



16th Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

Standing Committee on Social Programs

Report on the Review of the
2008-2009 Draft Main Estimates

Chair: Mr. Robert C. McLeod

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May 28, 2008

SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Speaker:

Your Standing Committee on Social Programs is pleased to provide its Report on the Review of the 2008-2009 Draft Main Estimates and commends it to the House.

Robert C. McLeod, MLA
Chairperson

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL PROGRAMS

REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE 2008-2009 DRAFT MAIN ESTIMATES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Department of Health and Social Services	1
Introduction.....	1
Nurse Practitioners	1
Telehealth and the Medical Travel Policy	2
Stanton Master Plan	3
Support for Homecare and Respite Services	3
Electronic Medical Records and Interoperable Electronic Health Records.....	4
Future of Health and Social Services Authorities	4
Phase 2 of Family Violence Strategy.....	5
Recruitment and Retention Issues	5
Federal Fiduciary Responsibility for Indian and Inuit Healthcare Costs.....	6
Support for Non-Governmental Organizations	6
Support for Territorial Dementia Facility	7
Assisted Living Facility in Hay River	7
Department of Education, Culture and Employment.....	8
Introduction.....	8
Wage Subsidy Program – Apprentices.....	8
Responsibility for Public Housing	10
Childcare User Subsidy for Students.....	10
Eco-Literacy	11
Childcare Facilities	11
Childcare Subsidy Program.....	12
Income Security Program Reform	13
Recommendation	13
Utility Costs at Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre	13
Student Financial Assistance Program Reductions	14
Renewable Energy Technician Program	14
Sustainable Communities Program	15
Department of Justice	15
Introduction.....	15
Proposed Correctional Facilities and Renovations	15
Recommendations.....	17
Court Workers	17

Recommendation	17
Community Justice Programming.....	18
Recommendations.....	19
Programming Staff at North Slave Correctional Centre	19
Law Bursary Program.....	20
Paradoxes of Budget-Cutting Exercises for the Department of Justice	20
South Slave Drug Interdiction Task Force	21

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
SOCIAL PROGRAMS**

**REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE
2008-2009 DRAFT MAIN ESTIMATES**

INTRODUCTION

The Standing Committee on Social Programs is pleased to present its report on its review of the 2008-2009 Draft Main Estimates.

The Standing Committee is responsible for the oversight of the Departments of Education, Culture and Employment; Health and Social Services and Justice. These Departments expend 60% of the GNWT's operations budget in providing services to the residents of the Northwest Territories.

The Committee met to consider the Departmental Draft Main Estimates between April 1 through 11, 2008.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

Introduction

The Committee met with the Minister and her officials on Wednesday, April 2, 2008 and Thursday April 3, 2008 to review the Draft Main Estimates for the Department of Health and Social Services.

Committee members made note that the Department is proposing to spend \$309,822,000 in Operations Expense and \$32,414,000 on Capital Projects in fiscal year 2008/2009.

We would like to thank the Minister and her officials for appearing before the Committee and responding to the Committee's questions and concerns.

Committee members offer the following comments on issues arising out of the review of the 2008-2009 Draft Main Estimates.

Nurse Practitioners

Members of the Committee are very concerned with how nurse practitioners are being utilized at NWT Hospitals and how they are being integrated into the NWT Healthcare system.

It is understood all Nurse Practitioners that have had their education or upgrading paid for or subsidized by the Department could be employed in front-line positions at community health centres.

There are a number of nurse practitioner positions that have been funded on an ad hoc basis, utilizing one-time federal funding pots. These positions have been acknowledged to reduce hospital stays and associated costs and improve patient outcomes.

The Department and Health Authorities should be using nurse practitioners to improve patient outcomes throughout the NWT Healthcare system and making the necessary program and funding decisions to best utilize our nursing resources. It may also be necessary to re-profile existing vacant nursing positions to accomplish this goal.

Committee members are aware that considerable expense was incurred between the cost of training and the development of enabling legislation and an implementation plan.

It is time to follow through, and we expect to discuss the use of Nurse Practitioners and review a definitive implementation plan during the review of the 2009-2012 Business Plans in September 2008.

Telehealth and the Medical Travel Policy

It is noted from examining forced growth figures in previous Main Estimates and Supplementary Appropriations that medical travel costs are increasing at an alarming rate. Some of these costs, like increases in airfare and charter costs because of the rising price of aircraft fuel, are outside of the control of the Department of Health and Social Services. The areas where the Department can control costs are related to the number of patients using medical travel and the frequency of that travel.

