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**The Honourable Shane Thompson, Speaker**

# Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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**Hon. Shane Thompson**  
**(Nahendeh)**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>PRAYER</b> .....	<b>671</b>
<b>MINISTERS' STATEMENTS</b> .....	<b>671</b>
MINISTER'S STATEMENT 41-20(1): FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE RELEASE OF THE FINAL REPORT OF NATIONAL INQUIRY INTO MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS .....	671
MINISTER'S STATEMENT 42-20(1): INCOME ASSISTANCE IMPROVEMENTS .....	672
MINISTER'S STATEMENT 43-20(1): MINISTER ABSENT FROM THE HOUSE .....	673
<b>MEMBERS' STATEMENTS</b> .....	<b>673</b>
MEMBER'S STATEMENT 224-20(1): INCOME ASSISTANCE – HOW TO BE REGIONALLY APPROPRIATE.....	673
MEMBER'S STATEMENT 225-20(1): INCOME ASSISTANCE – FOOD SECURITY.....	673
MEMBER'S STATEMENT 226-20(1): INCOME ASSISTANCE – GUARANTEED BASIC INCOME.....	674
MEMBER'S STATEMENT 227-20(1): INCOME ASSISTANCE – REDUCTION OF DEPENDENCE .....	674
MEMBER'S STATEMENT 228-20(1): INCOME ASSISTANCE – REDUCTION OF DEPENDENCE .....	675
MEMBER'S STATEMENT 229-20(1): GUARANTEED BASIC INCOME.....	675
MEMBER'S STATEMENT 230-20(1): INCOME ASSISTANCE – REDUCTION OF DEPENDENCE .....	676
MEMBER'S STATEMENT 231-20(1): INCOME ASSISTANCE – LIVING ON THE LAND DISQUALIFICATION .....	676
MEMBER'S STATEMENT 232-20(1): INCOME ASSISTANCE – PRODUCTIVE CHOICES.....	677
MEMBER'S STATEMENT 233-20(1): HAY RIVER TRACK AND FIELD 2024 .....	677
MEMBER'S STATEMENT 234-20(1): WILLEM KANIGAN, 2024 YOUTH PARLIAMENTARIAN.....	678
<b>RECOGNITION OF VISITORS IN THE GALLERY</b> .....	<b>678</b>
<b>REPLIES TO THE BUDGET ADDRESS</b> .....	<b>678</b>
Ms. RIED'S REPLY.....	678
<b>REPORTS OF COMMITTEES ON THE REVIEW OF BILLS</b> .....	<b>681</b>
BILL 2: MISSING PERSONS ACT .....	681
<b>REPORTS OF STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES</b> .....	<b>681</b>
COMMITTEE REPORT 2-20(1): STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT REPORT ON BILL 2: MISSING PERSONS ACT 681	
MOTION TO RECEIVE COMMITTEE REPORT 2-20(1) AND MOVE INTO COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE, CARRIED .....	686
<b>RECOGNITION OF VISITORS IN THE GALLERY (REVERSION)</b> .....	<b>687</b>
<b>ORAL QUESTIONS</b> .....	<b>687</b>
QUESTION 226-20(1): IMPLEMENTATION OF GUARANTEED BASIC INCOME .....	687
QUESTION 227-20(1): P3 PROJECTS.....	688
QUESTION 228-20(1): REGIONALIZED DELIVERY OF INCOME ASSISTANCE PROGRAM .....	689
QUESTION 229-20(1): IMPLEMENTATION OF GUARANTEED BASIC INCOME .....	690
QUESTION 230-20(1): OUTCOMES OF PRODUCTIVE CHOICES .....	691
QUESTION 231-20(1): INCOME ASSISTANCE STATISTICS .....	692
QUESTION 232-20(1): INCOME ASSISTANCE .....	693
QUESTION 233-20(1): FOOD SECURITY .....	694
QUESTION 234-20(1): RESIDENCY REQUIREMENTS FOR INCOME ASSISTANCE.....	695
QUESTION 235-20(1): PATHWAYS TO EDUCATION FOR INCOME ASSISTANCE CLIENTS .....	696
QUESTION 236-20(1): INCOME ASSISTANCE STATISTICS .....	696
QUESTION 237-29(1): AURORA COLLEGE TRANSFORMATION.....	698
<b>TABLING OF DOCUMENTS</b> .....	<b>699</b>
TABLED DOCUMENT 109-20(1): NWT OFFICE OF THE REGULATOR OF OIL AND GAS OPERATIONS ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024 .....	699
<b>NOTICES OF MOTION</b> .....	<b>699</b>
MOTION 31-20(1): CROSS-BORDER CRIME REDUCTION FORUM.....	699
<b>CONSIDERATION IN COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE OF BILLS AND OTHER MATTERS</b> .....	<b>699</b>
COMMITTEE MOTION 9-20(1): TABLED DOCUMENT 93-20(1): MAIN ESTIMATES 2024-2025, DEFERRAL OF DEPARTMENT – HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES, CARRIED .....	720
COMMITTEE MOTION 10-20(1): TABLED DOCUMENT 93-20(1): MAIN ESTIMATES 2024-2025, EDUCATION, CULTURE AND EMPLOYMENT – CORPORATE MANAGEMENT – REDUCE OPERATIONS EXPENDITURES, DEFEATED .....	733

<b>REPORT OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE .....</b>	<b>734</b>
<b>ORDERS OF THE DAY .....</b>	<b>734</b>

**YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES****Tuesday, June 4, 2024****Members Present**

Hon. Caitlin Cleveland, Mr. Edjericon, Mr. Hawkins, Hon. Lucy Kuptana, Hon. Vince McKay, Ms. Morgan, Mr. Morse, Mr. Nerysoo, Ms. Reid, Mr. Rodgers, Hon. Lesa Semmler, Hon. R.J. Simpson, Mr. Testart, Mr. Thompson, Mrs. Weyallon Armstrong, Hon. Caroline Wawzonek, Mrs. Yakeleya

The House met at 1:32 p.m.

**Prayer**

---Prayer

**SPEAKER (Hon. Shane Thompson):** Colleagues, I'd like to thank Jonas Lafferty for the guiding words this afternoon. I hope everybody had a good weekend and get ready to rock and roll.

So Ministers' statements. Minister of Status of Women.

**Ministers' Statements**

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 41-20(1):  
FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE RELEASE  
OF THE FINAL REPORT OF NATIONAL  
INQUIRY INTO MISSING AND MURDERED  
INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS

**HON. LUCY KUPTANA:** Mr. Speaker, today I rise to acknowledge the Fifth Anniversary of the Release of the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The final report describes the dire situation faced by Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people as genocide, and delivers 231 Calls for Justice directed at governments, institutions, social service providers, industries, and all Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, here in the Northwest Territories, where half of the population is Indigenous, we are all too familiar with the harmful effects of colonialism. From the era of residential schools to the decades of tuberculosis and the Sixties Scoop, we are either survivors of the trauma or know someone who is.

Mr. Speaker, many Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people in the NWT and across Canada, continue to experience violence in the home, workplace and within their community, and they continue to go missing. In the NWT, there are currently 80 active missing persons cases. As I speak here today, Frank Gruben, who went missing from Fort Smith in May 2023, still has not been found. I call on anyone with information that could help find

Frank Gruben, to step forward to call Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-8477.

Mr. Speaker, since the release of the final report, the Government of the Northwest Territories has taken steps to begin to affect change so that Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people can feel safe, valued, supported, and honoured in every community. In response to the Call for Justice, the GNWT is implementing its Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Action Plan tabled in November 2022. One of the actions identified in the plan is to look at how our government is responding to violence directed at Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people, recognizing that partnership is key in building trust with Indigenous residents and communities. In the next three years, we will be designing new foster care models to help break cycles of gender-based violence for children and youth as well as conducting a feasibility study on developing a NWT restorative justice model to support survivors of family violence.

Mr. Speaker, as part of our government's response to the national action plan to end gender-based violence, we have signed a four-year funding agreement to implement a whole of government response to ending gender-based violence, family violence, and intimate partner violence. Our interdepartmental approach involves working closely with Indigenous governments and non-profit organizations to coordinate activities, which include contributing more funding to family violence shelters and community organizations.

Mr. Speaker, work has also advanced on establishing an MMIWG advisory committee, which will provide advice and guidance to this government on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls-related matters. It will be a pathway for communities to provide input into programs and services to ensure they reflect and address community needs and aspirations as they relate to the Calls for Justice. The draft terms of reference for this committee have been developed with input from Indigenous governments, key stakeholders, and other community partners. Once the terms of reference are finalized,

organizations will be able to put forward their committee members for appointment. The intent is to have this advisory committee in place by the fall of 2024.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories is dedicated to ending violence directed at Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people. We will do this by implementing the action plan using a whole-of-government approach, while working with the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls advisory committee to guide this work. I will look to the Legislative Assembly to continue to collaborate with our community partners to develop solutions that are reasonable, effective, and sustainable and by continuously striving to do better.

An annual report on the implementation of the action plan is being prepared and will be posted on the GNWT's Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls web page by the end of June 2024.

Mr. Speaker, the GNWT is committed to working with all Northerners and partners across Canada to address systemic causes of violence, inequality, and racism so that Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people can feel safe and empowered in their communities, in the Northwest Territories, and across Canada. Quyananni, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister responsible for the status of Women. Members, I wish to draw your attention to the presence of Colette Langlois, our current ombud, and Krista Carnogursky. I apologize if I said that name wrong, our incoming ombud. Ms. Langlois, thank you for your years of service. And Ms. Carnogursky, we wish you well as you take on the task of this important role. So welcome to our Assembly.

Ministers' statements. Minister for Education, Culture and Employment.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 42-20(1):  
INCOME ASSISTANCE IMPROVEMENTS

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to update you on crucial improvements to the Northwest Territories Income Assistance Program.

July, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment will introduce a new targeted income assistance program for seniors and persons with disabilities. These anticipated changes, first announced last year, are ready to roll out across the territory next month.

Income assistance programs provide essential support for residents in financial need. Clients

will receive a base benefit amount based on the number of people in their household and the northern market basket measure of their region to reflect cost of living differences across the Northwest Territories. This base benefit covers basic needs like food, clothing, and other daily living activities. Clients will also be eligible for other benefits based on their circumstances including shelter, utilities, child care, security deposits, flood and fire emergencies, and even education and training benefits.

We have also increased the income exemption amount. The exemption can be taken as a lump sum amount or be split into smaller amounts provided it does not exceed the annual limit. This allows clients to accept some monetary gifts or generate some additional household revenues without a significant impact on their benefits. For example, some people may want to work a few hours per week or participate in paid cultural activities or collect an honoraria from serving on a board. In addition, Mr. Speaker, this new program will address the barrier of monthly applications. Seniors and persons with disabilities will only need to apply once a year, enabling them to budget for their monthly costs more effectively.

These enhancements are the result of extensive engagement with residents, Indigenous governments, and stakeholders. Residents were clear that we need improved supports for vulnerable residents, better program accessibility, and to do our part to support seniors and elders to age in place.

Mr. Speaker, these program changes represent an increased investment of \$5 million into the income assistance program. Education, Culture and Employment will use a performance measurement plan to ensure proper monitoring and evaluation of these programs. More importantly, Mr. Speaker, these program changes will result in better services for residents who need it most, while recognizing the incredible value that elders, seniors, and persons with disabilities bring to our communities. Significant work to reduce barriers, including fewer layers of administration and less paperwork, will also improve the overall experience for clients, care providers, and non-governmental organizations trying to support them. By making this system more efficient, seniors and persons with disabilities will have more time to focus on what matters most, including self-care, training and education, community participation, and time with family.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories is committed to delivering programs and services that help residents live their lives with dignity, reach their long-term goals, and

benefit from opportunities in the territory. Guided by engagement with hundreds of residents and stakeholders, I am confident that these crucial improvements to the income assistance program will improve the quality of life for NWT residents who need it most. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Ministers' statements. Mr. Premier.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 43-20(1):  
MINISTER ABSENT FROM THE HOUSE

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Mr. Speaker, I wish to advise the House that the honourable Member for Thebacha, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, will be absent from the House today and tomorrow for the Canadian Council of Forests Ministers meeting in Cranbrook, British Columbia.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Premier. Ministers' statements. Members' statements. Member from Great Slave.

### Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 224-20(1):  
INCOME ASSISTANCE – HOW TO BE  
REGIONALLY APPROPRIATE

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I am joining in with my colleagues to speak about income assistance services in the NWT. Mr. Speaker, since becoming an MLA, my understanding of social programs and services, like income assistance, has continued to evolve. I have learned through discussions with my colleagues that what I think may be appropriate for Yellowknife residents may not be appropriate or perhaps applicable to other communities or regions. For example, what I think might be a good idea and could really work for folks living in Yellowknife might not work the same way or at all for folks who are living in the Mackenzie Delta or the Tlicho.

I'm excited for my colleagues to have the opportunity tomorrow to hear from Karl Widerquist, who is an expert on basic income. As I have stated before in this House, I believe a guaranteed basic income could be an exciting approach for our territory.

Mr. Speaker, I've said previously that the current structure and function of our income assistance system is paternalistic in nature. I would also add that it is colonial in nature because it makes people dependent on the program and disincentivizes participation in the labour force.

This brings me to my next point, Mr. Speaker, which is the general lack of meaningful work opportunities that are available in small communities and regional centres compared to what is available in Yellowknife. This situation further complicates the inherent issues with income assistance and entrenches people within that system without any other options available to them. We must also consider that there are some people who may have little to no desire to participate in the day-to-day wage economy and would much prefer to primarily participate in a traditional economy instead.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, at the core I believe the GNWT's social programs need to be reexamined and restructured so operationally they function to properly meet the needs of the people and work to meet residents where they're at and properly address what they need. I think it's important that we consider looking at income assistance from the lens of appropriately tailoring what the program needs to look like in the context of a region-based or community-based way. I will have questions later for the Minister of ECE. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Great Slave. Members' statements. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 225-20(1):  
INCOME ASSISTANCE – FOOD SECURITY

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in order for people to live financially independent from the government, there needs to be local economic opportunities. There needs to be business activity and a local economy in order for people to earn wages and prosper. When there's a lack of business activity, Mr. Speaker, like we see in the Beaufort Delta region, families have no choice but to turn to income support. And when families are limited to income support to pay their bills, providing healthy nutritious meals becomes even more of a challenge.

Mr. Speaker, the population of Inuvik is 3,383. The most recent numbers from the bureau shows that 645 people in the Inuvik region were income assistance recipients.

Mr. Speaker, we know the cost of living in the NWT is highest in the communities further north. For families living on income security in my region, Mr. Speaker, food insecurity is a real threat. The bureau also shows that 24 percent of households in Inuvik are worried that there's not much money for food. Mr. Speaker, 287 homes in Inuvik worry about hunger and what will be the next meal.

I want to acknowledge the inspiring work initiated by Indigenous governments in my region to address this issue. The Inuvialuit Regional Corporation is responding to rising food prices and the accessibility of country foods to families. The IRC provides food baskets to school-aged families. Mr. Speaker, the Inuvialuit Community Economic Development Organization also runs a new processing plant that provides country food to beneficiaries. Mr. Speaker, these are the food security solutions that make a difference in the lives of families and households. These are the initiatives we need to supported across the territory, Mr. Speaker. And I'll have questions for the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment later today.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Inuvik Boot Lake. Members' statements. Member from Yellowknife North.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 226-20(1):  
INCOME ASSISTANCE – GUARANTEED  
BASIC INCOME

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, income is the leading factor that determines how healthy someone might be. People who have higher incomes are much likelier to be healthier, and people on lower incomes tend to have worse health. It's easy to see how more money would allow someone to buy healthier food or have more recreation opportunities, but what could actually be more important to someone's health is the toll that poverty takes on mental health and relationships. How incredibly stressful it is to have too little to get by and support your family. The stress of insecurity, not knowing whether you'll get the short-term work contract or the short-term income assistance you need next month or the month after. That insecurity prevents you from making good plans, and instead you might make shortsighted decisions that are likely to drag you deeper into crippling debt.

Now, our system has been designed to prevent anyone receiving income assistance from accumulating savings, so they can never develop that sense of security.

According to a March 2023 report by Alternatives North, the idea of a basic income guarantee for the NWT is to take away this stress and insecurity. It can allow people to go back to school, retrain for a new job, or start their own business. It can allow others to care for aging or sick loved ones, volunteer in the community, find appropriate housing, recover from stress or trauma, and put healthy food on the table. Now, the GNWT is rolling out major changes to income assistance that will,

thankfully, take us more in the direction of guaranteed basic income, particularly for seniors and those with disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, there is disagreement about whether raising income assistance levels and decreasing barriers will actually lead people to take steps like retraining or starting their own business. I've heard concern from my colleagues in this room that too much dependence on government is draining people's motivation, their sense of dignity and confidence to make their own decisions. I believe we need to continue on this path towards guaranteed basic income while also tackling other major things that take away people's sense of security and prevent them from achieving their potential, such as housing availability and better early educational supports. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. Members' statements. Member from Mackenzie Delta.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 227-20(1):  
INCOME ASSISTANCE – REDUCTION OF  
DEPENDENCE

**MR. NERYSOO:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to discuss the issue that income support clients in my riding, the Mackenzie Delta, are two times higher than the rest of the NWT. What is happening in my riding, Mr. Speaker, for so many people to be on income assistance and how is the government responding to this?

The purpose of income support, as stated in the policy manual, is to help people to become independent and self-reliant. Unfortunately, it does not appear that income assistance in the Mackenzie Delta is helping people become independent. What we see is that once people start, they do not get off income assistance. I also see students in my region who go through the education system. They are socially passed and can't keep up with university or college. It is not uncommon for these young people, capable of working or pursuing post-secondary education, to become income assistance clients. Our young adults are getting stuck on the income assistance. This does not help their self-esteem.

Mr. Speaker, I do not want to penalize people who have medical conditions or cannot work. These people need the support of the government but, unfortunately, I see a lot of people who should be working but instead are on income assistance. I want to address the cycle of dependency that carries through to families and generations on income assistance. How can we get people working?



The government needs to look at the policy and make changes that incentivizes people to work and make productive choices, and the government should report on the outcomes of productive choices. How do we measure the outcome of income assistance? We should be able to report the number of people on income assistance and the number of people who have moved on. How many success stories do we have? I will have questions for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment later. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Mackenzie Delta. Members' statements. Member from Monfwi.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 228-20(1):  
INCOME ASSISTANCE – REDUCTION OF  
DEPENDENCE

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Getting back people to work and off income support assistance.

Mr. Speaker, I care for and am concerned for the future generations. I am concerned that we are losing the resilience that our ancestors survived for generations on. Life is different now than 50 years ago.

Mr. Speaker, income support was created as a temporary solution, a band aid solution, to give people assistance for a short period of time. But, unfortunately, what it has become is a system that people get on and do not get off of the income assistance. For some young people, some young adults, it has become a norm.

Living on income support, life is limited. We all know that. There is not much people can do but be controlled by the system. We all know that if people are working and earning wages, they would have a better standard of living than income support. So why is this temporary income support not helping people get back to work?

Mr. Speaker, income support does help people pay their bills and survive but we all know the challenge with this program is that once people are on income support, they get comfortable. There is no incentive to get out of the system. Mr. Speaker, how do we support people to want better than income support?

Our elders survived and took care of each other and their families before income assistance, before child tax payment, before the subsidies that we have today. Income support should be designed to help people get back to work, to incentivize people to go back to work not penalize them. Has the Minister considered

trying pilot projects in regions or communities to roll out income support differently?

A job is one reason that can help people wake up early every day, stay sober, be productive, and become self-sufficient. We need to look at different ways of delivering income assistance so we can truly support people to get back to work. Mr. Speaker, can I have unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

Thank you. Maybe that means for a temporary period of time they are allowed to work, and their monthly income support is not reduced. Maybe we allow people to earn enough to save so they can find a way out of living on income support. I will have questions for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Monfwi. Members' statements. Member from Range Lake.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 229-20(1):  
GUARANTEED BASIC INCOME

**MR. TESTART:** Mr. Speaker, I'm going to join my colleagues in speaking about income assistance. It's clear there's severe shortcomings in how the GNWT works to address poverty and inequality. As we search for solutions, I would like to turn to my colleagues' attention to the work Alternatives North has done to find missing pieces of our social safety net.

After years of tireless study and research, they have concluded that what the North is missing is a universal income program. They've even provided us with the steps we need to take to put this program in place. Rates of poverty and low income remain stubbornly high while standards of living remain stagnant, at best. The NWT Bureau of Statistics recently discovered that poverty has risen to 15 percent but the data gets even worse as it's broken down. 15 percent of single parent families in the small communities live on low incomes, and 24 percent of NWT children younger than 15 live in households that struggle to meet their financial needs. These numbers do not even begin to tell the bigger picture of the fact that many working families are living dangerously close to falling into these low income and poverty thresholds every month. The GNWT seems only interested in continually added entitlement programs but doing so only increases administrative costs and builds barriers into our system that leave our most vulnerable stuck in a poverty trap. A basic minimum income would round up programs we already have by ensuring every

Northerner has a liveable wage without adding to our administrative costs.

Mr. Speaker, the previous government shrugged off this report when it was first released but this new government now has the opportunity to correct that mistake and begin working with NGOs, municipalities, Indigenous governments, and their federal counterparts to begin phasing in pilot programs across the North that will raise the standard of living in communities in the NWT.

Mr. Speaker, one pilot program would be an improvement over zero. It's time for universal basic income. It was time yesterday, it will be time tomorrow, and certainly we'll find out if it's time today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Members' statements. Member from Frame Lake.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 230-20(1):  
INCOME ASSISTANCE – REDUCTION OF  
DEPENDENCE

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to support the words shared by my colleagues that we need to take action to reduce dependence on government support. I really appreciate the perspective they bring into this House from their experience living and representing the communities and the frustration they feel when they see people becoming dependent on the government rather than achieving independence and self-reliance.

I also have a bit of experience working with youth in some of our communities in my own role as an instructor of an environmental monitoring training program and can say that the youth I worked with were capable, energetic, and excited at the prospect of gaining some skills which would lead them into an interesting career.

This work is another part of why I'm so passionate about post-secondary education because I've seen myself how big of an impact even an introductory program can have on lifting people up to grasp the opportunities in front of them. It also flies in the face of the idea that people simply don't want to work.

So, Mr. Speaker, I share and want to build upon the messages shared by my community colleagues that we need to be working to reduce dependence on the government for programs such as income support, which I think is a necessary support but shouldn't be seen as an end goal. With this in mind, I look to the upcoming changes to the program being implemented by ECE. I can see how

requirements like the productive choice requirement or the requirement to seek and maintain employment were seen as paternalistic and restrictive, and so I don't necessarily take issue with their removal. However, I am wondering what the department is planning to do to reduce dependence on this kind of programming if not through these requirements. I'll have some questions for the Minister on that later.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to speak to the experience of a constituent who has accessed income support. She was required by the department to drain her modest RRSP savings in order to continue to qualify for support. This was done in accordance with section 20 of the income assistance regulations. While I understand there is a need to ensure fairness in program access, I would say at a basic level it feels counterproductive and unfair to require a person to drain retirement savings in order to access support in a time of need. I think the department should have a look at requirements like this and how they can have the unintended consequence of furthering entrenching people in the need for support as has been so eloquently spoken to by my colleagues today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Frame Lake. Members' statements. Member from the Dehcho.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 231-20(1):  
INCOME ASSISTANCE – LIVING ON THE  
LAND DISQUALIFICATION

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know of two constituents who are in a unique and unfortunate set of circumstances involving income assistance.

Mr. Speaker, there are two constituents in my riding who are a couple and are in a situation where neither of them have jobs. They don't have housing accommodations or any support of any kind. This couple, sadly, is caught up in the addiction process. They decided to go out and live on the land together because they wanted to sober up and, in doing so, they also attempted to get their income assistance. But they were denied and told they were ineligible to receive any assistance because they do not live in the town with a fixed address despite the camp this couple is at is within the community or municipal boundary.

Mr. Speaker, there's something very wrong with this picture in more ways than one. This government needs to support people when they decide to change their lives for the better away from addictions. Why are income assistance recipients penalized for deciding to live off the

land where there are no jobs, no available housing, and no government support available to help them? No, it said.

Why are income assistance recipients penalized for deciding to live off the land if there are no jobs, no available housing, and no government support available to help them?

Mr. Speaker, when people are struggling with addictions and have no support, going out on the land will help them because the land is healing. People can gain insights on healthy living while connecting with nature. If NGOs or communities provide land-based healing already, then how is this situation this couple is dealing with any different? Why is our government not supporting people to be on the land when seeking healing and sobriety? With proper guidance and support, people living off the land can actually heal themselves and become productive citizens when they return to communities.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Department of ECE can work with NGOs, communities, and Indigenous governments to create a new way to assist recipients of income assistance that want to sober up and change their lives. There must be another way for people who do not have fixed addresses to receive some level of support from them. I will have questions for the Minister of ECE at the appropriate time.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from the Dehcho. Members' statements. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 232-20(1):  
INCOME ASSISTANCE – PRODUCTIVE  
CHOICES

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like my colleagues, I want to talk about income assistance today. I sometimes I see it as dependence versus transition to independence. I read on the internet the other day, it said welfare dependency can be defined as a state in which person or a household is reliant on government's benefits or further income for a prolonged period of time, Mr. Speaker, and without which, they cannot manage or sustain their daily living.

