

JULIE GREEN—MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE
NWT Child Benefit
Committee of the Whole—2018-2019 Operating Budget Review
Dept. of Finance —February 23, 2018

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, my questions are about the NWT Child Benefit, which is referenced on page 153 and on page 154.

Mr. Chair, in November, Alternatives North had an economist calculate the living wage for Yellowknife, and it also included the additional benefits that have been offered to families by both the NWT and Canada in the form of child benefits. The result of that work was that the family with two income earners did not qualify for the child benefit because the threshold for receiving the benefits was too low, and that is in spite of the fact that the income that this calculation was based on was a very modest income. My question is whether the Minister would consider raising the threshold on the NWT Child Benefit from \$80,000 to \$100,000, again, on the prorated basis that it exists today? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Ms. Green. Mr. Stewart.

MR. STEWART: Thanks, Mr. Chair. As the Member noted, we did make the changes and increased the eligibility for the NWT Child Benefit. So far, since those changes have been made, there has been an average of 2,200 or so, approximately 2,200, families receiving that benefit. Prior to that, there were about 1,493 families, so there are about 700 more families who are now receiving that benefit than were previously. Obviously there would be costs with increasing the threshold level that would have to be considered along with other priorities, but there has been a significant expansion in terms of the number of families that are covered under the NWT Child Benefit. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: Thank you. Thank you for that response. It is true that it is more widely available, but the point I am making is that this family of four which this living wage calculation was based on had an income of \$92,000 so they did not qualify for the NWT Child Benefit, and I am sure any of us sitting here can appreciate that \$92,000 annual income for a family of four is not a fortune. What I am asking is whether the Department of Finance can provide an estimate of the cost of raising the threshold to \$100,000 so that we can consider what that will cost? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I can commit to having the department do a review and see how many more people might take it, some statistics if we raised it to \$100,000. Again, you know, this is going to be another cost driver. Another one of the reasons we need to look at trying to generate more of our own source revenues is so that we can pay for particular programs like this, but we will do the work, and, once we get the data available or get the analysis done, we will sit down with committee and have a discussion with them on the way forward. Thank you,

Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Minister. Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, I appreciate the Minister's commitment to do the research on that. I also agree with him that we need to find ways to generate more own-source revenue to pay for this and other things that will increase the wellbeing of the residents of the NWT.