Members of the Committee were concerned with the proposed downgrading of support for Telehealth and the potential negative impact that will have on medical travel costs.

Members of the Committee believe that, wherever possible, the use of Telehealth to consult with other healthcare professionals is preferable and more cost-efficient than sending patients on medical travel. In order for this to occur, it is important that Telehealth programs in the two territorial hospitals be delivered in a coordinated and focused manner. For this reason, the Committee recommended that two Telehealth coordinator positions, one at Stanton and one at the Inuvik Hospital, be retained.

The Committee was pleased that the Department reinstated the Telehealth Coordinator in Inuvik. However, Committee members remain concerned that even though there may be qualified persons to operate the Telehealth equipment at the Stanton Territorial Hospital, without a person in a coordination role the equipment may not be utilized to its full potential.

Committee members will be tracking the usage of Telehealth through the business planning and results reporting processes.

Stanton Master Plan

It is noted that there is no long-term planning in place related to the future of the North's flagship healthcare facility, Stanton Territorial Hospital.

At this time Committee members are being asked to approve piecemeal capital projects without any inkling of how these projects interrelate to a Master Development Plan for Stanton.

Members of the Committee are aware that some wards are overcrowded and that patient privacy is slowly being eroded. We also hear that medical and administrative staffs at Stanton are being asked to work in less than ideal conditions.

The Minister has committed to following through on the development and finalization of the Stanton Master Development Plan and has made it one of the priorities of the newly appointed Public Administrator for Stanton.

The Committee wants to make it very clear that we will have great difficulty in recommending future approvals of capital projects for Stanton in the absence of the Master Development Plan.

Support for Homecare and Respite Services

The Committee supports the Homecare programs offered through the Authorities and their partners. These programs are instrumental in keeping people in their own homes for as long as possible and keeping healthcare costs under control.

The Committee is also very pleased to support the expansion of respite care services to communities outside of Yellowknife in the 2008-2009 fiscal year. Many families do a fantastic job in addressing the medical and care needs of their loved ones – but these same people need a break every once in while.

On a related matter, it is noted that policies under the Income Support Programs administered by the Department of Education, Culture and Employment do not allow employed persons to stay with family members renting public housing, when those family members may require some assistance in maintaining their

independence, without using the employed person's income in calculating the rental rate.

It is known that seniors living in their own homes utilizing homecare and assistance from family members to maintain their independence are less of a cost to government than those who move into government run long-term care facilities.

The Committee will be making a recommendation to the Department of Education, Culture and Employment to change Income Support policies, so that, with appropriate approvals from medical professionals, persons who move in to provide assistance to family members in social housing will not impact unit rental rates.

Electronic Medical Records and Interoperable Electronic Health Records

The Committee notes that the Department of Health and Social Services is solely responsible for the costs associated with the development of the Electronic Medical Record and that Canada Health Infoway is paying the bulk of the costs associated with the development of the interoperable Electronic Health Record.

It is hoped that the eventual rollout of these two systems will help the medical community in accessing information and improve patients' medical outcomes, while at the same time reducing the administrative costs and burden for the Department and Health Authorities.

It is hoped that the Committee will be able to see the implementation of these new systems during the life of the 16th Assembly.

Future of Health and Social Services Authorities

It is apparent to Members of the Committee that our current method of administering health and social services by using regional authorities is unsustainable going forward.

A Health Authority with 42,000 residents in southern Canada would be a very small Health Authority. In recent years, in most provincial jurisdictions it is likely a Health Authority of that size would have been rolled into a larger Authority.

The fact that the NWT has seven Health and Social Service Authorities means that many administrative functions are duplicated and that some economies of scale by such things as centralized purchasing are not being realized.

In addition, it is understood that having seven different employers of healthcare workers has made it difficult for workers to temporally work in other communities,

if the same health authority does not employ them. It is supposed that a single employer of healthcare professionals would make the system more flexible in responding to emergencies and staffing shortages. Members also believe that a centralized single employer would result in better outcomes for the funding that is currently spent on recruitment and retention, by allowing for greater mobility for our healthcare professionals.

The original intent behind Regional Health Authorities was to build regional governance capacity. Members believe that between the development of the institutions of the territorial government, the Non-Governmental Organizations and the various Aboriginal Governments and Development Corporations, that this capacity now exists and that a strong case can be made for consolidating operations into a single Board representing all regions of the NWT.

