



NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
TERRITOIRES DU NORD-OUEST
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE

MEETING GO 58-20-25

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

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FRIDAY, AUGUST 29, 2025
EAGLE ROOM, LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
9:30 AM

AGENDA

1. Call to Order
2. Prayer/Reflection
3. Review and Adoption of Agenda
4. Declarations of Conflict of Interest
5. Public Matters
 - a) Bill 26, An Act to Amend the *Public Service Act*: briefing from Gayla Thunstrom, President, Union of Northern Workers (UNW)
6. In Camera Matters
 - a) Debrief
 - b) Correspondence review
 - i. 2025-08-19 – Individual Yellowknife nurses – Feedback on Bill 26: An Act to Amend the Public Service Act
 - c) Committee business:
 - i. Bill 26: An Act to Amend the *Public Service Act*
 - d) Internal briefing on the 2024–25 annual reports of Legislative Assembly statutory officers
 - e) Correspondence review
 - i. 2025-07-18 – Minister of Finance – Confidential
 - ii. 2025-08-26 – Confidential
 - iii. 2025-05-11 – Alternatives North – Follow-up on comments concerning the Indigenous Employment Policy
 - iv. 2025-08-01 – Northwest Territories Teachers’ Association – Feedback on Bill 21: An Act to Amend the Workers’ Compensation Act

- v. 2025-08-18 – Minister Responsible for the WSCC to the Gwich'in Tribal Council – Response to feedback on Bill 21: An Act to Amend the *Workers' Compensation Act*
 - vi. 2025-07-25 – Workers' Advisor Office, Northwest Territories and Nunavut – Feedback on Bill 21: An Act to Amend the *Workers' Compensation Act*
 - vii. 2025-08-28 – Honourable David Akeeagok, Nunavut Minister Responsible for the Worker's Safety and Compensation Commission – Responses to written questions concerning Bill 29 and Nunavut's Bill 57
- f) Committee business:
- i. Bill 21: An Act to Amend the *Worker's Compensation Act*
 - ii. Bill 29: First Responders Workers' Compensation Amendment Act
 - iii. Bill 22: Legislation Act
7. Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday, September 10, 2025 at 1:30 p.m.
8. Adjournment



Presentation to Standing Committee on Government Operations

Private Member's Bill 26 An act to amend the Public Service Act

Union of Northern Workers
Solidarity for over 50 years!

Introduction

- The Union of Northern Workers – “Union 101”
- What we’ve heard from members
- Concerns with Bill 26



Who we are

The UNW is the largest union in the Northwest Territories (7,000+ members)

The UNW is **membership driven**.

This means that it is our **members** who:

- support fellow members in job appeals, grievances and workplace issues
- sit on bargaining teams and negotiate collective agreements
- sit on joint employee-union committees such as health and safety
- are elected to represent their fellow members at the political level



How the UNW works with PSAC

The UNW is a **component** of the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) and is part of the PSAC North region.

This means that every UNW member is also a member of the PSAC.

The PSAC is led by a National Board of Directors that includes 7 Regional Executive Vice Presidents and 15 Component Presidents.

UNW members are represented at a national level through BOTH the PSAC North REVP and the UNW President.



PSAC and UNW Leadership



Sharon De Sousa
PSAC National President

Elected by PSAC members at
National Convention



Josée-Anne Spirito
**PSAC Regional Executive Vice
President – North Region**

Elected by PSAC members at
PSAC North Convention

UNW member who is an LPN



Gayla Thunstrom
Component President - UNW

Elected by UNW members at
UNW Convention

UNW member who is
an LPN



Representative Leadership at UNW

UNW Triennial Convention is the supreme governing body of the union.

The UNW Full Executive is the governing body between Conventions.

Each Region (represented by an RVP) is made up of smaller units called Locals.

Each Local is represented by Local Officers elected from and by members of that Local.

All UNW Executives are elected from and by the membership.



Representative Leadership at UNW

The UNW Full Executive:

President: Gayla Thunstrom, NTHSSA – Local 11

1st Vice President: Chris Taff, GNWT Finance – Local 1

2nd Vice President: *currently vacant*

RVP Beaufort Delta/Sahtu: Maria Amestoy, NTHSSA – Local 3

RVP Deh Cho: Dawn Bell, Housing NWT – Local 13

RVP Fort Smith: Lauraine Armstrong, Aurora College – Local 12

RVP Hay River: Jeff Groenewegan, GNWT Infrastructure – Local 6

RVP Kimberlite: Johnny McKinney, Ekati – Local 3050

RVP North Great Slave: Andrew Gregory, NTHSSA – Local 11

RVP Somba K'e: Randy Thompson, GNWT Finance – Local 1

Equity Vice President: Valerie Salmon-Laylor, NTHSSA – Local 3



Where we are

UNW members are divided into 27 **Locals**.

