

## MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

### RENTAL OFFICE WAIT TIMES

February 21, 2018

**MS. GREEN:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the NWT Rental Office provides recourse under the Residential Tenancies Act when landlords and renters are in dispute. One of the most common disputes, of course, is a tenant's failure to pay rent. As it turns out, not being paid is only the beginning of the landlord's troubles.

Let me explain. Let's say a landlord is owed three months' back rent for a total of \$6,000. That is big money. The landlord goes to the rental office. She files an application for a court order to recover the debt. Next step: a hearing to lay out the facts. According to figures contained in the 2016-2017 Rental Office Report, only 12 per cent of hearings take place within 60 days, 28 per cent take more than 120 days, and the vast majority, almost two thirds, take in excess of 90 days from the time of the application. The importance of this time lag is that the landlord does not get a penny until the court order is in place.

Mr. Speaker, a constituent of mine filed an application last April and was lucky to get a hearing in just six weeks, but the follow-up action, the written order to recover the rent owed, was not issued until August, more than three months later. Then, there is an additional wait for the garnishee order. All told, it took almost half a year to get the legal authority to recover her debt.

Even at this point, the landlord's troubles are far from over. Now they have to collect the money. The property owner goes to the last place of employment they know of for the tenant, and they hope the tenant still works there. Of course, losing your job is a common reason for not paying your rent, so that is often pointless. The same goes for a bank garnishee on someone who is unemployed.

Obviously, Mr. Speaker, the point here is timeliness. Yes, landlords need to prove they are owed the money, so a hearing with a decision and a garnishee order are all necessary steps, but wait times have bloated over the last year. The 2015-2016 report says that only 9 per cent of hearings took more than 90 days, compared to 63 per cent last year. As to the time between the hearing and the written order, we have no way of knowing, because the Rental Office Report does not include that crucial set of figures.

The rental office is an example of citizen hardship because essential government functions are starved for resources. I will have questions for the Justice Minister. Mahsi.