



15th Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

Standing Committee on Social Programs

Report on the Review
of the Draft 2004-2005
Main Estimates

Chair: Ms. Sandy Lee

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SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Speaker:

Your Standing Committee on Social Programs is pleased to provide its Report on the Review of the Draft 2004-2005 Main Estimates and commends it to the House.

Sandy Lee, MLA
Chairperson

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
SOCIAL PROGRAMS
REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE DRAFT 2004-2005
MAIN ESTIMATES**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Department of Justice.....	1
Department of Health and Social Services	7
Department of Education, Culture and Employment	12
Northwest Territories Housing Corporation	20

Standing Committee on Social Programs Report on the Review of the 2004-2005 Draft Main Estimates

Introduction

The Standing Committee on Social Programs met from February 19 to February 25, 2004 to review the 2004-2005 Draft Main Estimates. The Social Programs envelope includes the following Departments and Corporations, Justice, Education, Culture and Employment (EC&E), Health and Social Services (H&SS) and the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation (NWT HC).

Department of Justice

Introduction

The Standing Committee on Social Programs met with the Minister and his officials on Thursday, February 19, 2004 to review the Draft Main Estimates for the Department of Justice.

Members of the Standing Committee noted \$79,973,000 in Operations and Maintenance, \$645,000 for Infrastructure Acquisition and estimated revenues of \$10,416,000 for the Department in 2004/2005.

The Standing Committee made note of the following issues and concerns.

Capital Planning Process

The Committee was very concerned with how the Capital Planning Process works. It was noted that in last year's Infrastructure Acquisition Plan over \$10.0 million starting in 2004/2005 was identified for the construction of a new Territorial Women's Correctional Centre in Fort Smith. In this year's Plan that project no longer appears.

Committee questions how a \$10.0 million project could have been important enough to be included last year and yet not survive the current year's process.

Committee has taken this concern to the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight for a possible recommendation on the seeming inequities in the Capital Planning Process.

RCMP in Small Communities

There are communities in the Northwest Territories that are too small to generate a sufficient caseload to justify a permanent RCMP detachment. With recent court cases dictating that single-member detachments are not legal under the Canada Labour Code it is unlikely the RCMP will be able to have a presence in every community in the Northwest Territories for the foreseeable future.

Regardless of the factors, the Committee believes there is a strong case to be made to change the way policing is delivered in communities without a regular police presence.

Using their own experiences Committee Members illustrated that even within communities of a similar size there is a need for different levels of policing services.

The community of Sachs Harbour is a small traditional community that would like to have a permanent detachment once again. Failing that the community would like to see RCMP patrols on a more regular basis, with a possible emphasis on working with the children in school to deal with a recent increase in vandalism.

The community of Colville Lake has a different need. Resource exploration activity in the area has meant that many residents, of what was a traditional community, are now participating in the wage economy. Excess money has meant an increase in alcohol and drug use and related problems especially around payday. Residents of the community of Colville Lake would like to see the RCMP in their community during the payday weekends to provide increased security.

Committee hopes some of the resources provided by this Budget will go toward improved policing in communities without full-time detachments.

Increase in Number of Police Officers in the Northwest Territories

The Department and Minister of Justice have embarked on an ambitious plan to increase the number of police officers serving the general public. The Committee supports this plan.

This year's Main Estimates contain an additional \$2,461,000 in forced growth spending for police services. This funding will provide nearly \$1,000,000 in increased funding for operations and maintenance, with the remainder used to hire 12 new officers for the NWT. 6 officers will form the core of a relief unit to make sure that detachments in the communities are fully staffed when permanently posted officers go on holidays. The other 6 officers are to be posted in Yellowknife, Inuvik, Rae and Hay River.

Working from a Resource Requirement Report prepared by the RCMP last year the Department plans to provide funding to hire an additional 15 officers over the next two budget planning cycles.

The Members of the Standing Committee on Social Programs will not be offering any comment on where these new officers should be posted as it is understood that the decisions related to the number of police officers in any community is the sole purview of the RCMP.

The Committee looks forward to reviewing the Minister's plans for increasing the number of RCMP Officers in the NWT during the next Business Plan review in September.

RCMP Positions Paid for Solely by the Federal Government

Several positions for which the federal government is responsible, related to diamonds, drugs and organized crime, are not staffed at this time. Members are concerned that as the number of diamond mines increases, and the pipeline gets closer to fruition, a rise in organized crime and drug use will occur.

The Committee supports the Superintendent of "G" Division and the Minister in lobbying to ensure that these positions are filled well in advance of any increase in resource development activity.

Members also offer their support for having further positions in the RCMP related to diamonds and protection of Canada's arctic sovereignty moved from the south to the Northwest Territories.

Planning for the Pipeline

Committee is concerned with a perceived lack of coordination and planning related to the proposed pipeline down the Mackenzie.

There is a need to work together now at the community and territorial levels with the RCMP and the Courts to identify what the anticipated problems will be and how the justice system will deal with them. Waiting until such time as the construction of the pipeline is upon us is unacceptable.

