

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

QUESTION 878-18(2): UPDATE ON SOBERING CENTRE

September 26, 2017

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Health and Social Services. As I pointed out in my statement, since the launch of the Yellowknife street outreach program, there has been a noticeable improvement in conditions downtown, not to mention a reduction in the costly use of both ambulance and hospital services. The city has announced its intention to continue the R.I.D.E. program while the new sobering centre location is renovated and opened. Can the Minister provide us an update on the new sobering centre? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as the Member indicated, we have a long-term solution for the sobering centre here in Yellowknife. The building does have to go through some renovations. On September 25th the Yellowknife City Council actually approved a proposal for the use of the new building for the sobering centre and a day shelter. This proposal allows us to actually continue our planning for the number of renovations that are required on that site. The department and the city are actively working with partners right now to find interim location while renovations are completed. In order to ensure that no opportunities are missed, we are working with the city right now to issue a public appeal for potential space that could accommodate the program in the short term.

MS. GREEN: Of course, I look forward to hearing the results of that call for interest. As I mentioned, the City of Yellowknife has stepped up and put their dollars behind the effort to reduce drunkenness and help people in need. It is worth knowing that analysis shows that the majority of people being served actually come from places other than Yellowknife, so this is truly a pan-territorial problem, and yet it is the Yellowknife ratepayers who are facing the tax hike this year to help pay for these services. My question for the Minister is whether the GNWT will increase its contribution to the operation and delivery of the street outreach program where it is a territorial program.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Mr. Speaker, we are committing significant funds to the operation of a sobering centre here in Yellowknife as well as the day shelter, recognizing that, yes, many of the individuals who are utilizing those programs have moved to Yellowknife from different locations. Yellowknife is the home for many of those people, and many of them have moved from different locations. We are contributing significant dollars, which is now part of our core funding, moving forward.

MS. GREEN: I appreciate the Minister's commitment to the day shelter and sobering centre expenses. I am wondering if he will include, in the next business plan, an increase in the contribution to the operation and delivery of the street outreach program.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Mr. Speaker, we have worked collaboratively with the city

on a number of different initiatives. They have been partners with us throughout this whole process. They have taken on the responsibility of the Safe Ride Program. We have taken on the responsibility of the sobering centre. This is costing us right now about \$1.4 million, to do the sobering centre and day shelter here in Yellowknife. Those funds are, as I have indicated, already core funding. We are not at this point planning to provide additional funds to the city for their Safe Ride Program, but we will continue to provide the location that many of the clients of the Safe Ride Program will go to.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Minister. Of course, the Minister is aware that the sobering centre is a harm reduction facility and a further harm reduction measure is a proposed managed alcohol program, which we have talked about in this House before. Are there any plans to introduce a managed alcohol program now that there is a permanent location for the sobering centre? Mahsi.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Mr. Speaker, many times in this House I have indicated that, once we get a sobering centre up and running, what I have indicated previously is that we will need about a year to get it up, running, make sure the program is running effectively before we actually move forward with the concept of a managed alcohol program. We have not been up and running yet. As soon as we are up and running for a while, we will see how things are going. We will make necessary tweaks to make sure that the programming is effective and efficient. We are definitely open to exploring the possibilities of a managed alcohol program at that time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.