It should be clear to all residents of the NWT that if Members of the Legislative Assembly are faced with a choice of cutting health and social services programs or changing governance systems to save money, Members will choose to save programming for residents.

Phase 2 of Family Violence Strategy

The Committee was pleased to see that the Family Violence Action Plan has moved from being coordinated by the Department of the Executive during its development and implementation to being delivered by the Department and its Authorities.

The Department will be spending nearly \$1,000,000 to enhance emergency services in regions with no services and to increase funding for existing shelters and programs.

This is an important step in ensuring the safety and welfare of northern families. The Committee looks forward to reviewing results of our increased investment in future years.

Recruitment and Retention Issues

The Standing Committee has reviewed information provided by the Department on bursaries and paying for seats in medical schools for doctors. It is not apparent that the people of the Northwest Territories are receiving value for money in sponsoring these medical seats as past experience indicates that very few of these doctors are returning north – even with return of service agreements in place.

The reality is that other jurisdictions are so desperate for doctors that they are more than willing to foot the bill to pay out a return of service agreement. Although the original intent made sense, given the problems in recruiting doctors,

the situation has evolved into one where the Department of Health and Social Services is paying to train doctors for other jurisdictions.

NWT students are being accepted into medical school on their own merits regardless of whether the Department of Health and Social Services is paying to reserve seats for NWT medical students.

For this reason, the Committee recommended that the Department of Health and Social Services examine eliminating paying for seats at medical schools. The Department agreed with this recommendation and will be phasing out paying for seats at medical schools as the current students graduate.

Federal Fiduciary Responsibility for Indian and Inuit Healthcare Costs

It is noted that the Federal Government has capped forced growth for healthcare costs for Indians and Inuit at two percent per annum. With increases to healthcare costs averaging six to seven percent annually, the amount the Territorial Government is responsible for is increasing at an alarming rate. Information provided by the Minister of Health and Social Services estimates the amount in dispute is approaching \$95,000,000.

This money could be used to enhance existing healthcare services or to develop new programs or infrastructure.

It is obvious to members that it would be reprehensible as a government to restrict the services available to eligible Indians and Inuit to correlate to the available funding from the Federal Government.

The Minister and the Premier are encouraged to work with their territorial and provincial counterparts to lobby the federal government to live up to their fiduciary and treaty obligations to provide healthcare to aboriginal Canadians and to develop a long-term funding solution that recognizes the increased costs in delivering healthcare.

Support for Non-Governmental Organizations

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) deliver many programs and services on behalf of the Department of Health and Social Services and their Authorities.

Subsequent to our discussions with the Minister, she provided Committee with a list of the NGOs that have entered into multi-year funding agreements with the Department of Health and Social Services. It was noted by Committee members that these multi-year agreements are for organizations that are territorial in nature, have an advocacy role and require core funding to fulfill their obligations to an identified class of people, such as seniors or the disabled.

Committee members are more concerned with NGOs that enter into funding agreements with the Health and Social Services Authorities to provide programs and services to community residents. Members have heard that these NGOs are facing difficulty in retaining qualified staff because of uncertainty over year-to-year funding and that too many of their resources are being utilized in preparing yearly reports and funding proposals to justify or request program spending or funding.

It was felt by Committee members, that, where practical, three-year funding agreements would provide enough certainty to NGOs for them to recruit and retain qualified program delivery staff and reduce the administrative burden on the NGOs.

Health and Social Service Authorities need to be more proactive in dealing with the NGOs that deliver programming and services on their behalf to the residents of the Northwest Territories. The administrative burden placed on NGOs to report on activities and prepare annual funding proposals can be unrealistic and detract from the NGOs' ability to actually deliver the services for which they have been contracted.

Committee members are aware that work is underway by a Cabinet committee to examine ways to support NGOs while ensuring that Government gets value for money. As well, the examination on the future role and need for Regional Health and Social Services Authorities may provide an opportunity for improving relationships with NGOs.

The Committee looks forward to measurable progress during the life of the 16th Assembly.

Support for Territorial Dementia Facility

Members of the Committee look forward to the opening of the Territorial Dementia Facility in Yellowknife. This is a welcome addition to the spectrum of services available in the North and will keep families closer to their loved ones in a safe, caring environment.

Assisted Living Facility in Hay River

There are many northerners in southern Canada living in assisted living situations, far from their families and home communities. The Department of Health and Social Services spends a significant amount every year in meeting the needs of these residents. It is important to note that these costs are increasing yearly and that the point has been reached where it makes economic sense to deliver more of this programming in the north.