Mr. Speaker, how does the department transition families from dependency to programs to independencies? I worry that the cornerstone of hope is really their plan. I don't see a graduated scale we're inspiring people to stand on their own, even with our support. You know, work instills pride, very fundamental to being a human being. A place in society that has accountability but also a sense of accomplishment leads towards healthy living.

It's not a perfect path, Mr. Speaker, but it is one that does show the greatness of being human.

Being stuck on income support is a tough experience, Mr. Speaker. I know many; I have spoken to many over the years; and no one feels as if it's the best spot for them but they are trapped in that cycle of dependency. You know, income support sometimes can be viewed as, or income assistance can be viewed as the back dooring of a universal basic-basic, very basic income. It's barely enough to get by. So how do we get people on their feet? We don't know.

We eliminated the cycle of productive choices, so yet we have people in these dependency cycles and yet when we say where the system is changing and people are getting off income support, I wonder why. Is it because they stopped filing their paperwork? Did they not qualify that month? Or did they get a job and find their own way? I don't know, and I'd like to know if the department has any idea.

Again, when I talk to people on income assistance, I hear depression, anxiety, and frustration. They want to do more, they want to be more, and they can be more, Mr. Speaker, and yet we have to find a way.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I want to stress that the department needs to enable productive choices, get people back on their feet, let the government support them. There's no shame in giving more to those who do shoot for independence because at the end of the day isn't that our goal, to ensure that we have healthy families, independent people contributing to a northern society for one and all? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. Members' statements. Member from Hay River South.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 233-20(1):  
HAY RIVER TRACK AND FIELD 2024

**HON. VINCE MCKAY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week, actually starting tomorrow, from June 5th to 7th marks the 30th Annual Northwest Territories Track and Field Championships in Hay River. And I know this might come to a bit of a surprise to most of you; however, I will not be there participating as an athlete. It's been a long road, and it's been a long five years since the last track and field events were held because of COVID-19 and natural disasters, this annual tradition finally returns. If you're from Hay River, you know how significant this event is and how deeply the community is involved. It takes hundreds of volunteer hours and immense dedication to put

this together. The community's commitment shines when over 900 athletes will show up this year to compete. If you've been an athlete over the past 30 years, you likely have fond memories of this trip and this event.

I want to take the time to congratulate the track and field committee on organizing this year's event and all the hard work done in its previous two years despite the disasters that prevented this event from happening. Thanks to your dedication, the field will once again be filled this year with young athletes from the Northwest Territories. This commitment deserves acknowledgement.

To the athletes attending this event, I hope you enjoy our community and all it has to offer. Though I am saddened I will be away this year and not able to volunteer, I am delighted to know that this event will be another success with many young athletes making memories and breaking records. Have fun this week, and good luck to all the athletes. Once again, thank you to all the volunteers, athletes, and sponsors of the NWT Track and Field Championships in Hay River. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Hay River South. Members' statements.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 234-20(1):  
WILLEM KANIGAN, 2024 YOUTH  
PARLIAMENTARIAN

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** Colleagues, during the youth parliament, the Member from the Dehcho, Willem Kanigan, did a Member's statement on the issue of lack of maintenance and pavement of the all-season highway that connected Fort Simpson to Fort Liard. I would like to share it here today.

A concern that many of the residents of the Dehcho region have raised to me is the condition of the route that connects Fort Simpson to other communities during all times of year.

The road that links Fort Simpson to Fort Liard is extremely difficult to navigate during many of the winter months due to snow build-up and icy conditions along the road. This highway is vital to many people in the Dehcho region and acts as a lifeline to them. Constituents and their family use this highway to get supplies and for personal use, and unsafe road conditions impede their way of life.

At this moment, the road that connects Fort Simpson to Fort Liard is, for the most part, a gravel road with only a 70-kilometre section out of the 393 kilometers being paved. Many locals have voiced concerns about the

road and the challenges it poses to them during the winter months and throughout the year, and I believe that the only way to fully remedy this issue would be to better maintain or to pave the Fort Liard Highway. For these reasons, he will ask the Minister of Infrastructure to allocate additional funds towards maintenance of the highway between Fort Simpson and Fort Liard or to give additional funding towards paving the highway to improve road conditions year-round. The conditions of the road that connects Fort Simpson to Fort Liard are extremely challenging during the winter months due to icy conditions, snow buildup, and the fact of the road not being paved. These conditions pose a difficulty to many residents of the Dehcho region.

He asked the Minister of Infrastructure to allocate additional spending on the maintenance of the road or pave the road as this would resolve the issue completely. I would like to thank the Youth Member for this statement and allow me to share it with you here today.

Colleagues, I think that Member may have seen some of my Member's statements in the past, so I have to say thank you very much for doing it.

Members' statements. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member for Hay River North.

### Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to recognize one of my constituents, Ms. Colette Langlois, the current ombud of Northwest Territories, and I want to thank her for her service and for establishing the Office of the Ombud in Hay River. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Hay River North. Recognition of visitors in the gallery.

Replies to the Budget Address, Day 6 of 7. Member from Great Slave.

### Replies to the Budget Address

MS. RIED'S REPLY

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a quote I saw online recently that I can unfortunately not attribute but it doesn't diminish its truth. Quote, "The role of a politician is not to get into power. The role of a politician is to act as a steward and caretaker for our society, to manage society for the betterment of all of us."

That quote sums up why I am here today. I want to help provide the direction that leads to the betterment of all of us in the NWT. But the job of governing "better" seemingly gets harder by the day, week, year, and decade. Some of it simply is that all the problems feel like too much. Disasters and catastrophes, both of nature and those driven by people and their desire for power, feel amplified more and more in this century.

As a millennial, I can confidently say that my generation is bone-tired of living through unprecedented situations. To us, unprecedented doesn't really mean anything anymore. It's just another Tuesday. And so many days feel like just going through the motions to find enough money to scrape together for housing, food, and basic needs. But, Mr. Speaker, despite it all, or perhaps even because of it, I have hope. I'm here to try and lead with my heart and compassion, balanced with evidence-based decision-making. I'm here to remind the government of its core mission: To always focus on lifting up the people of the Northwest Territories by choosing programs and policies that make sense, by responding effectively to what people tell government that they need, and not acting simply in lip service.

I'm here to listen to my colleagues, especially those with lived experiences different than mine, and understand the hardships that their constituents face across the territory.

I do believe that everyone in this room, on both sides of the floor, would agree with the key tenet of leading with compassion. I think that intent was clear when we collectively set out priorities of the 20th Assembly that focused on fundamental human needs. The 19 elected representatives in this room could all agree on:

- Sustainability,
- Accessibility and affordability of housing,
- A strong economic foundation,
- Access to health care and addressing the effects of trauma, and
- Safe residents and communities.

But I'd argue that right now the roadmap getting us from today to the Premier's vision of the NWT 50 years from now is a bit tenuous.

As a first-time MLA but a long-time political nerd, I understand how the pieces of the nesting doll- the priorities, the mandate, the business plan, and the budget - fit together to create the agenda for each government. But when I look at our first efforts to create an

agenda of our own by passing our shared priorities through this process, it starts to look like we're playing a game of telephone. Rather than translating our priorities into a plan that will create meaningful results for our NWT residents, we have produced a largely status quo budget.

While this is disappointing, I recognize that this is partly a function of how the puzzle pieces come together to create the plan. It's hard to be nimble and quick in our system of governance, and I'm prepared to give the Premier and Cabinet the benefit of the doubt as we go through the current budget debate.

I can understand why this budget is status quo, Mr. Speaker. The increasing pressures on government spending and growing debt are discouraging constraints that have to inform and influence the plans that we're making. But I'm still frustrated by the lack of substance behind the promise to do better in the three and half short years that we have left together. So I'm going to speak mainly in broad strokes, Mr. Speaker. It's imperative from my perspective that the budgets of the 20th Assembly need to both meet our challenges in the here and now but also align with the needs of the future. I think we may have started down the right path from a debt perspective but perhaps not as fully in other ways. I will always ask Cabinet to impress upon the GNWT to consider paths forward that are proactive instead of reactive.

One such proactive concept, the Government Renewal Initiative, or GRI, began as an exciting concept. In 2020, the Minister of Finance said, "The Department of Finance is planning to shift the way our budget is developed. The Government Renewal Initiative will rely on value-driven budgeting principles to review GNWT programs and services, department by department, and allocate resources to areas that are most critical and valuable to residents.

Value-based budgeting, also known as priority-based budgeting, is both the idea that underlies the building of the budget as well as the method. It's founded on the commonsense idea that government financial resources should be allocated based on how effectively programs and services give value to residents.

We now hear from the Department of Finance that GRI is shifting its focus to evaluation since program inventories for the GNWT are complete. This is fine as an evolutionary growth in the initiative, but it concerns me deeply as the GNWT's internal capacity for formal evaluation is limited.

A truly robust program evaluation takes, on average, about 12 to 18 months. How many

hundreds of people years are we behind in knowing what programs are effective and a good use of our dollars? While we lag behind on knowing the true value of many of our investments in programs and services, I'm concerned that we aren't making the best decisions of what is truly the fat that can be cut. Instead, we're told vacant positions might be a solution but feedback from constituents has shown that isn't necessarily the case. In turn, leading to frustration and rallies outside of this House, as recently as last week. I commend the Minister of Finance for going to the public service to ask for commonsense solutions to bringing budgets in check with the realities of what we have to spend. \$1800 suggestions is a fantastic start, Mr. Speaker.

I fully believe that many more cost savings can be found that do not cut positions or impede or cut programs and services that residents rely on. At the same time, we need to make sure that we do not fall into the trap of making cost savings the primary measure of this Assembly's success. Fiscal sustainability certainly matters but it is a measure of administrative success, of an organization's ability to use its funds efficiently. If we want to be successful as an Assembly, we need to do much more than simply use our resources efficiently. We need to use our resources to produce meaningful results for the people of the NWT.

Financial debt is not the only debt the government should be thinking about. We should also be thinking about debts in education, shelter, and health and wellness, that often don't get measured simply because they do not show up clearly in the main estimates. It is these human debts that NWT residents experience directly in their lives and which this Assembly should be addressing as its primary focus. To do this, we need to have a fundamentally different discussion about how we allocate and use the government's financial resources.

The challenges NWT residents need us to address are persistent and longstanding. Making meaningful progress on them may well require an extraordinary and potentially inefficient investment that we need to be prepared to talk about. We also need to be prepared to consider whether or not the current distribution of resources among departments is truly contributing to achieve those results or is simply maintaining the administrative status quo.

I believe that this kind of fundamental shift in how government resources are allocated is the true promise of GRI, but we aren't there quite yet. Finding administrative efficiencies and cost savings is a step in the right direction, but we

can't stop there. We need to have the collective political courage to put our convictions and principles into action by fundamentally altering the way future budgets get made and government resources get allocated. I recognize this work will take time, and I'm willing to wait until next year's budget to see this initiative bear fruit.

It's imperative to align budgets with the challenges of the future. I hope that everyone here today can now fully embrace the fact that climate change is the existential threat of our lifetime and being well prepared means doing business differently in so many ways. It's a monumental task to shift the culture of government from reactive to proactive, Mr. Speaker. For my part, I am going to do my best to learn what I can about change management in my time as a Member.

I also appreciate that Cabinet has hard decisions to make every day to balance the wellness of our territory now to where it could be in five, ten, or fifty years from now. I ask for Cabinet to define their leadership by embracing and welcoming letting go of ways of doing things that no longer serve us. The conversations that I have had with this Cabinet give me a great deal of hope on this front.

We point to reconciliation a great deal throughout how we plan to move forward in partnership with Indigenous leadership, but I believe we need to look beyond to a future where we have decolonized government and truly work in partnership. The systems of government that we have were built by people, and we can deconstruct them and put them back together however we want. Nothing is stopping us except for our imaginations. The implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has to be much, much more encompassing than just a statement of consistency in our legislation going forward. I eagerly look forward to the action plan and the priorities for change set out by Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations in partnership with the GNWT. I think this is an excellent opportunity for our public government to continue to work differently and better than we have before in all ways that we legislate and deliver services. That conversation excites and invigorates me, Mr. Speaker. This conversation is one I continue to ask for throughout our term, and I am certain the Premier will get tired of me buzzing in his ear, and that's okay.

When stakeholders from all backgrounds and points of advocacy ask us to pull in one direction, we must all put that into action. I genuinely hope that the Premier visits every riding and sees the inequity my colleagues from

smaller communities speak to every day. I hope that he visits some of the rentals in my riding that showcase that there are stark differences in what Yellowknife looks like depending on what opportunities you have access to. I hope he sees firsthand the youth who struggle for purpose in systems that fail them, that he sees that artists who yearn to share their creations but have fleetingly few avenues to do so, that he sees the folks who want to be deeply rooted in their relationship with the land but can't afford the gas for their sled to go harvest. Perhaps we can't solve everything all at once, but we can make meaningful changes in these three and half short years that inspire hope, Mr. Speaker.

I will not lose an opportunity to speak to the fact that in the four-year business plan, the GNWT has noted that the Residential Tenancies Act is up for review and possibly amendments in the life of this government. I was horrified to have the media reach out to me this past weekend to tell me that residents in my constituency had faced a 150 percent rent hike, Mr. Speaker, which is essentially a backdoor to eviction. We can't continue to allow things like this to happen to residents when it is very much in our power to change the law, Mr. Speaker. We can take decisive action and make life better for so many.

What good governance looks like for me and what it looks like for my fellow colleagues may be different in execution, but I genuinely believe that after getting to know my colleagues these past few months is that we are all asking for us not to forget those of our territory with the least. 70 percent of this territory had a collective trauma of evacuation, and the disparity of how that evacuation played out aligns all too closely with the disparity of income and opportunity for too many of us, Mr. Speaker. I really wish we would stop speaking about resiliency as if it is a compliment. We need to stop commending people for being resilient and instead redesign the systems that we operate in that make people suffer.

One final note, Mr. Speaker. During my campaign, I knocked on the door of an educator who works at the Kaw Tay Whee School in Dettah. She told me in no uncertain terms that her school kids will be coming for my job if I was elected, and I told her that was fantastic because it is. More than anything, I want to leave this House, the GNWT, and the territory better than I found it for those kids in Dettah who are coming for my job and will be governing sooner rather than later, Mr. Speaker. They deserve our best work today and every day until the end of our term in 2027. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Great Slave. Replies to Budget Address, Day 6 of 7. Reports of committees on the review of bills. Member from Monfwi.

### Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills

#### BILL 2: MISSING PERSONS ACT

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Reports of committees on the review of bills. Mr. Speaker, your committee would like to report on its consideration of Bill 2, Missing Persons Act.

Bill 2 received second reading in the Legislative Assembly on February 26, 2024, and was referred to the Standing Committee on Social Development for review. Throughout the committee's review, the committee received five written submissions and held three public hearings in the communities of Yellowknife, Aklavik, and Inuvik where over 55 people attended overall. The committee also heard from the Minister of Justice and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police during its review. The committee heard evidence to support the amendment of three clauses to balance the expediency required by the police and the privacy of those who may be fleeing an abusive situation. The committee brought forward these amendments in its clause-by-clause review on May 28, 2024, and the Minister of Justice concurred with all three motions.

Mr. Speaker, the committee reports that Bill 2, Missing Persons Act, is ready for consideration in Committee of the Whole as amended and reprinted. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Bill 2 stands referred to Committee of the Whole. Reports of standing and special committees on the review of bills. Member from Monfwi.

### Reports of Standing and Special Committees

#### COMMITTEE REPORT 2-20(1): STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT REPORT ON BILL 2: MISSING PERSONS ACT

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Mr. Speaker, your Standing Committee on Social Development is pleased to provide its Report on Bill 2, Missing Persons Act and commends it to the House.

Mr. Speaker, report on Bill 2, Missing Persons Act.

## A MESSAGE TO THE FAMILIES OF MISSING PEOPLE

Thank you to the families of missing people that spoke courageously on their thoughts and experiences with the Standing Committee on Social Development. Committee's thoughts are with the family and friends who have experienced the disappearance of a loved one.

### RESOURCES AVAILABLE

Committee acknowledges that subject material related to Bill 2 is very challenging for many families across the Northwest Territories. Committee has included resources available for those experiencing the disappearance of a loved one and/or domestic violence, which can be found in Appendix A.

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Bill 2, Missing Persons Act, is intended to assist the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in locating a missing person in the absence of a criminal investigation. The intent of the Missing Persons legislation will provide the RCMP with additional mechanisms to investigate Missing Persons cases in the Northwest Territories. These additional mechanisms will allow RCMP to move more quickly in investigations to locate missing persons when there is no evidence of criminal activity.

In May 2021, the Executive Council directed the Department of Justice to develop Missing Persons legislation in response to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Call for Justice 5.8. MMIWG Call for Justice 5.8 calls for all provinces and territories to enact Missing Persons legislation. The Government of the Northwest Territories made a commitment in "Changing Relationship: Draft Action Plan in Response to the Calls for Justice on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People" to develop this legislation in response to MMIWG Call for Justice 5.8.

A What We Heard report on the drafting of Missing Persons legislation was tabled by the Minister of Justice in July 2023. The Minister of Justice brought Bill 2 forward to the House in the February 2024 Sitting of the 20th Legislative Assembly.

Bill 2, Missing Persons Act received second reading on February 26, 2024, and was referred to the Standing Committee on Social Development for review.

This report summarizes committee's review of Bill 2, starting with our engagement with the GNWT, the RCMP, and the public. This report also describes committee's efforts to review

and strengthen Bill 2, including three motions to amend the bill - all of which were adopted at the clause-by-clause review – and nine recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to pass it off to the Member for Mackenzie Delta. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Monfwi. Member from Mackenzie Delta.

**MR. NERYSOO:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

### PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

On March 25, 2024, committee received a public briefing from the Minister and his staff on Bill 2. The Minister's presentation is included in Appendix B.

Between March 2024 to April 2024, committee engaged the public. Committee hosted four public meetings in Inuvik, Aklavik, and Yellowknife-Sombak'e. There were two public meetings held in Yellowknife-Sombak'e one of which was with the RCMP and the other was with the public. A total of 55 people attended committee's public meetings.

Committee also sought written submissions on Bill 2. We sent nine targeted engagement letters to non-profit organizations. Committee received written submissions and presentations from:

- Salvation Army – Yellowknife
- Northwest Territories Disabilities Council
- YWCA Northwest Territories
- Northwest Territories Status of Women Council
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police – G Division.

These submissions and presentations are also included in Appendix B.

Committee appreciates everyone who offered their feedback at public meetings and in written submissions. Committee is especially appreciative for the family and friends of missing persons who provided their thoughts and feedback on Bill 2 and missing persons cases in the NWT. All participants welcomed Bill 2 as a positive and needed step in helping to solve missing persons cases in the NWT. Participants offered thoughtful ideas to improve the bill and feedback on key areas that relate to missing persons.

Committee categorized public comments received into ten themes.



## 1. Traditional knowledge, Indigenous leadership, and cultural safety

Community feedback brought up the need for Indigenous leadership to be consulted and involved when dealing with missing persons cases, specifically the inclusion of traditional knowledge during search and rescue operations. There was public feedback on the inclusion of Indigenous leadership when the families of missing persons are communicating with the authorities. It was noted that families would be more comfortable talking to their own people as they may feel intimidated by the RCMP and local authority. Public comments stated that the involvement of Indigenous leadership could be on a case-by-case basis.

There were public concerns on the deflection of responsibility or unknown responsibility for search and rescue operations in communities. A question arose regarding how we can better act when a person goes missing and how we can learn to operationalize search and rescue in smaller communities.

Committee noted these concerns which highlighted the necessity for policy work to include Indigenous people in missing persons cases and search and rescue, especially due to high rates of missing persons cases in the NWT being Indigenous peoples. Committee therefore recommends:

**Recommendation 1:** The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends the Government of the Northwest Territories work with Indigenous governments and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to establish a committee of local and community Indigenous leaders when a missing persons investigation is underway to aid with search and rescue operations, include the involvement of traditional knowledge and facilitate communication with the affected family and loved ones.

There were concerns raised by community members on the RCMP remaining culturally responsible when dealing with missing persons cases, especially in the case of individuals fleeing domestic violence and who may not want to be found.

There were also concerns regarding the impact of RCMP attempting to enter a family violence or support shelter without permission or reasonable explanation. For the YWCA-NWT, it is currently policy to deny RCMP access to their family violence shelter unless there are exceptional circumstances warranting their entry such as threats to the health and safety of clients or staff. The YWCA-NWT encourages meaningful engagement and communication

from the RCMP with their shelter and frontline workers – as the shelter's primary concern is to advocate for their clients and their safety.

Committee sought clarity on cultural and trauma-informed training for the RCMP, and it was confirmed that they do have specific training to conduct missing persons investigations that is mandatory for all RCMP members of the G Division to participate. There is other training as well for RCMP to ensure there is a trauma-informed and culturally sensitive approach to their work.

Committee hears these concerns and presents the following recommendation to ensure that trauma-informed approaches are of the utmost importance to and practiced by the RCMP and justices when investigating missing persons cases and issuing search orders and record orders:

**Recommendation 2:** The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends the Government of the Northwest Territories work with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and justices to evaluate any cultural safety programming/training being offered to Royal Canadian Mounted Police members and justices to ensure it is trauma-informed and otherwise responsibly addresses those working with missing person cases in the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to pass it off to the Member for Range Lake.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

## 2. Privacy Protection

It was stated by members of the public at a public meeting that the urgency of finding missing people is more important to their community than the protection of someone's privacy. There was no concerns on the privacy of missing persons, as long as common sense was considered when taking into account the protection of someone's privacy.

Committee received a recommendation to add third party consent clauses to the legislation, similar to British Columbia's Missing Persons Act. This clause requires the police to gain third party consent first before proceeding with a record access. Committee notes this suggestion but felt that the legislation covers most common scenarios that are seen in the NWT and does not require the addition of third-party consent clauses.

As described in a written submission by the Salvation Army–Yellowknife division, it was

recommended that care must be taken when the RCMP is requesting information that could be helpful in a missing persons investigation. It was also recommended that the information requested be pertinent to the case of the missing person. There were concerns on the potential of accidentally providing information to somebody's abuser – which highlighted the importance of protecting a person that may be fleeing domestic violence. When ascertaining a missing person's well-being, the RCMP stressed that they do not provide information that is not agreed upon by consent of the missing person for release.

During a presentation by the YWCA-NWT, it was recommended there be training for justices handling missing persons cases to ensure their approach is trauma-informed when granting access to records or search warrants. They highlighted the importance of being sensitive to the issue of domestic violence and the various dynamics that exist with missing persons cases.

It was also recommended there be training on the Missing Persons Act and its usage for RCMP, non-profit organizational staff, and shelter workers.

Committee takes note of this feedback and presents the following recommendation:

**Recommendation 3:** The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends the Government of the Northwest Territories establish training specific to the Missing Persons Act and its responsible, culturally-appropriate usage for justices, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, non-profit staff, and shelter workers.

### 3. Communication

There were public concerns on the difficulty for families and friends of missing persons to contact the RCMP to receive information and updates on ongoing missing persons investigations. It was highlighted that it is critical for the family affected by a missing persons investigation to be updated often so that family members do not have to consistently approach the RCMP for updates. There was a suggestion to create a liaison position to support the families of missing persons, especially with relaying information to and from the RCMP and communication regarding the investigation. Committee appreciated this suggestion, and also heard a large emphasis on ensuring local, trusted people on the ground in communities were being utilized rather than officials from elsewhere, where possible.

As such, this theme of communication with the family of a missing person has been factored in

with Recommendation 1 of this report, where a committee is established on the ground in the community of the missing person to aid with communication between the family and the authorities.

Mr. Speaker, I now call on the honourable Member for Yellowknife North to continue this report. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

### 4. Historical Missing Persons Cases.

Clause 14 of Bill 2 requires the RCMP to prepare an annual report to be provided to the Minister of Justice on the total number of emergency demands, a description of the types of records specified, and any other prescribed information. In public meetings, there were questions about where unsolved cold and historical statistics on missing persons cases in the NWT are to be recorded and published, and whether and where that information is currently located or published. Participants requested that the year and reason for why people are missing in the NWT also be published. Further, committee heard feedback questioning the procedures involved with identifying human remains.

One recurring theme committee heard from members of the public was concern about how long-standing missing persons cases will be prioritized and solved.

Committee therefore recommends:

**Recommendation 4:** The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends that in the formulation of regulations for the Missing Persons Act, the Government of the Northwest Territories require the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to include a schedule in the annual report referenced in the Missing Persons Act that outlines statistical missing persons information in the Northwest Territories, and that the regulations state where the annual report will be published.