Members have direct access to the Union's decision-making process through their Local.

Members are assigned to a Local according to the bargaining unit to which they belong, or the Department and/or Community where they work.

UNW Locals are distributed across the seven UNW Regions.

UNW Equity members also elect an RVP to the Full Executive.

Beaufort Delta-Sahtu
Locals 3, 19, 29, and 39

Deh Cho
Locals 13 and 31

Fort Smith
Locals 2 and 12

Hay River
Locals 6, 21, and 22

Kimberlite
Local 3050

North Great Slave
Locals 9, 10, 11, 25, 345, and 38

Somba K'e
Locals 1, 16, 28, 30, 32, 33, 40, and 41



Union Members = the Union

All UNW members in good standing have the right to:

- Representation in the workplace (grievances, etc.)
- Benefits & rights in a collective agreement
- Union education
- Become a shop steward to represent union colleagues in the workplace
- Run for UNW leadership at all levels
- Vote for UNW leadership
- Provide input on By-Laws and Regulations
- Provide input for their collective agreement
- Run for positions on their unit's bargaining team
- Vote on whether or not to accept a negotiated collective agreement
- Vote on strike authorization
- Give input and opinions on UNW direction and operation



Types of Unions in Canada

- closed shop
- union shop
- **agency shop (or Rand Formula)**
 - Employer hires non-unionized workers, even though a union is present
 - Employees can **choose** whether or not to join the union.
 - Employees who do not join the union still pay union dues because they benefit from union representation in things such as grievances and the rights/benefits of the negotiated collective agreement.

Collective Bargaining - GNWT

Each Local with GNWT **bargaining unit members** elects delegates to attend a bargaining conference.

The union bargaining team is elected from and by the delegates at the bargaining conference.

Bargaining proposals are debated and prioritized by the delegates at the bargaining conference.



Bargaining unit vs Bargaining Agent

Not interchangeable.

The **Union** is the **bargaining agent** for the group of employees under one employer.

The group of employees are the **bargaining unit** that is represented by the union.

- Canadian Industrial Relations Board definition



Bargaining unit vs Bargaining Agent

“bargaining unit” means a unit of employees established by subsection 41(1.4) for the purpose of collective bargaining

“employees association” refers to the UNW and NWTTA

- *Public Service Act*



UNW Member Engagement on Bill 26

Healthcare Member Survey (March and April 2025)

** All participants were confirmed active UNW members in good standing in the healthcare field*

Membership Meetings (including dedicated healthcare member meetings) over the last four months.

Additionally, UNW leadership and staff have been recording individual member feedback as it is received.



What We've Heard

Most common concerns in healthcare:

- Issues with senior managers and the workplace management culture in healthcare;
- Lack of supports, including training, retention efforts, and education;
- Concerns over health and safety relating to burnout, understaffing, patient ratios, and lack of resources.



What We've Heard

None of these issues are addressed by Bill 26.

These are **employer** issues, and the Bill does not change who the employer is.



What are UNW Members saying?

Most UNW members (healthcare or otherwise) do not have a good understanding of:

- What Bill 26 is trying to accomplish
- What Bill 26 actually says
- The full impact of Bill 26 on nurses and UNW membership



What are UNW Members saying?

The political lobbying for a new bargaining unit for nurses is increasing division amongst healthcare members.

It is pitting member against member and profession against profession.

Nurses in administrative positions in the GNWT will be isolated from their other colleagues.



What are UNW Members saying?

Hay River Health & Social Services

This unit is an example of how a smaller, healthcare-specific bargaining unit in the NWT is actually at a disadvantage compared to GNWT counterparts.

This bill creates confusion over their voice and vote should they be finally brought into the GNWT bargaining unit.

An already small bargaining unit of workers. Removing the nurses makes it even smaller – feels like “union busting”



CANN Survey

The survey is fundamentally flawed and the data cannot be relied upon for accurate information.

It was highly accessible to the public.

It required no authentication to take survey, anyone could do it, not just nurses.

