

**Julie Green—MLA Yellowknife Centre  
Childcare Needs  
Committee of the Whole—2020-2021 Capital Review  
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**MS. GREEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just briefly, I'd like to get an understanding about the situation with providing space for childcare within school replacements or renovations. I'm not going to make, again, the whole case for why it's important. Let's just say that it is, and that childcare construction is at a very high standard, so it's very difficult to find places that meet the requirements unless they are purpose-built. On what basis does the department decide to include childcare space in new schools and in renovations, extensive renovations to schools? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake):** Thank you, Ms. Green. Before we move on, I'll just let committee know the information item is on page 13, but we'll go to Minister Cochrane.

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Currently, within our capital budget process, childcare facilities are not identified as a capital project. We've never done that. It does need to be something, I think, that needs to be looked at in the next Legislative Assembly. However, in saying that, though, I have been working with communities. Any new school that is on the books and that I have gotten into and talked to, we're actually working closely with them; it's not only childcare centres that we're looking at. It's making schools hubs of communities. I have really been focusing with the community governments. Can they put their band offices in there? Can we get Health and Social Services a spot in there for early childhood development things? More of an inclusive hub. The answer is right now, it's not in our capital, but in the background, it's the right thing to do. We're working with communities to do that in partnership models, and we do have some uptake on that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**MS. GREEN:** Thank you. I like the idea of making schools hubs. That's the point of putting gyms in schools, so that the community will go there and use it as a community centre. On what basis is childcare considered in some of these projects and not in others? For example, it's my understanding that the Colville Lake School is going to include childcare. Can the Minister confirm that, please?

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

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** Thank you. There is no firm confirmation at this time. Again, we're in negotiations with the communities, if they're willing to. We're just at the breaking ground with talking about that, so I can't sit in this House at this point and say it is firm that it is going to happen. We're still in the discussion phase of that. The communities do see the importance of it. They do agree that schools need to be hubs. I think they're on-board for working that way, and the department will do our best to make those realities. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**MS. GREEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Can the Minister confirm that the renovation and addition at Mangilaluk School in Tuktoyaktuk will include space for future childcare needs? Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. What I should clarify is that any other partnerships that we're talking about at this point is not that the GNWT would take on the capital for childcare facilities in schools, or healthcare facilities in schools. It's a partnership, so part of the partnership is working together, putting money together, making it best for their communities.

The school in Tuktoyaktuk at this point is just looking at school updates and a renovation, but there is no plan at this time to put a childcare facility in that school, as far as I know. I haven't had conversations with that community to look at that. If the community was interested, I'm more than willing to have those discussions in a partnership share costing. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**MS. GREEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Is the Minister open to having the same kind of discussions with the community of Yellowknife around the J.H. Sissons school rebuild to figure out whether there's a partnership possibility to include childcare spaces in that school? Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The city of Yellowknife is a little bit different in that it's a bigger centre. I'm working with the smaller communities because, in all honesty, they have a lot fewer resources than our capital city does, and huge needs within that. Within the smaller communities, it is mostly Indigenous governments who have funding to bring to the table because they are already building things like their own band offices, et cetera. The city of Yellowknife, there is no Indigenous community, actually, that has an ownership of these schools. In fact, a lot of the schools are owned by the GNWT. Currently, within this Legislative Assembly, daycare infrastructure has not been one of our priorities. It hasn't been considered, so there is no consideration of that within the planning, and we are in the planning stage already. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**MS. GREEN:** Thank you. What I take out of that is that Yellowknife is disadvantaged because it is a large community, and it is not a majority Indigenous community. That doesn't make sense to me, because the waiting lists for childcare in Yellowknife are very substantial and they represent a significant barrier to recruiting staff into jobs; not only government jobs, but private industry jobs. People think long and hard about coming here because childcare is so unavailable. It seems like there is an opportunity to do some partnership conversation here. I'm unclear why the Minister is unwilling to even talk about it. Thank you.

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

**HON. ROBERT MCLEOD:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. ECE, my understanding is they work with the communities to identify third-party funding to offset the cost of extra space for childcare. If available, the GNWT provides planning, design, and project management support towards these efforts. They are currently in the process of conducting analysis on options to support capital costs related to childcare in the GNWT, including what role the GNWT should play in the private market, for example, the capital; limited market, for example, in Tuktoyaktuk; and no market, for example in Cold Lake. Communities are being included in this work, is my understanding. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**MS. GREEN:** Yes, I would appreciate the Minister providing that information that he just cited to Priorities and Planning. The point here is that childcare is not a money-making proposition. It is run on a cost-recovery basis by non-profits. I don't know of any exceptions to that. So the daycare environment in Yellowknife is not really any different than it is in a small community. There aren't bag of money sitting around to create childcare spaces. The Yellowknife Daycare Association is a non-profit that recently constructed a large new building, fortunately, and they have a big mortgage on it, so I'm still not getting why this wouldn't be a priority for all communities in the NWT, and I'm looking for the commitment for the information. Thank you.

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

**HON. ROBERT MCLEOD:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Looking after our children is a priority of this government and every community in the Northwest Territories, and if there are options there for providing good, safe daycare day homes for them, then we will partner with those communities, as I said before. This information was provided in the form of a letter to the Committee of Priorities and Planning. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**MS. GREEN:** Thank you for that information. Is it possible for the Department of Education to work with childcare providers in Yellowknife to create space in the new school building that will replace J.H. Sissons, to explore that possibility? Thank you.

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

**HON. ROBERT MCLEOD:** Minister Cochrane.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake):** Minister Cochrane.

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do want to clarify, it's not like the capital city, Yellowknife, has been neglected in this. The MLA had brought up the name of the Yellowknife Daycare Society. That daycare society, that infrastructure building was provided free of cost for decades within this community. We haven't done that in other communities. So Yellowknife hasn't been neglected in that. The reason I'm working with smaller communities is they don't have any daycares. They have zero daycares. Some of them have zero early childhood programming, period. So I always say a society is judged by how we treat or most marginalized people, and I've heard in this House even today, if we support the smaller communities, Yellowknife benefits. Those children are mobile.

The other thing, too, is that, with the smaller communities, like I say, there are opportunities for financial partnerships. I agree, and I've said that in the House, that childcare should be a priority in the next government. It's going to come in the next month or so. I think that MLAs who are here should bring that forward, if we're going to look at infrastructure. This is not the time. It's the end of the Assembly. We need to look at that in the next one, and hopefully it will become a priority in the next one, because everyone in this House agrees that early childhood is important.

So we're not neglecting Yellowknife. Yellowknife has daycare centres. We've given for decades a free-infrastructure place in Yellowknife for daycares. We have not done that in the communities. It's time to support our smaller communities, as well. Thank you, Mr. Chair.