

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE
QUESTION 172-19(3): NORTH SLAVE CORRECTIONAL CENTRE ASSAULT

March 10, 2020

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Justice about the attack on the prison guard at the North Slave Correctional Centre last May. Let me start by saying that I recognize that this Minister was not the Minister at that time. The report into the attack was conducted by two Justice Department staff; in other words, there was no third-party involvement. Why not? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Yellowknife Centre. Minister of Justice.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This particular investigation, which was back in May, was not conducted by staff from the North Slave correctional facility, though the Member is correct; it was conducted by other members from the Department of Justice. The nature of the investigation into any incident is responsive to the incident itself, and in this case, this was deemed to be adequate and appropriate. I would also note, Mr. Speaker, that the RCMP were called and were involved, and the WSCC was involved, so there were responses from a variety of different avenues. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. GREEN: Thank you to the Minister of Justice for that response. The point of third party investigations or input from third parties in investigations is to strengthen public confidence in the results. Does the Minister believe that that is, in fact, the case and would have been helpful here?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: I am confident in the work that was done in response to this incident by our staff, by the Department of Justice staff. That said, that doesn't mean that we can't still, being a new government and looking more broadly at correctional services and more broadly at the work that is done by all corrections staff, always strive to do better. I can say that there is going to be a workplace assessment done about safety and corrections this spring, and that that is, in fact, going to be external to the Department of Justice.

MS. GREEN: The Justice Minister has delivered some good news, there. I'm not sure who does the external workplace safety assessment, but that seems like a very good measure. There are a lot of loose ends in this report. One, which is just not understandable because of the amount of blacking out, is whether serious incident protocols were followed. Can the Minister assure us that, in fact, these protocols were followed, given the seriousness of this incident?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: It's not uncommon in any kind of an incident that there will be areas of improvement. What I would speak to are, in fact, the improvements and responses that were made as a result of this incident. For example, there was additional training provided in January of 2020, so already this year, surrounding the kinds of responses that should be taking place. There have been discussions within Corrections and in the workplace, specifically around when and how to review policy and about refresher training, which does happen regularly within the facility. In addition to that, being aware of the need to be particularly responsive to what is a very difficult workplace, there has, in fact, now been an inter-departmental working group formed with human resources and Corrections to ensure that we're providing the very best staffing and staffing support to our front line, but also to the supervisors within the facility.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Final supplementary, Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Minister for that. The video, which is the information I have to go on, raises a whole bunch of questions. Why didn't the guard on the other side of the door intervene? Why did the guard on this side of the door not have another guard with her? There are many questions that this video raises, which there are no written answers to, in terms of publicly accessible information, or even through ATIP. My question, which I want to repeat again, is about serious incident protocols. I'm sure that the correctional centre has them, and I'm interested to know whether they were followed in this case. Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: There are certain forms of escort within the facility that require two guards to be conducting an escort, and the staff at the correctional facility are aware of that. That policy has been the subject of review, and that has been the subject of review by the staff and by the supervisors at the facility. I am confident, going forward, that they have looked at that, that they have looked at that policy specifically, and that the things that we've done since then, including training in January, including the interdepartmental working group to support the staff, and hopefully, also with the workplace assessment that is coming in the next month or so, that any shortcomings in terms of following policy will not be repeated and that, indeed, policies will be at the very best possible level to ensure the safety of all the people who are working at the correctional facility. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.