Individuals could do the survey as many times as they wanted. The UNW is aware of members submitting the survey multiple times.



CANNN Survey

The association acknowledges the limitations of the survey:

“Due to current software limitations and reliance on registrant self-reporting, it is not possible to determine with certainty the exact number of registrants actively practicing in the Northwest Territories.” (top of pg. 4)

“It is important to note that the survey was publicly accessible, and a significant portion of CANNN registrants have addresses located outside the Northwest Territories. As a result, the confidence level and margin of error associated with the data are uncertain, introducing the potential for bias or inaccuracy in the findings.” (bottom of pg 4)



CANNN Survey

The questions were leading, without context, and sometimes confusing.

For example, question 4 says:

“Dual Mandate - CANNN is both the licensing body and the professional association. These functions have been separated in other parts of Canada to better fulfill their unique mandates. Would you support the creation of a dedicated association focused solely on nursing advocacy, advancement, and bargaining?”



Correcting Misconceptions

“The UNW has not been representing nurses or healthcare effectively.”

The UNW has long been a public advocate for healthcare members and has published many articles, columns, letters to legislators, reports, and more over several decades.

The UNW has won a number of high-profile grievances for healthcare workers who have come forward with violations of the CA.

The UNW’s bargaining team achieved many improvements and benefits for healthcare workers in the last round of negotiations, adding to Appendix A10 of the collective agreement which specifically sets out terms and conditions for healthcare workers.



Correcting Misconceptions

The Bill Proposal says:

A separate collective agreement would allow for the inclusion of certain healthcare standards and safety precautions in collective agreements that protect both the public and healthcare professionals, such as safe staff-to-patient ratios and limitations on consecutive shifts.

FACTS:

These things are already possible within the current GNWT CA under the exclusive Appendix (A10).

The employer has stated to the UNW unequivocally that they will never implement staff-to-patient ratios because it would be impossible to uphold. This is the same employer that the nurses would be up against in negotiating a brand new CA.



Correcting Misconceptions

The Bill Proposal says:

A separate collective agreement would also increase the likelihood of targeted benefits and allowances for nurses (that do not need apply to the entire unionized GNWT workforce), which would support better employee retention and higher morale among nurses generally.

FACTS :

Again, there are many targeted benefits and allowances for nurses that do not apply to the entire GNWT that were negotiated and are contained in Appendix A10.

In fact, new nurse benefits were achieved in the most recent rounds of negotiations, as well as increases to existing benefits and allowances.



Correcting Misconceptions

The Bill Proposal says:

A separate collective agreement could open the door to an “interest-based negotiation” model of collective bargaining, which is currently advocated by the NWT Medical Association as a way to keep patients at the heart of the process, drive costs lower, achieve better outcomes, and heal relationships between healthcare workers and the Health Authorities

FACTS :

Interest based negotiations are highly favoured by employers and not unions, as it takes away power from the union members.

Regardless, the bill does not address this type of negotiations in any way (nor should it – that is union interference).



Correcting Misconceptions

The Bill Proposal says:

While the GNWT has signaled its intention to begin investigating and consulting on the idea of establishing a Labour Relations Board in the NWT, this is expected to take several years.

FACTS :

This investigation and consultation is very important for many reasons.

The NWT is a very different jurisdiction from the provinces (including the very small population), and a Labour Relations Board may or may not be feasible.

The Yukon's model for example, we have heard is not working well for them.



Correcting Misconceptions

The Bill Proposal says:

Legislative changes to the Public Service Act become politically challenging and are traditionally avoided during active negotiations. Moving forward now with a private member's bill focused on specifically addressing nurses' concerns is a way to prevent unnecessary complications and ensure a smooth transition without disrupting labour negotiations.

FACTS:

The UNW's internal processes to collect bargaining input from GNWT members is well underway.

This Bill is already undermining that process.



Correcting Misconceptions

The Bill Proposal says:

Nurses have expressed a strong desire to merge into one territory-wide nursing-specific collective agreement—not only to increase solidarity and level the playing field amongst nurses, but to allow for greater mobility among nurses who wish to take locum placements to fill gaps in other NWT communities.

FACT:

A level playing field and greater mobility is already possible, and has been happening for years.



Correcting Misconceptions

The Bill Proposal says:

The Premier and Cabinet have committed to complete the amalgamation of the HRHSSA and the NTHSSA during the life of this Assembly.

