

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

HOUSING POLICIES FOR FAMILIES

May 31, 2018

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, last week, I provided my mandate letter to the Minister now responsible for the Housing Corporation and Homelessness. One of my priorities is to help get families experiencing homelessness into housing. I mentioned constituents of mine, a working family of six, who have been living in a bachelor apartment for the last three years and who have not been able to obtain housing from the Yellowknife Housing Authority.

I was puzzled by the Minister's reply to me about this situation. He said, and I quote, "In some of our small communities where we don't even have housing, those numbers go up, and that's where we need to work on addressing needs right across the Northwest Territories." I interpreted his answer to mean they aren't homeless, because at least they have a home.

Mr. Speaker, this family doesn't really have a home. There are six of them in a place that is intended for one person. They have a mini-bar and a hot plate. This accommodation does not meet their needs, but because they aren't living in a tent, they are not absolutely homeless. As a result, they have not risen to the top of the Housing Authority waiting list. In fact, it would increase their chances of getting into housing if they did live in a tent.

Mr. Speaker, this situation is familiar from my YWCA days. The staff at YWCA Transitional Housing Program helped families stabilize themselves by providing various kinds of support. When the family is ready to move out of Rock Hill, they usually have to move back into homelessness in order to gain enough points to get into public housing. All that good work that is done to help the family goes out the window, and the family has to go back to square one, at least temporarily.

Mr. Speaker, when I consider the family of six and the YWCA, my conclusion is that the Housing Authority is looking for an excuse not to house people. Their approach tells me that, no matter how unsuitable the housing, it is, at least, a house. This is clearly wrong-headed. Families should not have to live in a tent or on a couch to rise to the top of the public housing waiting list.

I encourage the Minister to take a closer look at families whose accommodation is marginal and figure out how to make their lives better without first making them worse. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.