

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

YELLOWKNIFE LIVING WAGE CAMPAIGN

March 7, 2017

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to report today on efforts to introduce a living wage in Yellowknife. The principle guiding this work is that people who work full time should not be living below the poverty line. Eleven Yellowknife organizations with a total of more than 300 employees have now signed with a pledge to pay their employees the living wage.

First, a little background. In 2015, a northern non-profit commissioned an economist to calculate a living wage for Yellowknife. The calculation was based on a 40-hour work week. It included expenses such as food, shelter, transportation, clothing, childcare, and recreation. It does not include paying debts, saving money, helping other family members financially, or owning a pet, among other things. It really is just the basics. The living wage for Yellowknife was calculated for a family of four with two full-time wage earners and two children, one of those children in day care, one in school, as this is the most common family type. The living wage in Yellowknife, Mr. Speaker, is \$20.68 an hour for each full-time worker.

The research and calculation of a living wage are important when you consider that, in 2015, there were 1,700 people in Yellowknife making less than \$20 per hour, with most of that group earning less than \$16 per hour. Contrast this to the territorial minimum wage if \$12.50 per hour and you see how far short the legislated wage falls from the wage needed just to get by.

For low-income earners, a living wage can be a permanent solution to poverty. It relieves families of the stress of meeting basic expenses and dealing with financial emergencies. It also allows families to access social and recreational activities that most of us take for granted.

Workers earning a living wage have more money in their pockets to spend locally. They contribute more to the tax base, and that benefits the entire community. Staff retention and workplace productivity is increased, and recruitment and training costs are reduced for employers. Mr. Speaker, a living wage is truly a win-win situation for business and workers and it represents a systemic solution to poverty.

When you are out and about, look for the blue and white living wage supporter decal that living wage employers have posted in their establishments.

Outreach is continuing to get more businesses and organizations to take the living wage pledge. I salute Alternatives North for leading this work and all the living wage employers present and future.