### 5. Renaming Legislation.

There were public requests to change the name of Bill 2 to recognize an individual from a high-profile missing person's case in the NWT, Frank Gruben Jr., since the media coverage of his case resulted in the expedition of missing persons legislation in the NWT. The request was to change the bill's name to "Frank's Act".

Committee notes that in the Rules of the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly,

Rule 8.4(1) states "... the preamble and title are considered last and cannot be amended." In addition to this rule and by convention, the Legislative Assembly follows the House of Commons procedure and practice where the title of a bill must accurately reflect the content within the bill.

Therefore, committee makes the following recommendation:

**Recommendation 5:** The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends the House refers the matter of titling bills to the Standing Committee on Procedures and Privileges to review and consider the current conventions in the titling of bills and if those conventions should be expanded.

## 6. Jurisdictional Consistency

There were comments made by the public on better coordinating missing persons searches and investigations between bordering jurisdictions, especially for missing persons in communities that border Alberta, the Yukon, British Columbia, and Nunavut. There was emphasis on ensuring that the bill is consistent with legislation in bordering jurisdictions.

Committee notes these concerns and sought clarity on what jurisdictional review was completed when developing this legislation. The GNWT confirmed that the legislation allows for interprovincial cooperation in missing persons cases and that the department conducted a jurisdictional review of Missing Persons legislation across Canada when drafting the legislation.

The Government of the Northwest Territories drafted the legislation informed by their public engagement, aspects of legislation in other jurisdictions, and how they might best align, as well as northern contexts.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to pass it off to the Member for Dehcho.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. Member from the Dehcho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

## 7. Records Access

Community members raised questions about retrieving records from social media companies throughout a missing persons investigation. Concerns were voiced on accessing records through social media companies that are based in different countries such as in the U.S., and whether that would pose difficulties or if there are policies against accessing accounts or records.

Committee sought information on accessing records through social media, and it was confirmed that information being requested would depend on the social media company, their location, and the extent to which they wish to cooperate with law enforcement. There may be difficulty in accessing data held by American-based social media companies, which usually requires working with law enforcement in the United States to get a search warrant and can be a lengthy process.

Information could be provided to RCMP through a "humanitarian request", and typically this information is limited to date, time, and location.

## 8. Truth and Reconciliation.

Community members raised thoughts and concerns on how survivors of the Sixties Scoop are technically missing because their parents or family members may not know where they are or how to find them. It was suggested there be a program established to help reunify families of the Sixties Scoop.

Committee hears and believes in the importance of these concerns. Committee sought clarity on current tools and supports in place to aid survivors of the Sixties Scoop and their families.

Committee presents the following recommendation:

**Recommendation 6:** The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends the Government of the Northwest Territories work with the federal government in establishing legislation specific to the Sixties Scoop and creating programming to assist those impacted by the Sixties Scoop in the Northwest Territories.

## 9. Record Retention and Destruction.

There were concerns presented by the YWCA-NWT about how the legislation outlines when and how records obtained during the course of a missing person investigation should be destroyed. YWCA-NWT suggests there needs to be a timeline for the destruction of records once the person is found and the case is closed. It was suggested that there be a timeline for the destruction of records once the person is found and the case is closed.

The committee hears these concerns and presents the following recommendation:

**Recommendation 7:** The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends the Government of the Northwest Territories include specifics on record retention and

destruction in the development of the regulations for the Missing Persons Act.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to pass it off to the Member for Monfwi.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Dehcho. Member for Monfwi.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:**

#### **AMENDMENTS**

Committee put forward three motions to amend Bill 2. These are included in Appendix C of this report.

#### **Motions 1 and 2**

Clauses 7(4) and (5), and 8(3) and (4) of Bill 2 as proposed required a justice to consider any information that suggests a person may not want to be found in determining whether to issue a record access order and search order. As mentioned earlier in this report, RCMP have noted to committee that regardless of the circumstance of somebody's disappearance, RCMP are required to ascertain a missing person's well-being. There was concern that including these clauses may cause disruption or confusion for RCMP when they are required to search and ascertain a missing person. Committee also heard feedback from non-profit organizations in ensuring that RCMP and justice's approach to missing persons cases are trauma-informed when considering the dynamics and circumstances of a person's disappearance.

Committee therefore moved to amend Clauses 7(4) and (5), and 8(3) and (4) and replace them with clauses that allow for these considerations to take place within the terms of the orders. Both motions were carried during the clause-by-clause review with the Minister's concurrence.

#### **Motion 3.**

Clause 9(4) as proposed required the RCMP to consider any information that suggests that a missing person may not want to be located when determining whether to make an emergency demand. Committee recognizes the requirements of the RCMP as well as the importance of ensuring that processes related to missing person investigations are trauma-informed and consider whether a person has left or is attempting to leave a violent or abusive situation, for example.

As such, committee therefore moved to delete Clause 9(4) and made the following recommendation (Recommendation 8), and emphasized that trauma-informed training is

factored in with Recommendation 2 of this report. The motion was carried during the clause-by-clause review with the Minister's concurrence.

**Recommendation 8:** The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends the Government of the Northwest Territories incorporate the consideration of information that suggests that a missing person may not want to be located in the development of the regulations for the Missing Persons Act.

#### **CONCLUSION**

On May 28th, 2024, committee held a clause-by-clause review. Committee passed a motion to report Bill 2, as amended, to the Legislative Assembly as ready for consideration in Committee of the Whole.

This concludes the Standing Committee on Social Development's review of Bill 2.

**Recommendation 9:** The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends the Government of the Northwest Territories provide a response to this report within 120 days.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Monfwi. Reports of standing and special committees. Member from Monfwi.

MOTION TO RECEIVE COMMITTEE  
REPORT 2-20(1) AND MOVE INTO  
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE,  
CARRIED

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Mackenzie Delta, that Committee Report 2-20(1), Standing Committee on Social Development Report on Bill 2: Missing Persons Act, be received by the Assembly and referred to Committee of the Whole. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Monfwi. The motion is in order. To the motion.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Question.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Question has been called. All those in favour? Opposed? Abstentions? Motion has passed. The motion is carried. Committee report number 2 has been received and will be moved into Committee of the Whole for further considerations.

---Carried

Reports of standing and special committees.

### Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery (Reversion)

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** Colleagues, I would like to recognize a constituent of mine. We don't get too many from the Dehcho, but I'd like to recognize Julia Erasmus here and welcome her to the House. Thank you very much for being here.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Reports on oral questions. Acknowledgements.

Colleagues, being respective of the time, we will have a short recess and give the interpreters a bit of a break.

---SHORT RECESS

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, colleagues. Oral questions. Member from -- where do I want to start -- Range Lake.

### Oral Questions

#### QUESTION 226-20(1): IMPLEMENTATION OF GUARANTEED BASIC INCOME

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You're very generous, Mr. Speaker.

Today is a theme day for income assistance programs so I'll get the ball rolling and ask the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment what is the department's position on a universal basic income in the Northwest Territories? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. I think I'm going to be calling on you a lot today.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, a program of that magnitude and of such a change in political direction of the government would need to come from this Legislative Assembly and would be something that would need to be found, I would say, within our business plans and also within the priorities of this government. Thank you.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So not a chance is what I'm hearing. That's disappointing. I think these programs are a way to save money, not spend more, and in a government that's looking for efficiencies, looking for cost savings, and more importantly looking to empower Northerners, these things would be great. So would the Minister reconsider this position or at least bring it forward in a forum where we can all discuss it

and perhaps set a new direction for the Assembly? Thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there's some great reports out there and there are some that talk about the cost of some of these programs. There's two different kind of ways that people can deliver universal basic income. There's the universal basic income. There's the universal basic income way, which has got quite a significant price tag on it and puts it somewhere as a potential -- you know, anywhere from \$500 million to \$800 million. And there's also a negative income tax style of a guaranteed basic income that is out there that is slightly more cost effective, but it is still up there at over \$80 million. So this would be a significant initiative and investment of this government and one that all of us would have to be on the same page of. And what I'm hearing from my colleagues on the other side of the House is definitely not everyone on the same page yet as far as this is concerned. So I think in order for the government to embark on such a journey, there would need to be some unity within this House first. Thank you.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, we don't have to do it all at once. I think that's imprudent. We should probably look at a pilot project. The two examples in Canada that have been universally successful have lifted people out of poverty, until they've been shut down by lack of funding, you know, were pilot projects. Can the Minister at least commit to exploring a pilot project? Thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I love the idea of new ideas, and I like the idea of being able to explore that and talk about it and figure out what that might look like. So absolutely, I'm more than happy to sit down with the Member and explore that. I think that part of the conversation would have to be what does that look like and where would it be, where would it go, and would it be welcomed there as well. So I think there's a lot of conversation yet to come, and that would have to be with all the Members of this House, and I would be more than happy just with -- as with any subject, to sit down and speak to my colleague and really take the direction of caucus of what they want to see done. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Final supplementary. Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this could be a game changer. So I'm going to ask the Minister if she can bring it to the Council of Leaders. I think they would be

best to tell us where their greatest needs are, where they think it should work. And if we get their buy-in, we might be able to get some federal dollars and some bilateral support in making this happen. So can the Minister commit to getting it on the agenda the next Council of Leaders meeting? Thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm not in control and neither is Cabinet of the agenda for Council of Leaders; however, if the Council of Leaders would like to see this on an upcoming agenda, I would absolutely support that and be more than happy to have this conversation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

QUESTION 227-20(1):  
P3 PROJECTS

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my favorite time of the day, question period. I'm always excited.

Mr. Speaker, the P3 initiative, where we've seen examples such as a hospital, have borne fruit and in the future, we may see the Slave Geological road, or certainly the Taltson, find this route. But one of the challenges of a P3 project is it falls under the management framework and, of course, it has procurement challenges, even the special panel that reviewed it saw. So when it comes to specifically for the purchase of goods by supply, my question to the finance Minister is, is can the finance Minister look at working with their P3 partners to ensure that these types of businesses are supported in the similar manner as the BIP policy does? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. Minister of Finance.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we certainly do work with P3 partners, and individual P3 projects that exist right now have different parameters and different contracts to them. Certainly going forward, if there was a future P3, of which there's none contemplated at the present date, we can work to ensure that we are doing that in the best way forward, keeping in mind the priorities of the government and at that point I think that would include whatever type of arrangements would be negotiated to with that P3 partner. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the management policy looks at construction, but it doesn't look

post-construction, how they intertwine, the relationship between P3s and local northern suppliers. And it was even noted during the review of it is it has caused nothing but problems for people looking for local opportunities.

So my question for her is what can the Minister currently do about the current P3 project to ensure that northern suppliers have a chance on bidding rather than just going south to buy their goods and keeping Northerners out of the game?

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, one of the P3 projects we have right now is with the Tlicho government on the TASR road. Another one would be at Stanton. And both of those projects, Mr. Speaker, I believe are under current contractual arrangements. So short of breaching our contract, which certainly the Government of the Northwest Territories does not want to do, I would not try to enter into some sort of renegotiation of what is existing, P3 project contracts do, time to time, come for renewal or for renegotiation and at that point we can certainly look at the contents thereof and ensure that they continue to align with the priorities of the government. Thank you.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Mr. Speaker, these contracts aren't one or two years and local suppliers, whether they're born in Hay River or they were born in Yellowknife or even Inuvik, the fact is they're waiting a lifetime for them to finish. So would the Minister be willing to use her influence as Minister to go talk to these P3 contractors to ask them how we can ensure local northern businesses who supply local labour, those people live here and work here, get a chance to ensure that these businesses are able to be maintained, established, working and supporting our community as they are. So would the Minister be willing to go talk to them to find ways to make this work?

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I missed one earlier, Mr. Speaker. There's also the Mackenzie Valley Fibre Optic Link. So that, along with Stanton and the Tlicho All-Season Road, are the current three P3 projects that are in their operating phase, and different departments are responsible for each - finance, infrastructure, health and social services, and we certainly, I would expect, remain in contact with the three party -- all of the parties that are involved as we are P3 partners, and we'll continue to have conversations with them to make sure that we are providing the services as contemplated in those arrangements. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Finance. Final supplementary. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** So thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when the government talks about wanting to -- no surprises and work together and they get the topic in advance when I ask questions, they should come with some answers. And my question, really, is built around the fact that I'm asking what is the Minister doing to work with this? We have constituents and businesses that are at significant risk when these P3 projects decide well, we're going to get all our goods, not some of our goods, all our goods down south. And these are lifetime contracts, Mr. Speaker. So if they're going to wait to supply -- whether it's paper towel, toilet paper, or even hand soap, they could be waiting 25 years to be -- responses. So I'm asking the Minister one last time to be clear, what can she do and what is she willing to do to ensure that there's some type of relationship with northern suppliers? Thank you.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, let's just be clear. I had no notice of these questions. I don't know what phone number this Member's using but I had no idea these were coming today. So this is a surprise to me.

On top of that, Mr. Speaker, these are not lifetime contracts. They are limited period contracts. And, in fact, one, I believe, is coming up for renewal in 2027, which is not that far away. When those contracts come up for renewal, as I've already said, we are certainly happy to look at them and ensure that they continue to meet the needs of the Northwest Territories residents that they're serve something, whether it's Mackenzie Valley Fibre Link, whether it's the Stanton Territorial Hospital, whether it's the Tlicho All-Season Road, as they come for renewal and as we continue to have them effective for the residents, we will continue to make sure that those contracts continue to serve our needs. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Finance. Oral questions. Member from Great Slave.

QUESTION 228-20(1):  
REGIONALIZED DELIVERY OF INCOME  
ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you, my colleagues, for speaking a bit about basic income today.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of ECE explain if her department has ever considered tailoring the income assistance system in the context of a regionally-based or a community-based way rather than with a one-size-fits-all approach. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Great Slave. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the benefit rates are based on the region in that it uses the northern market basket measure to determine the basic funding that an income assistance client receives. So it is based regionally considering that. While ECE understands that one size fits all might not work for everyone, it works very hard to ensure that programs like income assistance are delivered as fairly and as consistently as possible across the Northwest Territories while still taking into account that there are differences in cost of living for residents from one end of the territory to the other. Thank you.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So as I said in my statement, structuring our social programs so they're designed to meet people where they're at rather than the other way around is the way to improve quality of life across all of our communities. So would the Minister consider piloting a project within income assistance that would reconfigure and tailor our existing system to the needs of the people in one particular region that maybe isn't dollar-based but is more based around their opportunities for employment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in the month of July the Department of Education, Culture and Employment will be starting its new income assistance program. And so that program will allow persons living with disabilities and seniors to be able to do an annual application instead of a month to month application. And this reduction in the administrative burdens that are on some of income assistance clients will be able to free up a lot of time for the client navigators. And that time that is freed up with client navigators will be able to be used in more of a wraparound service provision where people can start finding out from income assistance clients what it is that they want to do, what it is that they need supports with, and be able to really meet residents where they're at in that way. Thank you.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's really great to hear. I am hoping the Minister may be able to commit to bring the findings of

the client navigators back to us come budget time next year possibly? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, part of the new program is to do a performance management plan that would report on some of the findings and some of the review that takes place of the program changes and not only of the program itself but also to the communities as well where clients live so that we are looking at it very holistically.

In addition to that we do have an idea, for example, of how many people participate in programs when we take a look at the mains every year and so there is information available on an annual basis, and I would be more than happy to learn from the Member what else she would like to see. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife North.

QUESTION 229-20(1):  
IMPLEMENTATION OF GUARANTEED  
BASIC INCOME

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So we've been speaking about the changes to income assistance for seniors and people with disabilities that mean they would only need to apply for income assistance once per year, and that seems very positive, both in terms of less burden both on clients and the staff and the system. Are there plans to make the same change for all recipients of income assistance beyond seniors and those with disabilities? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm very excited about the changes as well that are taking place for income assistance clients who are seniors and persons with disabilities. At this time, there is not a plan to change it right across the board. And I think it's worthwhile pointing out that this view is not shared by all of my colleagues on the other side of the House. But what I'm really excited about as well is there is going to be more time freed up, like I said for the client navigators to be able to work with income assistance clients who are not part of those two categories. And so there are about 62 percent of income assistance clients who fall between 19 and 59 years old, and so that 62 percent of income assistance clients are going to be able to get a lot more one-on-one time to

be able to do things like talking about pathways to education, talking about pathways to employment, talking about pathways to entrepreneurship. There are a lot of programs available within our government to be able to support people and what it is that they want to do next, and I'm really excited about how this program is going to start connecting some of those. Thank you.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So the hesitation to make the same changes for all recipients, who are not seniors or those with disabilities, is that because of a concern that it wouldn't be in the best interests of the clients, that people would take advantage of the system, or that the system would lose too much money in that you'd have people sort of going through the cracks or going over the space of the year and making more money than they're supposed to and the system wouldn't be able to claw that back as it is now? So I guess the question is, is the aim to really hold on to that ability to claw back the money month to month or is the aim, you know, a sense of needing to watch over much more closely those clients that we need to watch them over on a month to month basis to make sure that they're not breaking the rules of the system? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd say the MLA for Monfwi said it best in her statement today when she said that income assistance is really supposed to be a temporary solution. And so income assistance is there as a month to month solution for northern NWT residents who are having economic shortfalls, who are -- their needs outweigh their income on a month to month basis. And so, really, the program is there to be able to catch people. And with the changes that are happening to income assistance that we've been talking about here today, what we're really intending to see is more connections to other programs that help people so that they are not seeing those income shortfalls. There are changes as well to -- in order to support that, there are also changes to the amount of earned income that somebody can keep on a monthly basis. So with the new program, for example, somebody will be able -- an adult will be able to keep \$500 of their earned income and in addition to that, 25 percent above that of what they earn. So, for example, if somebody makes a thousand dollars a month through employment, they will keep the \$500, and then 25 percent of that second bit of the \$500, so they would be able to keep \$625 of their earned income. And so this is one of those ways that you're creating pathways to employment, where you're not having people fearful that their income



assistance is going to be clawed back and it's creating some grace in those pathways. Thank you.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So purely just on a financial level, I'm curious whether analysis has been done comparing the administrative costs of doing that month to month administrative checks and all the paperwork that's required versus the amount of money that the system is able to recover from people by doing those month to month checks; has any analysis been done to compare just on a financial basis, you know, which ends up on top? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this type of work has not been fully done. About 20 years ago, the GNWT undertook an initiative that aimed to better align and streamline various social programs, but that work did not continue. What we are seeing, though, right now is -- absolutely I agree with the Member, there needs to be an alignment of our social programming and our social services and that's why you see a lot of conversation in the 19th Assembly, and has continued into the 20th Assembly, about integrated service delivery and an acknowledgement that integrated service delivery is such a massive undertaking. It's not just about aligning services; it's also absolutely about making sure that even our computer systems within the government are aligned and can talk to one another. And so what the 20th Assembly has acknowledged is that this needs to be done in a very calculated way to make sure that we are going about this in a way that sets Northerners up for success, including the government up for success. And so it is starting with integrated service delivery within the Homelessness Strategy. And there is mention of that that can be found as well in multiple sections of the business plans. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Final supplementary. Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So the Minister seems to have anticipated my final question around the consideration of combining various income assistance benefit programs into a single program in order to streamline. I think, you know, part of the idea of guaranteed basic income is that it's supposed to make the system more efficient. And so by combining these different pots of funding. Does the Minister see the attempts to streamline those income assistance programs as moving towards aspects of a guaranteed basic income system? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Short answer, please.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** I will do my best, Mr. Speaker, and I will not just say yes, I see the value in making sure that we are serving residents where they're at and that we are reducing administrative burdens on residents as best as we can. Thank you

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Oral questions. Member from the Mackenzie Delta.

QUESTION 230-20(1):

OUTCOMES OF PRODUCTIVE CHOICES

**MR. NERYSOO:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've made a few statements on income support, and I was shocked to hear that my riding of the Mackenzie Delta has two times higher than the Northwest Territories, which is 7 percent. And in my riding, it's up to 15 percent. My main goal is to try and get these clients off of income support and on to being productive members of their respective communities.

Mr. Speaker, the department used to provide annual reports on income assistance, but these reports are no longer -- not publicly available anymore. Can the Minister commit to provide income assistance annual reports? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Mackenzie Delta. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I can commit to that to the Member.

**MR. NERYSOO:** Thank you for the commitment from the Minister. The Minister acknowledged in the House on February 8th, 2024, the intended goal of productive choices is not being met. Can the Minister describe how the department tracks clients' productive choices? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yes, the department used to track productive choices when it had it as a requirement under the program, but it is not a requirement under the program anymore. If the Member had an interest in seeing the historical data on productive choices, I could definitely work with the Member to pull some of that information. Thank you.

**MR. NERYSOO:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister commit to reporting on the outcomes of productive choices that clients take, how many clients on the productive

choices move forward to school or finding work? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, while the department no longer requires clients of income assistance to partake in productive choices, I do understand the goals of the Member, and I have really appreciated all the Member's statements that he has done on income assistance. It has provided me with the opportunity to learn about what his goals are and what the realities are in the communities that he represents.

With that being said, I want to confirm for the Member that as part of the new income assistance program that there is a performance measurement plan that is intended within that review and that the department intends to kind of keep an eye on what is happening within its community of clients and even within the communities that those clients live in. And so there is an intent to kind of keep an eye on this and to be able to report back.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, there are numerous deliverables within the business plan, within Education, Culture and Employment's plan that also speak to the number of income assistance clients who are employed and increasing that number. And so I really look forward to being able to work on that with the Member. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Final supplementary. Member from Mackenzie Delta.

**MR. NERYSOO:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister describe the wraparound supports provided to clients on income assistance with respect to productive choices? How is the department helping people make productive choices that will actually improve their independence and self-reliance? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I've had the opportunity to speak with multiple residents who, at some point in their lives, have been on income assistance. And one of the things that they have expressed to me is frustration about how difficult it was to find pathways off income assistance once they were on it. And so one thing that's very important to me -- and I know that the Member shares this interest as well -- is creating those pathways for people to be able to access employment, access entrepreneurship, and access education programs as well. And that's one of the reasons I'm so excited for the changes to income assistance is because it frees up more time for the client navigators to be able to work with 60

percent of the clientele who fall between the ages of 19 and 59 and to be able to create those pathways, work with them to find out what are their goals, and let's get you working towards them in a supportive way. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Oral questions. Member from Monfwi.

QUESTION 231-20(1):  
INCOME ASSISTANCE STATISTICS

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is for the ECE Minister. Does the Minister track the outcomes of income assistance clients other time? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Monfwi. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I assume I would need to know more information about what the Member is looking for as far as outcomes are concerned. But at this point, what I could point to for sure are the desire to increase deliverables from income assistance clients within the business plans, which speak to the number of income assistance clients, for example, that are employed and changes to the lives of income assistance clients like that and being able to support them through those pathways.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Okay, thank you. Thank you, I was looking for a success story.

So, Mr. Speaker, can the Minister provide a percentage of how many people on income assistance, or how many people on income assistance leave the program because they are employed or no longer need assistance? Thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, while I don't have that specific data at my fingertips right now, it's definitely, you know, something that I would like to work with the Member on in the life of this Assembly, is to be able to have a number of great success stories, even if it is people who are using the new income assistance program in order to generate earned income that they can hang on to and be able to work towards some additional self-reliance and be able to enter into the workforce as well. So I think this is a really exciting time as far as income assistance and being able to give people the support they need economically while also being able to make sure that there are pathways for people to be employed, to start a

business if they want to, or to enter into education or training program as well. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Colleagues, the interpreters have asked us to slow down, so please remember that.

Member from Monfwi.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you. What is the length of time the average person is an income support client? Thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I think it is -- you know, there are some people who are on income assistance when they turn 19. And one of the changes that I think is really important that's been made to the program as well is it used to be that if there was an adult living in a home with a parent who was on income assistance, that that dependent child who was living at home would have to go out and go on income assistance right away. And one of the changes that has been made to the program is that that person can remain a dependent and not have to go on income assistance right away, not to have to declare their income to income assistance until after the age of 22 so that they're able to go out to work, to start a job, and to be able to still remain in the home. And I think that's really important because I think as parents, we all want the opportunity to empower our youth to be able to generate a bit of a nest egg before they leave the nest. And so I think this is a really important change to the program as well. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Final supplementary. Member from Monfwi.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does the Minister track demographics of clients; what do we know about the types of clients on income assistance?

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Monfwi. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there are demographics that are tracked. We know where people live. We know the ages of clients. We know if it is -- you know, what their gender identity is. And so I think that depending on what the Member is looking for, I can either provide more information or can align some of the demographics with whatever it is that the Member is looking for, as long as we are ensuring that we are still only collecting data

that we actually need for the program, for the government, and respecting people's privacy. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Oral questions. Member for Frame Lake.

QUESTION 232-20(1):  
INCOME ASSISTANCE

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And in keeping with the theme of the day, I have some questions on income support.

