

**MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE**  
**COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS**  
**November 2, 2016**

**MS. GREEN:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to draw your attention to a study published this year by YWCA Yellowknife titled "Hush Hush No More: Improving NWT Community Response to Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls." It contains some important recommendations about new responses by health providers and communities to sexual violence as well as prevention.

Mr. Speaker, by way of background, this study is based on interviews with women who have experienced sexual assault and service providers from five NWT communities. The study notes that men and boys also experience sexual violence but they were not part of this particular study. The details are depressing. Sexual assault occurs on a continuum from unwanted touching to rape; two-thirds of the female victims are under 24 years old and fewer than 10 per cent report what happened to them to the police. Statistics Canada says these assaults occur in the NWT at nine times the national average.

Mr. Speaker, I want to highlight the need for a better society-wide understanding of consent. Consent is the means to reduce these shocking numbers. Consent means that people freely agree to engage in sexual activity with one another. A person can't consent if he or she is impaired by drugs or alcohol; when there's a physical or psychological threat present; or when there's a difference in their power and authority. It's also possible to consent and then later change your mind. Children under 12 can't consent to sexual activity of any kind, and between the age of 13 and 16 they can consent if their partner is a teenager as well. If consent doesn't fall within those very strict guidelines, then sexual assault is taking place.

Mr. Speaker, the YWCA study highlighted the silence that surrounds this issue. It quotes elders warning younger people not to report assault and not to make trouble. Secrecy has been the norm, in part because of the possible repercussions of reporting these incidents, especially in small communities. As a result, victims often blame themselves for what happened. Sexual assault creates feelings of powerlessness and it's time to turn that around. The report contains 10 recommendations and some of them can be implemented immediately. For example, it's important to engage and support people who have disclosed sexual violence in a non-judgmental way. It's also important for us as parents to talk to our daughters about the danger of sexual assault and how they can keep themselves safe and the need for consent. The government also needs to put a high priority on increasing awareness about consent, and responding effectively to girls and women who report being assaulted.

Mr. Speaker, sexual assault is a chronic problem in the NWT; but the biggest lesson of all is that it's preventable. What stands in our way is talking openly about sexual assault and creating a culture where it is unacceptable. Mahsi.