

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

### **MANDATE OF THE STATUS OF WOMEN COUNCIL**

**May 29, 2018**

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, during the last sitting, the Minister responsible for the Status of Women indicated she's moving the NWT's Status of Women Council in a new direction, the scope of that new direction is becoming clearer over time.

To refresh the memory of my colleagues, the Status of Women Council is an arm's-length agency of the territorial government, with its own board of directors. The board and staff are authorized to regulate their own affairs, including conducting research on matters that relate to the status of women, to participate in programs that improve the status of women, and, of course, to provide the Minister with assistance and advice.

It's important to note that the council staff is not part of the public service. Its independence is crucial. It is the publicly established and funded advocate, distinct from the service deliverers that are dependent upon government for funding.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister responsible for the Status of Women is jeopardizing the independence of the council. The Minister has not made public the evaluation she is using as a justification for removing the campaign schools from the council. The council is now fully staffed and in a position to resume offering the schools, but the Minister has directed the curriculum development and implementation be taken into the Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs. She has not provided a solid reason for this change.

Perhaps most disturbing, the council has been directed to suspend its leadership of the Coalition Against Family Violence. Does anyone need to be reminded about the importance of advocating for women's safety, given our high rates of intimate partner violence? The council has hosted the Family Violence Coalition since its inception in 1999 because of its unique advocacy role. It is the primary advocate for, to quote the Act, "promoting a change in attitudes within the community in order that women enjoy equality of opportunity."

Mr. Speaker, women's equality begins with their safety. The coalition under the council's direction has been the driving force behind the development of the Men's Healing Program, Family Violence Awareness Week, and other anti-violence initiatives, but no longer. The coalition hasn't met in five months, and the council believes this is no longer their work.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister is presiding over the wholesale dismantling of the Status of Women Council. If it can't set its own priorities, what is the meaning of its independence? The council is moving in directions that are at odds with the stated purpose of the council in the act. There has been no consultation. The Minister owes the women of the NWT an explanation.