In the next business planning cycle, Committee will be looking for evidence of a plan addressing the justice needs of residents living along the pipeline corridor.

Continuity of Care for Inmates / Justice and Health and Social Services

It was noted by several Members of the Committee that there seemed to be a lack of sufficient linkage between the programming offered by the Department of Justice while a person is incarcerated and those services offered by the Department of Health and Social Services and their partners upon the release of that person. Members believe that a community-based case-management approach must be taken to ensure an inmate's success upon release.

Committee Members understand that totally cooperative efforts are somewhat limited by privacy legislation, but, would point out that at the very least, the Department of Justice should be identifying treatment opportunities in an inmate's home community and offering to assist the inmate in accessing these services upon release. Hopefully, a released offender would take advantage of the programs and services available to him or her.

The Department of Health and Social Services has the responsibility of ensuring that programs and services are available in all communities in the Northwest Territories. If we release an inmate into a community, without adequate supports, we are setting that person up for failure. Chances are without those supports, a person will gravitate to the situations and behaviour that caused them to offend in the first place and end up back in jail.

The Committee believes there is a need for a multi-pronged approach that includes a role for the Community Justice Committees, the local community governments, aboriginal governments, Chiefs and the Mayors in ensuring the successful reintegration of an offender into his or her home community.

Any help we as a government can give to residents that limit their contact with the criminal justice system is worthwhile.

The Committee will be following up on this issue with the Department of Justice and the Department of Health and Social Services.

River Ridge Facility in Fort Smith

The Committee would like to commend and support the Department in its decision to convert the River Ridge Young Offenders Facility into an Adult Male Facility to deal with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders amongst inmates.

It is important inmates who may not have the cognitive skills to recognize the consequences of their actions are removed from situations where they may be subject to violence from other inmates or disciplinary action for acts unacceptable to the correctional institution.

Because of the decrease in the number of Young Offenders sentenced to custodial sentences, this program also has the benefit of utilizing unused facilities and staff to deliver an effective program that relieves strain on other adult institutions.

The Committee looks forward to reviewing the effectiveness of this exciting new correctional program during the life of this Assembly.

Young Offender's Facilities

With the coming into force of the federal *Youth Justice Act* in April of 2003 the way in which young persons under the age of 18 are treated by the criminal justice system has changed significantly.

The new *Youth Justice Act* focuses on a community-based approach rather than the custodial/incarceration approach under the old *Young Offenders Act*. This has meant an increase in the use of warnings, alternative sentencing options and probation in the young person's home community. The consequence of this is that the majority of Young Offender Facilities have been operating at well below capacity.

The Arctic Tern Young Women's Facility in Inuvik is a case in point. Prior to the coming into force of the new legislation that facility was operating at or near capacity, caring for between 8 to 11 female young offenders at any one time with a staff complement of 20 employees. Since April of 2003 the Arctic Tern Facility has averaged 2 offenders at any one time with the same staffing complement.

Committee notes there would be lower costs involved for female young offenders if they were sent to out-of-territory institutions. However, this has to be balanced with the human costs of displacing offenders so far from their families and communities.

It was noted by the Committee that the Federal Government is subsidizing 60%, or approximately \$1.2 million of the \$2.0 million total operations cost of the Arctic Tern Facility. Hence, the cost to the Government of the Northwest Territories to house two young offenders is not as high as it would appear on first blush.

The Standing Committee believes that it is important to review how sentencing under this new legislation plays out over the next while before any decisions are made in rationalizing Young Offender Facilities in the Northwest Territories.

Members of the Committee will be following up on this issue in the next and in subsequent Business Planning Cycles.

Residential Tenancies Act

The Committee noted the Act was originally drafted in 1988 and has not been significantly examined since that time.

There have been numerous complaints from both landlords and tenants made to Members of the Legislative Assembly asking for this legislation to be examined and changed to meet the present day realities.

The Standing Committee is satisfied with the Minister's commitment to include amendments to the *Residential Tenancies Act* as part of the legislative agenda.

Wilderness Camps and the Correctional System

Committee opinion is split in the value of the Wilderness Camp Program with some Members having questions as to the long-term viability of the program and whether the low level of inmate uptake justifies the sustained cost, while other Members believe the program should be expanded so that inmates could be in camps closer to their home communities.

The Committee noted there is a Request for Proposal out right now calling for interested parties to put in proposals for the operation of Wilderness Camps. The Standing Committee on Social Programs looks forward to a briefing on the results of this RFP and further discussions on the Wilderness Camp Program.

First Nations Policing

The Standing Committee is very interested in the continuation and expansion of this program in the Northwest Territories. Members strongly believe that a community is best served by an effective police force made up of persons representative of their culture and language. The RCMP and the Department are to be commended for their efforts thus far.

Committee will be following up on this issue throughout the next Business Planning Cycle.