Mr. Speaker, my first question is considering removal of the productive choice and employment requirements, as we've been talking about a fair bit this afternoon already, how is the department proposing to continue work to reduce dependency on income support? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Frame Lake. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd say one of the significant changes that I've had the opportunity to speak to quite a bit today is freeing up quite a bit of time of client navigators by ensuring that we are reducing administrative burdens to a significant number of income assistance clients. That leaves about 60 percent of income assistance clients who are still reporting month to month. And it allows the client navigators to form more in-depth relationships with those clients. So it means that all of a sudden they are able to make stronger connections within the communities that these clients live in and that they want to work in. It means that we are connecting clients to more opportunities within communities. We have heard from multiple Members in this House about some of the ways that traditionally income assistance clients through sometimes productive choices have had the opportunity to add to community, and there are tremendous amount of people there, especially in the North, who want to be able to build strong communities. And so how can we connect them to those opportunities?

In addition to that, it's connecting people to, like I said, education, and with my ITI hat on, there's a tremendous amount of programs and people over there who are eager to support people with their entrepreneurial goals. And that is a goal of mine, is to see a lot more entrepreneurs in the territory as well. Thank you.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So if there aren't triggers in terms of the

requirements that were previously put, are there going to be any kind of triggers or places where some kind of connection point is created with the department so people are connected with these client navigators who have new time to be engaging with clients? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, income assistance is a month to month program, which means that there is already a baked in month to month connection for a tremendous amount of income assistance clients with their client navigators. So these are relationships that every month are being worked on. In addition to that, there is also the career development officers that work within the regional offices as well. And these are people who are creating pathways to whatever are the career goals of persons as well. And so the client navigators would also be able to work in conjunction with those roles too. Thank you.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, yeah, I would just say to the Minister I hope to see some new programming coming forward to that end to getting people connected with employment.

Mr. Speaker, on a slightly different note, section 24(v) of the income assistance regulations requires people to drain their retirement savings in order to be eligible for income assistance. Is the Minister willing to review these regulations to see if we can achieve the balance of program fairness without forcing people to compromise their long-term future? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am most definitely willing to look further into any part of any regulation. I think it's really important that we ensure that we're supporting our most vulnerable residents while still ensuring that we're also maintaining fiscal responsibility. I think it's also prudent for me to also say that income assistance is intended to be a program of last resort and is intended to pick people up when they need to be picked up in order to get to the next month and hopefully be able to access programs that lift them out of that program as well. And so yes, definitely willing to look at that. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Final supplementary. Member from Frame Lake. Oral questions. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in my Member's statement I spoke about the inspiring work initiated by the Indigenous governments in my region in providing food baskets and country foods to residents or beneficiaries up there. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs and our Premier. I know he's well versed in all things food security, and I'd like to ask him how is the Government of the Northwest Territories working with Indigenous government in the Inuvik region to address food security? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Inuvik Boot Lake. Mr. Premier.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The GNWT has a number of programs that we are utilizing to help address food security issues. We have \$1.75 million available each year under the anti-poverty fund. And that has been disbursed in the Member's region quite widely. It can be used for a number of different things. So the Aklavik Community Corp has received money for the beluga harvesting program. The hamlet of Paulatuk has a food security program. They've received \$25,000. Inuvik Native Band, \$30,000 for food supports. Inuvik Youth Centre, \$30,000 for the drop-in centre. So there's an entire list here of ways that we are working with the Member's region to support food security. Thank you.

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank Premier Simpson for that information, certainly it's good to get that on public record.

Mr. Speaker, how is the department working with the federal government to maximize the Nutrition North support programs for my region?

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So currently, the federal government is undertaking an internal review of the Nutrition North program, and so we're waiting to hear what comes of that. But I can tell you that there is constant advocacy to the federal government regarding the Nutrition North program. It was spoken about in this House many times by the former Premier. I'm sure it'll be on future meeting agendas when I meet with the Minister of northern affairs as well. And so this is an area where there's obviously significant interest across the North. Is it a perfect program? Of course not. But I know that there are examples of significant supports being provided to ensure that small remote communities have accesses to some basic necessities. And I will continue to

press the federal government to make improvements to that program. Thank you.

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I know oftentimes, you know, some of our issues are communicating what we're doing in our regions. And I'm not sure if working with other departments such as ITI or ECE, can the Minister kind of let me know how the Government of the Northwest Territories is ensuring that our communities that are eligible for the harvester support grant and the country foods subsidies are being made aware of this support? Thank you.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The thing about food security, as a file, is that it cuts across the entire government. We have food security initiatives obviously in ITI, in ECE, in ECC. And so I don't have that detail right now but I can commit to getting back to the Member with that. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Final supplementary. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you for that answer. And I look forward to that information.

One final one, Mr. Speaker, I know that the Minister spoke about the funding, the \$1.7 million. Can he speak specifically what the department's doing to support the work of the community food banks in Inuvik, please?

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, in terms of the specific numbers for food banks, I will have to get back to the Member. But as I stated, there is funding through the anti-poverty grant and other areas where we do provide support. But I can commit to getting that information. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Premier. Oral questions. Member from the Dehcho.

QUESTION 234-20(1):  
RESIDENCY REQUIREMENTS FOR  
INCOME ASSISTANCE

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, according to the income assistance regulations, an applicant is required to provide a home address before assistance is granted. So if a person is homeless and does not have a fixed home address, can the Minister confirm if that person will be denied eligibility to receive income assistance? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, member from Dehcho. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I know personally of some people who have received income assistance but did not have a fixed address. And so I would like to be able to -- the Member did mention a couple of people in her community and would like to be able to specifically work on those cases with the Member to see what we can do. Thank you.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you. And thank you to the Minister for that. Mr. Speaker, hypothetically, if an individual is living on the land or living off the grid or in a tent outside the municipal boundary of an NWT community, would such an individual be eligible to receive income assistance? Thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I heard the Member's statement today, and I absolutely agree with the importance of having the opportunity to be out on the land. And so I wanted to assure the Member that an applicant can access income assistance benefits if they are temporary outside of their home community. And this definitely applies to residents that are participating in traditional activities as well. It would be very important, though, that the applicant who intends to go out on the land apply for income assistance before they go away and to notify their client navigator right away so that work on this can be done before they head out on the land. And I think it's also worthwhile to the Member to know as well that client navigators can advance income assistance benefits for up to two months, but it's important that the applicant needs to demonstrate to the client navigator that they will be residing in a remote and inaccessible location for the extended period of time, because it's not a typical thing that's done. Normally, it is a month to month application period for clients who are not part of or won't be part of the seniors and persons with disability bracket. And so there is something that can be done there, but it's important that people come prepared and they act early before they're out on the land in order to be able to set up that arrangement. Thank you.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, if an individual who is living off the land due to various circumstances, including with the intent to seek sobriety and improve their life for the better, does the Minister agree that such an individual ought to be entitled to some level of social assistance? Thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this, I find, relates to the first question as well and I think it's really important to reiterate that people don't need a fixed address in order to be able to

access income assistance. For example, we also have people who are living in shelters who access income assistance. And so I absolutely agree that, you know, housing is not a privilege that everybody has at this time and that we need to make sure that we are coming together and working as hard as we can to make sure that there are solutions for residents and that we do what we can. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Final supplementary. Member from Dehcho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Minister commit to looking at whether people that are on income assistance but living outside of the boundary, the community boundary, but living the region, are they still eligible for income assistance? And can they go to a client navigator and still get that information and be able to get the assistance from the income assistance worker? Thank you.

**MR. TESTART:** Yes.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yes, if somebody qualifies for income assistance and they do not have a fixed address and they are, you know, living on the land, absolutely go and speak with your client navigator and make sure that you have that conversation with them and that you are able to apply with them. It would, again, be the same response from the first question, which is that absolutely, people can access income assistance outside of their home community. They do not need a fixed address in order to access income assistance, and that if somebody qualifies, I absolutely encourage them to follow up with their client navigator so that we can ensure they have the support that they need. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister for Education, Culture and Employment. Oral questions. Member from Monfwi.

QUESTION 235-20(1):  
PATHWAYS TO EDUCATION FOR INCOME  
ASSISTANCE CLIENTS

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is also continuing with my questions for ECE Minister.

For income assistance clients that want to go back to school, this is what we heard from many of our constituents or from the small communities due to lack of housing, wants to go back to school and complete their education, can the Minister work with the Minister of housing to ensure that these students have

their home to return to after studies? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Monfwi. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it was my understanding that ensuring that students have pathways to education and then being able to return to their home communities is something that was changed in the last Assembly, but I can absolutely commit to having that conversation with my colleague as well to ensure that we're creating pathways to education. Thank you.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know my colleague asked about this, but I will say it again. I will ask this question as well.

The department used to produce an income assistance annual report. Why is this report not published anymore? Can the Minister commit to making the income assistance annual report publicly available again. Thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I can absolutely commit to doing the annual report with income assistance. And I also just want to reiterate that part of the new program is also doing a performance management plan as well to ensure that we know how the new program is working and that we know how it is serving residents as well. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

QUESTION 236-20(1):  
INCOME ASSISTANCE STATISTICS

**MR. HAWKINS:** I know, I know, that's okay, I'll never tire.

Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up a question right off of my good colleague from Monfwi who was talking about tracking information. And she brought up a really good point about what type of information is being tracked by the department. And I suspect the Minister may not give every answer but does the Minister and the department track anything useful with respect to ways we get people off of income support and back into the working life? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I think that we -- this theme day could not have come at a better time because we are at the beginning of what I see as a very exciting time within the department of education and within income assistance. We are on the verge of entering into this new program. It starts in the month of July. That new program will see increased opportunities for client navigators to be able to work with income assistance clients and to be able to work on those pathways. And part of the information coming out of that will be through this performance management plan where we can take a look at what's going on, how is this impacting residents, how is this impacting communities, what does this story look like? And that, in conjunction with, for example, the business plans which tell a story about the expectation on increased income assistance clients having jobs while they're on income assistance. And the fact that this new program also creates those methods for people to be able to hold on to a lot more earned income, I think is really exciting, and I really look forward to being able to come back to this House and tell, as the Member for Monfwi says, success stories. Thank you.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm excited that the Minister's really excited, but I'm still curious over here as to what specific information the department tracks that we know what they're doing or how they're progressing through the system to be able to stand up on their own. So is there any other useful information outside of their age, where they live, and their gender that we can build upon to help strengthen the program and the individual as we hope that they can return back to the working world. Thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Member is asking what we previously track. And so as I'm saying that this is a new program and so going forward, we're going to have the opportunity to look at a lot more data and see what is going on. But that's not information that I have at my fingertips to be able to provide the Member right now. But I very much look forward to being able to tell the story of what this new program is doing for NWT residents and to be able to talk about those success stories. Thank you.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister talked about the navigators at length. So maybe she could explain the business case as to why they are there and specifically how they're going to help individuals get to where -- I think where we hope they're going to -- back into the working or education world or whatever

is appropriate as it fits appropriately with the individual. Thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we have a host of client navigators across the territory that work in small communities. They work in regional centres. And they work in Yellowknife. And these client navigators work closely with career development officers. They have, of course, a very intimate knowledge of student financial assistance, which also falls under the income security division. And so these pathways to employment, pathways to entrepreneurship, they are absolutely things that these individuals are trained to support clients through. And so whether it is somebody wanting to access training programs, whether they are wanting to go into entrepreneurship that, is something that with ITI, there is a definite really nice marriage that can happen there going forward so that people are supported in order to be able to pursue what their goals are. I think one of the changes that has happened here between going from having productive choices to not having productive choices is an acknowledgement that not everybody fits within the themed boxes that productive choices were. Productive choices forced somebody to kind of pick something from a list that maybe wasn't what they wanted to do. And what this is acknowledging is saying okay, we all have goals and we all have dreams and they don't have to fit into a box, but let's set you up with people who can help walk you through what it is that you want to do and to acknowledge or identify what that path is and how to get there. So we've got the client navigators, we've got the career development officers. We also have economic development officers over in ITI. Especially when you're talking about, you know, regional centres, a lot of these people already know one another. We've got funding opportunities within SFA, funding opportunities within ITI and other departments. We also have the ability to also set people up with apprenticeships as well or with training opportunities. There's, for example, fundamentals through Aurora College, which is an absolutely great program, and then there's also SNAP opportunities too. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Final supplementary. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It only makes me wonder do the -- are the navigators counsellors in the context of the big C counsellors, or are they just cheerleaders in the sense of just supporting advocates? And if with eliminated productive choices, how do we

encourage them to create goals? And if they don't want to be involved in the navigator process and we don't require them to be productive choices -- to be involved in productive choices, does the department just sit and do nothing? Like, I'm just trying to understand how we get them involved. Thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** So to the first question that the Member asked, Mr. Speaker, about whether or not they're big C counsellors or little C counsellors, I'm not sure if that means are they mental health counsellors; no, they're not mental health counsellors if that's what meant. Sorry, I was talking to fast.

In regards to what type of counsellors they are, they are people who are -- they fill a role, and they provide pathways. They are professionals. They understand their department. They understand how to create connections. And one of the things that reducing the administrative barriers of this program does as well is allows client navigators more time to create more connections within communities so that they too are forming connections that they can then bring people to and connect them to.

In regards to how ECE is going to turn around and force people to take on these pathways, there are 19 of us in this room right now that weren't forced to have to take on a pathway but we did, and we were privileged enough to have the opportunity to step into that pathway. And so what this is doing is creating those opportunities to step into pathways. And I don't think that everybody needs to be forced, and I don't think that staff are going to sit by idly and not do anything. I think that there are tremendous amount of people who want opportunity in this territory, and we as a government are at an exciting point to be able to ease the path to those opportunities. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife North.

QUESTION 237-29(1):  
AURORA COLLEGE TRANSFORMATION

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So my questions, again, are for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, but this time I want to ask about Aurora College and the transition to a polytechnic university.

So the college has announced that the transition to a polytechnic university will be significantly delayed. And we hear from the college that it's because of inadequate funding from governments. We hear from the ECE

Minister that it's up to the board of governors now, they're arm's length. So my question to the Minister is who can we hold accountable for the delay in the polytechnic transition? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in this House the board of governors does not have a seat and so you get to hold me accountable. Thank you.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a clear commitment and statement that is certainly welcomed to everyone.

My second question is that the transition team that was set up for the polytechnic university transition, I know that it has now been disbanded, the transition team that was within ECE. Were there goals or benchmarks set for what that team needed to accomplish before it was disbanded? And if so, were those goals met? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the transformation team had a goal to accomplish 66 goals, 66 milestones. They accomplished all of them. There are a total of 80 milestones. And since the transformation team was disbanded, the college itself has completed three milestones. So that is since November of 2023. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Okay. I mean, my next question is what tools does the Minister have to be able to hold the board of governors of Aurora College accountable to actually finish the transition to a polytechnic university by a certain date given that their funding is coming from our budget? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the most significant tool that I have at my fingertips is the mandate letter that is issued to the board. That letter has -- or the next letter, because the one that is an interim letter expires in July so the next reiteration of that has been jump started by myself through a letter to the board of governors. And what tools does this Assembly have? This Assembly approves the budget, and that budget goes to Aurora College. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Final



supplementary and final supplementary for today's oral questions. Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So does the GNWT have a line in the sand, like a date by which the polytechnic university must be established? And what would be the consequence to Aurora College if that goal is not met? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I think this is a really exciting opportunity for the Northwest Territories to be able to transition into a polytechnic. Because I think that there is this idea that we're talking about bricks and mortar. But what we're talking about is really important programming that lends to building a solid economic foundation. And so absolutely I will acknowledge that the milestones are definitely delayed. That is quite clear as to where the transformation is at right now, and I really look forward to working with the college and the board of governors to getting that back on track and seeing how we can support one another to achieve our common goals. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Colleagues, as I said before, oral questions, our time is up. Oral questions. Written questions. Returns to written questions. Replies to the Commissioner's address. Petitions. Tabling of documents. Minister of ITI.

### Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 109-20(1):  
NWT OFFICE OF THE REGULATOR OF OIL  
AND GAS OPERATIONS ANNUAL REPORT  
2023-2024

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following document: NWT Office of the Regulator of Oil and Gas Operations Annual Report 2023-2024. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Tabling of documents. Notices of motion. Member from Range Lake.

### Notices of Motion

MOTION 31-20(1):  
CROSS-BORDER CRIME REDUCTION  
FORUM

**MR. TESTART:** Mr. Speaker, I give notice that on Thursday, June 6, 2024, I will move the following motion:

Now therefore I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Mackenzie Delta, that

the Government of the Northwest Territories initiate a Cross-Border Crime Reduction Forum that would involve the Governments of the Northwest Territories, Canada, Yukon, Alberta, and British Columbia;

And furthermore, the focus of a cross-border forum will increase the response to violence and drug trafficking in rural and remote communities;

And furthermore, that the focus of the cross-border forum improve efforts to disrupt the illicit drug network and drug-related crime and violence in Northwest Territories communities;

And furthermore, that the Government of the Northwest Territories provide a response to this motion within 120 days.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Notices of motion. Motions. Notices of motion for the first reading of bills. First reading of bills. Second reading of bills.

Consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters, Minister's Statement 4-20(1), Minister's Statement 5-20(1), Minister's Statement 17-20(1), Minister's Statement 24-20(1), Tabled Document 93-20(1).

Colleagues, by the authority given to me as Speaker under Rule 2.2(4), I hereby authorize the House to sit beyond the daily hours of adjournment to consider business of the House, with the Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh in the chair.

### Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** I now call the Committee of the Whole to order. What's the wish of the committee? Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, the committee would like to consider Tabled Document 93-20(1), 2024-2025 Main Estimates, Department of Health and Social Services and Department of Education, Culture and Employment.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Does committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Thank you, committee. We will proceed with the first item. But before we do that, I would like to

take a short break, and we'll resume in about ten minutes. Thank you.

---SHORT RECESS

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Committee, we're going to continue on where we left off on Thursday. Does the Minister of Health and Social Services wish to bring in witnesses to the House? Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Oh sorry, hang on. Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Yes, I do, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. Sergeant-at-arms, please escort the witnesses to the Chamber.

Would the Minister please introduce your witnesses.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, my deputy minister Jo-Anne Cecchetto. And ADM of finance, policy and planning, Jeannie Mathison. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Committee, like I said earlier, we'll resume from Thursday where we left off but before we start, we're going to stop at 6 o'clock for supper, and we'll continue on to give the translators an opportunity to have a little break.

Where we left off on Thursday is that Mr. Testart was the last one to speak, and you have eight minutes left. Member from Range Lake, do you have any further questions to the Member?

And before we do that, I just want to back up here. We're going to be on page 211 in your booklets. And the Member from Range Lake, you got eight minutes if you had any questions to the Minister.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you, Mr. Chair. Your memory's been better than mine because I had forgotten where we left off. And I've also forgotten what questions I asked and what the answers were, so I will go again. I could check Hansard, but I'm too lazy.

Mr. Chair, for this particular item -- I'm too lazy -- addictions treatment facilities, so there's

a drop in the budget from the revised estimates to these main estimates. Can the Minister explain why we require less funding for something which I think is a high need service of this government? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Before we go to the Minister, I just want to remind my colleagues here that we got translators, so I'm told if we could speak slowly as well. And also all your pressing issues and questions you had, we have allotted time of ten minutes, so I just want to remind my Members. Okay, I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Last year we had to go for a supp with the increase in number of people that were accessing and the cost that it -- the increased cost to travel, like the air costs and stuff to send people out. This time we didn't put those costs -- we didn't bill that into the budget this year because we were able to get an agreement with NIHB that their NNADAP programs that they have in Canada, they will approve the funding if any Indigenous people that are status or Inuit that fall under their program can access those programs, that through NIHB, the travel will be also included. So that might take some of the costs down. So it's more of the supplementary increase the last budget that we had to go for. This year, we're hoping that the other program will be able to offset some of those costs. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. So the -- it looks like that supplementary appropriation doubled the cost. So is NIHB really paying for half of our addictions out of territory treatment? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you. For that detail, I will let the ADM fill that information in.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the ADM.

**MS. JEANNIE MATHISON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the supp funding last year for the increase was a combination of the supp for the facility-based addictions treatment as well as some one-time funding for a third party funding agreement. Next year -- or in 2024-2025, the budget has been increased by \$923,000 to address some of the forced growth in the facility-based addictions treatment, so not all of it. So last year we got \$1.8 million in supp for

the addictions facilities. Our budget has increased by \$900,000 in 2024-2025. We're hoping to make up the difference through those other arrangements that the Minister just spoke about. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. And if the department is unable to make up that difference, would then a supp come forward, a supplementary appropriation come forward? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, one of the things that I -- I guess, becoming in this role is that -- and I've been saying it on the floor of the House, is that we can't really forecast some areas in health and, you know, right now, there's been a bigger uptake in addictions program in the last fiscal year, and, you know, if -- we hope, you know, that this is the path that our residents are wanting to go, we will support them, and then we would have to go back for a supplementary appropriation or else to be able to try and fund that within. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Do we know -- thank you, Mr. Chair. Do we know the cost per client based on the actuals, the 2022-2023 actuals of this program? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** We don't have the actuals per cost. We have the contract base facility what the -- like, what they charge per person going to the five facilities that we have in the contract. And we also have the -- it's the flights and accommodations. So where they're coming from in the territory to the facility base, whether or not they need, you know, an escort to go with them to -- it ranges, so there's not one cost. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. The Member of Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, I mean, if -- I think just about everyone committed to some sort of land-based treatment option, whether it's an on-the-land program, an Indigenous cooperated wellness centre, but the priority is getting local options

into regions and decrease our reliance on out of territory specialized facilities. I think a good place to start there is to look at cost and to see if there is -- like, what's realistic here, because we always resort to the same arguments where we can't do it efficiently or effectively in the Northwest Territories due to costs and limitations on specialized workers who can -- and doctors and psychiatrists and clinicians, etcetera. So could the Minister commit to creating or doing a calculation of what it costs per client to receive out of territory treatment services averaged across all regions, one; and then two, by region, or whatever's easiest. It's just if we have an actual number to work off of, then we could start having a responsible conversation. Because I think when, yes, these things are challenging -- challenges, but they're not insurmountable, and there's a very real need for treatment options, local treatment options, and I think we need to start by getting to grips with what the service actually costs the government and where there's potential savings. So can the Minister commit to providing an average cost per user of this service? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Yes, Mr. Chair, that is something that we -- and the department has been doing lots of work in this area. And, you know, I hear what the Member is saying, and I agree that there -- right now as we stand, though, there aren't a lot of programs that are up and ready to access in the Northwest Territories and so what we're hoping is that within this government, and that's why it's in the business plan, that we can collaborate with those Indigenous governments that have programs. And we know that we're spending anywhere from \$200 to \$650 a day outside the territory on services for individuals. And depending on how long their program is, some programs, you know, are longer than others and then some have additional aftercare programs that they can stay on longer. So, yes, we can -- I'm not sure how quick we can come up with those numbers, but we can pull that stuff together. And I know that we have been because that's something that I know that I've also stressed is that if we do have addiction-based programs in the territory, how are we going to support them as well to have residents being able to access them. And so that something that we will be looking into. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Any other Members that want to provide questions to the Minister? I'm going to go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And kind of getting back to some conversations we were having last week, have been kind of similar to the Member for Range Lake jogging my memory. And I do remember we were talking about residential care and the comments that the Member from Yellowknife North making regarding that and the desire to see people -- see us working towards keeping people in the territory.

