

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE
QUESTION 127-19(2): NEW FEDERAL CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES
LEGISLATION
March 2, 2020

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Health and Social Services. As I mentioned in my statement, new federal legislation sets minimum standards for the treatment of children in care. These standards are meant to ensure that Indigenous children grow up immersed in their language, culture, and community. My question for the Minister is: how does our child and family services legislation align with the new federal legislation? Thank you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Yellowknife Centre. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. DIAN THOM: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Child and Family Service Act and the federal Bill C92, and the child and family services in the Northwest Territories act is in line with the principles of the federal act. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MS. GREEN: My more specific question is: whether the order in which children will be placed, if they are taken into care, is that exactly the same order that exists in our Child and Family Services Act?

HON. DIAN THOM: Yes, that's correct. The Northwest Territories Child and Family Services Act and the federal act recognize the need to deliver culturally appropriate services by decisions concerning the children are made in the best interests of the child, taking into consideration cultural values and practices. Also, each community has a role in supporting and promoting the best interests of the children, and the wellbeing of the families and the communities. Yes. They are in line, and some of the principles that we have are in line.

MS. GREEN: Thank you to the Minister for that answer. What are GNWT's expectations with respect to accessing funding associated with the new federal law?

HON. DIAN THOM: The Member is correct in her statement. She did recognize that the implementation and the funding has not been worked out. We are still in the process of waiting for the federal government to have a meeting. There was a meeting scheduled, an FTP for last month, and it has been rescheduled. Although we recognize that the

legislation is place, we still need to work on what does that mean for the Northwest Territories.

DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Member for Yellowknife Centre, final supplementary.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you to the Minister for that answer. One of the things this means for the NWT, and for all provinces and territories, is that Indigenous government organizations have an opportunity to become responsible for child and family services in their own jurisdictions. What role does the Minister see the GNWT having with respect to helping Indigenous government organizations take on this responsibility? Thank you.

HON. DIAN THOM: The Member is correct. The child and family services, you look at the children who are in place, and we have 99 percent of Indigenous children in place in care. Right now, within the Child and Family Services Act, the Indigenous and government organizations can enact their own child and family service law for their citizens. Right now, we have only one Indigenous group in the Northwest Territories who has reached out to our department, and is interested, and looking at what does that mean for their Indigenous groups. They have the option to enter into a process that would have their laws prevail over territorial law and the federal law. It is in our best interests to work with the Indigenous groups in the Northwest Territories as the majority of the children in care are in our care, and we would like to build on that partnership with Indigenous groups. If they can come to the table and do a better job than we are, then let's absolutely entertain that. Thank you, Madam Speaker.