

## **MLA JULIE GREEN – YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE – IN THE MEDIA**

### **Lights on for 10 nights, 11 days for woman in Yellowknife RCMP cell**

**By: Avery Zingel**

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Link: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/woman-held-11-days-yellowknife-rcmp-detachment-1.5460452>

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#### **Yellowknife jail was full, Fort Smith facility not suitable, because of 4 court appearances**

A woman had to spend 11 days in an RCMP holding cell in Yellowknife because the four cells designated for women at the North Slave Correctional Complex were full.

RCMP shared information about the circumstances of the woman's detention, after [CKLB Radio](#) first reported that she was kept in detention in holding cells over Christmas.

In an email to CBC, Julie Plourde, media relations officer for Yellowknife RCMP, wrote that the detachment has a block of "holding cells," as well as two other cells commonly referred to as the drunk tank. Those two cells are kept for people who are under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

"Those cells are specifically designed to ensure the safety of an intoxicated person," Plourde said.

"At no time was the woman held in one of those cells."

Plourde said the woman stayed 10 nights and 11 days in a holding cell. All holding cells at the detachment are "lighted at all times ... for safety, monitoring and operational needs."

Plourde said following RCMP protocol, the woman received out-of-cell time, blankets and mattresses, meals and reading materials.

According to the email, RCMP released the woman on Jan. 6 after her final court appearance.

#### **Ensured safety and well-being: RCMP**

The woman had been charged with two counts of failure to "comply with condition of undertaking." She had four court appearances within 11 days in relation to those charges.

Plourde said officials considered sending the woman to the Fort Smith Correctional Complex for women, but that wasn't an option because there were no "suitable flights to ensure her presence in court."

"The woman was scheduled to appear in court four times. Add to that the challenge of statutory holidays, and the GNWT mandatory holiday break," Plourde said. "She ended up staying 10 nights and 11 days in a holding cell, not something the RCMP wished for."

CBC requested additional information about how often RCMP are using holding cells for longer-term stays at the detachment. Plourde said this requires a review of their cases, which could not be completed in time for this story.

### **Government Reaction**

Yellowknife Centre MLA Julie Green pressed N.W.T. Justice Minister Caroline Wawzonek about the situation in the Legislative Assembly on Wednesday.

Wawzonek said she wants to look into what happened.

"When faced with a situation like this, the RCMP do their best to try to accommodate the individual, and make them more comfortable," Wawzonek said. "But at the end of the day it is not a place that is suitable for an extended period of time."

The Justice Minister also said she wants to find ways to better accommodate circumstances such as these in the future.

### **Previous criticism of police detention**

Police in the Northwest Territories have previously been criticized for how they detain people, specifically involving the detention of a woman and girl in separate incidents.

In this case, Plourde says the court — not the RCMP — decides whether someone should be held in custody. Police held the woman because the courts were unable to place her in another facility.

Under the territory's Corrections Act, a place of detention managed by the RCMP can be used to supplement existing correctional facilities.