

MLA JULIE GREEN – YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE – IN THE MEDIA

N.W.T. MLAs debate whether to call on Yellowknife sobering centre to reopen

By: Hilary Bird

CBC NEWS – April 15 – 2020

Link: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/yellowknife-sobering-centre-mlas-1.5533291>

Day shelter services currently cut off for all but 30 people who are homeless in the city

A committee of 11 Northwest Territories MLAs is debating a motion that would call on the N.W.T. Disabilities Council to reopen the Yellowknife Sobering Centre as a drop-in facility.

Thirty people who are homeless in the city began a quarantine period at the sobering centre and day shelter on April 3, as a precaution against COVID-19. They will remain there, day and night, for a minimum of 30 days. During the quarantine, the facility is closed to the rest of the city's homeless population.

The quarantine was one of the ideas that came out of a meeting of non-government organizations a few weeks ago, Denise McKee, executive director of the N.W.T. Disabilities Council told CBC News last week. The council runs the day shelter.

But those who are homeless and not among the 30 people being quarantined are now without a place to warm up, use the bathroom, shower, do laundry, access the internet, hang out or have a bite to eat. The Salvation Army in Yellowknife has opened as a place for people to go to during the day.

The motion calling on the council to break the quarantine was brought up by Yellowknife Centre MLA Julie Green, who was critical of the decision because she said the council, which receives funding from the territorial government, broke its contract.

Green said the contract between the council and the government was for "12 hours of day shelter time and 24 hours of sobering centre time."

"The contractor has broken the terms of that contract," Green said Wednesday at a technical meeting of the government's Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight, discussing the current status of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Green said that without a sobering centre currently open, RCMP picking up intoxicated people are being forced to bring them to cells.

No one from the N.W.T. Disabilities Council was immediately available to comment.

The motion was supported by Thebacha MLA Frieda Martselos, but not by Yellowknife North MLA Rylund Johnson, who said he didn't believe it was part of his role as an MLA to direct the council on what to do with the sobering centre.

Yellowknife Frame Lake MLA Kevin O'Reilly said he supports the intent behind the motion, but believed it should instead be directed at Health Minister Diane Thom.

Following a brief discussion, Green stated that she would work with MLAs to draft the specific wording of the motion.

That motion is set to be debated when the committee reconvenes on Friday.