

**THE HONOURABLE LOUIS SEBERT
MINISTER OF JUSTICE**

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Public Engagement on the Legalization of Cannabis in the Northwest Territories

Mr. Speaker, as Members know, the Government of Canada has made a public commitment to legalize cannabis. On April 13, 2017 the federal government introduced its proposed *Cannabis Act* in Parliament. The proposed *Cannabis Act* would set the national framework for legalizing, strictly regulating and restricting access to cannabis. Provinces and territories will have the authority to regulate the retail distribution and sale of recreational cannabis to adults, but cannot undermine the federal legislation. If passed in Parliament, the federal government intends to bring the Act into effect by July 2018.

The Government of the Northwest Territories or GNWT wants to make sure it is ready for cannabis legalization by having the right rules and guidelines in place to govern those aspects that will be within our power. That includes matters like determining and regulating how cannabis is distributed and sold in the Northwest Territories or NWT, rules around age and public use, ongoing education and awareness campaigns outside those done by the federal government, drug impaired driving and workplace impairment policies.

Although we had to wait until the federal government released its legislation to fully understand the proposed framework for legalizing cannabis and what things the GNWT would be responsible for, our government was already researching this issue and monitoring developments nationally. Now that we have a more complete picture of the federal framework, we need to move forward on our own policy, program and legislative regime.

To help guide our work, the GNWT is proposing a set of draft principles that would establish our approach to cannabis in the NWT. These draft principles include:

- Restricting youth access to cannabis, and protecting young people from promotion or enticements to use cannabis;
- Allowing for adults to possess and access regulated, quality-controlled legal cannabis;
- Discouraging drug-impaired driving;
- Protecting workers and the public from drug-impairment in the workplace;
- Protecting public health by controlling the public smoking of cannabis;
- Enhancing public awareness of the health risks associated with cannabis;
- Providing a safe and secure retail regime for the adult purchase of cannabis; and
- Providing for local options to establish cannabis distribution and consumption restrictions and prohibitions.

We know that this is an issue that matters to many Northerners, Mr. Speaker, and about which they have concerns. Our government wants to make sure that our plans respect those concerns and take the views and opinions of NWT residents into account, while still complying with federal requirements.

To make sure we understand Northerners' views, we will be engaging with the public and stakeholders over the coming months. Our engagement will include public meetings in regional centres and select small communities. The public engagement documents will also be posted online to allow residents to make their views known through written submissions. The GNWT will also be writing directly to key stakeholders such as NWT community governments, Aboriginal governments, the NWT

Chamber of Commerce and the NWT Medical Association to seek their views on the proposed principles.

With a federal deadline of July 2018, we will need time to develop, draft and pass legislation and make other preparations, Mr. Speaker. We expect to complete this public engagement process by mid-September and to share a “what we heard” report with Members of the Legislative Assembly and the public after that. This will ensure that we have time to incorporate public feedback into our plans and proposals before bringing them forward. It should be noted that in addition to the public engagement on proposed principles, there will be further opportunities to provide feedback as legislation is advanced.

We know this is an important issue to residents and the GNWT is committed to having effective measures in place to protect the health and safety of NWT people and communities. We encourage everybody to take the time to let us know their views on the issue and the principles the GNWT is proposing to guide its work over the coming year.

I look forward to hearing from Northerners on this subject, Mr. Speaker, and from Members. I am sure that we will have many more discussions about how to regulate cannabis as specific plans and legislation are developed and brought forward for consideration over the fall and winter.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.