Auxiliary Police in the NWT

The Committee noted that the use of Auxiliary Police in those communities with an RCMP Detachment is an important way of improving police services at the community level while not impacting seriously on the budget.

According to information supplied by the Department there are presently 35 Auxiliary Police in 9 communities. This ranges from 11 Auxiliary in Yellowknife to 1 Auxiliary in Deline. After security clearances, the RCMP provides training.

The Standing Committee on Social Programs strongly encourages communities and residents to take advantage of this program and to help the RCMP in delivering services in their communities.

Northern Rents for Federal Employees

Members are aware that there may be a change in the way rents are calculated for federal employees. As Members understand it, rents may be increased to market rates. This could have serious consequences for the Territories as it may make it difficult to attract RCMP and DND personnel to accept northern postings.

In addition, should the Federal Government decide to increase to market rents there is a strong likelihood that the Isolated Post Allowance would be increased to compensate. If this happens it would result in increased costs to the GNWT for their portion of the Isolated Post Allowance related to the payment for RCMP services.

The Committee will be monitoring this issue and following up at the next opportunity with the Minister of Justice.

Department of Health and Social Services

Introduction

The Standing Committee on Social Programs met with the Minister of Health and Social Services and his officials on Friday February 20, 2004 to review the Draft Main Estimates for the Department.

Committee noted the Department is estimating it will spend \$246,978,000 in Operations Expense and \$9,929,000 contained in the Department's Infrastructure Acquisition Plan for the fiscal year 2004/2005.

The Members made note of the following issues during their review of the Draft Main Estimates for the Department of Health and Social Services.

Federal Government's Failure to Meet its Responsibility

The Committee noted that the federal Department of Health and the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs are disputing more than \$30.0 million in charges relating to the delivery of health services and programs to Aboriginal people in the Northwest Territories since 1999. The Committee commends the Department of Health and Social Service's commitment to delivering a quality healthcare program to all northerners regardless of ethnicity. The Committee agrees with the Department there is no option but to pay for these services as the evolution of a two-tier healthcare system is unacceptable.

To date, the government's efforts at the officials and ministerial tables have been cordial but ineffective. The \$30.0 million this government is carrying on its books, as a receivable from the Government of Canada is money that this government could be putting towards delivering programs and services to all residents of the Northwest Territories.

With this thought in mind the Committee believes it is time to aggressively involve our Aboriginal partners in our dispute with Ottawa and has forwarded the following recommendation to the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight for their consideration.

The Standing Committee on Social Programs recommends the Government of the Northwest Territories place the issue of the Federal Government failing to meet their healthcare responsibility to aboriginal residents of the Northwest Territories on the Agenda for the Northern Leaders Meeting with a view to arriving at a consensus on a joint plan of action to recover this debt.

Dementia and Long Term Care Facilities

The Committee supports the Department's efforts thus far in assisting the Yellowknife Association of Concerned Citizens for Seniors in planning a dedicated dementia facility in Yellowknife.

Committee Members believe there is a real need for such a facility in the Northwest Territories. Such a facility would relieve strain on other long-term care facilities that are not designed or properly staffed to deal with the myriad of needs that caring for a dementia patient can entail.

It was noted by Committee Members that there was a need to balance territorial facilities like a dementia centre with that of the need for more long-term care facilities in the Regions.

The Standing Committee on Social Programs looks forward to further discussions on the future of a dedicated dementia facility and regional long-term care facilities in the next business planning cycle.

Telehealth

The Committee is very interested in ensuring the success of the Telehealth Program. Members noted with disappointment the scaling back of the equipment purchases when compared to numbers contained in last year's Infrastructure Acquisition Plan.

In the subsequent discussions Members did point out that the use of Telehealth does not always translate into cost-savings for the Department of Health and Social Services. In some cases it would result in increased costs as a doctor may order someone medicated in advance of the doctor's regularly scheduled visit to a community, based on observations made through the use of Telehealth. However, the Committee does not view this as a major problem as several Members did point out that early diagnosis of a condition does increase the chance of a positive outcome for the patient and could possibly reduce the costs to government through the use of a less invasive or drastic treatment regimen.

The Standing Committee looks forward to further discussions on the future of the Telehealth program in the Northwest Territories during the next Business Planning cycle.

Board/Authority Operations

It has become apparent to Members that the present Board and Authority structure for the Department of Health and Social Services and the Department of Education, Culture and Employment is no longer sustainable given the fiscal situation that this Territory finds itself in.

As the Health and Education Authorities spend the bulk of Government dollars in the Northwest Territories, it is appropriate that the Government's initial effort in reviewing the Board and Authority regime in the Northwest Territories should begin with them. It is also necessary that a long-term vision be developed which clearly defines any new authority's role and function.

If the streamlining effort is done properly Committee Members see an opportunity to increase local and regional involvement in the process. Members would point out there is a need to examine such issues as the present review of the Dogrib Community Services Board and a communications and participation strategy to ensure that communities understand the need for streamlining of the Authorities and have the ability to let their concerns be known during any process.