I just wanted to note that, you know, at a constituency meeting I had recently, I was talking to a few different members of the public who had come to the meeting to express their hope that something could be put in place, even just as simple as something like respite care or temporary care. So this is for families who are providing care, or they have someone in care. They're generally able to maintain this themselves for the most part, but obviously from time to time may not be able to. So is this something, at the very minimum, that the department would be able to consider and look at in order to reduce this, you know, significantly expensive item where we are sending people out of the territory. Are there ways that we can kind of better support people where they are so that we don't end up in situations where we have to send people out? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I know that we do -- we do review, and as I mentioned the last time we do reviews on all of the clients that are out of territory and in each individual reviewing, if there is a possibility in bringing those individuals back. However, what the Member is also speaking to is, you know, respite. And in our long-term care, there are beds that are allocated as respite beds. And I know sometimes families get to the point where, you know, they're exhausted or, you know, they may be leaving for an emergency or having to leave town and, you know, have no other place. This is an area where with increasing the amounts of long-term care beds in our regions is going to help alleviate some of those areas for respite beds for those residents that are living in the Northwest Territories being supported by their families. And I think right now we have 17 respite beds in the Northwest Territories. And I believe that those respite beds are -- I think they're all full. And so, you know, I look forward to the -- like, the openings of our long-term cares. And we've heard in this House of the other long-term care facilities in our regional centres. And I know that that's one area that we're looking at. And, you know, so I'll just leave it at that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think that what was being desired and what was being spoken to in this case is hoping that, you know, care can be provided in such a way that people could be kept at home and not necessarily -- we're not necessarily talking about people who need to be in a bed or, you know, being provided medical care so to speak but sometimes just kind of some social support. I'm wondering if the Minister could kind of speak to that kind of care, keeping people at home, giving people support where they are, where they need it, so that they don't have to be in the hospital or sent south. Thanks.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, we do -- in the previous section, we have home and community care as part of our -- that is where we would have supports for families. And I know that in a perfect world, we would have 24-hour care in all our communities to be able to provide home support work, home care. And that's not the reality. We're slowly implementing it now. Up until a few years ago, it was only Monday to Friday, you know, and very seldom in the evenings. So we know that is something that we've heard loud and clear. And, I mean, myself as an MLA, I also raised those issues. And we're slowly -- and I think we just recently announced that there are some other areas outside that are getting more services into the evenings and on the weekends to support families. So Yellowknife has home care, and, you know, there's families there that need, you know, assistance. There is assessment that goes through for those families that -- you know, and if they're needing more services then, you know, the family can stress that. But, however, we have to -- you know, we have to provide services across the Northwest Territories, and so we have to try and make sure that we're putting those resources equitably across the territory. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's it for questions on this section. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Any further Members want to ask questions? Go to the Member from the Dehcho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you. And the question I have is how is the -- because there's a rising demand for treatment, addictions treatment. How is the department addressing the rising demand for alcohol addictions treatment program? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. To the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, we have -- this is the work that's been done on -- the access to out of territory treatment addictions are the request of some people in the territory. So we have to ensure that we have those facilities and we have contracts with those facilities. We have one Indigenous facility that we have a contract with right now. And I know that within the Northwest Territories, what we're trying to do is we're working with -- you know, providing funding for Indigenous governments to be able to -- and we've heard them loud and clear, that they want to be able to run on-the-land programs. You know, they've strictly said that they are the best people to know their own people to provide those programs to helping get their -- you know, get residents in their each different ridings well and to be able to support them in their own way. And so we will continue to collaborate with those Indigenous governments to provide programming. And that's why we've created all the funding pots and we've amalgamated them and so that way they're a lot more flexible to the needs of the different regions. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go back to the Member from the Dehcho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you. Is there support to assist communities to develop a community-based treatment program? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go back to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** If there's communities that are interested in, you know, accessing the dollars to provide programming in their communities, what I can do is I know that I -- I don't have it on hand, but what I can do to the Members is provide the information to the funds that we do have available and where they can -- who they have to contact to access those funds and then they can -- you know, they can, you know, assist the Indigenous government on their proposals on what they want to do. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go back to the Member from the Dehcho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** I think that would be very useful because I think a lot of times -- well, it's just my own perspective -- that there's the thought, but there's just not the know how to develop a plan and get everything in place to ensure that on the maybe year later they have a full program where people can go to and take part in a treatment program. And also look at maybe even staying there for an additional time period after they're finished the treatment program as part of aftercare and then integrate back into the community. I've even thought about using this type of a model for inmates that come out of jails to go into an on-the-land program. It'll be -- it could be used for different things like that, so where they are worked with and then reintegrated back into town and hopefully into employment, housing and employment. So it's something that I've been thinking about, so. Yeah, so just having the support that they need to get the ball rolling in the communities and the support to the people that are going to apply for the funding and want to get going with the treatment program. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I take that more or less as a question. Is there any further questions? Thank you. I want to go to the Member from the Mackenzie Delta.

**MR. NERYSOO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. This particular subject or issue of concern is -- has a great deal to do with myself and the Northwest Territories as a whole. I've seen, witnessed, a lot of clients going out to the southern regions to get treatment, and I applaud them, and I encourage them. Just yesterday coming back from the Mackenzie Delta, I saw one of my constituents on his way to Toronto and I wished him well, and I hope that, you know, he gets the counselling that he wants and deserves. But coming back from a southern institution and coming back into the community where you see all your friends and your families who are still practicing or using alcohol and/or drugs and you have to go back and interact with your families and friends because it's -- you need the support, and that support may not be there. So aftercare is very important in success of these clients because at the moment now, you see them, they don't have nowhere to go within the communities and the regions. They don't know where to go. They don't know who to talk to. I mean, just integrating back, right back into the community is a struggle. They don't have any friendship centres within the communities. They don't have any place where they can drop in to see, you know, like, I'm still trying get that message to somebody that -- in the community that cares. Tell them that, you know, I'm still trying but I also require assistance in aftercare.

So what I would like to know is, you know, is there some kind of program or some kind of funding available where communities who would like to see nothing better than the health of their residents be able to access funding where they can start up a program, not just when a client comes back but ongoing programs where past clients have went south for treatment and have fallen off but they want to get back into the program and try again. Because I always say never quit trying to quit. And I always tell people that, you know, it's -- no matter if you tried 20 times, just keep trying. And I've often encouraged people that. I use that as my own model too. I struggled. I still struggle. And myself, I'm fortunate that I have family that were very supportive, are very supportive. I have friends. And I get involved with the community, but some of these people are not very good at approaching people for help. So it'll be good if the department can have funds available for communities where they can have an ongoing aftercare program. It doesn't have to be an expensive program. It just has to be something there that a community member can initiate saying that, you know, that you just came back from treatment, if you need help give me a call. There's no services like that within my community. So it'll be good if the department can have funding available for someone, even if it's just an individual, you know, go play a baseball game, go play some cards during the night when times are getting tough, you know, provide some meals. Some of these people don't have homes.

So my question is there somewhere in here that communities can start community-based programs for specifically aftercare? Because we have clients that are going, taking the initiative to go down south, but coming back to nothing. So that's my question to the Minister. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. In this section, there is the out of territory use facilities but in the previous section, there was the community wellness and addiction recovery fund that is that fund that's been amalgamated to incorporate all of the old -- there was two or three different pots of funding. So it streamlines the process so that access to -- communities can access it if it's for addictions, it's aftercare, it's mental wellness, they can access through that program. And I think Indigenous communities can access up to a certain -- like up to \$200,000, I believe, per year. And regional governments have the opportunity to apply and access dollars on multilevel -- like, multi-year agreements. So there is funding there. And, you know, I've committed to sharing

that information to Regular Members. And I've been stressing that throughout all my visits with Indigenous governments, is that we do have this fund. We hear continuously that communities want to have -- make their made in their own community kind of program. That's what this fund can do. So, again, I will make sure that information is shared with committee. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go back to the Member from Mackenzie Delta.

**MR. NERYSOO:** Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to the Minister for the response. This is just really more of a comment. Having the success of these clients that return from the treatment centres is a responsibility of not only the client, him or herself, but also the families. The family requires counselling because they have to adapt to these changes that this individual is trying to make, and also the community. It affects everybody. It affects us all here as MLAs and as Ministers, the Premier, and everybody. It affects all of us. One person that is struggling with alcohol has an impact on all of departments. So me returning back to a community after session is completed that, you know, I'll have to make sure that the Indigenous governments are aware that there is funding available, that we have to take the initiative to start helping keep healing our people. And it's an ongoing process. It's not going to happen in one year. It's a lifelong process that we have to keep engaging in their welfare. So, you know, I'd just like to thank the department in doing their part too. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you for your comments. Any further Members? I want to go to the Member from Monfwi.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. With reference to addiction treatment facility, there's a major difference within the budget. From 2023-2024, there's reductions for this fiscal year. Can the Minister explain to us why there is a reduction within current the fiscal year or for the upcoming fiscal year 2024-2025? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, that increase was -- the difference was that there was the supplementary funding because of the increased costs that the out of territory treatment facilities with the new agreements, and it also was the increased cost to the travel that it was increased numbers that

we were getting for people that were going out for treatment. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Monfwi.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Okay, thank you. So it just goes to show that we really do have an addiction issue in the North, and especially with the drugs and alcohol. So it's just that there is the difference here is that there's reductions. I have an issue with that where, you know, why? Because we know that there is a major issue. You know, and why there's a reduction within the budget. I know that just like what my colleague said from Mackenzie Delta, in small communities, and in here too, we know of someone who is suffering with addictions. We even have family members who are suffering, you know, with addiction issues. And lately I've been hearing in my region is that a lot of people are seeking help. They want to go for help. They want to go deal with their addiction issues. So I know that there's the on the land base. So some of those will work for some people. And with the treatment facility, some it will work, it will work for some people. Because we don't have something to fall back on when they come back, like the transition centre or a program that's going to be, you know, helping these people. Some of them, they only last a day as soon as they come back. So we do need something in place. Because the government is spending a lot of money trying to send -- you know, to send the people out to get help that they need to deal with their addictions. But there's nothing. There's nothing in place for a lot of -- in the small communities, like there's nothing. It's going to be -- it's good that Yellowknife -- and there's Yellowknife and Inuvik. But from my region, there probably -- you know, there's nothing there for my communities or for my regions. And with things that's happening in Yellowknife, crime related to drugs, it's a lot of people are scared to go to Yellowknife to seek help. So with the transition centre that's being proposed in two communities, I just wanted to ask the Minister if they're looking at having the same program in other regions for next fiscal year. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. At this time right now, what we have in the budget for -- and in our business plan is to have these two programs, one in Yellowknife and one in Inuvik, as it is a partnership with an NGO and health, infrastructure, and housing. And so right now where we're at is getting these two up and running and hopefully to have that -- and, you know, and, I mean, if there's a way to be

able to work with Indigenous governments and with other partners, if there's federal dollars that we can access that we could try to bring more of those facilities in the territory, you know, I fully support that type of work but right now where we are financially is this is where we can -- you know, what we can do right now. And like I said, any time I talk with Indigenous governments if there's -- you know, if there's a way that we can tap into some of these federal budgets that the announcements with mental health wellness and addictions and different pots of money that they have, if there's ways that we can work with communities to partner, you know, we're always looking for different ways to try and provide different services but right now what we have on the books is just for these two facilities. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go back to the Member from Monfwi.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you. Okay, this one is for the residential care. Okay, the budget is good for the 2024-2025. I've been talking to some family members and I have -- I didn't talk to the people in care, but I've been talking to some family where it is hard for them -- especially, it is okay to visit the family that are in care, and I know there are some family that were very advocate, they really advocated for the family members that are in care so I know that they brought them back. They brought them back up North. They're in our regions in care. By there are some that are in group home. Family there wants the family to come home too, because some of these, when their family come and visit it is hard for them. Both parties, it is hard for them. It is difficult for them to leave each other because the young person or the adult that is in care is away from the family members. This is, like, going back to residential school where the family -- they are away from their family, their language, their culture. You know, so they -- so some of them are saying they would like to see them back up North in some kind of a group home setting where there is service for them, there is program and services for them. And I know about the specialized services for children and youth. It's not that I'm talking about, it's for other that can come home and be cared for by -- in the North where they will be near family.

So I just wanted to ask the Minister if this group home, the residential and group home facility can be extended to outside of Yellowknife in the regions where families would like to care for them. Can they provide that services to other regions?

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. You know, I hear where the Member's coming from and I understand that there's many -- the clients that we do have in residential care facilities are very complex and, you know, however, we all wish that we would be able to have all the service to support people. And, you know, my community is kind of like your community, it doesn't have all of the specialized services there. And we also don't have the staff that will help to be able to take care of a number of the needs of the people and to support the family on top of that. So right now what we do is we look at each individual -- when we review all of the people that are living in supportive living on a case by case and if there's -- you know, if things change in -- like, people that are outside of the territory, if there's circumstances that change in the territory and there's way to repatriate them back into the Northwest Territories, at least they're in the territories. But as to a lot of these clients, repatriating them into the smaller communities or the regional centres, there's just not the level of support to be able to support that resident and the family. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go back to the Member from Monfwi.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you. I know it is complex, but there are some that can be brought back to the North. And I -- only if you -- if the department's talking to some of the families, I'm sure. Because there are some that are there without no families. We know that. And the power of attorney, and they don't know who is the power of attorney. And I know that from talking to some of the people here who have loved ones over there, they said they only find out after the fact that their loved ones was in the hospital like, you know, and because they don't have anybody. There's no family anymore or not -- like, not that family anymore but it's just that the guardian is not around no more and there's no power of attorney. So the state is, but nobody contacts the family members in the North.

So I just wanted to ask the Minister if they can, you know, arrange some kind of a communication with the family members that have loved ones down south. Because I know it is hard on the loved ones that are left behind. And it's hard for the family to leave their loved ones behind. And it's just -- it's a repeat of what the residential school did to our people. So that's how they feel. It just feels like going back to residential school days. That's what they are saying. That's how they are experiencing the experience that they have leaving their loved ones behind, especially in the south. And it's not like down the road, it's quite a ways. So

that's more of a comment. But I just wanted to ask the Minister -- it's more of a comment but it's up to her to reply. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair. And we do have the Office of the Public Guardian. And, you know, if there are members of the family, like -- you know, the instance that you've explained, maybe the person that had passed away who was the public guardian and there's family, I would suggest that those family members reach out to the public guardian. I know that they always want to make sure that there's a connection between family members and the resident. So thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Any further Members that want to ask questions to the Minister? I don't see any hand up, I'll continue on.

No further questions. Please turn to page 212, Health and Social Services, out of territory services, operations expenditure summary, 2024-2025 Main Estimates, \$93,555,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Moving on to supplementary health benefits beginning on page 214. Are there any questions? I'm going to go to the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So I'm going to keep these pretty general, just trying to understand a little bit better the Minister's thinking behind the changes to EHB. So in the business plan, one of the items is around stewarding physical health and contributing to fiscal sustainability, and HSS has an item that says income assessment process and fee structures established and incorporated into more HSS program and service delivery areas.

And my question is with regards to EHB specifically but health programs in general, how does this improve access to health care for all our residents per the priorities of this Assembly? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, one of the things that -- within the Northwest Territories, there are many programs that we provide at no cost and we have been providing those at no cost to residents of the Northwest Territories who hold a valid NWT



health care card. Many of those services, when you look across the jurisdictional scan in Canada, those are a fee for service like throughout Canada. And so within extended health benefits, one of the areas in that is they're -- you know, what we're focusing on right now is trying to make a program that's equitable to the Northwest Territories residents. And there are a number of clients who are low income that live in the Northwest Territories that have no services, no pharmacy service, like no pharmacare plans, no medical supply plans. So they go without. And if they can't afford it, it's a choice that they have to make between, you know, certain things that we talk about in this House frequently. Where are you going to come up with the rent? Or are they going to come up with paying for their medication. Some people -- you know, and so this is the area where we're looking at under the fiscal responsibility is -- like, the programs that we have in the health department, the ones that are core services, we're -- you know, like, we're not going to be -- those are insured services. And then there's services that we -- you know, that we provide. And so we're looking at the ones that -- you know, we have been -- you know, that's one thing that we've been able to do for a long time but under our fiscal responsibility and, you know, where we are to keep a program like this going, then we have to be able to find ways to pay for some of these programs. And within this program, there are other things that are being done as well as just, you know, putting the fee schedules in for income testing as well as looking at -- and making, I think we have drug plans that we are negotiating so that we're bringing the cost of drugs down so that residents in the Northwest Territories that are utilizing a lot of these expensive drugs, it's not costing our program on extended health benefits. It's decreasing those costs as well. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go back to the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you to the Minister for that. And thank you to her department for sending us some more information about EHB today. I really appreciate it. In the -- and it was a publicly accessible letter. Thank you for that.

So in that letter, it's noted that currently about 1,400 people are in the EHB program under the specified disease conditions list. The department estimates that that will grow when the specified disease condition list is dropped and the new policy rolls out in September, and the cost differential that health is estimating will be about \$1.2 million. So it's an increase in expenditures for the department even with this

change. And I can appreciate, you know, wanting to get folks who are, you know, finding it -- who fall below the threshold on to a program that allows them to access benefits. No issues there. I think it's great. Hundred percent behind it.

In previous presentations, public presentations that the department gave to Members, they used the calculator that is publicly available as well, and they spoke about band 15. So just as an example, for band 15 in Yellowknife, the net income for a single person who falls under band 15 -- I realize it might be different for families or folks with dependents -- it's \$74,431 net income. So someone who's making probably in the range of \$95,000 of gross income. So if you work out the average rent and grocery bill that a single person would pay even if, say, you're -- you know, you're a roommate, in a roommate situation, say you're at the beginning of your career in your early or late 20s, the deductible for a single person to co-pay into medication is \$540 and you max out at -- I think it's 820, which is another \$280 on top of that. So for that entire expenditure over a year, that's basically coming out to -- you know, if you're in a roommate situation, that's -- if you're lucky, that's a month of rent. So I guess my question to the Minister for her isn't really so much a question as a comment but, you know, how does she see someone, you know, basically paying an extra month of rent here in the capital as being an equitable program? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. There was a lot of numbers. There was a lot of calculations in that. I am not a mathematician, and I could not keep up with where we were at. What I can say with that, you know, is I understand that there's people out there that are not getting any services. There are people that are getting -- you know, and the majority of people already -- that may be working in positions, they may have some type of insurances. This doesn't inhibit them from applying on this program as well. So this is the payer of last resort, but it can be in combinations with other. It's not going to affect, like, NIHB clients. There's no change to that. There's no change to Metis benefits. There's no change to the senior's portion of the EHB. That all remains the same. It's the under 59. And I hear the Member. You know, there's been lots of different concerns. We've postponed it, I think, in the last government to do more fulsome reviews. We've advocated for change. Those changes have been -- that's what's the delay, is trying to implement the regional calculations and that will roll out on September

1st. And so, you know, and this is one of the things that I've said to my department is that over the course of the year that it's rolling out, if there is undue hardship we will make sure that we review those cases and, you know, and have -- you know, hopefully be able to look at the process and what we're going to be doing with those. And I also want to know after the full year is, too, how many, you know, more people that we've assisted and, you know, if there is the costs that people are -- you know, if there's concerns, then, you know, to hear that feedback. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go back to the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you to the Minister. And I do appreciate, you know, that she wants to do right by the people and maintain monitoring on that. But I'm going to ask a really brief question, but it might be a hard question to answer.

Does the department anticipate now, with the bill in the Canadian Parliament going through on pharmacare, have we started to look at any anticipatory measures around how that might impact this program and some of our pharmacy medication based programs? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, again, our extended health benefits policy is the payer of last resort. So the new Pharmacare Act that's going through the federal government right now is specific to diabetic medication and to birth control. It doesn't include -- at this time, that is as far as it's expanded to. And so they would have to go through that program as we are the payer of last resort first. If they are -- like, if their condition is diabetes or if they want to access birth control. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you. Next on the list I have is the Member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I appreciate the opportunity to talk on this page. And I just want to stress that the extended health benefits concern is significant to the riding. And it's a little bit of divide and conquer that FMB may have been preaching or pushing this perspective for some time saying well, you need to do this this way and this this way and based on these types of fairness calculations. But who really decides what's fair and reasonable is us, really. And I mean when we're struggling to keep people here and a reason to stay here, I mean, folks are now being paid

more whether they're in Alberta or BC and, you know, they're reluctant of wanting to stay every day becomes a different type of factor, and it's frustrating. The divide and conquer concern is by now extending it to seniors, which I'm happy, just for the record, that they're not at risk, but what it is is it finds a way to continue to marginalize the opposition to this and -- by saying that, well, it only now affects a small group and we're going to be income testing them and doing this and doing that. And, you know, it's just -- you know, there was a time that the NWT was certainly the place to be, whether it was for experience, whether it was for money in the sense of employment, whether it was for opportunities, adventure. And there were many stories have been written, that I've heard throughout my life here, and how exciting it is when you hear about saying why are people here? Well, you know, I came on a whim and I stayed, and I created a family. And so that's very important. And I think these types of changes put this at risk.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I'm being very serious but in the same token not. You know, like I'm prepared to do what we need to do to reverse this. I'm not prepared to do a hunger strike but I am willing to be serious if necessary. But we need to find a way to revisit this. And it's frustrating, and it's upsetting. And those who now are on the screening list, you know, there's so little money garnered by pushing the income test. It's just -- it becomes one more frustration. And I know there wasn't anyone on the campaign trail that brought us here in the swell of support that each one of us shares that didn't hear something to the effect of cost of living is frustrating. And now we're just finding new groups to pay more. And that's really what the issue is, is that new groups are paying more. And they weren't defined before but we're certainly defining them now, and we're defining them to raise more money. And I get it, we need money. But I think it's about choices. And maybe the issue I want to stress on this is the fact that sometimes we have to think things through fundamentals. And I know vote one money isn't the same as vote two. But when you talk to somebody at their door and I tell them that, you know, like oh, we need \$10 million more for one program, what that really boils down to is it's about less than 4 kilometers of highway. And it really stings when you think about that. You know, what are we willing to do to collectively support people? You know, I mean, I'm sure everyone would give up an extra couple kilometers of chip seal. I know no one wants to give up their chip seal. But that said, when we think about it collectively well, we'll give up a little bit more and work together to get the ends in. And I'll tell you, there's very little as important out there when you -- especially as

you get older -- now, I mean, I'm looking in this room and I'm seeing a lot of, I'll say, less young people, and nothing becomes more relevant than health as time goes on. And then you learn that health and family go hand in hand. And health is very important. And I don't want people to put their health at risk over 1 kilometer or 2 kilometers of chip seal, whether it means we upgrade the -- you know, the housing trucks this year and we push them back a year, or the infrastructure car, or whatever. I mean, the point is we can always find a way. We just have to want to be willing to collectively be responsible for that way. And so I'm not sure what the right approach is, but -- although currently a hunger strike is off the table, but I'm not going to say it won't be if we need to be serious about this. And this really affects lives. This scares people. And I think, you know, that's got to shake at the core of the business we do. And so I wish we were, as Members -- unfortunately Members are in the position of deletion, not addition, and that's the process of how our -- well, all these legislative systems work, so. But, I mean, we must revisit this. And waiting a year for a promise that we'll revisit it and whatnot, I think that that's too late. You know, whether -- I've heard the saying a long time ago, and it's one of my favorite sayings, and I'll end on this point, is that, you know, you cannot unring a bell. And that's what this is. It's a ringing of a bell, and it sets the tone, and it's impossible to undo. So you can change the program back all you want, and that would be great, but the truth is that once it's changed it sends that message, and that's -- that'll resonate with people.

So, Mr. Chairman, I'm just going to leave it at that. I just wanted to speak to the particular page. I appreciate the opportunity to do that. And I can't emphasize enough this decision has to be revisited, you know, for the sake of the many, not just the few. Thank you very much.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll take that as a comment. Next on my list here is the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah, I -- I'm going to try and come at this from a slightly different angle just so we're not belabouring the point too badly on extended health benefits. But I wanted to ask specifically about the northern market basket measure and the switch to using this as kind of a determined -- the ceiling under which people would be covered or would have to kind of cover some of the costs themselves, increasing on a sliding scale from there. So I'd just like to hear from the department the appropriateness of using the basket measure. I know that the NWT has its own that it's kind of developed based on the federal one. I actually asked the

developers of the federal one by e-mail last week about whether the basket measure was intended to be used to determine program eligibility for programs such as this, and they were very clear that it was not developed to be used as a tool for that. Still in the process of putting together a written question on that question specifically. But I was just hoping to get some commentary from the department on, you know, why that's been determined as the appropriate tool to determine eligibility for this program? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. As I mentioned, this extended health policy has been reviewed. I know that there was -- in the last government, it went back out to review because of a lot of the concerns. There was recommendations to make changes. Those changes were made. How we use this -- you know, what tool we use to measure low income, you know, there is a jurisdictional scan across Canada on how other jurisdictions provide any type of support to low income, and -- you know, and some of the -- you know, and I know we provided information to committee on this. There's been many presentations. There's -- you know, like there were provided on this topic. And right now where we're at is that -- that is why there's so many different layers of this. And so there -- until you hit -- I think it is about -- and I'll take example for Yellowknife. Until you hit a net take home of \$60,000 -- and that's a single person -- you don't have to pay a deductible for your pharmacy but you may have to pay up to \$400 a month. And that's the maximum that you may pay over the year. So that -- you know, and that's for any prescriptions. The maximum that they might have to pay for medical supplies in that group is \$500 a year for their medical supplies. Anything after that, it's covered by -- it doesn't matter what it is, it's covered by the Northwest Territories. And so the low income is set there to ensure that the low income people have access to all of those, as well as that is the line where the dental and the vision is also eligible in that group. You know, and whether that's the tool to use, I know that the Minister -- that Minister Cleveland has the same tool in income support. And so what we're trying to use is we're trying to streamline. And I know that that's a conversation that we've all had is trying to use the same tool where we're measuring all our programs that we're income testing that we're using the same tool across the GNWT. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** I'm going to go back to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And, really, not to repeat comments made by other Members, but I think, you know, the problem that I'm seeing is I still have constituents who seem confused about what's happening. The department has produced kind of a calculator, but there still seems to be some confusion about kind of what their benefits are going to be. So anything the department can do to kind of improve comms on this would be appreciated. But, you know, I can just say for the record as it currently stands as it's been presented, I'm not in agreement with the changes that are being made. I'll leave it at that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Is there any further questions from Members? I don't see any. I'll continue on.

No further questions, please turn to page 215. Health and Social Services, supplementary health benefits, operations expenditure summary, 2024-2025 Main Estimates, \$35,321,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, Member from Range Lake, we're talking about what I just spoke on, correct? Okay, all right, you've got ten minutes.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So we are on supplementary health benefits? Yes, okay.

