

## **MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE**

### **PERSONAL INFORMATION DISCLOSURE FOR PUBLIC HOUSING TENANTS**

**March 6, 2018**

**MS. GREEN:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in November 2016 the NWT Information and Privacy Commissioner received a complaint about the way the NWT Housing Corporation was collecting personal income to calculate rents for public housing tenants. The complaint was about a new policy making tenants give housing authorities permission to collect income and other information directly from the Canada Revenue Agency. Some tenants didn't want to provide direct access to their tax records. They asked for alternatives, such as continuing to report income on the basis of submitted documents. They were told there was no alternative, and if they didn't provide consent, the housing authority would charge full market rent and a failure to pay would result in eviction.

Mr. Speaker, the NWT Housing Corporation had good practical reasons to change the annual income assessment. Public housing is, of course, subsidized, so income verification is necessary for spending public funds. Annual reporting eliminated the need for 33,000 monthly income reviews a year across the NWT. Basing rent on income tax files promotes tax filing, giving low-income folks access to other federal programs such as the GST rebate and the Canada Child Benefit. These changes aligned closely with the income verification policies of the Department of Education, Culture and Employment and the Department of Health and Social Services. I believe that the NWT Housing Corporation had good intentions.

Investigating this complaint, the Information and Privacy Commissioner was told that monthly reporting was still an option for clients who were uncomfortable allowing access to CRA records, but in practice this turned out not to be the case.

The Commissioner's ruling on the complaint said, "The right to privacy is about far more than the ability to keep things confidential. Privacy is about the right of the individual to choose what information is provided to whom and how."

The ruling called on the Housing Corporation and its LHOs to amend its practices to provide an alternative method for annual reporting to make clear there are alternates to CRA consent and to make consent time-limited. I'll have questions for the Housing Minister. Mahsi.