If a decision is made to follow the Community Service Board model there is an opportunity to improve service delivery at the community level and to make the system more accountable to the people it is supposed to serve.

The Minister has indicated he wants to work with the Committee in examining this issue and Members look forward to these discussions.

Support for Prevention and Promotion Programs

The Committee is convinced the Department is losing ground on the prevention and promotion front at a time when there is a strong indication it is time to increase our efforts in health promotion and prevention. Members are very alarmed by the health-indicator statistics as presented by the Chief Medical Officer. All trends are indicating an increase in preventable diseases and conditions. In the minds of Committee Members, this indicates a need to develop a course of action.

It seems the Department is at cross-purposes with itself when it reduces funding to health promotion and prevention programs. We are not going to reduce costs down the road in providing healthcare to our residents unless we are prepared to make an investment right now in health promotion and prevention programs.

Committee Members strongly support the efforts of the Department in implementing tobacco awareness campaigns targeting young people before they become addicted to nicotine but would point out there is a need to put a similar effort into developing and delivering health promotion and prevention programs aimed at sexually transmitted diseases, tuberculosis, diabetes and obesity.

Any health promotion and prevention program needs to be flexible enough to adapt to the needs identified in health indicator reports such as the recent report on cancer trends in the Northwest Territories. For example, it is apparent the Department has addressed the issue of smoking in a dedicated health promotion and prevention strategy. What are not addressed are the other behaviour patterns that have contributed to the increase of other types of cancer like colorectal cancers. There is a clear need for a health promotion and prevention program aimed at the other primary causes of cancer in the population of the Northwest Territories.

The Standing Committee on Social Programs recommends that the Department of Health and Social Services develop an Action Plan to deal with the increase of incidences in sexually transmitted diseases, tuberculosis, diabetes and obesity.

The Standing Committee will be vigorously pursuing this issue during the next Business Planning Cycle and wants to see evidence of an increased emphasis on health promotion and prevention programs at that time.

Territorial Treatment Centres

The Standing Committee on Social Programs is very concerned with the state of addictions treatment in the Northwest Territories. Many constituents have expressed frustration with their inability to access the programs and services they need to detoxify themselves and gain sobriety closer to the communities in which they live.

There is also concern about the lack of treatment programs available for young persons in the Northwest Territories.

This is an issue the Committee hopes can be dealt with during the life of this Assembly. Members believe it would be possible to develop a system using residential and community-based treatment programs that meet the needs of territorial residents.

Insurance and Women's Shelters

Members of the Standing Committee were made aware that Women's Shelters in the Northwest Territories were having problems accessing affordable insurance for their facilities due to exorbitant increases over last year's insurance rates.

Further information supplied by the Department indicated they were able to assist all Shelters in the Northwest Territories in acquiring suitable insurance coverage for 2004/2005.

While pleased the issue of insurance coverage for the Shelters was laid to rest for the next year, Committee Members caution that this issue may come up again. If insurance premiums make it impossible for the Non-Government Organizations to deliver these important programs it may become necessary for the Department to take a more direct role.

At the very least, the Committee would like to see the Department following this issue closely and coming up with a plan of action.

Support for Aboriginal Liaison Person at Stanton

The Committee appreciated the Minister's recognition there was a need to improve services for Aboriginal patients at the Stanton Territorial Hospital by addressing translation and cross-cultural communication issues.

In particular the Committee noted the Hospital has hired a discharge planner and coordinator to help people get back to their home communities and ensure that medical practitioners are ready for them when they arrive. This is a welcome first step but Members noted that it only addressed half of the equation. Those residents who arrive from our smallest communities are sometimes left to their own devices in accessing services at Stanton. This can be very overwhelming to someone with limited English skills and understanding of how hospitals operate.

During the next Business Planning Cycle the Standing Committee would like to see evidence of either a system or dedicated staff to deal with incoming Aboriginal patients

Department of Education, Culture and Employment

Introduction

The Committee met on February 23rd, 2004 with the Minister and his officials to consider the 2003/2004 Draft Main Estimates for the Department of Education, Culture and Employment.

The Committee notes an estimated \$213,705,000 for operations expenses, an increase of \$2,685,000 over last year's numbers and a total of \$13,430,000 for capital infrastructure for 2004/2005.

Yellowknife Aurora College Campus

The Committee is concerned with rising costs and diminishing adequacy of the current Aurora College facilities in Yellowknife. During the review of the Draft Main Estimates the Committee noted \$145,000 forced growth due to increased lease costs for the Northern United Place (NUP) Aurora College Yellowknife Campus. The Minister clarified that the total increase to lease costs for this year are actually closer to \$329,000. Members note the total lease costs for the Northern United Place Campus are now \$1,529,000. This does not include lease costs for off-campus facilities.

