

**Preventing and Reducing Family Violence**

Mr. Speaker, we want NWT residents to thrive in a strong and healthy society; and there is no place in strong and healthy homes for family violence. In response to this goal, our government made a mandate commitment to strengthen initiatives and partnerships to prevent and respond to family violence. By working together we have made real progress in creating and supporting the programs that will help us achieve healthier communities and families.

The Department of Justice along with the Departments of Health and Social Services, and Status of Women, all have important roles in supporting this mandate commitment. The Department of Justice, through initiatives designed to combat family violence and provide protection to victims, works to hold violent people accountable for their actions, and support those who are most vulnerable.

It takes courage for people to step forward and disclose family violence. It is our responsibility to work closely with the RCMP and our communities to ensure that the most appropriate supports are available when victims need them. It is also our responsibility to provide an opportunity for perpetrators to take responsibility for their actions.

Mr. Speaker, each year, I provide annual policing priorities to the RCMP. This year, these priorities included continuing to enhance their response to violence against women and families. This has been reflected in the Policing Priorities Action Plans developed in partnership with each community in the Northwest Territories. The Commanding Officer of G Division has assured me that family violence remains a priority, and that members will continue to do their part to foster changed attitudes towards family violence in NWT homes.

The RCMP serve as an important contact point for referrals to Victim Services workers. These workers are based in eight communities throughout the NWT to provide emotional support, information and referrals for victims of family violence. They help victims with safety planning, emergency financial assistance, and provide information about the court process.

Another support to victims of violence when they need it the most is Emergency Protection Orders. These orders, as provided for in the *Protection Against Family Violence Act*, are a tool available to victims of family violence as part of their safety planning to protect themselves from abusive family members. They are available at any time of the day or night.

The Department of Justice also continues to provide training, public information and outreach on the protections provided under the *Protection Against Family Violence Act*, to RCMP Detachment Commanders, shelter staff, community justice coordinators, and victim services workers. Public information and outreach events are held in partnership with other GNWT Departments throughout the year.

We are on the right track with the RCMP policing priorities and other initiatives to support victims of family violence, Mr. Speaker. I applaud the work that the RCMP, the Department, and our communities have done over the past years to enhance the services, and the quality of life in our communities.

Mr. Speaker, our government also made the commitment in its mandate to continuing the support for a healing program for men who use violence in intimate relationships, such as A New Day Healing Program.

As evidenced from the discussion in this House, in public and in the community, it is clear that support for this program is strong. I share that sentiment. That is why our government has made the decision to transition A New Day from a pilot project to a long-term program. We have worked to improve the program and ensure that there was no disruption in service delivery during the transition.

A New Day program uses the same curriculum that was tested in the pilot, with scheduling changes to make it easier for men to get into and stay in the program. Groups meet weekly, and men who want to participate can start whenever they are ready. If they need to take a break for any reason, they now have the ability to quickly rejoin group sessions at a later time instead of having to start over.

The transition from pilot to long-term program has been smooth. All supports to men who are ready to take responsibility for their actions and make changes in their lives are in place including well-qualified, culturally competent and experienced facilitators to properly assess clients and safely run groups. The program contractor has been accepting registrations at their office every weekday.

We also committed in our mandate to continue to look at ways to expand the Domestic Violence Treatment Options Court, an option for those who have been charged with an offence. In 2015-2016, the DVTO Court was expanded from Yellowknife to Hay River, and is now available to offenders from Behchokò, K'atl'odeeche and Enterprise. Low to medium risk offenders who take responsibility for their actions must agree to attend an 8-module "Planning Action Responsibly Towards Non-violent Empowered Relationships", otherwise known as the PARTNER program.

The Department of Justice provides support in the areas of assessment of offenders, bail supervision, program delivery, support for victims and referrals to outside agencies. Those who successfully complete the program have this taken into account during sentencing in recognition of the work they have done to reduce the likelihood of violence in their relationships. Earlier this month, as one PARTNER program was concluding in Yellowknife with five graduates; a new program was commencing in Hay River, demonstrating that northerners want programs to support healthy family choices.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, within our correctional facilities, programs have been created to allow offenders to address the root causes that lead an individual to criminal behavior, including violence. Programs are delivered in a way that recognize the importance of culture, and take into consideration the short time that most territorial inmates are incarcerated for.

In support of this, we will be launching the Respectful Relationships program in our correctional facilities. Inmates will learn to examine the values, beliefs and behaviour that form the foundation of respectful relationships through this program. They will also learn specific tools and techniques aimed at ending their use of abuse in relationships. Staff have already been trained to start delivering Respectful Relationships this fall.

Later this fall the Department of Justice will also be engaging stakeholders on its proposal to modernize the *Corrections Act*. There will be provisions that will strengthen the requirement for culturally appropriate programming and foster an environment that responds to offenders' needs for risk reduction and rehabilitation.

Mr. Speaker, we need to work together to make our communities safer and change attitudes towards violence in our homes. Family violence is not a private matter. It devalues everyone, primarily women and girls, and keeps people from leading full lives. It shatters the bonds between generations, dishonouring our Elders and breaking traditions. It is important that as leaders, we continue to stand unified in denouncing family violence in the Northwest Territories.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.