While it still may be marginally cheaper to contract with southern operators of assisted living facilities, the fact is that, once this money is paid out to these contractors, no net benefit to the NWT's economy occurs. By basing these services in the NWT, the wages paid to employees and the money spent on obtaining local services and products will at least contribute to the economy of Hay River.

As a Committee, we look forward to the opening of this new facility and hope that it may serve as a template for the development of facilities and services for northern residents who may require assistance in meeting their day-to-day living arrangements. Members also look forward to families being able to reintegrate themselves into the lives of family members who will be repatriated from southern Canada.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, CULTURE AND EMPLOYMENT

Introduction

The Committee met with the Minister and his officials on Monday, April 7, 2008 to review the Draft Main Estimates of the Department of Education, Culture and Employment.

Committee members made note that the Department is proposing to spend \$293,914,000 in Operations Expense and \$24,508,000 on Capital Projects in fiscal year 2008-2009.

We would like to thank the Minister and his officials for appearing before Committee.

Committee members offer the following comments on issues arising out of the review of the 2008-2009 budget-planning cycle.

Wage Subsidy Program – Apprentices

The Department proposed during the draft Main Estimate review to eliminate all wage subsidy programs. Members of the Committee were very concerned that funding to subsidize apprentice wages was included in this proposed reduction.

While the elimination of the Training on the Job and the Youth Employment Program subsidies is regrettable, it is clear to Committee members that the same economic conditions that led the Department to implement these programs no longer exist. The NWT economy is booming and more and more students are graduating from high school and taking advantage of post-secondary educational opportunities. In addition, many of the large employers in the non-renewable

resources sector are being good corporate citizens and are investing in education and training for their employees. All of these factors have lessened the need for the GNWT to offer wage subsidy programs as a way of fostering economic growth.

However, Committee members believe that companies that hire apprentices still need to be subsidized to encourage them to continue to hire and train apprentices. Of particular concern to members are the small business operators, the Local Housing Authorities and Municipalities that hire apprentices which, in recent years, have lost many of their qualified trades people to the opportunities and higher wages offered by the large multi-national, non-renewable resource companies operating in the Northwest Territories.

Apprentices and the time spent by journeypersons in instructing them and supervising on-the-job activities do not contribute to the bottom line of companies. It is generally acknowledged that apprentices do not start to contribute to the bottom line of a company until they are in their third year. This is why the subsidy program does not subsidize fourth year apprentices.

There is a shortage of qualified trades people in the north, and it is contributing to the higher costs that governments and residents are forced to pay in constructing or renovating infrastructure, homes and businesses.

Members note that the Department is planning to invest in improving opportunities for students in high schools to be exposed to the trades and in ensuring that trades programs are delivered through Aurora College, using up-to-date equipment and technology.

In addition, members had the opportunity to see mobile trades training in action on a recent trip to Inuvik and were impressed with the opportunities this type of innovative approach will offer adult learners and students still in secondary school. The Committee supports the Department's plan to invest a further \$200,000 per year in delivering this program.

The Committee could not reconcile these increased investments that will encourage students to pursue trades training with reducing the potential number of available apprentice positions.

The Committee recommended that the Department reinstate the Apprentice Wage Subsidy for companies/organizations in the NWT that employ fewer than 100 people. The Members were pleased that the Department agreed with this recommendation and reinstated \$1,000,000 to the budget to subsidize businesses for the hiring of apprentices.

Responsibility for Public Housing

Members of the Committee are still hearing from constituents that the transfer of responsibility for social housing from the NWT Housing Corporation to the Department of Education, Culture and Employment is not working and is causing hardship for many families.

It is acknowledged that any time there is a major shift in how government delivers a program, there are bound to be program delivery issues. The Department has recognized that there are problems and has told the Committee they are working towards implementing solutions and improving communications with stakeholders.

While the effort is appreciated, it has to be made clear to the Department and the Government that the members of the Standing Committee will need to see tangible proof of the improvement in program delivery before the review of the Business Plans in September of 2008 in order for there to be continued support of this program transfer.

If improvement is not readily apparent, the Committee may consider recommending, with renewed vigour, that the responsibility for all aspects of Social Housing be returned to the NWT Housing Corporation and its Local Housing Authorities, who have proven they can deliver the program and have the confidence of community residents.

Childcare User Subsidy for Students

Members of the Committee were very concerned to hear that the Department would be eliminating the Student/Childcare User Subsidy program that provides subsidies to students while they attend post-secondary institutions in the NWT, to care for their children while they are attending school.