The Committee is concerned costs are escalating for a facility known to have substantial shortcomings for College program delivery. The building has reached capacity and classroom space is already being rented off-campus. In addition, the NUP campus has no dedicated parking, insufficient student housing and the campus design provides limited opportunities for student interaction outside of the classroom setting. The Yellowknife Campus is the only Aurora College Campus struggling to deliver programming in a facility that was not purpose built. The Standing Committee indicated a strong need to begin to look at options to address these problems.

During the review the Department commented that the NUP lease will expire in 2007 and they have begun to consider options. Committee Members were pleased to hear that the Minister had initiated a cost-benefit analysis of staying in the current location versus new construction. The Committee supports a cost-benefit analysis and looks forward to seeing the results, possibly during the next business planning cycle

Student Housing at Aurora College

The Committee is concerned with the lack of vision that the Department demonstrated for student housing at Aurora College Campuses. Inadequate student housing is a problem for all three campuses and Committee Members stress the need for a comprehensive plan to deal with the issue.

During the review the Minister explained that the decision had not yet been made whether to use the \$2,272,000 total Capital Allocation for the Green Apartments and the \$2,314,000 total Capital Allocation for the Brown Apartments in Fort Smith for a retro-fit of the existing apartments or for construction of a completely new structure. The Committee questioned if the plan to retrofit the Fort Smith apartments would be cost-efficient. They noted that \$446,000 had been allocated for work to begin as early as 2004/2005. Given the vagueness of the Department's plans, the Committee was concerned that the start date for this project was too soon and recommended careful analysis prior to action.

The Minister assured Committee Members of further consultation on this issue prior to the commencement of any work. The Committee is receptive to this approach.

Over the last few years, Aurora College has implemented a number of excellent programs geared at students from across the NWT. Many have relocated to attend. Unfortunately, the Department's student housing initiatives have not been keeping pace with the growth of programs. As a result, housing needs for out-of-town students, particularly in Yellowknife and Inuvik are not currently being met.

During the review of the NWT Housing Corporation Draft Main Estimates the Standing Committee noted that a considerable number of out-of-town students were occupying social housing. Approximately 90 Aurora College students are currently occupying social housing and another 18 are on the waiting list. The concern is that student use has increased pressure on a program whose mandate is not to meet the needs of out-of-town students.

Student housing was an unresolved issue from the last Assembly and the Committee sees no indication that Aurora College and the Department are any closer to developing a comprehensive plan. Committee Members expressed considerable apprehension for what it sees as an ad-hoc response to a crucial issue that warrants a carefully thought out strategy.

As the Department and Aurora College had not yet finalized how they were going to deal with the issue the Committee got a commitment to be informed of further details as they unfold. The Committee is giving the Department the benefit of the doubt and has approved the \$446,000 because they do need the planning money to advance the project.

Residential School Survivors and Secondary Victims

The Committee would like to see a pro-active position from the Department of Education, Culture and Employment on the issue of residential school survivors and secondary victims. The Committee stresses the need to actively look into possible funding opportunities from the federal government for the GNWT and to support individuals and organizations in accessing the available funding.

Committee Members would like to see the Department's efforts go beyond restitution to victims as directed by the Courts. Committee Members would like to see the Department look for additional opportunities for involvement in assisting residents in accessing federal programs and dollars. The devastating impacts that the residential school system has had on families, language, culture and heritage are well known. Members of the Committee hope that the Department will keep this issue in mind and that it will be reflected in Department goals and program delivery.

Rationalization of Income Security

The Committee is pleased to offer support for Education, Culture and Employment's plans to rationalize income security programs. Committee Members commented that excessive "stove piping" and compartmentalization of the various components of income security result in unnecessary frustration among clients. The Committee feels that a more integrated case-management style delivery model would increase the quality of service to clients. The need for

life management skills counselling to be integrated into income security program delivery was emphasized.

During the review the Minister provided a brief historic overview of the decision made in 1994 to separate what was viewed as strictly clerical income support functions from the counselling aspects of the social services program. The rationale was that this would free up more time for social workers to provide counselling services. Unfortunately the counselling mandate appears to have fallen through the cracks. Income support recipients in need of life-skills counselling are not always receiving the services they require.

The Committee favours a broad-based approach to the review of income security programs and emphasizes the need for cooperation among all government departments involved in income security and social services program delivery. The Standing Committee also advocates increased training of income support workers to better identify the needs of clients so as to better assist clients to help themselves. The Committee looks forward to a full briefing on income support programs and a discussion paper on options for the rationalization of income security by June.

The Minister proposed substantial Committee involvement during the examination of income security programs. The Committee is receptive to this approach.

Bachelor of Education Degree Program

The Members of the Standing Committee are disappointed to note that the 4 year Bachelor of Education Degree program in the Northwest Territories will not go ahead as planned. Aurora College had anticipated beginning delivery of the fourth and final year of a Bachelor of Education Degree at the Fort Smith Campus starting in September of 2004.

The Committee understands that current fiscal constraints have brought the Bachelors of Education Degree as well as a number of other deserving programs to a standstill. However, Committee Members are very supportive of the Program and hope to see its implementation sometime in the near future.

