

## MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

### YELLOWKNIFE SOBERING CENTRE OPERATIONS

May 30, 2018

**MS. GREEN:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have been an enthusiastic supporter of the efforts by the City of Yellowknife and the GNWT to tackle social issues downtown. The Safe Ride Program and the sobering centre together reduce the harm intoxicated people may do to themselves, and they have made the downtown a more hospitable place for all of us to live and work. These initiatives respond to requests by residents of Yellowknife Centre to take action on what seemed to be then an ever-expanding problem.

Today, I want to focus on the operation of the sobering centre. The NWT Disabilities Council operates the centre on contract with the GNWT at the Salvation Army. The contract for the sobering centre and the day shelter together is worth \$1.4 million a year. Both are expensive and essential services.

Mr. Speaker, my expectation of the sobering centre is that it would be a destination of last resort for intoxicated people, an alternative to going to the hospital emergency room, a stairwell, or a heating vent, but the reality is that not everyone is welcome there.

The NWT Disabilities Council has been known to ban people from the sobering centre. Clients may be banned for yelling, possession of alcohol, and physical aggression. At the staff's discretion, each action is accompanied by escalating penalties that range from being directed to go for a walk to a three-month total ban from the premises.

Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge there's a fine balance between protecting the staff from the harm by clients and protecting clients from harm by staff by being kicked out, especially in the cold weather. The NWT Disabilities Council has a special duty of care to ensure their staff are trained in harm reduction for this group of clients, and they deliver services that are trauma informed, from a trauma informed perspective that views addiction as a disability. Surely it comes as no surprise that clients who are drunk are often difficult. It is the nature of this service.

Mr. Speaker, I am concerned that the NWT Disabilities Council is struggling with this balance, and the most vulnerable people, those who are intoxicated and have no other resources, are at risk of further harm because it turns out that the sobering centre isn't a destination of last resort, but yet another place to get kicked out of. I will have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services about how to get the sobering centre back on track. Mahsi.