

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

OPEN LETTER TO MINISTER OF JUSTICE FROM NORTH SLAVE CORRECTIONAL COMPLEX INMATES

October 18, 2017

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, last week I received a package of 69 letters written by inmates at the North Slave Correctional Complex. The letters were sent to me for distribution to other Members and the Minister of Justice. The letters were accompanied by an eight-page open letter to the Justice Minister, and I want to reflect on that letter today.

The letter writer states a fact that's indisputable: the courts and jails see the same individuals over and over again, yet "most inmates yearn for a better life and desperately want to be clean and sober." The writer goes on to say, "We have firsthand knowledge of how ineffectual this prison system is; it's just a warehouse for people to bide their time, so when inmates are released, they have learned virtually nothing."

Mr. Speaker, according to information from the department, inmates are offered a suite of programs that address underlying issues in their lives, such as the use of violence and substance abuse, as well as educational opportunities. The letter writer reports changes in recent months, including the loss of the recreation officer position and the "dismantling of the arts and crafts room." He also says that people wait months for their first consultation with a psychiatrist. If true, when combined with their lack of access to the large yard for more than a year, it's clear that inmates have a lot of unproductive time on their hands.

Because this input has been received across a wide front to many members, and because the catalogue of issues is both broad and detailed, I'll be looking for a comprehensive response from the Minister, more comprehensive than the response he provided in his statement to the House yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, in addition, I will be seeking to understand why the feedback and complaints processes in place, including the inmate council referred to by the Minister, were not engaged to respond to these concerns, and whether these processes need to be adapted to respond to inmate grievances in a more meaningful way. I will have questions for the Minister. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.