Programs geared to training NWT residents to meet the NWT's needs for professionals in areas such as teaching and health care have been proven successful. The Bachelor of Education Degree Program is a key component of the strategy for teacher recruitment and retention in NWT communities.

Early Childhood Development

Social Programs Committee is very concerned with the sunset of parts of this very important initiative, particularly under the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. Anecdotal evidence has placed a very high value on the success of the “language nest” portion of this program as part of any successful early childhood development program, such as the Aboriginal Head Start Program.

There was general consensus between Members from both smaller and larger centres on the success of the program and the need to save it from being lost because of the failure to ensure ongoing funding. It was also recognized that the infrastructure is in place to continue this program, but there is a danger of losing this infrastructure if the program is allowed to lapse for any significant period of time. There was no advance evaluation done by the Department on the success of the early childhood development programs affected by the sunset of the applicable funding.

The Committee pointed out that in a direct and tangible way, Language Nests deliver many aspects of Education, Culture and Employment’s Departmental goals: better beginnings for children; support and resources for community involvement in the education process; and the promotion of Aboriginal language and culture.

What’s more, it is a program that has been successful in virtually every community across the territories. Few programs attain this level of success across all regions. Young children have had the opportunity to spend time with elders where they are exposed to Aboriginal language through storytelling at the time that the mind is most ready. They gain a strong foundation in their aboriginal language in a cultural context and are infinitely better prepared to learn once they enter the formal K-12 education system.

The Committee recognizes that current fiscal realities force this government to make some very difficult decisions. However, this Committee feels that the Aboriginal Language Nest program must be a priority at this time. Investments in the youngest members of our society ultimately pay off. Committee noted that language is fundamental to identity. Pride and competence in an individual’s Aboriginal language improves self-esteem, which directly translates to success in school, in post-secondary education and in employment. The far ranging benefits of Language Nest Programs have been well documented in New Zealand and Hawaii, where they have been established for 25 years.

Committee Members noted that the Department is currently undertaking a review of the effectiveness of the sunset programs under the Early Childhood Development program. The Committee is very concerned, that a program, that by all accounts is successful, can be lost without any proper analysis as to its effectiveness.

Until such time, as Committee Members can be persuaded to the contrary, we offer the following recommendation:

The Standing Committee on Social Programs recommends that the Department of Education, Culture and Employment continue to provide base funding for its Early Childhood Development Program at 2003/2004 levels and program delivery parameters.

This concern was passed on to the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight and was subsequently conveyed to the Minister of Finance.

Community and Family Support for Education

The Committee recognizes the positive effects that community and family support have on the education process. Some Members commented that in smaller communities families are interested in what's happening at school and yet, in many cases, parents are hesitant to become directly involved. The Committee supports Education, Culture and Employment to work with local Education Authorities to continue to foster increased involvement at the community level and to develop strategies to overcome barriers to family participation.

The Committee supports a conception of education that recognizes culture and language as vital component of the education process. A system that reflects the values of a community is more likely to draw involvement and support of family, which directly translates into increased success for students. A healthy individual self-identity is an important component in preparing school-aged kids for success in further education and productive life choices.

Quality of School Programming in Communities

The Committee was pleased to hear the Minister's comments that more students are accessing senior secondary schooling in their home communities. The Committee applauds the work that has been done to implement grade extensions in communities. Grade extensions permit students to complete senior secondary education in their own communities where family and community involvement, and continued exposure to cultural heritage, provide the necessary support for students to be successful in school and for healthy personal development.

However, the Committee did note that anecdotal evidence suggests a number of problems that substantially undermine the quality of senior secondary education in the smaller communities. Notably, students in a single class often range in age and grade-level to such an extent that individuals are hindered in their ability to learn. Not only is this frustrating for students, but it is hugely detrimental for students who go on to further their studies in larger centres.

The Committee would like to see an 'across the board' standard of evaluation and a strategy to ensure that this standard is attained or exceeded by all NWT students, regardless of where they attend senior secondary school.

The Standing Committee on Social Programs recommends that a quantitative evaluation on grade extensions be undertaken to ensure that not only are students accessing senior secondary schooling in their home communities but moreover, that they are graduating with a quality of education that allows them to be successful and competitive if, and when, they pursue post-secondary studies.

NWT students in smaller communities deserve the same quality of education that their counterparts in the regional centres receive. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment must ensure both quantity and quality in smaller communities. The Committee looks forward to being apprised of a documented improvement in the quality of senior secondary education in smaller communities over the next four years.

Student Financial Assistance

The Standing Committee on Social Programs is concerned with the rapid increase in costs for the Student Financial Assistance Program since 1999/2000. From 2002/2003 actuals to the 2004/2005 Draft Main Estimates the budget jumped by \$5,394,000, representing a 24% increase. If this proves to be an ongoing trend, it is alarming. Committee Members are concerned that this kind of an increase over any length of time cannot be sustained.