So the Minister has seen the AOC report calling for a pause to income testing this program. And I believe -- that's, I think, enough to understand the disposition of the House -- or this side of the House on that initiative.

Should that income testing be paused, what would that do to the appropriation for supplementary health benefits? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you. At this time, there's no -- I mean, the program is set to go live September 1st, Mr. Chair. And next month, they'll be opening up the process for people to start applying through the program. And then, you know, those questions that are out there that what their eligibility, what the questions, how much, you know, it might cost individual members, that's why we're opening up the application process earlier on. But as this time, the program is going to change because if it doesn't, then there's 2,200 people that are still in the Northwest Territories that are not getting any services under this current policy. And so that's why, you know, nobody seems to be thinking about those 2,200 people. If we

don't change the policy to include those, right now the policy is disease based. So thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, let's talk about what we're talking about. We're not talking about stopping the change to the beneficiaries. We're talking about scrapping the income testing. That's the issue that has been raised, or that's the request. It's not an all or nothing. If it was all or nothing, we would just delete this and the government would have to come up with a new proposal. So how would that affect this appropriation? If we scrap income testing, we add the 2200 people the Minister spoke of because I think those -- I firmly believe those people need care -- or need access to these benefits, and I support that part of the change. So if we add those people and make no other changes, does -- what -- what is the financial cost to government to do so? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go back to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will pass that over to the ADM.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the ADM.

**MS. JEANNIE MATHISON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So we've estimated that the cost of providing benefits to those that currently do not have benefits is about \$2.5 million. We've estimated that the additional revenue that will come in from the co-payments by those that are deemed to pay them is \$1.2 million. So the shortfall that we are incurring right now is approximately \$1.3 million. However, there is work ongoing at the department, which has been ongoing for a couple years now, to bring down the cost of the benefits that we're providing under those programs most specifically related to drugs. There's been significant amount of work to enter into product listing agreements with drug manufacturers over the past few years. The work on those -- to get those rebates has been significant but at some point it's going to reach. We're going to max out because we'll have all of our agreements in place. So currently, in 2024-2025, we expect rebates of \$3.2 million on that work, and which just kept us within our budget for the Extended Health Benefit Program. So the shortfall is \$2.5 million, is what we're estimating, because at this point we would not be able to predict any future PLAs to a significant magnitude. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go back to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Just a -- thank you. I appreciate having that kind of cost accounting. So just to be clear on the shortfall, so if it's costing us \$2.5 million to bring new beneficiaries on board and the income testing is going to generate \$1.2 million, is the shortfall not \$1.3 million, then, because of the new revenues coming into the program? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** I'll pass that to the ADM.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** I'll go to the ADM.

**MS. JEANNIE MATHISON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I gave the cost without the income assessment.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go back to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Okay, so it's -- so \$2.5 million would be the entire program with the 2200 people added? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** I'll go back to the ADM or to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Yes, thank you, that's correct.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go back to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. So given that -- okay, so we have costs. So do we know how much -- so basically we don't -- this isn't saving money as much as it's generating revenue and the that revenue's going to be used to support the program as it's currently designed. Is there still -- if everything works out with the rebates and with the co-pays, what is the gap missing debt? Or what's the total cost overrun at that point? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, this is all by estimates because we don't know what the 2200 people -- because they haven't fell within a specific disease, so we don't know what their needs are. They may have high costs in pharmacare or medical supplies that they require but they haven't fallen under one of the specific diseases. And so these individuals, you know, we don't know until we actually get them to start applying to the

program because until then, you know, that's where we're at, and so there's -- in the presentation, and I know that when we were in the briefing, and there's -- it could be -- cost us \$1.3 million. If there's not a significant uptake, it could not -- you know, we could cover our costs. So there is -- it's all estimates right now, and that's why I'm saying, like, until we have the roll out and we know what people -- what services and what the needs are of the residents that haven't had access to this program. As well as the many other programs that are out there that are supplementing some of the individuals, so some of these individuals on this may have access to some types of insurances, which will offset some of those costs. We won't know that until people are actually applying to the program. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go back to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. These are all estimates. The entire budget is estimates. So, I mean, we're making -- that's the -- I don't understand why we can't have a clear estimate on what we expect to expend here. And that's, I think, the issue here, is when we reviewed this at the committee stage, there wasn't a clear cost saving measure for co-payment, there wasn't a clear estimate for how much this is going to cost, and all of that. So where I'm sitting right now is I think -- I know for a fact, because my constituents have spoken to me about this, that there are people who are caught in the gap between, you know, the extremely low income threshold that's been -- that's going to be put in place and the high cost of their care, that now they're falling off this system. And these are people who aren't seniors so they're in that gap where they have high needs, they make too much money but they're not seniors so they won't be covered. And those people are going to be left out in the cold. And that's why I can't support this change, especially when we just don't have the numbers to support it. So if we're just going to say well, it's estimates, you can't really critique this until we actually have actuals, I mean, I don't know how we proceed on this entire budget. So I guess I'll leave at this, noting the clock, but -- or I'll ask one question on the clock.

So will the Minister reverse income testing for extended health care benefits? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Yes, thank you. Before I go to the Minister, I just want to remind Members that these mics that we have on our desk, they're very sensitive and it affects our translators, so if we could just be careful whether we throw pencils down or hit it by

accident there. It affects their ears. So I'm going to go to the Minister. Mahsi.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, we have provided numbers. You know, the estimate is what is in the budget, and we've said that it's 1.3 -- like, and it's in the letter that I sent today as well, that the summary of the expected increased costs is \$2.5 million, less the estimated co-payments by residents of \$1.2 million. That leaves a shortfall of \$1.3 million. So thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. We'll take one more, Speaker, then we'll go for supper for 30 minutes, and we'll come back. And I'm going to go to the Member from the Dehcho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week, I spoke of -- well, talking about medical travel. I looked at the -- and it looks like there's a significant drop in the main estimates from 2022-2023 to 2024-2025. That's a huge number that it dropped. And I brought up a constituent concern last week about that individual that was in Edmonton, could not be brought back to the North because an incident happened in Edmonton. And this individual had paid taxes all his life in the North. He needed assistance to come home. And I mentioned that his health was taking a toll for the worst. Well, I regret to inform this House this individual passed away Saturday morning. So it's pretty hard for me to be here right now to talk about this. So I need to ask the Minister -- I did make a point last week to say can the Minister do a one-time coverage for travel back home for anybody that gets hurt out of the NWT? I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Consider a one-time coverage for travel back North for anybody that gets hurt outside of the territory? That's what I want to say. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. You know, I hear the Member, and I'm -- you know, my thoughts and prayers go out to the family and her community and, you know, her constituents. You know, this is -- these decisions and some of the things with medical travel and this is why there's -- this is the hard part of this, you know, is that there's only so much money in the territory, and we want to do everything for everybody. But we as a government can't operate on single individual cases case by case. You know, and I hear the Member and I understand the concerns. You know, there's -- but at this time, that's why we've committed to reviewing the entire -- you know, the medical travel policy as a whole to see how we are running this program. You know, and I

hear the Members, and everybody wants -- you know, we want to have services provided for free to all our Members. We want to have services that, you know, anywhere else in Canada that you are paying for free in the territory because of the cost of living. But in order to be able to provide all of those services, we have to pay for those services and so, you know, we have to pick areas where we can support people to travel for their medical appointments. We have to pick, you know, and then so when we have extended health benefits, we've got people wanting to go out for treatment, you know, and there's so many needs that our territory needs and, you know -- and unfortunately, where we are is we -- I mean, I'm sure health could have -- I could ask the Minister to give me \$1.2 billion, double my budget, to provide everything that -- you know, and even that wouldn't be enough. And, you know, so -- and so I'm really -- you know, I'm really -- I'm sad to, you know, hear what the Member's -- you know, what she's had to say, but unfortunately, this is why we have -- we're doing these reviews and we're looking at ways to try and come up with ways to pay for certain things that people of the Northwest Territories needs, and we have to prioritize. And I get Members don't agree with sometimes the way that we're prioritizing. And thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Does the Member from the Dehcho have any further questions?

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Yes, thank you. And thank you to the Member for that. I apologize for that. The reason that it's hard on me is because I'm -- it's a close family member. And I went to see him when I was in Edmonton the last time.

So the next thing I have is what policy change can the Minister make so this is the last family that goes through this? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. This is why we're looking at the policy review. You know, and even the information that I explained to the Member in the House, you know, people leaving the Northwest Territories, I myself, you know, when I first travelled, you know, that's not something that we normally do because we usually jump in our vehicle and we head down to Whitehorse from the Beaufort Delta. We don't think about having to access what happens if we get hurt, you know, or what happens if we're in an accident. And so, you know, that's another -- that's part of this is going to be making sure that residents know, you know, what their coverage is and what

their -- you know, when they're getting their health care cards, what they're actually covered for and when they need to get other coverage. And so, you know, I'll make sure that that's part of the review when we go through it as we are going through it. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go back to the Member from the Dehcho.

No, I'm going to continue on, I'm going to go to the Member from Monfwi.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is -- yes, it's regarding -- I know the extended health benefit, there are some -- some of my constituents, they're going to benefit from this. So it's good that it's there. But I'm going to speak to medical travel benefits.

I do sympathize with the Dehcho because that person, he worked many years, over 20 years, and paid his tax. I don't know him personally but there's a lot of people that know him in Tlicho region. And he paid his tax. He paid income tax, territorial tax. And yet we cannot provide a medical travel assistance to come home.

My constituent went through this last year too as well because the medical service was not provided to the individual, it's a retiree, an elder and retiree. Same thing, paying her tax all through the years of working for the government and she was denied. So the family took it upon themselves to travel south and to come home. That was denied. But the only thing the government approved, it's sad to say what Dehcho is going through, is the government paid for the body to come home. And I don't like that. I don't agree with it. It would be nice if the medical travel can be extended to NWT residents because there are some things that happened, it is beyond our control. I know medical travel is important. It's necessary for NWT residents due to some of the services that we don't have in the North, so medical travel is approved with agreement in place with Alberta. It is in place for them to seek the services provided.

But I just wanted to ask the Minister further to what my colleague said, part of the review -- I know insurance benefit when we're travelling, they always say do you want medical travel insurance, do you want insurance, you know. So if those kind of insurance can be extended to NWT residents provided to the residents wanting to travel or to travel outside of NWT, so we do not have to go through this, through what the -- my colleague from Dehcho is going through and what my previous -- my former -- my late constituent through last year.

So I just wanted to ask the Minister if they can seek or find some ways to extend this medical travel to all of the NWT residents that are going to be travelling outside? And I know they're reviewing that medical travel, but I just wanted to know if they can find some ways to accommodate the northern residents who lived here. Some of them were born and raised here. Some of them, they spend over 20 years here and then we cannot, you know, just let them be out there. And then, you know, we have to accommodate them. We have to find some ways to bring them back home. So will the Minister answer that or, you know, make it part of their review.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, the medical travel policy -- and I hear the Member, you know. And if people leave the territory on their own for whatever reason and it's not through being sent out for a medical -- through medical travel for access to an appointment or surgery or services, then this program doesn't apply to those people. So any residents or any people that are travelling out of territory, that's why I was saying in the House it's very important that you know what your coverage is, and I was saying some people have credit cards. And I hear the Member, you know, and I'm sure she'll tell me back that her elder doesn't have a credit card or something, you know, and I understand that, you know. But it's really important that, you know, there's services for -- and our residents need to -- and, you know, because we've -- this is not the first -- like I said, this is not the first person that's -- the BF that's come through the Minister's office with the same concern. And many NWT residents, you know, do not realize that when they're leaving on their own, that it's not medical travel and so when they end up getting sick or somewhere outside of anywhere in Canada or anywhere, then they're -- it's their responsibility to get back home.

I hear the Member. I know that we're doing a review, but this medical travel is not an insurance program. It's what we -- actual costs that we pay to send people out. The fee that we have to pay to the boarding homes, the flights that we have to pay for medical travel, it's not an insurance. Insurance is what I said is outside, so if people are leaving the territory. And I get -- and I hear -- you know, I know the Member, you know, in small communities not everybody has this information. And so that's for us to try -- I guess to try and make sure that people are aware of what they're covered for, whether they live in the city or whether they live in a small community and they choose to travel

outside the territory for personal reasons. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go back to the Member from Monfwi.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Okay, thank you. I know that -- we're going to be talking about it, you know, as long as we're here because it is an important issue. So I just -- there's another issue that I had is that lately I know in small communities people are having -- you know, that need medical travel or that are travelling on medical travel to the south, we've been having issues where people are having a hard time trying to find a medical escort that require medical escort. And I know a lot of them are saying due to high cost of living, I can't leave my work long. Like, they will be granted some leave but not for two or three weeks. And some of them, they have families. So that's why it's hard. It's difficult for some of them, you know, to find a good medical escort. And I know Larga that looks after, you know, NIHB -- but anyways, they don't provide the services needed, you know. They just provided accommodation and the transportation to and from to the medical appointments. But there are some people that need medical travel assistance escort but some of these people, they don't mind going but they don't want to stay longer.

So I just wanted to ask -- I know this is outside and we've been talking about it, if medical travel escort can be offered at the other end, you know, in Edmonton or where -- you know, mostly to Edmonton because that's where most of our -- you know, and I know government are good at creating a positions here and there for, you know, for various departments. Would it be possible for the government to create somebody at -- in Alberta or where our residents will more often that there could be some kind of a medical travel escort or somebody that can be working with our residents that go south and especially with the language too as well with -- as a translator as well. Because it's hard. It's hard for many of my constituents. They say, no, I can't go. I would love to escort but due to high cost -- somebody has to pay -- I have to pay my bills, you know. I can't. And some of them, they have small children. They say, I can't leave my kids for long. So that's always a problem. So it would be nice if the department can come up with some kind of a plan to accommodate the patient seeking the assistance or the services provided outside of Yellowknife because we don't have -- the only time -- the reason why that medical travel is required is because due to the lack of services in the North. So I just wanted to ask the Minister if they could create a position

or, you know -- because we already have some people living in the south. Our residents, you know. Not just my residents but from all over the North there are some people living there, so maybe they can accommodate those -- you know, the people that are there already to help or work with our community members. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And yes, I -- we can include that kind of a review as part of our -- you know, with the support. And I hear you that there are a lot of times when seniors sometimes they struggle, they need assistance to travel for an appointment and they can't find a nonmedical escort to go with them, even though they're approved. And sometimes they just need that little bit of extra support. And so those are the types of things that we want to take a look at and how we can streamline and, you know, and in those cases be able to look at how we are supporting people in our boarding homes and things like that. And so, yes, I will commit to making sure that that's part of our list of to do/to look at as part of the medical travel review. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. We're getting close to the end here so we're going to go as far as we can until the supper is ready. We're still on page 215, and I seen the Member Yellowknife Centre had his hand up.

**MR. HAWKINS:** (audio) and it's -- I was just -- there was an area my good friend from the Dehcho and I were talking about and just by way of a sentence or two to -- you know, the North is a bit different, and we all know that. We talk about that all the time, right. So I mean, who am I telling here in this room? We have 19 experts of how the North is different and we talk about it every day. But, you know, sometimes we can't apply a Hamilton, Ontario, application of how we treat our folks and our families and our friends. I mean, when you're in a small community, I can't say everyone here knows in this room, but when you grow up there, you know everybody and it's hard not to be connected whether you know them or not. You just know them. You know, it's the reality. So whether you're related or just friends, who knows. But the thing is that what makes this different is that those special relationships, and what makes me wonder about, you know, why don't we invest the time in creating a bereavement policy. And I think that's truly what the Member's after in some form or fashion about how do we address these things. Because when you're in a community, you know, and you don't have resources to connect or pull things together or deal with them in these



ways, you just don't have them, and it becomes a massive crisis at a time that this just layers on trauma.

So my question for the Minister -- like I say, I don't need the whole ten minutes, but I mean, it's a matter of is it time to ask the department to examine a bereavement policy? Because there were always those who could afford it. There were always those who have insurance. But there's a lot of people that that wouldn't qualify for it. So I'm asking, can you consider it and examine it and then come back to the House on your thoughts on that and as well as, you know, what type of economics are we talking about? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm unsure as to what the ask is. I get what -- I understand what bereavement means but I'm -- I know that we have -- we have support where we assist families when -- you know, when we have burials and things like that. And we do have programs for that. So I'm not sure what the exact ask is or the question is. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go back to the Member from Yellowknife Centre for clarification.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Yeah, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, you know, some of it is about burying and people back, whether they didn't make it. I'm not trying to be insensitive, but. And sometimes it's about connecting people to dying children, relatives, etcetera. So there is a bit of a variety. Someone's on their last leg and told you were on holidays, it's your fault, in the sense of it's your responsibility fault. That's what I mean. So I think the Minister knows what I'm getting at, and it's not as simple as defining it as one black and white policy. It's about trying to look at ways that we can connect and support individuals, you know, in crisis. That's what it's about. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you for that clarification. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess where I'm at is is that if somebody was to -- yeah, and I hear what the Member's concern is. And if somebody was to be gone out on medical and they passed away then, of course, we would cover that. If there's a family member, you know, we have -- like I said, there's support. There's financial support. There's federal support for families who -- you know, that have lost somebody. And so we do have some, you know, areas where we do

support families with some of those costs. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go back to the Member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** I didn't want to tie much time up, Mr. Chairman. So we're coming back, and I feel like I might be going in a circle so I don't want to waste committee's time on that. But I'll just say that I think some of the points might be slipping through, and I'll have the -- you know, I'll sit down with the Member of the Dehcho, and maybe we'll go visit the Minister one day over tea. She's buying. And we'll discuss it further there. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Sounds like a great idea. Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I won't stand between us and dinner. Just very briefly, two comments -- or two questions I guess.

The first one I guess from -- again, from listening and from what I understand about the extended health benefits. Would it not solve some problems if we were just to look at increasing the income threshold? Would it not resolve some of the issues I'm hearing? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Sorry, Member. Can you just repeat what your question was so that I can make sure I'm answering the right...

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, and correct me if I'm wrong, but given what I've heard and what I understand of the new EHP, the program, would it not solve some of the issues at least if we were to look at increasing the income threshold to a higher income threshold?

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you for repeating your question to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess by increasing that -- I mean, the thing is is that what do we -- what do we establish as a -- if this is the range that we're going to be using, you know -- and this is something that it's not just my department. It's something that we're all using this as the income testing. But it

would cost us more if we increased because we would have to pay more. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, I understand that. But is that not the touch point? Is that not the issue that seems to be what's causing grief? Or is that someone -- for example, I've heard stories that are on income support and then -- I know this doesn't qualify for a higher income but then would take a -- I won't say menial, but a small part-time job on the weekends, then lose the income support benefits, then left with no benefits at all. So -- and then same applies for someone who's making that -- you know, what is a living wage? I mean, there's way more and you can't really compare us obviously to the southern provinces because if you live in Inuvik and pay your \$40 gigajoule for gas or if you're paying for the price of groceries and so on and so forth. So I'm just saying would that not alleviate some of the concern if we were to, and I understand that it's -- it ties in with other programs that have an income threshold but why do they all need to be the same? Why can't we look at this separately and increase that income threshold?

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess where I'm -- my -- I'm -- it's not for me to ask you questions. But for the concerns that I've heard are not on the low income side I guess. They're -- people having -- anybody who's under that threshold or has never had any services before, you know, I mean, this is where they're actually going to have an extended health benefit whereas they've never had it before. You know, if you're living in a house and you own your home and you're paying high utility costs, you know, I mean, this is where income testing is coming in and other insurances -- so, like, your employer insurances will also be there. There -- you know, and so this is a net. So when we look at low income, you know, like, take for instance we all know people that are making in this -- you know, salaries maybe around 50 grand. And then so what their net might be is 35,000 or 40,000, right. So when you look at the band that they're sitting at, they might be in the low income or they might be at one or two, and then they may, if they're -- depending on the cost of what they're -- like, we're bringing down the cost of the medication they may use so depending on where they are at, their maximum they may pay at those rates are -- I think it's \$400 or \$300 a month or a year and so that works out to -- and that's only if their medication -- if

they've maxed out, you know. So if they're -- if they're maxing out what they're using but they'll never pay more than that \$400. And as you go up in the bands -- and I mean, it's on the website. It's all there. People can look at what their CRA net income is and if they have medication, they will be able to say whether or not, you know -- how much they'll be, you know, eligible to receive or what they'll save in their costs on their medication or their medical supplies. If they fall below the low income, they'll have the access to the dental services. So these are, like, the people that, you know, are low income, no job. Our disability clients who are not working, they will fall below that. And if they're not under NIHB or they're not under Metis and they don't have any other insurances, they're non-Indigenous, you know, they may be new Canadians to the country that are working a low income job, they will have access to those programs. So thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go back to the Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

**MR. RODGERS:** I'm not arguing that. I'm saying is that what's low income? You have two people that don't qualify for the other benefits that you just mentioned. They're making 80 grand a year. You have a couple making 80 grand a year each, or a couple making that living in Inuvik. Not a lot of money left over at the end of the month, believe it or not. If you look at the bills and you know yourself what you have to pay up there. And if you had a couple of kids in that household as well -- and, again, what I understand -- and I get it. And when I've talked to people in the department and I've talked to other people, you know, this affects likely more residents in Yellowknife than it does outside of Yellowknife, but there are some. And so my -- and I'm trying -- listen, we need to get to a solution here because I hear what my colleagues are saying as well. But if we did -- if we looked at increasing that, would that not alleviate some of our problems, is all I'm saying. And the Minister doesn't have to answer that because I know she's just answered it but, you know, that's the issue. What is considered too much to make or too little to make, I guess is the question. And I get it. It's online. And I know there's a calculator and I know you can look at it. But are those numbers realistic I guess is what I'm saying. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you. And I hear the Member. And, you know, and this is why I've said I've -- I've even raised it with my own department to make sure that we're committing

to reviewing and taking feedback. And, you know, and if we're going to look as a government as to what we're going to use, that doesn't just fall on my department. And, you know, that's the thing is I don't want to be using something that's different than what housing is using, than what income support is using, and all of our programs that we provide services. And so if there's -- that's a bigger discussion than this and so at this time, you know, I -- I hear what the Member's saying but that is a bigger discussion that -- you know, that we decide, like, where and what we're going to use. And I think those discussions are already starting to happen. So thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And, again, I apologize. I wasn't supposed to take this long. But, yeah, listen, our country is ran on the fact that if you make more, you pay more, and that's how our country's run, and I don't have an issue with that at all. Look at our tax brackets, and you can see that, Mr. Chair. But, again, I -- my only comment -- and I don't expect an answer -- is that I don't know why we have to be across the board with these things. We can look at individual programs and income testing differently as far as I'm concerned. But thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. Is there any further questions from Members before I continue on? I don't see any hands up, thank you.

There are additional information on item pages 217 to 222. Are there any questions? Thank you. Again, I'll read out -- I didn't hear, was there a question?

There are additional information items on pages 217 to 222 in your booklet. Is there any questions?

Don't see any questions -- sorry. Mr. Premier.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thanks, and maybe I missed it. Did we call the vote for the supplementary health benefits? Because I recall we called it and then there was about three more people who spoke afterwards. So I'm not sure if it was official, or. Thanks.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** We're just going to continue the next page here. We'll continue on. Thank you. There are, again -- on your booklets, page 217 to 222, are there any questions? Thank you. Members, please return now to the department summary found on page 185 with information items on pages 186 to 194. Are there any questions? Okay.

We started at 4:46. We'll just take a -- we'll just take a supper break now. We'll take a -- hang on a second.

Thank ou. I'll have to back up here from what I'm told. Anyway, I'll continue on here on pages -- no further questions. We had said that -- health and social services, supplementary health and benefit, operations expenditure summary, 2024-2025 Main Estimates \$35,321,000. Does committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. There are additional items on page 217, 222. Committee, thank you. Are there any questions on pages 217, 222?

Don't see none, moving on. Thank you, Members. Please return now to the department summary found on pages 185 with information items on page 186 to 194. Are there any questions? Pages 185 with informational items on page 186 to 194.

I don't see no further questions. Seeing no further questions, committee -- sorry, I'll go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll try to wave a blue page or a white page or something to gain your attention.

