

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 178-19(2): THIRD-PARTY REPORTING AND OVERSIGHT OF SEXUAL ASSAULTS

March 11, 2020

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Justice. I spoke frequently in the last Assembly about the benefits of involving third parties in sexual assault reporting and oversight of police sexual assault investigations. I believe that these initiatives will allow us to provide better services to survivors and to get a better idea of barriers to reporting and resolving cases. My question for the Minister is whether she supports moving forward on implementing these changes in the NWT. Mahsi.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member has already alerted me previously to the fact that there is a report produced on this matter in June and that NGOs and stakeholders met at that time. Since then, Mr. Speaker, there's been some update, which is that the RCMP continue to engage with the proposed review committee and that, meanwhile, the GNWT Department of Justice is also putting forward a second meeting of the same stakeholders to review progress with respect to having the NGO group come together. So I say all that, Mr. Speaker, because the degree of support or program develop that will result will depend very much on what happens at these subsequent meetings, when we hear back from these same stakeholders, to determine exactly how they want to see this program unfold and that that will then better inform my ability to stand up in the House and explain the nature of the program as it goes forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. GREEN: Thank you to the Minister for that answer. What we are proposing here for the Northwest Territories isn't new. It's not even new in Canada. There is third-party reporting in place in the Yukon. There is third-party oversight of police files available in Ontario. It is my understanding that the RCMP has already done the preliminary work to make this happen. Given that that landscape is already fairly well formed, what are the barriers to implementing these changes in the Northwest Territories?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: There are two different things that are at issue. First, with respect to third-party reporting, that certainly would provide another avenue of reporting, another way in which victims can come forward, and arguably in a way that would provide some flexibility and alternatives when people may not be in a position, for

whatever reason, to attend the RCMP. That said, the model that is being looked at at present involves non-governmental organizations or victim service providers who are not necessarily GNWT employees, so, of course, we need to ensure that those individuals or those organizations have the capacity to deliver the training and capacity to then deliver any kind of services in order to perform the function of third-party reporting. I certainly don't want to underestimate what that might entail or assume that those agencies would have the ability to take that on. We would want to ensure that either they have that capacity or that we are able to support them in developing that capacity. With respect to the third-party oversight, at that point, the Member points out that this is happening in other jurisdictions. However, wanting to work with our RCMP partners to ensure that, when this is happening or if there's going to be third-party oversight, that that is done in a way that is respectful of their operational processes.

MS. GREEN: I appreciate the Minister is being cautious, but the fact is that the stakeholders who were at the special meeting in June of last year were uniformly in favour of these initiatives, recognizing that there were some issues to be sorted out. What I'd like a sense of from the Minister is how long it's going to take to work through the considerations that she has named in order to put these services in place.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: I understand that the next round of stakeholder engagement is actually scheduled to take place in April of this year, so only just next month. At that point, there will be a review of what work has been done so far, what programs have been undertaken to this point. At that point, if in fact the various NGOs and stakeholders, victim services providers, and organizations are able to say that they can roll out and move forward, I would anticipate that there won't be a stop put in place, but the Department of Justice would be there to support their provision of those services. We do need to hear back from them, being partners in these programs. As I say, I expect that that's going to take place next month.

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

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Minister for that. I just want to point out what a glacial pace this is moving at. I've spoken about it for, say, three years, and the consultation happened in June, and the follow-up is happening in April, so I really am concerned about when this is actually going to happen. I wonder if it makes sense for the government to put out an RFP for a service provider and work specifically with the respondents to that RFP in order to launch the service, rather than doing more consultation and then moving on to an RFP at some other point?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: I had been hoping that I could simply say that I would commit to get back to the Member with the results from April. I am more hesitant to say that I'm going to put out an RFP based on the fact that I don't know what the reports of the pilot will say. That said, as I've said, the GNWT doesn't want to hold this back. If the stakeholders are in support and they are able to undertake the project and to continue it forward, the GNWT is not going to stop third-party reporting from moving forward under those circumstances. I think the best that I could perhaps do for today is to say that if, in fact, the reporting comes back and the pilots come back as being positive and that there is capacity to move this forward, then, at that point, the matter will move forward and it will move forward in a fashion that is timely, keeping in mind that we have June session where, if I haven't issued an RFP or if the department hasn't issued an RFP, then, by that stage, I would expect the Member to be asking me questions again, and hopefully it would be much easier to commit. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.