In discussions with the Minister and his officials it became apparent that this program was undersubscribed and that the regular childcare subsidy program would also be applicable to students with children attending post-secondary institutions in the NWT.

Members also confirmed that money received for Student Financial Assistance would not be used in determining program eligibility under the regular Childcare User Subsidy Program.

With this understanding, the Committee is prepared to accept this reduction, as there should be no adverse effect on students with children pursuing post-secondary opportunities.

Eco-Literacy

In reviewing the presentation and discussion with the Minister on the proposed Main Estimates and potential new departmental initiatives, it became apparent to the members of the Committee that the issue of eco-literacy was not addressed.

To become ecologically literate is to understand the principles of organization that ecosystems have developed to sustain the web of life.

In this century, ecological literacy will be a critical skill for politicians, business leaders, and professionals in all spheres. It will be one of the most important components of education at all levels, from schools to colleges and universities, to the continuing education and training of professionals.

Members are aware that many teachers are incorporating eco-literacy in their lesson plans but are of the impression that this is done on their own initiative and not as a required part of the curriculum.

The intent behind developing such a curriculum is to foster the experience and understanding of nature. Being ecologically literate, or eco-literate, is to understand the basic principles of ecology and to be able to embody them in daily life and in the lives of human communities.

The Standing Committee on Social Programs would like to see the principle of eco-literacy incorporated into the curriculum for all school age children and strongly encourage the Department of Education, Culture and Employment to begin the planning process for inclusion in the 2009-2012 Business Plans.

Childcare Facilities

The availability of suitable facilities in many of the smaller communities in the Northwest Territories has hampered the abilities of these communities to create new daycare spaces so that all residents can participate in wage economy or further their education.

The Children's First Society in Inuvik and the various non-profit organizations running daycares in Yellowknife and other NWT communities are hard-pressed to come up with economical solutions to their space requirements, because of the aforementioned lack of infrastructure and the effects of inflation and a strong economy on rental rates in the private rental markets. It is clear to Committee members that the Department of Education, Culture and Employment has to take a larger role in helping daycare operators meet their space requirements.

Innovative solutions involving industry, Aboriginal governments and development corporations, local governments, and other GNWT Departments and

Corporations need to be researched. All spare infrastructure that exists at the various levels of government need to have its suitability for use as a daycare facility determined.

Partnerships between the NWT Housing Corporation and Aboriginal development corporations, to allow for the inclusion of daycare facilities in infrastructure that may be built using loan guarantees, is one example of a potential approach that may provide benefits to all involved parties.

Central governments traditionally step in when the private sector or junior levels of government cannot respond to the needs of the population. The Committee would suggest this is the case with ensuring that NWT parents have reasonable access to quality, affordable daycare in their home communities.

The north's robust economy is providing many opportunities for residents of the NWT. It is a shame that primary caregivers with children under the age of 12 are denied the opportunity to participate in learning and economic opportunities because of a lack of daycare opportunities.

We should be concentrating efforts on making sure that all persons who live in the Northwest Territories are employed. Increased availability of quality daycare programs would help.

The Committee is hopeful that the Department will consider a renewed effort in developing quality daycare spaces as part of the 2009-2012 Business Planning process.

Childcare Subsidy Program

Committee members support the Childcare Subsidy Program, which allows low-income earners who are parents to participate in the wage economy or pursue post-secondary studies.

There is still a concern on how the policy to not provide the subsidy to daycare operators when the child is absent because of sickness or family emergencies is negatively impacting daycare operators.

It is noted that if a child is sick, they are not allowed or supposed to attend daycare and that the daycare operating costs remain the same, regardless of whether a particular child attends or not.

Members believe that stable funding equals a stable daycare operation and that this regressive punitive policy should be rescinded. We look forward to further discussions on resolving this issue during the review of the 2009-2012 Business Plans in September of 2008.

Income Security Program Reform

During discussions on respite care programs delivered by the Health and Social Services Authorities, it became apparent to members there was a disconnect between the services offered by the Department of Health and Social Services designed to keep people living in their own homes for as long as possible and the policies that guide the delivery of Income Security Programs.

For example, it is possible for a family to hire someone to live with their grandmother to assist in meeting her day-to-day needs without impacting the public housing rental rate she is charged.

However, using the example of a granddaughter employed at the Northern Store, moving in to assist, Grannys' rental rate would go up depending on how much the granddaughter made.