Yeah, on this one I wanted to follow up on a line of questioning I brought to the justice Minister when he was before us, and it was just related to programming we have in place related to addictions, social programming, things like that related to the drug and gang problem that we have. The question that I was putting to him was, you know, whether policing is the best option for this, and I would purport that it is a part of it and fully open to that. But the question for the health Minister is, I guess, is do we feel that we have the appropriate level of supports in place for fully addressing these issues, those being addictions, those being mental health, in her section of the budget to make some progress on these issues? It's a pretty general question. I'm just interested to hear from the Minister on the level of attention that's been paid to that.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm not sure where in the budget -- and if it's just the overall question on the entire budget, then I mean -- the budget that I have, I know that we have a business plan. We will be working within that to come up with, you know -- to, you know -- we're getting -- we've got the mandate

now. You know, the mandate letters will come to the Ministers. We'll be looking into with our departments to look at where and how we move the business plan and the priorities of this government along. As to what -- you know, what those estimates might be, this budget here is -- you know, it's got some of the stuff that we have in there that's going to move things along. But I guess what I can say is, Mr. Chair, that there are many issues in the Northwest Territories. I mean, there's many issues that are plaguing our country nationally that, you know, that we all want to try and stress to fix. How we get there, I mean, we have dedicated staff that are -- you know, we have a Cabinet who's willing to work in collaboration with Indigenous governments to access funds and work together to try and provide the best programs and services that we can to the residents of the Northwest Territories. I've heard all my colleagues, you know, and their issues in their communities and their concerns, how -- you know, and I guess that's -- we'll do -- you know, we'll strive to be able to achieve the things that we need to do in our business plan and within our priorities in this government and if there are funds, you know, that's the -- that's the area that we work together to try and ensure that, you know, this is where a lot of the things that people are concerned about is how are we going to move forward with these priorities and, you know, we have to look at ways that we're going to generate money, we have to look at ways that we're going to work with Indigenous partners to leverage money from the feds, we have to look at the federal budget to leverage those dollars for the territories. And those don't all happen in the first six months of a government. And it's ongoing. And I look forward to continue to work with my colleagues on this side of the House and as well as my Cabinet colleagues and the leadership, and Indigenous leadership in these territories to make sure that our priorities are moving forward. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah, and I do -- I do recognize that was a very general and high level question, but I guess the point I was getting at is that we do seem to have quite a focused plan for dealing with crime on the policing side and was just kind of hoping to hear from the Minister what we're doing on the social side. And a lot of that falls under her department. And to the point -- I mean, I was asked the question myself the other day and had a difficult time kind of coming up with an answer like are we doing enough? I think if we look outside and look to what Members are

saying is going on in their communities and I look to the streets of my community, the answer is no. And I think that we need to, you know, keep up the pressure and continue to look at ways that we can address some of these issues. But I'll leave that as a comment, Mr. Chair. And that's it for me for now. Thanks.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Any other Members that want to speak to this line item on page 186 to 194? Okay, I'll continue on. Seeing no further questions -- oh, sorry. Member from Dehcho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am looking at -- we could bring up, like in my riding, there's long-term and continuing care services. There's lots of my constituents or the older people that have to move to Yellowknife, Hay River, Fort Simpson, or even in some cases, to Behchoko. It's tough on them. So I wanted to look at possibly looking at having long-term care in one of my communities. Because the riding is -- I know Dehcho is a big place but the riding the Dehcho is, again Fort Providence, Kakisa, Hay River Reserve, and Enterprise. And there are people that, you know, want to stay home. They want to stay home because of the language, because of the food, the culture, the participating. And so eventually looking at having a long-term care facility in my -- in one of my communities. One of the communities that I represent would be ideally -- I know we have the closest one is Hay River but, again, people want to stay home. I have people in Yellowknife -- we have people in Yellowknife and Hay River right now and if they could, they would rather be at home. And right now I have a seniors home there that's not -- it's not a long-term care facility. It's a seniors home where they house seniors anywhere from 50 years and older. There's 13 units there. But it's not a long-term care facility. So that's what I wanted to bring up is just having a long-term care place in my community, even in Fort Providence where people can be -- can stay home. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, right now we have long-term care facilities. And I know that the Member is aware of the one in Hay River. We have Yellowknife. We have new beds opening up in Yellowknife. We have a long-term care in the Beaufort Delta region, Fort Smith, and the Dehcho, the Sahtu. Currently, there are expansions going on into some of those facilities. And I hear the Member that, you know, the people want to stay home. I know I hear it that, you know, closer to home, closer to the language, closer to their loved ones, closer to -- but, you know, at this time,

like, the capacity to be able to care for seniors in some of the communities, you know, we try to -- when we look at housing, for instance, if we were to -- you know, in our small communities, you know, we have issues with trying to house nurses already. We have issues with trying to house teachers in those communities. We have -- you know, we have -- if we were to open a long-term care in every one of our small communities, I mean -- we do a needs assessment based on the territory and where the needs are. People can, you know, access those services to be on an application. And the needs right now, you know, are greater than what we have in our facilities and so that's why there's expansions in some of the regional areas where we have the staff that could take care of those clients. What we are doing is we're trying to expand into the small communities in home support and home care in the evenings and on weekends, you know, so that way seniors can stay at home longer, longer than they could before when we only had minimal long-term care -- home care and home support in the communities that we're basically running through Monday to Friday work hours. So thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from the Dehcho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I really -- elders in the community have talked to me, and I've been -- I went to visit some elders when I was campaigning and going to visit them when I go back to Providence to stay, and they talked about having nobody to call after hours when -- if they don't have family members. So they call the health centre, and the nurse can't leave the building. She cannot leave the -- well, the nurses are not allowed to leave the building. So they can't even go and assist an elder that fell down. And they have nobody else to call so they call the RCMP. And the RCMP too, they're inundated with issues that they're dealing with in the community. But because there's nobody else to help the elder, they have to -- they have to call the RCMP. They would -- they were thinking about -- like, even asking to have some kind of a way where they can have some help, like a number where they could call at night if anything happens to them. That will be another thing. I'm not sure how that could be worked into one of these home care programs or something like that, because if there's a person that doesn't have any family and wants to stay home and is mobile and everything but got hurt or something at night, without having to call the RCMP there has to be something in place for individuals such as the person -- well, for elders that want to stay home, age in place. So they asked me to bring that up. Is there something that can be done to help them? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I don't -- I don't have the level of detail of what the services are being provided in all of the Dehcho communities, but we can look at what services aren't provided right now and get back to the Member. And if there are concerns or, you know, as we're rolling out more and more communities that have the needs and if there is a needs assessment that needs to be done in those communities, you know, I -- like I said, I don't have that kind of level of detail here. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from the Dehcho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you. That's all I have for now, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Is there any further questions from Members? Okay. Before we -- the Member I have is from Monfwi but before we go to her, let's take a 30-minute break unless your question? You're going to use the full ten minutes? Okay, the food's there. We'll take a 30-minute break.

What do you want to do, you want to continue? Minister?

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** I am just wondering where we are in the budget. Like we've approved all and not approved some sections. Are we back at the front? Is it general comments on the overall budget? Departmental overview, is it -- we're bouncing all over the place, so.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** We're coming to the tail end of this document here. And the food is ready. We'll have a quick supper and we'll come right back and conclude this. We'll stop there. 30 minutes. Thank you.

---SHORT RECESS

Thank you. We just had a short supper break. And I hope the translators had a chance to have something to eat as well. And we're good to go. Okay, we're going to continue on.

Just so it's clear, we're still on pages 186 to 194 and taking questions. I had Monfwi on here, but I think she's not back yet. But is there any other Members that have questions on pages 186 to 194 to the Minister?

Okay, Monfwi MLA Member is not here. I'll just continue on. I see no further questions from Members.

Committee, I will now call the departmental summary. Health and Social Services,

operations expenditures, total department, 2024-2025 Main Estimates \$644,228,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

COMMITTEE MOTION 9-20(1):  
TABLED DOCUMENT 93-20(1): MAIN  
ESTIMATES 2024-2025, DEFERRAL OF  
DEPARTMENT – HEALTH AND SOCIAL  
SERVICES,  
CARRIED

**MR. RODGERS:** Mr. Chair, I move that this committee defer the further consideration of the main estimates for the Department of Health and Social Services at this time. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. The motion is in order. To the motion.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Question.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Question has been called. All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried. Consideration of the Department of Health and Social Services, operations expenditures, 2024-2025 Main Estimates, total department, is deferred.

---Carried

Thank you, Minister, and thank you to the witnesses for appearing before us. Sergeant-at-arms, please escort the witnesses from the Chamber.

Thank you, we'll continue on. Order. Anyways, we'll continue.

Committee, we have agreed to consider Tabled Document 93-20(1), 2024-2025 Main Estimates. We will now consider the Department of Education, Culture and Employment.

Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, please proceed with our opening remarks.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am pleased to present the 2024-2025 Main Estimates for the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. Overall, the department's estimates propose a decrease of \$9.858 million or 2.6 percent over the 2023-2024 Main Estimates. These estimates support the mandate objectives for the Department of Education, Culture and Employment while continuing to meet the

GNWT's fiscal objectives to prioritize responsible and strategic spending.

Highlights of these proposed estimates include:

- Forced growth funding of \$484,000 to support the increased demand in the senior citizens supplementary benefit and increased lease costs of the Aurora College North Slave Campus;
- Initiative funding of \$2.599 million to support the early learning and child care system in the NWT through funding from the Government of Canada;
- Transfers of \$1.228 million from the Department of Health and Social Services to support the redesign of the child and youth counselling program;
- Sunsets of \$4.485 million which are comprised of sunsets of one-time federal funding for Building Skills 4 Success in the NWT program and complementary funding for Minority Language Education and Second Language Instruction and funding for the Education Renewal and Innovative Initiative and Education Act Modernization Initiative;
- Other adjustments of \$2.993 million for budget enhancements for Technology Service Centre Chargebacks; revised cash flow of federal funding for the Aurora College Transformation initiative; and one-time federal funding for three initiatives: The North Slave Regional Training Partnership, the Implementation of the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence, and the Memorandum of Understanding with the Canada Council for the Arts;
- An increase in the amortization budget of \$313,000; and,
- Reductions of \$12.99 million to support fiscal sustainability. These reductions span all activities of the department and include \$280,000 under corporate management, \$160,000 under early learning, \$8.604 million under education, \$547,000 under income security, \$1.509 million under labour development and standards; and, \$1.890 million under languages and culture.

These estimates support the priorities of the 20th Legislative Assembly and vision of Budget 2024, by:

- supporting the mandate commitment to collaborate with Indigenous governments and residents to achieve the objectives of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by engaging with Indigenous governments through the NWT Council of Leaders Secretariat and education partners on customizations and modernizations to the NWT Education Act. Recognizing and supporting the unique educational governance circumstances of the NWT, and doing so in partnership is critical foundational work necessary to create an education system that works for NWT students and families.
- growing and enhancing the northern workforce by investing in skill development and by attracting skilled workers to the NWT. Our area of focus is supporting the NWT's early childhood education workforce by offering more professional development opportunities, continuing to provide for early learning and child care scholarships and, importantly, implementing an early childhood educator certification process. This certification process is an important step in recognizing and encouraging the value of training and experience for early childhood educators who provide care and learning opportunities to our youngest residents. Moving forward, it will support the department in providing wage increases to early childhood educators for increased training and experience and help to decrease the wage gap between early childhood educators and other educators in the NWT.
- working with NWT educators and education bodies to adapt to the British Columbia junior kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum for use in NWT schools. This redesigned curriculum aims to personalize learning, making it more student-centered, flexible, and focused on literacy and numeracy skills, with an emphasis on deep, active learning to best prepare NWT students for their future.
- supporting the GNWT's Fiscal Strategy by focusing efforts on ensuring reductions would not impact

the NWT's most vulnerable residents. This includes NWT residents accessing income assistance, and programming aimed at supporting the early learning and child care sector. ECE reductions will instead focus on transitioning in-person training to virtual sessions and reducing or eliminating underspent budget areas.

- ECE will also focus on improving program delivery efficiency through reviews of the Northern Distance Learning Program, Inclusive Schooling Ministerial Directive, and the Territorial Support Team service.

That concludes my opening remarks, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Does the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment wish to bring a witness into the House?

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** I do.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Sergeant-at-arms, please escort the witness into the Chamber. Thank you. Minister, please introduce your witnesses.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, on my left I have Mr. Jamie Fulford. And on my right, I have Ms. Katherine McDonald.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I will now open the floor for general comments on the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. Do any Members have general comments? I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Overall, I definitely appreciate that the department seems to have gone through with a fine tooth comb looking for reductions and efficiencies to be found, and some of them seem to make sense. But what I am struggling to see is a clear vision for what we are trying to achieve besides saving money and being more efficient. And the message that comes out to me is that we're committing to do more with less. You know, we're shaving off here and there, we're making do, we're doing more with less, which could be possible, but my main concern is that we actually know what we're doing and we're committed to doing it better, particularly when it comes to education, labour force development, apprenticeships, skills development. You know, we've seen in the business plans in this budget that the plan over the next four years is to review the northern distance learning program, the inclusive schooling directive, the adult literacy programs, but with the goal of looking

for efficiencies. And I'm wondering what is the vision that we're actually trying to achieve?

And I know that the Minister has been a strong advocate for education, particularly JK to 12 education, and equitable access to education and support services throughout her time in this building. So I wonder if she could explain what is the narrative that you want us to get out of this budget in terms of what we're hoping to accomplish in the next year with this budget, especially in terms of education, labour force development, skill development?

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. For general comments, I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. And, Mr. Chair, I appreciate the comments of the Member. And I'd say one of the crucial things -- or comment that the Member made that really struck me was his comments around know what we are doing and commit to doing it better and know what we're doing with our dollars. And one of the things that we really focused on when we were going through and looking at ways that we could get creative with our budgeting was looking at the dollars that we were not spending, and so that gave us the opportunity to actually kind of trim the fat off the top, if you will, to make sure that when we are spending dollars, that we know what we're spending them on at the end of the day and that we can be more purposeful with how we spend dollars within the Department of education. One of the conversations as a whole of government is how do we want to spend dollars on new initiatives. And we need dollars in order to be able to turn those into new initiatives. And so I think that's where knowing what we are doing with our dollars is really important and being very purposeful with them.

As far as the question around, you know, what would I like to be remembered by or this budget remembered by for having kind of our collective stamp on it is I think it's really important that we put systems in place that live on -- beyond us as politicians so that it is not a band-aid fix or a temporary fix. It only looks at a four -- in this case three-year kind of mandate but is something that will continue to serve residents when -- you know, when we are no longer the ones in this building and a fresh and eager set of politicians come in and continue on the good working kind of foundation that we as a team are putting together. And so what I am looking at these days -- and I talked a lot about it today -- is pathways to employment, pathways to education, pathways to entrepreneurship when it comes to income assistance. But that also, in my heart, extends to education and how we are making sure that we are creating systems and support networks that also

empower our youth to see themselves in those pathways to know they exist and to know that it is possible for them. And so I would say that for me, it's about being creative and making sure that we are creating accessible pathways for all residents of the territories and for them to see themselves in it. And I don't think that you need to necessarily in every turn have millions of dollars to be able to do that. I think sometimes it's looking at how we work. But absolutely, there are times where we do need an investment of dollars. And hopefully through this exercise, we'll be able to have those. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North on general comments.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I don't have any more comments at this point. I certainly have questions and comments throughout but that was -- that's enough for the general comments. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. We're going to continue on, Members, on general comments.

Okay, thank you. Seeing no more general comments, does the committee agree to proceed with the detail contained in the tabled documents? Committee, we will now defer the departmental summary and review of the estimates by activity summary beginning with corporate management starting on page 36 with information items on page 38. Are there any questions?

I'm going to go to the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Very simple question. Can the Minister please tell me how many staff work in the planning, research, and evaluation part of corporate management? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I have a headquarters number of 38. And sorry, the policy planning -- sorry, planning, research, and evaluation is seven.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Nothing further.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Any further comments? I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.



**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, the department is undertaking an inventory of its land reserves. Can the Minister speak to what the objective of that inventory is. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, when looking at the priorities of this entire Assembly, each department was tasked with seeing themselves in all of our priorities. And so for starters, with our looking for available land, we are specifically looking for is there ways that we can contribute to the intent to build more affordable housing in the territory. And I would also say that I am in addition to that also kind of keeping a lens on what might work well for future sites for early learning and child care centres. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go back to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. Well, as -- and I know that the -- for instance, the federal government has made this commitment to develop public land for housing, which I think every -- every Canadian hopes to bear fruit, including those in the North of 60. When it comes to housing, teacher housing is a major issue, particularly in the small communities. I think the Minister's kind of opened the door a bit to this with her response. So do we have a game plan for how to address the urgent need for quality and affordable housing for teachers in the rural and remote communities in the Northwest Territories? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I am lucky enough to serve on Cabinet with a housing Minister who also calls one of our small communities home and is also very passionate about making sure that the teachers who live in her community and in other communities in the Northwest Territories have a place to lay their head so that they can provide quality education to our students. So the Minister and myself have already begun to have meetings about how we can work together to support one another in this effort because we recognize it as a significant need across the territory.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. Yes, and I appreciate that that is a -- requires more than

one department to come up with a solution to that problem, and presumably working with municipal and Indigenous governments as well.

I will move along to the addition of a new assistant deputy minister for the language and culture division. The department has been quite capably providing this area of public policy for many, many years without this position. Why do we need it now in a time of fiscal restraint? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, culture and languages have traditionally been -- well, languages, for sure, have traditionally been within the division that serves our JK to 12 education as well. And as you can imagine, they are both large subject matters and equally as important as the other. And so the intent there was to really pull culture and languages out of that division and provide it with its own necessary spotlight to make sure that it has all of the resources that we can provide it to be able to continue to grow that area because it is a critical part not only to education in the territory, but it's also a critical part to healing our territory as well.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Before I go back to the Member from Range Lake, I would just like to remind Members that we're focusing only on the pages I mentioned, which in this case is on page 36 on corporate management. So I'm going to go back to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. And I don't want to speak to the languages and culture key activity. I wanted to speak to a senior management position within -- which fits, I believe, into corporate management. But I can move on if you wish, Mr. Chair. But I would say to that response, I think everyone understands -- at least in this Chamber understands the importance of language and culture. And I just -- I don't know if a new ADM is going to do the things the Minister's talking about. I think if we want to expend more financial resources on language and culture programs and do something big and bold that way, or perhaps create a new ministry or new department or new agency, those seem like better ways to emphasize the importance of language and culture. I don't know, can the Minister explain more how one position is going to fundamentally improve and main stage these programs? Is that -- sorry. Is that the problem? Do we not have enough senior corporate leadership in ECE to properly showcase

languages and culture in the Northwest Territories? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, it is one of those ones where, you know, we look at the way that things operate and sometimes we have ideas how to make them better. Sometimes they work out. Sometimes they don't. This is one that the department is very confident will help us grow our resources for culture and language, specifically especially language revitalization. There's -- you know -- and like the Member said, none of us will disagree with that. I think one of the things that's really critical about this as well is we were able to internally fund this position. We did not have to go back and request additional funding for this position within the department in order to make it happen. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go back to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Okay, how, I guess is my question. Like, I understand what the Minister's saying. This position is going to fundamentally improve service delivery. But how? Because, you know, it's one -- it's the addition of one person to provide leadership over the entire division -- or the entire key activity and all the staff that deliver those programs. So how is this one person going to make a difference? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you for your question. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, for the operational detail of that one, I'd love to pass to Mr. Fulford, the deputy minister.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the deputy minister.

**MR. JAMIE FULFORD:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. A few comments that I think the nature of that work lends with a high level of accountability that can deal at a high level with Indigenous governments, with the federal government. There's a lot of intergovernmental work involved. The past experience has also shown that bottlenecks in approvals can happen where it was previously housed, and that will also be something that would be resolved by this new organizational structure. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go back to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. How can we, then, as an Assembly, gauge whether or not this new position is effective the way that the department intends it to be? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I will pass back to the deputy minister.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the deputy minister.

**MR. JAMIE FULFORD:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would suggest that there's measures by which this households the department accountable but also by the many partners that this new position will be dealing with, and likely they'll have their views on the success or lack thereof and will be talking to the Members and will hear about it. So I think that those accountability connections are there. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. So I think I made my point around this. I think often we see the solution to a lack of a -- a lack of a whole-of-government approach to public policy issues be solved with a new ADM. I don't know why it's an ADM, but it always seems to be a new ADM that will dramatically improve service delivery. And I don't know if that's historically been the case. I'm very -- and I'm skeptical if it will be the case here. But if -- you know, if this is how the department wants to expend its resources, then I wish them the best of success. But I hope that they can return to this House and clearly demonstrate that the bottlenecks have been resolved, that there's more accountability, and that these programs are having bigger impact than they had under a previous corporate structure. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Any further questions? Seeing none. No further questions -- oh, I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Maybe just to pick up quickly, what type of targets are you setting for this particular position? I mean, we must have some matrix to decide that it's warranted and needed, and so can we get some objectives on how they're going to change this story. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I will pass it to the deputy minister.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the deputy minister.

**MR. JAMIE FULFORD:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The organizational structure that is contemplated here is in process, so that involves some of what the Member is talking about. So while it's not finalized, it's something that's top of mind. And, in fact, ECE is known for having in place those kind of structures to evaluate the steps that it takes, whether they are programs, policies, what have you. So thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go back to Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you. Would FMB have -- would they have had to approve the addition of this particular position? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. To the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go back to Yellowknife -- the Member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess I'm going to ask what's the sales pitch to FMB based on the results and targets and the necessity of this position, could you give it to us. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, it was the same along with what was shared here publicly today from the deputy minister and myself to himself and the Member for Range Lake.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go back to the Member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** So just to reaffirm, there's no targets or objectives formalized yet on this particular position? And if so, what's the salary range on this? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, the salary ranges of assistant deputy ministers are standard across the department. And all roles within the

department -- or within all departments and across the government also do performance -- not performance appraisals -- performance appraisals -- job evaluations, and then as people go through their position year after year, they do performance appraisals.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** I'm just trying to get the sense of why they're going to exist other than believing they'll do a good job. I mean, I think this money could have been better placed in a regional centre, whether it's great places like Fort Providence who really revive languages. You know, we have Tsiigehtchic, you know, or McPherson who are struggling to keep Gwich'in alive; Gwich'in's key. So I'm just curious as to how that rolls out. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I think one of the key components that was explained by the deputy minister was exactly what it is, a coordinator role, moving things along, playing the accountability structure of this division, and ensuring that we're able to reach our objectives and our targets. We have some pretty lofty goals as far as a territory of what we want to see, and I think they're important goals that we work hard to reach, and we can't reach those goals on our own. It requires an extreme amount of coordination with our stakeholders and our partners in that, being Indigenous governments, and also a lot of coordination and partnership with the federal government as well. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you. What that just described sounded like a middle manager who worked with communities and community programs and schools. Maybe you could explain a little further, if you could, why they need to be an assistant deputy minister. That's -- I don't know the exact salary range but I mean, it's in the range of \$200,000, I'm sure. So I mean, why couldn't a manager do this or two managers? You know, one north, one south. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, in addition to, you know, the accountabilities that we've described,

this person also is accountable to a team of people below them that support the work that they're doing. And so it's not just one or two people that they're supporting in this work. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** So who is this team and where exactly are they and who is supervising them now?

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. For the operational detail of that, I will pass it to the deputy minister.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the deputy minister.

