

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

QUESTION 932-18(2): CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES AUDITS

October 4, 2017

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Health and Social Services. He appeared at the Standing Committee on Social Development last winter to talk about the 2015-2016 audit of Child and Family Services. He provided as a follow-up, a report on the audit, but not the audit themselves. Why wasn't the audit given to us in the original form? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, audits prepared by the Department of Health and Social Services around Child and Family Services, are never made public or shared with committee as a result of the confidential nature of much of the detail and information contained within. When I met with committee in January 2017 when we discussed the audit, I indicated that although we had put in a new audit process as a result of recommendations from the Auditor General of Canada and as part of our building stronger families, an audit was done that looked at qualitative and quantitative data, and a new tool was developed by the Department of Health and Social Services for this process including a new database.

On reviewing the audit results, or rather the audit report, unfortunately, it became clear that the quantitative data collected was not at all reliable. This was as a result of a number of reasons including the staff were not particularly familiar with the new database that was created, and because the standards were constantly during that year the audit results were done, and they were not linked to consistent standards. It was a problem. It was unfortunate. It was frustrating for both myself and for the Members. I did commit at that time to pulling together a summary of the results that we had at the time, recognizing that the quantitative data was not as reliable as we had hoped for, but there was qualitative information gathered at the same time which did provide some useful insight. We provided a summary to committee. That document once again is not made public as a result of the confidential nature of some of the data within.

I have made a commitment that we are going to provide summary documents to committee in confidence moving forward. In 2016-2017, we have put in a new audit process that has been tested and retested to make sure that it is actually going to give us the data that we need in order to make informed decisions and provide quality reports which will lead to a quality summary that will be shared with Regular Members.

MS. GREEN: Thank you for that answer. What kind of reports, audit reports were shared with regional authorities in the 2015-2016 audit?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Originally, prior to the changes in 2015-2016, the audits were done with regional authorities, were done by a senior auditing team within the department, and were unfortunately conducted kind of on an irregular basis, and I think this is one of the things that the Auditor General rightfully, hammered the Department of Health and Social Services on, that this was not done in a regular way. This was not done regularly. In the past, the individual reports were shared with the authority so that recommendations for improvements within could be made. We want to be able to continue to do those types of things, provide information to regional operations of the new territorial authority so that they can make improvements and

provide high quality child and family services. With our new audit tool, we believe we have a system that will allow us to do both the qualitative and quantitative analysis so that we can continue to make recommendations at a local delivery level for the high quality provision of child and family services, recognizing that today, we are moving in a new direction of child and family services. Building stronger families is the new way of doing business. It is different than it has done before, and we are looking at supporting families rather than apprehending children.

MS. GREEN: There is no question that this is the right direction to go. Apprehending children is the last resort. With respect to the 2015-2016 audit of Child and Family Services, the former CFS advisor, Andy Langford, is quoted as saying, "Taken at face value, our measures of compliance are arguably worse than they were three years ago when the auditor general completed his audit." This is not a comforting result. Could the Minister tell us how the department responded to this observation?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: This goes to the fact that we have put in a new system for actually collecting data, and we have tested it rigorously to ensure that the data collection is something that is both useful and practical, and it will give us information we need to make informed decisions moving forward. Mr. Speaker, I certainly would like to see a copy of the information the Member is making reference to, and put it in context with respect to where that letter was sent to, who, and what was it answering as opposed to making assumptions in this House on exactly what the conversation before and after was.

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

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I think that the Minister can get that information from the department. It was obtained through access to information by media and reported this morning. One of the end results of the conversation last winter was that there would be this new audit tool which the Minister has referenced. When will the committee receive the report of Child and Family Services for the 2016-2017 fiscal year; and is there any consideration of making a summary of it public to promote confidence in Child and Family Services? Mahsi.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Speaker, the directors' report will be made public. It is a summary of activities over a year, ongoing progress and processes where we are at any given time with Child and Family Services. The summary that I am going to provide committee is not something we are prepared to make public at this time. I hear the Member, and I would like to, obviously, bring some comfort and confidence to the work that is being done in recognition of the incredible hard work that many of our staff are doing to improve Child and Family Services in recognizing that we are taking a new direction with building stronger families. Those summaries will contain some information that might identify, or certainly could be used to identify families which is something that we are not prepared to do at this point in time. I will share it with committee so that we can discuss about moving forward in a collaborative way for the best interests of our children, but I am not prepared to make that document public and risk identifying individuals. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.