It seems ludicrous to Committee members that a stranger can move in, without penalty, but yet a family member is denied the ability to help a loved one without having the family incur extra costs for rent.

There are considerable more costs involved to move someone into a long-term care setting than could be gained through increasing social housing rents in situations like these.

The Committee is not advocating a free-for-all approach and believes there is a role for the medical profession to play in determining eligibility and need, and for home care to provide on-going monitoring to ensure that such an arrangement is working out.

Recommendation

The Standing Committee on Social Programs recommends that the Department of Education, Culture and Employment modify their income security programs to allow employed family members to stay in a family member's social housing unit without incurring rent increases where such an arrangement would improve quality of life and allow for continued independent living.

Utility Costs at Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre

It was noted by the Committee that the Department expects to save \$14,000 in utility costs in 2008-2009 because of renovations and upgrades to the electrical and lighting systems at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre. The Department is to be commended for this.

This is an example of how the retrofit or replacement of existing infrastructure, using available energy-saving technology, can result in savings for the GNWT. If we were to extrapolate this type of savings to all of the major infrastructure projects for similar-sized buildings like schools and hospitals, the amount could be quite significant.

It is important that all capital projects consider energy saving and sustainability as guiding principles in their design and construction.

Student Financial Assistance Program Reductions

The Department will be reducing the Student Financial Assistance loan allowance by \$1,500,000. Members were concerned that this would have a negative impact on the amount of funding that students could access. In discussions with the Minister and his officials it became apparent that this was related to uptake and that the Department has sufficient funding to meet the requirements of students in 2008-2009 and for the foreseeable future.

With the understanding that no students will be adversely affected by this proposed reduction, the Committee is prepared to support the Department.

Renewable Energy Technician Program

With accelerating impacts of climate change and fossil fuel costs, this government has recognized the need to increase our use of renewable energy such as solar, biomass, wind and hydro. This need is emphasized in our energy plan and greenhouse gas strategy. There are increasing opportunities for community applications as "off-the-shelf" technology becomes available, yet the technical expertise is missing. This gap needs to be addressed. Doing so will contribute to achieving this government's education goals, its economic goals through the development of the local economy and economic diversification, and finally, in achieving its environmental goals through greenhouse gas reduction, adaptation to climate change and community self-sufficiency. There are a few such programs available nationally that could be drawn upon, or even partnered with, in the initial stages. Youth today are interested in this area of expertise, but frustrated with the lack of practical programming available.

In addition, existing trades programs like the building maintainer, electrician and plumber and gas-fitting courses that are offered through Aurora College need to incorporate this new energy-saving technology into their curriculum.

The Committee looks forward to discussing and incorporating renewable energy technology programming into the 2009-2012 Business Planning Process.

Sustainable Communities Program

The vision and goals of this Assembly revolve around healthy and environmentally sustainable communities. Communities that are economically, socially and environmentally sustainable do not just happen, they require comprehensive planning and skilled attention in many areas - from full-cost accounting to building community spirit, developing self-sufficiency and leadership, and the encouragement of a strong local economy that meets its basic needs utilizing largely local resources.

A Sustainable Communities Program at Aurora College could draw upon several of its existing courses, perhaps slightly modified, as well as others added to round out the need for a comprehensive curriculum. Graduates would add considerably to community capacity, and would be inspired to return to their communities to practice their skills and inspire others.

The Committee looks forward to discussing and incorporating such programming into the 2009/2012 Business Planning Process.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Introduction

Members considered the Draft Main Estimates for the Department of Justice on April 10, 2008. The Committee would like to thank the Minister and his officials for appearing before Committee.

The Committee noted expenditures of \$91,976,000 for Operations Expense and \$1,690,000 to be spent on Capital Projects for the fiscal year 2008-2009.

Committee members offer the following comments on issues arising out of the review of the 2008-2009 Main Estimates.

Proposed Correctional Facilities and Renovations

Members of the Standing Committee on Social Programs could not reconcile closing the Arctic Tern Young Offenders Facility in Inuvik, a facility that only opened in 2002, with constructing a new Territorial Women's Correctional Facility in Fort Smith.

The Committee does not dispute that the current Territorial Women's Correctional Facility in Fort Smith is not suitable, past its useful service life and needs to be replaced.

The Committee also does not dispute that the Arctic Tern Young Offender's Facility has structural issues related to its foundation that may prove to be insurmountable and render the facility unsuitable for continued use as a correctional facility. It is also recognized that the facility has been severely underutilized since it opened because of changes in the way youth are sentenced.

