

JULIE GREEN—MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE
Ft. Smith Women's Correctional Facility
Committee of the Whole—2019-2020 Operating Budget Review
Dept. of Justice—February 22, 2019

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I have some questions for the Minister about the new correctional facility for women in Fort Smith. It is scheduled to be done, I believe, at the end of this fiscal year. Could the Minister tell us whether that is still the case? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister Sebert.

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Currently, the following schedule is anticipated: construction completion by June 2019; building occupancy by August 2019; and the building will be in service in October of 2019.

That is the schedule. The two-month time period is required to ensure that the systems are operating properly and to orient staff to new procedures. Following completion of staff training and building commissioning, the facility will be ready for full occupancy. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Minister Sebert. Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, there has been about three months of slippage on this schedule. Could the Minister please explain why that is? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister Sebert.

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: Yes, I understand that the project has fallen behind schedule. This was due to a number of factors, including the complexities associated with building a correctional facility, collaboration with a design-build team around compliance with functional specifications, and a narrow weather window for deep excavations. It is a fairly complex structure, and yes, there has been some slippage. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Minister Sebert. Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, it is my understanding from seeing this facility myself that it is quite a bit larger than the existing facility. I am wondering how this budget accounts for the increased staff that will be required. I note that it is up by about \$600,000. Is all that is required to fully staff that facility an increase of \$600,000? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister Sebert.

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: Yes, I wonder if I might have Ms. Bolstad assist with answering that question. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Minister Sebert. Ms. Bolstad.

MS. BOLSTAD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. There is no increased operational funding required for the new female facility coming online. The increase may be noted due to amortization with the facility coming online, so that is just booking the accounting entry

for the facility over the 40-year term that we expect the building to last. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Ms. Bolstad. Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I don't understand how a facility that is so much larger, with so many more beds or rooms, can be operated by exactly the same number of staff. Could the Minister please explain that? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister Sebert.

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I understand that there are some vacancies that are going to be filled. I understand that the facility, while physically much larger, will have larger areas for meetings, and so on. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Minister Sebert. Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, could the Minister tell us how many inmates the current facility serves and how many the new facility will serve? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister Sebert.

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am just looking over the statistics. I understand that the initial capacity for the new facility will be 23 beds, with a possible provision for expansion, and that the current capacity is 20. I don't think there are 20 inmates there currently. It looks like there are 10 currently, nine of whom are sentenced and one on remand. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Minister Sebert. Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: Thank you. Is no increase in staffing required because there will only be 10 in the new facility? Is that the premise for not increasing the staffing? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister Sebert.

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Certainly that will be subject to operational requirements. I suppose, if we find that there is a great increase in the number of inmates and that we need more staff, we would have to look at that at that time. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Minister Sebert. Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: Thank you. Given the number of inmates who are in the old facility and the capacity of the new facility, can the Minister remind us why the new facility was sized the way it is? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister Sebert.

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. The old facility was not appropriate for women. In fact, there was a bit of an overflow, I think. Some of the space was used in a residence across the street. Also, as I say, it was not built to be a correctional facility initially. It was different things over different periods of time. Clearly, it was inadequate for modern usage. A larger facility was required. For that reason, the new

facility was built. The old one had many issues, which is not surprising in view of the fact the building was many years' old. I am not sure when it was built, but it was a long time ago.

Again, it was not built as a correctional complex. It was absolutely necessary that something new be built. We wanted to make sure that it was large enough to accommodate a possible increase in the number of women who would be housed there. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Minister Sebert. Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, having seen the current facility, I don't have any questions about why it was necessary to replace it. Given the overall trend of declining incarceration, I do wonder why the new facility was sized to house at least 23 women. Why was that decision made? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister Sebert.

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Certainly, the new facility is much larger than the old one, but it also contains a large space for programming, which is, of course, a necessary component in a modern correctional complex. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Minister Sebert. Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that there is room for programming, and that is a good idea. What I am asking about is the number of, let's say, beds that it was sized for, at least 23 inmates with the number of beds. How was that decision made, given falling incarceration rates and the fact that the current facility is not full in terms of bed capacity? Thank you.