The Committee was informed during the review of the Draft Main Estimates that the increase is due to increased uptake; more students are accessing funding for post-secondary education. The Minister explained that the level of funding available to students has not changed since a substantial overhaul of the program in 1999/2000.

It is well known that the cost of education is skyrocketing across Canada. According to StatsCan, Canadian undergraduate students paid an average of \$4,025 in tuition fees for the 2003/04 academic year. This is up from \$3,749 in 2002/03. The Committee pointed out that the program will need to be reviewed again sometime in the near future. The concern is that SFA costs

are already increasing unsustainably, even without increases to funding levels to meet the rising costs of education.

The Committee would like to see further analysis focusing on the sustainability of the program, to ensure that it is keeping up with student's needs and to see whether the program is attaining the desired outcomes. The Committee looks forward to detailed examination of this program during the Committee's review of all Education, Culture and Employment's income security programs.

Pipeline Employment Opportunities

The Committee acknowledges the work the Department and industry have done to date in delivering oil and gas training to the residents of the Mackenzie Valley. Committee Members support these efforts and encourage the Department to step them up so as to be in a position to benefit from this one-time event. The Committee stresses that preparations are essential and the window of opportunity is short. If residents of the NWT are not prepared, opportunities will be lost.

During the review of the Draft Main Estimates Committee Members questioned the Minister about the Department's preparedness to cooperate with southern unions. The Standing Committee on Social programs was pleased to hear from the Minister that departmental representatives had held initial meetings with unions that will likely be involved in pipeline construction.

The Committee cannot stress enough the importance of a cooperative approach to dealing with industry and their unions. A relationship must be developed if NWT residents are to receive the full benefit from the construction of the proposed Mackenzie Valley Pipeline.

The Department and its partners must be prepared to concentrate on the training necessary for northerners to qualify for the 250 jobs related to the operation of the pipeline. The Committee will be looking for tangible training targets in September 2004 when reviewing the Department's Business Plan for 2005 – 2008.

Services for 16-18 year olds

Members of the Standing Committee remain concerned with the gap in services experienced by 16 to 18 year olds who are no longer living with their parents or guardians. This issue was raised in the last Assembly and resulted in the passage of Bill 22, *An Act to Amend the Child and Family Services Act* on October 30, 2002. Changes to the *Act* made the Department of Health and Social Services unequivocally responsible for children under the age of 19.

Nonetheless, individual Members of the Legislative Assembly are still contacted on a regular basis by 16 to 18 year olds who are having problems accessing the services they require to address their basic needs. It would seem that many of these problems result from a lack of awareness front-line workers in the Income Support and Health and Social Services fields have of recent amendments. The Committee would like to see training for front-line staff so that they can ensure this demographic receives the services they require.

Harmonization

The Committee understands the harmonization initiative has been put on hold and is looking forward with enthusiasm to working with the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment in reviewing and rationalizing Income Security Programs.

The Committee is expecting a new era of cooperative efforts between all departments involved in income security programs.

Northwest Territories Housing Corporation

Introduction

The Standing Committee on Social Programs met with the Minister and his officials on Tuesday, February 24, 2004 to review the Draft Main Estimates of the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation.

Committee noted the GNWT is supplying \$53,047,000 of the estimated \$103,486,000 the NWT Housing Corporation will spend on delivering its programs and services in 2004/2005.

Committee Members made note of the following issues during their review of the 2004/2005 Draft Main Estimates for the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation.

Market Housing Initiative

On the face of it, Committee is willing to offer limited support for the market housing initiative at this time based on our initial discussions with the Minister and his officials during the review of the Draft Main Estimates.

As Committee Members understand, the Market Housing Initiative is to provide funding for the creation of rental housing in non-market communities to house teachers and medical staff. After the initial purchase of the mobile homes it is understood that the Corporation hopes to recover its cost by selling to Aboriginal Development Corporations.

What is of concern to Committee Members, and limiting their full support of the initiative, is the lack of consultation with the target rental market. It is not clear that the rental rates that will have to be charged to recover investments costs are acceptable. It is also not clear that the use of mobile homes meets the needs of the target rental market.

The Standing Committee on Social Programs recommends that the NWT Housing Corporation engage an arms-length organization to conduct a survey on whether the Market Housing Initiative meets the needs of its intended target audience – professionals at the community level.

The Standing Committee on Social Programs looks forward to further discussion on this potentially valuable initiative.

Sombe K'e Healing Centre

The Committee was disappointed to hear that the Sombe K'e Healing Centre was not suitable to meet the needs of a Territorial Treatment Centre for children. Now that this option no longer exists it is time to make serious efforts to get this facility off of the government books.