However, in the absence of an engineer's report that clearly outlines costs, options and potential remediation solutions for the foundation issues, it would be irresponsible for the Committee to endorse a plan that essentially writes off a purpose-built government asset, like the Arctic Tern Young Offenders Facility.

The Minister has informed Committee that such an engineering report will be completed sometime this summer. Should that report bear out the Department's assertion that it may be uneconomical or unsafe for the Arctic Tern Facility to continue as a correctional facility, the Committee is prepared to support a supplementary appropriation for planning the replacement of the Territorial Women's Correctional Facility.

This was the reasoning behind a recommendation made by Committee to the Minister Responsible for the Financial Management Board to eliminate the \$300,000 in the Infrastructure Plan for the planning of the replacement of the Women's Correctional Centre. The recommendation to delete was rejected by the FMB on the advice of the Department of Justice.

If it is economically feasible and safe to continue using the Arctic Tern Young Offenders Facility as a correctional facility, Committee believes the Department will have to rationalize the construction of a new correctional facility.

Options like renovating the River Ridge Facility or Arctic Tern Facility for use as a Women's Correctional Centre or maybe just renovating the River Ridge Facility for use as a Women's Correctional Centre and moving the current River Ridge cognitive program to Inuvik, or a combination of using Arctic Tern as a Women's Facility and building a smaller facility in Fort Smith to address capacity issues need to be examined.

In the minds of Committee Members, it is apparent that the Department is committed to the closure of the Arctic Tern Young Offender's Facility as the easiest way to meet a significant portion of its contribution to the reduction exercise. Whatever happens, there is still going to be ongoing operations and maintenance costs, and in the worst-case scenario demolition costs for the Government of the NWT. The costs may not be borne by the Department of Justice, but it will still be cost to government.

Unlike the Department of Justice, the Standing Committee on Social Programs is not prepared to write off a \$16,000,000 purpose-built facility until it is patently clear

that this is our only option. Nor are we prepared to support the construction of a similarly priced facility until this determination has been made.

Recommendation

The Committee recommends that \$320,000 for the Territorial Women's Correctional Centre be deleted from the Infrastructure Acquisition Plan for the Department of Justice.

Recommendation

The Standing Committee recommends that \$613,000 be added to the Operations Budget for Corrections and Community Justice to continue operation of the Arctic Tern Young Offenders Facility.

Recommendation

The Standing Committee recommends that the Department of Justice undertake a facility review that will outline the present condition of existing correctional facilities and the future space requirements for the correctional system.

Court Workers

The Department is proposing to delete four Court Workers in order to realize a saving of \$365,000 over two years. Statistics provided by the Department seem to indicate that the caseload some of these court workers have is too low to justify their positions.

Committee members note that two of the positions are in smaller communities, one position is in Fort Smith and one position is in Yellowknife.

It is obvious to Committee members that if there has been an increase in the number of cases going to Court, there should have been a corresponding increase in the number of applications processed by the Court Workers. The statistics presented by the Department seem to indicate the Court Worker Program model was flawed from its very beginning.

It is also noted that this Budget also asks for ten positions in court services and one additional Territorial Court Judge for a total cost of \$1,250,000 under forced growth.

While the Department managed to make a compelling case on the need for these new positions, the same cannot be said for rationalization used to justify the reduction of services at the community level.

The Committee recommended the Department reconsider these reductions and look for other opportunities to utilize these court workers in the communities doing other things such as supporting the activities of Community Justice Committees.

In rejecting this recommendation, the Department indicates its intransigence in embracing approaches that may be outside the current practices of the Department. Their response is that because the Court Workers help the accused in accessing legal aid there would be a "conflict of interest" if they were to be involved in delivering victim services programs or assisting Community Justice Committees. It should be pointed out that any restorative justice program has two components to deal with in that there is a victim and the perpetrator. It was obvious to Committee Members that the Department is not willing to look at other opportunities to utilize these positions at the community level.

Members of the Committee believe that Court Workers are the community's vital link to the criminal justice system. When a Court circuit comes to town they are essentially strangers, and Court Workers assist in ensuring that the accused show up, so that the Court's time is not wasted.

So on one hand the Committee is being asked to support enhancing the ability of the courts to deliver justice through the hiring of ten new positions and another Territorial Court Judge, and on the other we are being asked to support the reduction of justice services at the community level.

