

Corrections Service Moves Forward on Workplace Improvement

Mr. Speaker, corrections can be a difficult and challenging field. In addition to the demanding environment and 24/7 operations, the Corrections Service must always adapt to the ever evolving best practices. Five years ago, the Auditor General gave us a path forward to address conditions that focused on our case management and programs for offenders and as a result, significant changes have been made. This summer, a new *Corrections Act* will come into force signaling a shift towards a greater focus on rehabilitation and reintegration, and enhancing transparency and accountability of corrections services.

We are moving in the right direction, and have made progress but clearly, more work needs to be done.

Over the last number of years, the Department of Justice has heard various concerns raised by Corrections Service staff regarding their workplaces. To fully understand and address these concerns, the Deputy Minister of the Department of Justice initiated a workplace assessment to hear directly from staff across various levels and locations of the Corrections Services. This work was conducted by an independent contractor to encourage honest, confidential discussions. The goal was to hear from as many employees as possible. I want to thank and commend the staff who took the time to share their workplace experiences, both good and bad, with the consultants. It shows they care, are passionate, and want to be involved in making improvements and constructive change.

The final assessment report identified specific areas where we are doing well, and areas where we need to do better, including staffing; policies and directives; safety, leadership and support; and communication. The report also highlighted the need for management to do a better job engaging with staff prior to implementing changes.

The Department of Justice provided the report to staff to allow them time to consider solutions for moving forward. Senior leadership held numerous meetings with staff in December to discuss initiatives currently underway that will help address some of the concerns, and to open the lines of communication and listen to additional solutions to address the areas where improvement is needed.

Mr. Speaker, some of the actions we are currently undertaking include; revising and updating the Corrections Northern Recruitment Training Program; implementing new processes to ensure staff receive re-certification training in a timely manner; a full replacement of uniforms to ensure they are complete and fit appropriately; and continued participation in appropriate Leadership Training for supervisors and managers within the Corrections Service so they are better equipped to support and lead their staff. Meetings between management and staff will continue so that site specific operational challenges and issues can be addressed collaboratively.

I want to assure Members that the workplace assessment report will not be shelved and forgotten about. The report laid bare issues across the Corrections Service, and we must confront those issues head-on. The Department of Justice will be held accountable for the response to the concerns raised by staff and, Mr. Speaker, they want to be held accountable to ensure that these issues are addressed to the best of their abilities. However, there is recognition that the Department of Justice cannot make all the necessary improvements on its own. There is a need for a more collaborative working relationship between the Department of Justice and the Department of Finance, in their role as Human Resources, as well as with the Union of Northern Workers, or UNW. Acknowledging this, a working group has been established, chaired by the Assistant Deputy Minister, Solicitor General and will include senior officials from both departments, as well as the UNW. The working group will report progress to the Deputy Minister of Finance, the Deputy Minister of Justice and the President of the UNW. This group will listen to, and learn from, our dedicated Corrections professionals, as the team works collectively to improve Corrections Services workplaces.

This working group will oversee the development and implementation of a Corrections Service Workplace Assessment Accountability Framework, a monitoring and evaluation process and a staff communication plan. As outlined in the Department of Justice's 2020-2023 Business Plan, the Accountability Framework for Corrections, previously called the Human Resources Plan, will be established before the end of this sitting and all of the initiatives in the plan will be implemented by 2024.

I commit to providing updates on the progress the Department of Justice is making toward improving Corrections Services.

We must remember, our goal is always to ensure the safety of corrections staff and individuals within the corrections system. To feel safe, our staff must feel supported in their daily work so they, in turn, can successfully support probation clients and inmates as they work to make the necessary changes to reintegrate back into our communities.

Our employees are hard-working, professional and dedicated, and with their help, and the help of the working group, we will make positive changes to the corrections work environment and, as a result, to the safety of the people in our care.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.