

## MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LEAVE

February 28, 2019

**MS. GREEN:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. The government is considering amending its Employment Standards Act. A survey on the proposed changes closed about a month ago. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment is promising a report on what they heard soon, and I am looking forward to hearing that the changes to the act will include leave for workers who have experienced domestic violence.

Mr. Speaker, domestic violence leave is a period of approved absence from work. Employers covered by the Employment Standards Act would make the time available to employees. Employees could use the time to seek medical attention, attend counselling appointments, get legal advice, or find a place to live. The benefit to the employee is that they don't have to worry about job security while they are coping with domestic violence. The advantage to employers is that they are able to retain workers who might otherwise quit.

Domestic violence leave is now available in five provinces. The offering varies from five days of paid leave in Manitoba to 10 days of unpaid leave in Alberta. The federal government is also looking at introducing a combination of five days paid and five days unpaid leave for federally regulated industries, extending this benefit to almost a million workers.

If the NWT follows suit, there are several best practices to consider. The first is that there should be few barriers to accessing this leave. The second is that at least five days of leave should be paid. We know that many people struggle with the cost of living in the North, and they may be reluctant to take time off if the leave is unpaid. The next best practice is that discretion to grant leave should be up to employers, rather than some outside authority. They would decide how to verify the need and what, if any, written justifications they require. Of course, keeping all the information the employee shares confidential is of primary importance. Lastly, the allocation of the time should be flexible, so that employees can take the leave intermittently or in a block, depending on what they need.

Mr. Speaker, we are all aware of the epic rates of family violence we experience in the Northwest Territories, and of the difficulty of attracting and keeping staff. Domestic violence leave would address both of those issues, and I look forward to seeing it included in the forthcoming amendments to the Employment Standards Act. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.