

## MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

### POVERTY IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

October 30, 2018

**MS. GREEN:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, at the end of August the Government of Canada introduced its long-awaited and first-ever poverty reduction strategy. After years of telling advocates that poverty reduction was a provincial and territorial responsibility, the federal government has finally stepped up.

In 2015, one in eight Canadians lived in poverty, about 5 million people; a shameful number for a wealthy country like ours. The federal government has set a goal to reduce that number by 20 per cent in the next two years, and the government's long-term goal is to further reduce poverty by half by 2030. This measurement boosts the credibility of the strategy, and it gives hope to those who want to exit from the poverty track.

Mr. Speaker, the federal strategy introduces a poverty measurement. It's called the Market Basket Measure. The MBM puts a dollar figure on a basket of goods and services for a family of four. The MBM for Yellowknife in 2015 was about \$56,000. The problem with the Market Basket Measure as a general measure of poverty is that it isn't calculated for any other NWT communities.

The NWT has had a poverty reduction strategy for five years. Its vision is that Northerners will have access to the supports they need to live in dignity and free from poverty as active participants in community life. This vision still resonates, but the GNWT didn't establish a definition of poverty or a goal for its reduction, so it's difficult to say whether Northerners are less poor than they were five years ago.

A group of non-profits recently published a poverty update to show what poverty in the North looks like. Here are a few of the results. Twenty per cent of households earn about \$25,000, one in seven residents faces moderate to severe food insecurity, and there are almost 2,000 people on income assistance in the NWT. It's a grim picture.

Mr. Speaker, it's understood that children who grow up in poverty are likely to live in poverty as adults. This fact underlines the importance of providing resources to families to move them out of the poverty trap. The federal and territorial child benefits are a good start, but income thresholds must be raised, and we need greater investments in housing.

The National Poverty Reduction Strategy challenges provinces and territories to do better and provides the opportunity for a partnership to assault poverty in the GNWT. It's time to establish a poverty measurement, set goals for poverty reduction, and make a commitment to tracking results over time. I will have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services. Mahsi.