

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

ANTI-POVERTY ROUNDTABLE AND ACTION PLAN

February 11, 2019

MS. GREEN: Mr. Speaker, today, I am reflecting on the fifth annual Anti-Poverty Roundtable, held in Hay River in November. I appreciate the Minister's invitation to attend and being able to hear from colleagues taking action on poverty throughout the territory as well as the opportunity to see what local organizations are doing and to meet their dedicated staff.

There is no question that anti-poverty efforts have come a long way since the GNWT Anti-Poverty Action Plan was introduced. The anti-poverty fund for grass-roots projects is now \$1 million. There is more support for homelessness and communities outside of Yellowknife and for youth. Income-assistance clients receive more transfers from government than ever before.

While government is doing more, I am sad to say it is not doing enough. One in four children in the NWT live in poverty. The No Place for Poverty Coalition made 21 recommendations to the Minister to strengthen the next Anti-Poverty Action Plan, and we look forward to hearing they have been adopted.

Mr. Speaker, the action plan needs to include well-defined goals for which there is required funding for implementation and robust evaluation. It needs to focus on long-term solutions. Let's take hunger as an example. Statistics Canada says one-third of NWT children live in homes where having enough to eat is an issue. In addition to funding initiatives that respond to people who are hungry today, government needs to develop and pilot programs that improve food availability and affordability over the long term.

I also recommend both short- and long-term goals that relate to increasing the benefits paid by income assistance. Almost 5 percent of the territory's population is supported by income assistance, a number that has been growing, especially in Yellowknife and the Beaufort-Delta. While the department hasn't been able to provide analysis of how long families stay on income assistance, my sense is that some families rely on it from one generation to the next, to their detriment.

Mr. Speaker, an investment in poverty reduction pays off by requiring government to spend less on the negative effects of poverty, including poor health, poor educational outcomes, and poor employment prospects, to name a few. I will have questions about the action plan for the Minister of Health and Social Services. Mah