

MLA JULIE GREEN – YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE – IN THE MEDIA

After guard attacked, YK jail to receive external safety assessment

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Yellowknife's North Slave Correctional Complex will receive an independent safety assessment this spring, a year after a guard at the jail was attacked by an inmate.

Jordan Charlie, 19, delivered a series of blows to an officer at the jail as the two entered a corridor in May 2019. The assault was captured on surveillance cameras and the footage later [published by NNSL](#).

A Department of Justice investigation into the incident in part concluded the officer had not been following proper protocol at the time. However, the internal investigators found no specific training exists for the escorting of inmates.

On Tuesday, justice minister Caroline Wawzonek said an external contractor would now be brought in to assess workplace safety at the jail.

"I am confident in the work that was done in response to this incident by our staff," said Wawzonek. "That doesn't mean we can't – being a new government and looking more broadly at correctional services – always strive to do better.

"There is going to be a workplace assessment done about safety and corrections this spring ... external to the Department of Justice."

The assessment is expected in the next month.

Wawzonek was answering questions from Yellowknife Centre MLA Julie Green, who obtained a [heavily redacted copy](#) of the justice department's internal report through an access to information request.

"He landed more than a dozen punches on the guard's head and kicked him in the stomach several times when he fell to the floor," Green said, describing footage of the May 2019 assault.

"I am told this is the most serious assault on a prison guard at [the jail] in many years," she continued.

"There are many questions that this video raises, which there are no written answers to."

'Things will continue to change'

Wawzonek said her department had since taken action to make improvements at the jail.

"There was additional training provided in January of 2020 surrounding the kinds of responses that should be taking place," the minister said.

"There have been discussions ... 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 now been an inter-departmental working group formed with human resources and corrections to ensure that we're providing the very best staffing support to our front line, but also to the supervisors within the facility."

It's not clear how much, if any, of the workplace safety assessment will be made public.

"To the extent that it's a specific human resources matter, I would be hesitant to release names that are involving human resources," Wawzonek told Green. "To the extent that it's a broader assessment, I expect that can much more generally be released to the relevant committee."

The minister acknowledged the safety of corrections staff "deserves significant attention."

"There have been a number of things changed already," said Wawzonek, "and things are going to continue to change and roll out over the next few months."

In 2015, Canada's auditor general [released a report](#) highly critical of corrections in the NWT.

That report declared the territory had "not met its key responsibilities for inmates, did not adequately operate facilities to house inmates, and did not adequately manage inmates in compliance with key rehabilitation and reintegration requirements."