

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

2017 LIVING WAGE

February 12, 2018

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, living wage calculations have been undertaken across the country, including here in Yellowknife. The premise of the living wage is that no one who is working full-time should be living in poverty, yet many do. Tax filer data says that one in three single-parent families, and one in eight two-parent families, don't earn enough money to meet their most basic needs.

The living wage is calculated for the most common family type. That's two parents who work full-time with one child in school and one in licensed childcare. It won't surprise anyone that this family's biggest expense is rent. Close behind is the cost of childcare, at almost \$16,000 a year for full-time care for one child and after school care for the other. The cost of food rounds out the list of top three expenses.

Mr. Speaker, the living wage calculated for Yellowknife is \$22.24 an hour. That's a useful measure of the cost of living here. The wage has increased by \$1.56 an hour since 2015, driven by a 5 per cent cost increase in rent and 5 per cent in childcare, and 6 per cent in food in the last two years.

The living wage calculation takes into account government benefits and transfers. The revamped NWT Child Benefit netted the family of four only \$14 a year. The family was over the income threshold for the Housing Corporation's rent supplement program and had difficulty accessing a childcare subsidy. Income thresholds are too low for these programs to allow low-income families to benefit from them.

Employers who voluntarily pay the living wage see the benefits, including attracting and keeping qualified staff and increasing productivity. My hope is that more employers will consider joining this initiative. Government has a role to play, too, by increasing the income threshold for programs that takes into account the cost of living and by indexing benefits to inflation.

Mr. Speaker, the importance of paying a living wage is that it offers a systemic response to poverty. A living wage enables families to meet their basic needs without the help of public housing and food banks. It enables them to be independent, and to experience the satisfaction that comes with that. I will have questions for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker