

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

MAINTENANCE ENFORCEMENT COLLECTIONS

February 21, 2017

MS. GREEN: Mr. Speaker, the experiences of many single parents -- predominantly women -- who rely upon maintenance enforcement payments are generally not good. Our measures for collecting these vital family supports have improved over time, as have penalties such as lifting the driver's licences of deadbeat debtors. But, as a constituent of mine who is very familiar with these processes has pointed out to me, provisions for collecting and paying garnishees still leave a lot to be desired.

A major failing is that the thinly staffed maintenance enforcement office must track down people owing maintenance payments. Frequently, this means spouses who have fled abusive relationships must monitor the very people they are trying to stay away from. I asked the Minister's office if it would not be possible to require employers to report new hires to maintenance enforcement. I was told this can't be done, owing to privacy laws. Mr. Speaker, I don't accept this. Employers immediately file a TD1 tax form when they hire a new employee so taxes can be collected. If the tax collectors can get their money, so should the spouses owed money for children's food, clothing, and shelter.

Difficulty collecting payments from self-employed persons is another shortcoming. When payments are made under service and supply contracts, there is often no trail for the money to the name of the person. The legislation needs to be reviewed to create increased enforcement powers.

I will give one other example. The Maintenance Orders and Enforcement Act and regulations say an employer must immediately begin collecting garnishees and remit them within 14 days, but they don't cover how employers process their payroll or how to remit payments. Cheques sent by mail can take a long time to arrive. People owing maintenance may change work frequently, so they are always catching up on long time frames. This needs to be improved.

Mr. Speaker, women are the majority of those relying on maintenance enforcement payments. Women are most frequently the partner fleeing domestic violence. In all fairness, we should build a maintenance enforcement system to serve the people who are owed the money. I will have questions for the Minister. Mahsi.