Recommendation

The Standing Committee recommends that \$91,000 be added to operations expense for Corrections and Community Justice so that the four Court Workers will continue employment and the Department will have further opportunity to expand the Court Workers' duties and role in the communities.

Community Justice Programming

The Department is proposing to reduce the available funding for community justice activities by \$350,000 and not staff a position that was supposed to support these Community Justice Committees for an additional savings of \$83,000.

Again, the Committee was disappointed that the Department seems to be concentrating its efforts and apparent spending patterns on supporting the criminal justice system in those communities with stand-alone court facilities, to the detriment of our smaller communities.

One of the stated goals of the Department is to “Increase the capacity and role of communities to address justice issues”. Cutting available resources and support services to Community Justice activities runs counter to such a goal.

The Department points out that a portion of this reduction is because, historically, all of the allocation has not been spent. The Committee would point out that this could mean communities need more support from the Department in developing programming and effective Community Justice Committees.

A Committee recommendation to reinstate this funding was rejected by the Department.

The Standing Committee on Social Programs cannot support the erosion of programs at the community level, and the loss of opportunity for these communities to access funding to grow community justice programs and the activities and roles for local Community Justice Committees.

Recommendation

The Standing Committee on Social Programs recommends that \$433,000 be added to the operations budget for Corrections and Community Justice so that funding for special projects, community justice committee funding and support positions can be returned to last year’s level.

Recommendation

The Standing Committee on Social Programs recommends that if the Department is unwilling to continue funding Community Justice activities at 2007/2008 levels, the \$942,000 in forced growth under Court Services to hire 10 additional Court Officers be reduced by \$433,000 in order to fund community justice activities.

Programming Staff at North Slave Correctional Centre

Members of the Committee were concerned to hear that the Department was proposing to reduce programming staff at the North Slave Correctional Centre.

The Committee's major concerns with this proposed reduction centred on inmate wellness and the ability of the remaining programming to meet the requirements of the Federal Corrections Service.

The Department's response indicates that there will be no reduction in the types of programs offered or in the frequency of offering to inmates, and that existing staff will assume other duties.

Committee members have difficulties in accepting the Department's assurances, as members are always concerned when dedicated program delivery staff is eliminated and prevention programs are affected by budget considerations.

It is with some reservation that the Committee is prepared to accept the lay-off of Program Delivery Staff for Offender Programs.

Law Bursary Program

The Department is proposing to eliminate the Law Bursary program over the next two years. This program gave some support to students while they attended school and provided some opportunities for articling and summer employment.

While it is sad to see the program end, the reality is that there has been no real net benefit to the NWT or the Government of the NWT, as the majority of recipients have not returned to the north to practice law.

The Student Financial Assistance Program remains one of the most generous in Canada and is more than adequate in meeting the financial needs of students wishing to pursue the study of law.

Paradoxes of Budget-Cutting Exercises for the Department of Justice

In the 2005-2006 Main Estimates, the Department of Justice proposed the elimination of Court Registries in Hay River and Inuvik. At the time, the Department argued that the volume of work did not justify the positions or cost to keep the Court registries facilities open in these two communities.

The previous Standing Committee on Social Programs, in conjunction with the other Regular Members of the Assembly, successfully argued that there was a cost to making sure that justice was available and geographically accessible to all residents of the NWT, and the elimination of the Court Registries in Hay River and Inuvik was staved off.

Three fiscal years later, the volume of work is such that the Department of Justice has asked for ten new positions in Court Services, of which the communities of Hay River and Inuvik will be getting two Court Officers each.

Judging from the budget-cutting proposals put forward by the Department of Justice in this Main Estimate, it is obvious to Members that there is a trend in the Department to put forward simple solutions involving the closure of facilities or the elimination of services, to achieve the bulk of required cost-savings, rather than having to examine overall program delivery efficiencies.

While this may make it easy to achieve the cost-cutting targets, it is obvious that without any long-term, systemic approach to budget reduction exercises, any cost-savings that are realized may result in increased costs to the Department in future years.

The Standing Committee on Social Programs will be looking for evidence of such an approach when we review the 2009-2012 Business Plans in September.

South Slave Drug Interdiction Task Force

Communities south of Great Slave Lake have proposed the formation of a task force to interdict drugs that are brought into the Northwest Territories on our highway system.

As this is the primary method of transportation for drug dealers, and is an opportunity to curtail the availability of drugs in communities that are farther north, the Standing Committee on Social Programs would be willing to support such an approach.

We look forward to discussing with the Minister during the review of the 2009-2012 Business Plans.