The Committee was interested to hear that as the mortgage holder on this \$2.8 million facility, the NWT Housing Corporation had identified a number of social agencies that were interested in acquiring the facility and planned to issue a directed RFP to these agencies. While it would be preferable for a social agency to gain control of the facility and for the facility to be used for the benefit of NWT residents there are some concerns. Will the Department of Health and Social Services utilize any of the services that a Social Agency plans to deliver at the Sombe K'e Healing Centre? Will that utilization generate sufficient revenue for the Social Agency to maintain and pay for the mortgage on the facility? Will the proponents be made aware of the land-tenure issues and the maintenance and utility costs for the facility as part of the RFP package?

Committee would suggest any sale agreement have a caveat that the sale would not result in any increased appropriations for the Government of the Northwest Territories.

Should the Social Agency RFP option be unsuccessful, the Standing Committee on Social Programs would like to see the facility disposed of by open tender.

2004 Housing Needs Survey

During the review of the 2004/2005 Draft Main Estimates Committee Members were made aware that the Housing Corporation was putting its finishing touches on the 2004 Housing Needs Survey. This survey is compiled by the Housing Corporation and the NWT Bureau of Statistics every 4 years and is used in determining housing needs at the community level.

The Housing Needs Survey is important in determining resource allocations for new construction and repairs during a four-year period. Members of the Standing Committee appreciated the Minister's commitment to table the Housing Needs Survey at the earliest opportunity. It was not clear that this would occur during the March Budget Session. Members of the Standing Committee would appreciate being provided copies of the Housing Needs Survey upon completion.

Corporation Goals

Members of the Standing Committee on Social Programs were concerned the Housing Corporation goals changed without a demonstrated plan for implementation.

In particular, Members expressed concern that the new goal related to public education and training to reduce dependency on Housing Corporation social housing programs was not well defined. Members were concerned with how and who would deliver public education and training at the community level. The Housing Corporation admitted it has done a less than stellar job in educating people at the community level about the consequences and ramifications of accessing Corporation homeownership programs.

Committee will be looking for a clear indication of an adequate and well-reasoned training and public education component as part of the Corporation's 10-year plan when we meet to review that plan in April.

Supported Lease Program

The Committee supports the principle behind the Supported Lease Program of providing a transition mechanism to move targeted clients from dependency on social housing to independence. Members are however, concerned that as one Member put it "imposing a market mentality on a small community does have its pitfalls."

Members were not confident that the Corporation has developed a proper mechanism to report and monitor client progress. There is a concern this new program does not have a coordinated approach between the District Housing Office and the Local Housing Organization. In addition, concerns expressed by some Members indicate there have been problems in the past with District Managers failing to communicate effectively which has led to misunderstanding as to the client's responsibilities when it comes to homeownership. Members are also concerned that credit and lifestyle counseling may not be sufficient to break the cycle of dependency in some individuals and that the program needs to stand ready to deal with its successes and failures.

When reviewing the Housing Corporation's 10-year Plan in April the Committee will be looking for evidence that the Supported Lease Program has a clearly developed education component that clearly outlines to the client the intended purpose of the program, its intended outcome and consequences of homeownership.

Counseling Clients

Committee is concerned that the NWT Housing Corporation appears to put too much faith in the adequacy of present counseling services available to their clients. Members do not share that faith and believe that the Corporation has underestimated the difficulties in transitioning from dependency to open market.

The Committee strongly believes that there is a need to ensure that frontline staff at the District level and the Tenant Relations Officer at the local level are adequately trained to counsel clients.

Members were interested to hear that the Corporation is working with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation to develop public education materials on home ownership but remain convinced that the human quotient is more important in ensuring the client understands the responsibilities of homeownership.

Log Housing

Members of the Standing Committee understand the Corporation has had limited success in delivering affordable log housing programs in the past. However, some Members did point out that there is an opportunity to possibly use log construction to address the housing needs of single people in some communities through a user-build sort of program. It was felt that small units might be more economical than larger units.

Communication in the Communities

Members are aware there are many residents in the communities who hold the Government and Corporation responsible for upholding agreements made prior to the Housing Corporation coming into existence in 1974.

Members would complement the Minister on his awareness of this reality and look forward to further discussions on how we can meld promises made with the programs of today.

Federal Funding for Social Housing

Committee Members noted that 2004/2005 marks the beginning of the reduction of funding from the federal government for the construction and upkeep of Social Housing. Unless the federal government has a change of heart this will mean the GNWT and the Housing Corporation will be taking on more of the fiscal responsibility each year until the funding ends in 2038.

Obviously, this is of grave concern, as we do not have enough money presently to address social housing needs in the Territories.

Committee Members have heard indications at the federal level that there may be money made available for Social Housing in the federal budget. This would be welcome provided the NWT's share is not based on an inadequate per-capita funding formula.

The Committee strongly supports the Minister in any and all efforts to restore and increase the amount of money provided to the Territorial Government for the provision of Social Housing in the Northwest Territories. The Committee also supports the Minister in accessing funding for Aboriginal residents of the Northwest Territories through Aboriginal On-Reserve Housing Programs that are not available in the NWT. It is unreasonable for the federal government to deny access to funds that are clearly targeted at Aboriginal people.