

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

PROPOSED ELIMINATION OF AURORA COLLEGE SOCIAL WORK PROGRAM

February 20, 2017

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to oppose cutting the social work program at Aurora College. I believe, and my constituents have told me, that eliminating this program is the wrong thing to do for several important reasons.

Mr. Speaker, social workers provide essential services by supporting the well-being of individuals, families, and communities. They work with some of the most vulnerable people in society, including children, youth, and disabled adults. To be effective, social workers must understand the dynamics of the community they work in and develop the respect and trust of residents. Social workers deal with serious life-changing issues every day.

Mr. Speaker, given this background it's easy to understand why it's a benefit to train Northerners in the North to become social workers. In fact, the program description for the Aurora College program says:

"The program is designed to be of particular relevance to the Northwest Territories and its social issues, cultural groups, and delivery systems and resources. The courses and the field practicums are planned to meet the educational needs of students who will be working in the North after the completion of the program."

Providing southern social workers with a cultural introduction to the North, as the Minister has suggested, is no substitute for training homegrown social workers, which was the goal of this program when it began 35 years ago.

Mr. Speaker, we need social workers. The ECE labour market forecast estimates 158 social workers with degrees will be required in the next 15 years, along with 479 social and community service workers with diplomas. These are good-paying jobs, paying an average of \$68,000 a year, the report says.

Mr. Speaker, also consider that most social workers are women. I believe women become social workers because they are drawn to the role of caregiver and they find the job one that they can relate to. Some of the Aurora College students are mothers as well as students. They didn't start college right after high school, but decided to enrol in post-secondary education a little later in their lives. Imagine the decision that a woman or a family must make to move to Yellowknife to access this training; it's a significant upheaval. It's a testament to their determination that many students go through the access program before enrolling in social work. Now ask yourself whether this same woman or family is likely to move to Edmonton or Regina.

There are 17 students in each of the two years of the program, but the number of graduates is much lower. The answer to low completion rates is not to cut these programs, but put supports in place which will help students in their academic journeys. Cutting the programs will cut off access to education to a significant number of Northerners, and that access will have a domino effect. Education, as we all know, is a way out of poverty and into self-determination.

Finally, and I echo what my colleagues have said, I find it incomprehensible that the program is being cut before we see the contents of the new Aurora College strategic plan.

Mr. Speaker, I'm aware the Minister has said it was not his decision to cut the social work program, but the board of Aurora College answers to him. He needs to tell the board to change their minds and reinstate the social work program. I will have questions. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.