**MR. JAMIE FULFORD:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So part of what this revised structure allows is a consolidation of areas like languages, for example. So right now, there's an executive director that's responsible for the French language secretariat. There's a director responsible for the Indigenous language and education secretariat. And what it allows is some economies of scale, putting like together, and really elevating the profile of these important pieces of the work of ECE. We have -- we're in the process of doing those, as the Minister mentioned, job evaluation. That work will be made public imminently in the next month or so likely. So that role supported the heightened accountability and salary of an assistant deputy minister reporting directly to me as deputy minister. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** So specifically how much is targeted to this particular position all in? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. The total budget is 255.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. What other considerations were given other than hiring another senior-senior manager? Why didn't we just hire a middle manager or a programs person to help support the communities and committees working to continue to strengthen their language? And we

could easily put one in South Slave and the North Slave for half that price. Thank you. Well, not half, but you know what I'm saying.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, given the different options that exist, which were essentially leaving it as is, and comparing that to where we would like to be -- or how we would like to be able to support languages and culture across the territory and the effort and focus we'd like to see go into that, this was determined to be the best option in order to do the work that we wanted to see done within the department. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I mean, by that philosophy, we would have a trades deputy minister because we support trades or a teachers deputy minister because we want to see more teachers or like-minded thinking. I mean, so why can't it work with managers or program people? I'm not convinced in any way a senior executive needs to do this position in -- nothing's been sold to me as opposed to if you really want languages, why do you need another upper echelon bureaucrat? Because ultimately the other question to it is is it already staffed? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, the position is not already staffed. And the other thing that I think is worthwhile adding in is I do have an assistant deputy minister of trades. Trades are very important, and he is waiting in the back room. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Okay, I'll certainly say touché on that one. But it speaks to the broader point, we should have deputy ministers on every subject -- or ADMs, sorry -- of every subject, whether it's x-ray machines and deputy minister of nursing, and like, every area we have. I just think this is a horrible waste of money. And if we want to really support these, we should be giving them to the communities to inspire community homegrown programs. People don't need another -- another, like I said, upper echelon person. They need program people on the ground. So that's my comment. If I was given an opportunity, which I'm leaning towards

the clerk, I would look potentially maybe to a motion to delete if I had a chance to get one. Because I don't think this belongs here. We should be talking serious about doing real things. Thank you. I don't have the number.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay. Thank you for your comment. I think it's loaded. Is there any further Members that want to make -- ask questions? Okay, I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** There we go. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, so this department is crucial in a -- an important part of our efforts to reduce poverty and give people support and keep people out of the justice system, otherwise known as integrated service delivery. I know that the Premier has made this kind of the centerpiece of what his work in the Premier's office is to bring government together and offer integrated service delivery, eventually moving to a broader service NWT kind of model. But in the meantime, our most vulnerable citizens who need the most support are kind of the first stage of integrated service delivery. So can the Minister speak to how her department is building stronger integrated service delivery in partnership with other departments? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, this is going to take me into the income assistance section. So it is absolutely one of our deliverables under our business plan to work collaboratively with the primary's department, and that would take us into working with departments as well, like housing with Minister Kuptana. Within -- and one of the things we talked about quite a bit today was the ability of the new income assistance program to free up some time of the client navigators within the income assistance division so that as they are working with some of our most vulnerable residents, they are able to point to different services and programs that might be available. They're able to form relationships with staff over at housing, for example, and frontline staff over there so that there is a tighter connection between those programs. They are able to work with community partners and form relationships there and find out how they can create these pathways out of poverty together and/or pathways to supports that residents are looking for. So whether that is supports to education, entrepreneurship, or employment, that those pathways are created and are supported for residents of the Northwest Territories. So I would say that is the strongest way that we are

working on the beginning steps of integrated service delivery over at education.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Go to the Member for Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So this is important work, and I think the Minister laid out quite clearly how it works and how it will benefit clients, in particular clients who are, I think -- don't want to stay trapped in poverty certainly or even require these levels of services. I think everyone wants to get back on their feet. So this is -- I do support integrated service delivery. I've always supported integrated service delivery. I've seen how transformative it can be, especially for those who make frequent contact with the criminal justice system. What I think is missing here are some timelines and outcomes. It's fine to say that we're going to kind of -- these are our goals, this is what's going on, we're working with -- it's being led by another department. But surely, there must be some timelines and some goals for the suite of programs that ECE offers to clients that can be measured and they can be accountable for. Is that possible? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, this is work that we will be doing in conjunction with other departments. And we definitely, as far as income -- or ISD, rather, is concerned or not, the lead on that, and so it requires some collaboration on our part, but we definitely saw it as being important enough to make sure that it was included in the business plans right off the bat. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Okay, thank you. So as this corporate management also covers policy legislation and communications, earlier this year there was quite a public snafu with communications where an inappropriate meme was shared with the public inadvertently and it had to be pulled down. What steps are we taking to avoid those kind of missteps? This is -- again, lots of communication comes out of this department. It's responsible for a lot of -- like, for language, for culture, for promoting language weeks, culture weeks, all these kind of things. They have to do a lot of communications work. So what are we doing to

make sure mistakes like that don't happen again, and are we properly resourced in, you know, vetting -- like, do they have enough staff and resources to properly vet those kind of things before they come forward? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Yes, Mr. Chair, it was immediately taken down and an apology was immediately issued to residents of the Northwest Territories. And right away, following that, checks and balances were put in place with staff to ensure that something like that did not happen again, and we were able to use our existing resources to make sure that that was done. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. I suppose the question is -- like, and I appreciate that the apology was forthcoming and it was swift. It still made the news, which no communications professional wants. So I'm just wondering if -- I know, again, a lot of work has been done in previous years to centralize communications -- corporate communications, and I have heard anecdotically that perhaps that's -- that hasn't given departments the kind of capacity they were promised. So how is that working from the perspective of ECE in their communications function? Is the centralize -- is the shared communications function serving this department given it has such a large area of responsibility around important communications related to its public policy mandate? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I am quite confident that -- I'm quite confident in the work of the communications staff at the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. You know, I hope that they won't be judged on that one incident because there have been a tremendous amount of success stories that have come out of that office, and they work very hard. They have done a lot of beautiful work on behalf of the department and have been well-resourced to be able to do that. They are a team that works exceptionally hard and takes great pride in the work that they do and the importance of the work that they do and are able to work collaboratively with corporate communications while they do that work. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** So thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to be clear, like I am a big believer in no blame culture, especially when it comes to improvement, continuous improvement. So you blame the problem, you don't blame the person. And in this case, you don't blame the comms people. So I agree with the Minister, they've done great work, and I don't want my comments to be misconstrued as going after individuals or trying to apportion blame to hardworking public servants. I always said we have the best public servants in the biz, and I completely stand by their work. What I am saying is let's look at the problem. This thing happened. Is there a way we can resource these folks so they aren't, you know -- I'm sure they're running up against a lot of deadlines. They're working on a lot of projects. Like I said, this department has a ton of output. I'm just wondering if that shared corporate communications model is effectively serving this department given its high volume of public facing communications. And maybe this is a question more for the deputy minister. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I'd be happy to pass it to the deputy minister if the Member would like, but I can also let the Member know that communication is where I came from, and so it's very important to me that we have a communication division that is very well resourced and that we are able to actively and proactively communicate with members of the public, especially when a lot of the programming that comes out of this department is crucial and exceptionally important to residents of the territory. And so I can reassure the Member that the -- I have not had -- been communicated with that there's more resources needed, although I won't be shy to come forward now that I know I have an ally on the other side if I need more funding for comms. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And if I could just squeeze in one quick question, I would like to hear from the deputy minister just to get the perspective of the actual department. I appreciate what the Minister's background comes from, but I would appreciate hearing from the deputy minister on this. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the deputy minister.

**MR. JAMIE FULFORD:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Minister's views are completely in accord with mine, and I have nothing further to add. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Okay, I'm going to continue on here. Trying to get Members to speak that haven't spoken to this issue yet. But if I don't see any more hands, I'm going to continue on. If we could, I'd like to continue on.

No further questions, I'm going to go to -- I'm going to continue on here. No further questions. Please turn to page 37.

Education, Culture and Employment, corporate management, operations expenditure summary, 2024-2025 Main Estimates, \$12,456,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Sometimes part of the job requires a person to be nimble as we listen to the budget, certainly some of the answers, hence I am going to move a motion with respect to this line item. I move that the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, corporate management, operations expenditure summary, 2024-2025 Main Estimates, be reduced to \$12,201,000. And I'll speak to the motion. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. There is a motion on the floor. Thank you. There is a motion on the floor. To the motion. Okay, against? Sorry? Thank you.

We're going to -- I'm going to pass the -- to the mover, if you could speak to the motion.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This isn't personal or anything. I just think the value of the cost of this particular position at the value given, we could do so much more. We could, for example, turn this into two positions. One in the North, and one in the south. We have fantastic programs growing up. I mean, I would see language programming in the schools in Fort Simpson where I grew up. I'm very well knowledgeable around the issues of -- for example, what's happening around Diga School. You know, I supported the old language nest programs that have changed. And if we want to inspire young people to learn their language, learn their culture, this is exactly

how we could do it. So instead of finding ways to create more systems and bureaucracy -- I'm actually saying hire two people with that money. I'm not saying don't do anything. I'm just saying I believe it's -- get it into the schools and in the communities where it belongs. I mean, we don't have a, you know, community like Behchoko everywhere or Wekweeti. I mean, we need to inspire the communities to find their voices and their languages and to -- I would say that this is one of these situations where we should be saying rather than bigger administration, let's get on the ground people -- or sorry, people on the ground and find ways to cultivate this sort of inspiration and opportunities.

So, Mr. Chairman, I'm not going to go through the comments I made earlier. I suspect there will be some objections, which I respect. And this is sort of an on the spur of the moment so I mean, I didn't coordinate it -- this with my colleagues. But I'll let them decide whether they feel that this type of direction in the communities, in the regions, is more effective than someone sitting in an office tower in Yellowknife, you know, behind their computer saying, we want to coordinate better. And frankly, if we want to do something, you know, this is how you do it.

I mean, I should mention, you know, Gwich'in is one of the lowest speaking languages, if memory serves -- I'm not going to pull the statistics up, but if I remember correctly, at one time there was around 250 speakers of Gwich'in. Hiring someone in Yellowknife is not going to inspire that language. Getting somebody, an elder paid or some coordinator for those types of programming in that community, will help inspire those young people to connect with their language and culture. And that's the point is that more bureaucracy doesn't get it us better results. Let's get people in the program and in the community to create this and foster this excitement. And to me, that's the nature of the motion. It's not a -- it's not a mean motion. The problem is people -- and I don't want Cabinet to be sensitive. It's proposed as a deletion but, really, it's a find a different way to do this and it can be done fantastically.

So, Mr. Chairman, I'll leave it at that. If I said much more at this point, I'll just repeat, so I don't want to do that. And I'll let the -- my Members, if they feel the urge to rise to speak to it, either way, it's fine. It's part of the process and the business we do. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the -- to the motion, I got Yellowknife North. Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to be clear that this motion deletes just over \$200,000, so it will not allow more on the ground people in communities, in schools, language, educators. This motion just deletes money from the budget, and even though the Member's vision might be to add in programs and services, this motion cannot and does not accomplish that. So I just want us to all be clear that that's what we're talking about here.

I do think there's a place for us working with the department in terms of their business plans and the way they do things to try to encourage more on the ground programs, and that's a different discussion. But I feel at the moment we're micromanaging their operational matters, and I just don't think that we have enough information or basis for making the decision to just cut this budget by 200 and some thousand dollars. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. To the motion. I got Premier Simpson.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. And the Member for Yellowknife North stole my thunder a bit. I was going to say that deleting over \$200,000 from the budget does not give us the ability to hire people in the regions. So just so everyone's clear who might be reading Hansard or watching this, this is actually reducing the ability to do what the Member is saying. So it's a bit backwards. I just want to make sure that the Member himself is actually aware that this is a deletion and that taking money away does not somehow allow us to hire more people. So just for everyone's information, I just wanted to add to that. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of ECE, then to -- Member of ECE.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I appreciate the concern of Members. And what I think I would really love for people to be able to take home is the importance of what it is that we are talking about, which I think that everybody is on the same page of that is that we need to make sure that we are putting as much of a spotlight on culture and languages across the territory. When I have had the opportunity to speak with people from one end of this territory to the other, every time we start talking about healing, it always leads back -- the conversation always leads back to one of languages. And the amount of times that somebody has started a conversation about their journey to sobriety or their journey to healing, that starts with them reclaiming and revitalizing their language, I don't have enough fingers on my hands in order to express that. And it's not not just about

sobriety. It's absolutely about healing, and it's about enriching our communities and our territory and making sure that we are doing our best. This is a vital piece of reconciliation in this territory. And I understand what the Member for Yellowknife Centre is saying as far as people on the ground is most important. I couldn't agree more. But what puts people on the ground is the millions of dollars that ECE receives from the federal government. Every year, we have federal funding of \$5.9 million that flows directly through ECE and to Indigenous governments, and we need vital people in the department to be negotiating those dollars. And quite frankly, I would like somebody negotiating more of those dollars. And without those positions in the department, I cannot do that work, and I cannot make sure that we are in the territory getting a fair shake at the dollars that exist within the federal government to be able to do this work. If these dollars are cut, I don't just lose that position. Because this was internally funded, I'm losing another position within the department that can help do this work. And so I would urge Members to please leave the -- leave the funding where it's at, and let us go down this path of putting a spotlight on culture and languages because I think it's critically important, and I've long been an advocate for that. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. To the motion. Next I have on my list is the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I just wanted to speak to some of the comments that have been made by the Honourable Premier and the honourable Member for Yellowknife North around, you know, deleting this won't put jobs into communities. So I just want to point out that of this key activity, there are 38 jobs in headquarters. In languages and culture, there are 51 jobs in headquarters. One in the South Slave, and two in the Beaufort Delta. So we are not seeing -- this function of the department is a headquarters-based function. And I think this -- the Member's motion underscores the need to improve the presence of language and culture staff outside of headquarters and outside of, like, senior management level functions. And those are the points I was trying to make as well. And this does come from, I think, a place of those intentions. I appreciate what the Minister is saying, but the Minister also presented a budget where there are three jobs outside of Yellowknife to support language and culture, which is primarily Indigenous language and culture which is not residing in Yellowknife. So I just want to make that clear in kind of support of the Member's intentions for this motion, that this is a broader issue about where we're



spending those dollars and how we're getting those dollars to a community. And I think anyone from the regional centres and the communities that I have spoken with in this Assembly and who represents those regions will say they need staff in their regions to effectively deliver programs and services. The honourable Member for Boot Lake has made Members' statements about the need for this -- for a regional superintendent to be the -- you know, the Premier's eyes and ears in the region to make sure things are moving effectively and smoothly in this the region. And I think that's true across the board. So when you see those numbers and then you see the addition of another senior manager and the intention is to, like, raise the profile of language and culture, I think it just leaves some people thinking, well, is this really going to work, and is this really the right way to expend those resources. So I think this comes from a well-intentioned place. And, again, 51 positions in Yellowknife, three outside of Yellowknife. That's what we're looking at on languages and culture. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah, Mr. Chair, my colleague from Range Lake is not wrong. Certainly I am a huge proponent of positions, particularly senior positions being not centralized in Yellowknife, but being in the regions, such as the regional director position, which I would love to see as an ADM position. I would love to see many ADM positions or any new ADM positions moved to the regions and/or new positions go to the regions. Having said that, I don't want to delete money from this budget. I know the department has done their diligence on why they want it. I do question and I would fight tooth and nail about having it in Yellowknife. If you have an Indigenous languages ADM, that Indigenous languages ADM should reside in one of the regions where the majority of the Indigenous languages are being spoken. So and I think, you know, that position would sit very nicely in Inuvik or in Behchoko or in the South Slave, or in Dehcho. There's places that that position can be supported.

So yeah, and all due respect to my colleague from Yellowknife Centre, I understand where he's coming from, I don't want to delete the money from the budget but I, again, will fight tooth and nail to have this position put in the region where I think it will be properly housed. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Next on my list, I got Member from Monfwi. The

request came in for the interpreters for Members to speak slowly. Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Monfwi.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Okay, as an Indigenous person, due to colonization we know that it almost -- the Indigenous language and culture were almost extinct. And based on that, you know, like, I don't really want to support or reduce or delete a budget from this -- from the corporate management. I don't want to do that because -- especially concerning Indigenous language and culture. What I would like to see -- and I did ask the Minister in our briefing, and she said, well, I hope so. I hope I will take this position to the regions. And that's what she said. So I was quite pleased about that. I would like to see this position move to one of the communities outside of Yellowknife where the Indigenous language and culture is very strong and it's thriving and it's alive, you know. And I know that a lot of people, a lot of report have said that Indigenous language is dead or -- but it's not. And it is -- so outside of Yellowknife is what I would like to see where this position goes.

The last time that we had somebody as a director who had no Indigenous language background, nothing, and she was -- you know, I mean, the person was in charge of Indigenous language for so many years, and it's still continuing to this day. So I do support having this position move outside of Yellowknife. So I would like to see that, but I don't support reducing or deleting of the budget. But I just want to see that position somewhere. Because there is a pilot project happening with the South Slave with the ECE for ADM. So I would like to see that kind of a -- I would like to see more of support in that area. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Speaking to the motion only, next on my list I have is the Member from Nunakput.

**HON. LUCY KUPTANA:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. In speaking to this motion, I want to support my colleague, Minister Cleveland in this position, but I also want to support the remarks of the MLA for Monfwi how important this position is. It's a leadership position in this government, and I find it funny that we're having a motion on the floor of the House to talk about a senior leadership position in this government for language and culture, somebody that's going to lead the way for this government and provide the best expertise to the Minister for language and culture. So when we talk colonization, when we talk reconciliation, this is the discussion on the floor of this House. I just find that really funny and it's kind of -- after today's statement on Missing and Murdered

Indigenous Women and Girls and how we need to work towards reconciliation, that we have this sort of discussion. We need a leader, we need a senior leader, and we need this type of position for this government for Education, Culture and Employment. And I don't want to get into the operational issues of location or type of position, but the Minister will lead the way, and this is what she's proposing in the budget. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Mackenzie Delta.

**MR. NERYSOO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I too feel it is important that this senior management position be located somewhere outside of the city of Yellowknife. I come from a region where language is in dire need of revitalization. The Gwich'in language is one of the hardest languages to learn, and it's the least spoken language within the Northwest Territories, Indigenous language. We're losing our language at a fast pace. Our elders are -- we're losing our elders at an equally fast pace too so they're taking this language with them. We have a few knowledgeable people, such as our translators back there, that do take a good role in saving our language. So I too do not want to delete any numbers from this budget. Location, I would fight for having it located in one of the other regions, having it located where it's needed. I believe all the other locations would be appropriate. It would be well accommodated because, in essence, you're going to have to put something where it's needed, not a thousand miles away. So like I said, I don't want to delete any numbers, but I would like to see this position located in another region within the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from the Dehcho to the motion.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Like my colleagues that talked about, I too would like to see that. I don't want to see the budget deleted or reduced or whatever but would like to see the position moved into one of our regions.

We need -- kind of like I said before, we need role models in our regions. We need people in our regions that are at a higher status so our young people can look up to them and say, that's what I want to be when I grow up. And we don't have that, and everything is centralized in Yellowknife. It makes it hard for us in the smaller communities. The government needs to help stimulate the economy in all our regions. We need something in our regions. So that's what I'm going to say about that.

And also language -- an ADM for languages, I'm not sure how that's going to work, you know, but the Minister obviously knows what will happen if that person is hired. All our regions are struggling at some point with different things. So that's what I'm going to say about that one for now. Thank you. I don't support deleting or reducing the budget. But I do support having position put into one of our regions. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Any further Members to the motion. I got the Member from Frame Lake to the motion.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I think it's pretty clear where this motion is going, but we should make a point of throwing our reasons out there for decisions that we're making.

I see where the Member is getting at in terms of kind of questioning whether now is a time to be growing senior management, and I do -- I do think that those are questions that are worth raising. With regards to reducing the budget by \$200,000, similar to some of my colleagues, I just don't think that I want to see this budget reduced any further than it already is. I mean, one of the first thoughts I had when I originally cracked open the 2024-2025 Main Estimates was I was very disappointed to see reductions happening to education because I think of education as being such an integral part of the mandate commitment to grow and enhance the northern workforce by investing in skill development. You know, I've spoken to that ad nauseam in this House already and plan to continue doing that. For good reason, because I believe in it so much. And so I think it's important to discuss kind of the idea of senior management growth and whether that kind of is a wider issue, is really -- and adding positions, whether adding a position is always the answer, and I think that is a wider discussion.

Getting into each and individual decision and kind of trying to manage what departments are doing, you know, I haven't been part of operating this department, I haven't been in on the conversations that were involved in creating a position such as this, and I think we need to think very carefully about making decisions like this on the fly to change -- you know, changes to HR that are happening within departments that the department feels will help things move along more smoothly. So, you know, I would just note that something that stood out to me when I was listening to the Member from Yellowknife Centre speaking is he was speaking quite eloquently to, you know, a suite of inspired ideas. I would have appreciated those being brought forward for our report on the main estimates and think that we could

have maybe advocated for those that way. But simply by cutting the budget by \$200,000, obviously we can't achieve those things. But I understand the kind of symbology of the motion and understand that the Member may want to kind of make that gesture. But to wrap it up and try to be brief, Mr. Chair, I do not support cutting the budget by \$201,000. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. To the motion. Question. I'm going to go to the Member to Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I won't spend too long. I just want to say, first of all, I know what the delete function is. Unfortunately, people have to appreciate -- and I think the Premier put it well except the part which he says I may not be aware of what I'm doing. I didn't take that as offensive. I took that as tongue in cheek, which is fine. I give it so I should taketh, as they say, so I welcometh. So the point being is, though, it's an interesting observation, and I think it's very important to stress that because -- but the Members themselves only have the ability to delete. That's our only mechanism. Hence, that's why the narrative is so key when you make these motions is because when you say I want to delete this, it's critical that people on the government side understand the message is we don't -- it's not a case we don't support the government supporting language. It's not that. It's the question that's come up, and several Members caught it, caught the issue, which is on the ground, in the communities, in the regions. I mean, I'll be the first one to say thank you for a new job in Yellowknife. I mean, that sounds -- it's not intended to be rude but that's what this -- staying the status quo is exactly what that's going to deliver. And I'm in Yellowknife saying put it out in the region. I don't care where it goes because its excitement will create so much more synergy and energy in the communities.

So as far as promotion, Mr. Chairman, something interesting that comes up every single year, even when I wasn't here, is the Languages Commissioner are constantly asks -- calls for a promotion role. And if we wanted to do more for language, there's the gateway of opportunity as well. I mean, I -- all I can tell you is -- without spending too much more time is -- I'm going to say, respectfully, it isn't micromanagement. I know the Member for Yellowknife North brought that up. But every time a Member asks for something, one could define that as micromanagement. Oh, I need a nursing care thing in Stanton, that means micromanagement. We should put some \$10,000 in this. That's micromanagement. Like, in other words, where do we limit ourselves? I'm not offended by the comment but I'm making

the comment back saying, then we should never comment on anything on this side because anything would be perceived as micromanagement I guess. Which I don't support. I think that if we're given a budget, we should be allowed to ask questions. If we're given a budget to ask our opinions, here's my opinion. How do we help languages? Ultimately, Mr. Chairman, I'm not going to spend any further time on this. It's okay. I mean -- and I'm okay with people voting the wrong way by not supporting my motion, and I'll get over it. And I respect that, that you folks will make a less good choice. I didn't say bad. I'll just say less good choice. Because my initiative, really, is about stimulating opportunity in the communities. And as a young person who grew up in Fort Simpson, I mean, people spoke Slavey all the time as kids, and it inspired -- I mean, I still remember a few words, which I won't repeat, but that said, the -- it was exciting to see people do it. And when I hear George -- or sorry, the Member for Mackenzie Delta speak to about how tough his language is, I'm just trying to find new ways and inspire new ways we can get more speakers of that language and every single language around here.

So, Mr. Chairman, on that, I respect the results on how it goes, but I hope the message resonates that I support community languages, and I think frontline is really -- frontline and grassroots is really the way do it. And I have every right to make that argument. And I think that every Member has the right to disagree, even though it's okay, it's less good. Thank you.

COMMITTEE MOTION 10-20(1):  
TABLED DOCUMENT 93-20(1): MAIN  
ESTIMATES 2024-2025, EDUCATION,  
CULTURE AND EMPLOYMENT –  
CORPORATE MANAGEMENT – REDUCE  
OPERATIONS EXPENDITURES,  
DEFEATED

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I take it that all the Members have a copy of the motion in front of them. Okay. I'll read out the motion.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, it says on this motion here. I move that the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, corporate management, operations expenditure summary, 2024-2025 Main Estimates, be reduced to \$12,201,000. That's the motion. Do I hear a question?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Question.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, the motion is on the floor. To the motion. Of all those in favour? Show of hands. This motion, if

you -- this is to reduce -- so to the motion. Show of hands. Okay, thank you. All those opposed to the motion. Thank you. The motion is defeated.

---Defeated

Thank you. Members, noting the clock, and committee members, I will now rise to report progress. I want to thank the Minister and your witnesses. Sergeant-at-arms, please escort the witnesses from the chambers.

Okay, I'll read it out again for the -- what I have in front of me. Again, it just says here that noting the clock, committee members, I will now rise and report progress. Thank you to the Minister and to your witnesses. Sergeant-at-arms, please escort the witnesses from the chambers.

---SHORT RECESS

### Report of Committee of the Whole

**MR. SPEAKER:** Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

**MR. EDJERICON:** Mr. Speaker, your committee has been considering Tabled Document 93-20(1) and would like to report progress with one motion carried. And Mr. Speaker, I move that the report of the Committee of the Whole be concurred with. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. Can I have a seconder, please? Yellowknife South.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Question.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you. All in favour? Opposed? Abstentions? It's a tie. As a Speaker of the House, motion has been carried.

---Carried

Third reading of bills. Orders of the day, Mr. Clerk.

### Orders of the Day

**CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Orders of the day for Wednesday, June 5th, 2024, 1:30 p.m.

1. Prayer
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Returns to Oral Questions

5. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
6. Replies to the Budget Address, Day 7 of 7
7. Acknowledgements
8. Oral Questions
9. Written Questions
10. Returns to Written Questions
11. Replies to the Commissioner's Address
12. Petitions
13. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
14. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
15. Tabling of Documents
16. Notices of Motion
17. Motions
  - Motion 28-20(1): Consideration for Elders and Seniors in Debt Elimination
  - Motion 29-20(1): Municipal Block Land Transfer
  - Motion 30-20(1): Maintaining Northwest Territories' Housing Stock
18. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
19. First Reading of Bills
20. Second Reading of Bills
21. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters
  - Minister's Statement 4-20(1): 2023 Wildfire Season Review and Planning for the 2024 Season
  - Minister's Statement 5-20(1): Emergency Management Preparation
  - Minister's Statement 17-20(1): Reaching Average \$10 a Day Child Care in the NWT
  - Minister's Statement 24-20(1): Health Human Resources Recruitment and Retention

- Tabled Document 93-20(1):  
2024-2025 Main Estimates

22. Report of the Committee of the Whole

23. Third Reading of Bills

24. Orders of the Day

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

This House stands adjourned until Wednesday,  
June 5th, 2024, at 1:30 p.m.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 8:41 p.m.

