when we presented this information, the information that was brought forward. As I said, low income families are getting more money. I don't understand, but, if Members and committee wants to have another presentation, we can walk through it.

Each family is going to be different. As we do the formula funding, it's going to be unique to each family in each situation based on the family's age, the age of the children, the number of children in the household. If the Member wants to sit down, we can get one of our staff to sit down and walk through the details of how this is calculated. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.