

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

August 21, 2019

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I welcome the release this week of the Child and Family Services Quality Improvement Plan. This plan responds to the Office of the Auditor General's report last year about the ways in which government continued to fail kids in care despite a 2014 Office of the Auditor General report that identified many of the same problems.

The plan stresses how improving outcomes for the 1,000 children in care in the Northwest Territories must be achieved, specifically by complying with the policies and legislation that govern their care. Some highlights of the plan for me come from the cultural safety and respect section, including:

- growing the Indigenous workforce within Child and Family Services;
- developing a family preservation program that strengthens partnerships within communities;
- improving communications with Indigenous communities to support and care for children and families in their communities; and
- exploring options agreements with these communities to increase their role within Child and Family Services.

All of these actions are described as "on track," and I am looking forward to continuous reporting that demonstrates this is the case.

I do, however, have some concerns. The first is about the sheer number of action items, 70 in all. That's a lot of balls to keep in the air, as we all know. I am also concerned that there is an almost single-minded focus on process. I understand that process leads to outcomes, but one of the most important findings of the Auditor General's report is that social workers needed to spend more time with the kids and less time at their desks. The outcome I most want to see is that mandatory check-ins and time with children in care is not only met but exceeded.

My final observation is that the plan doesn't reflect the systemic issues that drive neglect, including low income, inadequate housing, and a lack of food. We need to think about how to keep children out of care altogether as well as what happens to them when they are in care.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I want to repeat my call for a debate about creating a child and youth advocate for the Northwest Territories. Children in care have rights, including the right to be heard and treated fairly. A child advocate can link the different players in the child's life to further his or her interests. I believe that better services for children include this key position, and I will continue to advocate for it. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.