

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES AUDITS

October 4, 2017

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in March of 2015, the Office of the Auditor General released its audit of child and family services in the NWT as set out in the Child and Family Services Act. The auditor found both departmental and regional action on child protection wanting. Let us take a step back and remind ourselves why we are talking about protection services for children. They are, of course, the most vulnerable members of society. While most children are born into families that are able to meet their needs, some are not. Some families are dysfunctional because of addictions, violence, and the legacy of residential schools. It is the well-being of these children government must protect. According to the last annual report on child and family services, there are an average of 1,940 assessments and investigations per year, a number that has risen over time. We are talking, Mr. Speaker, about 2,000 children for whom there are concerns that warrant investigation.

Mr. Speaker, this is a shockingly high number, and the stakes are high too. As the Auditor General said in 2015, "it is critical that the territory have in place a well-functioning child and family services systems, one that provides the required protection and prevention services to children and families in need." As shocking as the numbers are, so are the conclusions. The Auditor General reported that "the Department of Health and Social Services and the regional authorities were not adequately meeting their key responsibility for the protection and well-being of children, youth, and families." Further, there was a lack of accountability, monitoring, and resourcing to make the system work. This situation is the background to the current discussion about compliance audits.

The OAG found that most health authorities had not completed audits most years. The Auditor General described the failure to complete the audits as "significant as they provide the department with information that allows it to monitor whether regional authorities are delivering services in compliance with the act, and more fundamentally, whether children are being protected from harm, abuse and neglect." The Auditor General recommended that the department conduct audits annually, and require health authorities to create plans to address deficiencies. The department agreed with this recommendation.

Mr. Speaker, fast forward to January of this year. The standing committee on social development held a public briefing on child and family services. The Minister told us that the audit results were unavailable because of technology issues. He also said that trying to reproduce the audit would require him to go back and do a significant amount of work which he was unwilling and unprepared to do. What he did do was compile recommendations, and presented them as a letter to the committee. I am assuming that the audits for the 2016-2017 are now complete. I will be seeking assurance from the Minister that he was able to gather all the necessary data to monitor the provision of child and family services and to address any deficiencies the audit revealed. Masi, Mr. Speaker.