FACTS:

This bill could disrupt and interfere with the work that has already been done.

At best, it is confusing for HRHSSA members, who have fought for years to be included in the GNWT Public Service, not broken up into separate groups.



Correcting Misconceptions

The Bill Proposal says:

The Bill would be intended to serve as an interim measure; it is understood that section 41 of the Act and its prescriptions regarding bargaining agents would be superseded once the government passes legislation to establish a Labour Relations Board or similar mechanism to certify and decertify bargaining units.

FACTS :

Language matters.

It does not say it is interim anywhere in the bill.



Correcting Misconceptions

The Bill Proposal says:

Given the urgent need to address the growing concerns of nurses and prevent further erosion of our healthcare system, the only feasible path forward in the short-term is to amend the Public Service Act by creating an avenue specifically for nurses to be able to choose whether they wish to establish a separate collective agreement under a different bargaining agent.

FACTS:

This is not the only feasible path forward – it is a proposed band aid crossed with a magic pill that has not been researched fully, implications considered or addressed, nor broad consultation sought.



Correcting Misconceptions

The current *Public Service Act* is not unconstitutional.

No legislation is identical, but there are other jurisdictions in Canada with similar legislation.

This argument should not be relied upon to justify amending the Act through this Bill.



Leaving Nurses Vulnerable

Bill 26 makes mention of the current CA as a bridging agreement, but not who would enforce it.

The employer is under no obligation to start negotiations with the current CA as the baseline.

Arbitrated wins may no longer apply to nurses with a new CA.



Interrupting Union Business

Before Bill 26 came up, the UNW Executive was examining the UNW structure for ways to re-structure Locals with healthcare workers.

This work now has to be put to the side until there is more legislative certainty.



A Better Time and Place

During last negotiations, the biggest issues left on the table in the end were healthcare related.

The very same issues are being discussed by MLAs now, in a context that will not fix the problems.

Political support from MLAs during negotiations or leading into negotiations is more effective.



Conclusion

There are too many uncertainties and omissions in this bill.

The process is being treated in a very cavalier way.

This bill will tie nurses up in an unclear and uncertain legal process, potentially for years.

This bill deliberately bypassed and disregarded the practice of consultation and engagement with the subjects of the bill.

When you break down the issues we've heard from members, this bill won't fix them.



Conclusion

There is a huge lack of consensus amongst union membership, and clear lines of division by position and location.

The bill is causing rifts among members – your GNWT employees – which is hurting morale.

Forcing workers into a situation that divides and alienates them does not build a strong union – it weakens it.



Conclusion

We are asking the Committee and MLAs to vote against this Bill.

We have already publicly committed to discussing section 41 of the Public Service Act with the GNWT.

The UNW wants to continue building our relationship with the GNWT by working together in “phase two”.

We want to work with the GNWT to ensure any legislation affecting our members protects their best interests and is directed by the members, not legislators.



PUBLIC

LABOUR VIEWS 2022-2025

[Labour Views: Is the GNWT trying to privatize healthcare?](#) (Aug 14 2024)

[Labour Views: Now is the time for Canadians to stand together against healthcare privatization](#) (June 5, 2024)

[Labour Views: Is our Healthcare System about to collapse?](#) (Jan 17 2024)

[Labour Views: 2023 Territorial Election](#) (Nov 08 2023)

[Labour Views: To Fix Healthcare, Invest in the Workers](#) (Jul 05 2023)

[Labour Views: All Talk, No Action](#) (Jan 28 2022)

NEWS/COMMS

[UNW Responses to FAQ on Private Member's Bill Proposal](#) (Mar 21 2025)

[Letter to MLAs Re: The Use of Agency Nurses in NWT Healthcare](#) (May 27 2024)

[Media Release: Labour Market Supplement](#) (Oct 05 2022)

[Media Release: Ongoing Staffing Crisis at Stanton](#) (Sep 02 2022)

[Media Release: Ongoing Healthcare Staffing Issues](#) (Jul 19 2022)

[Media Release: UNW Response to Labour Market Supplement for RNs and MLTs](#) (Mar 02 2022)

[Media Release: Issues Concerning NWT Healthcare Workers](#) (Feb 13 2022)

[Online Panel Discussion: Hanging by a Thread](#) (Feb 04 2022)

[Media Release: Chronic Healthcare Staff Shortages](#) (Nov 25 2021)

HEALTHCARE ARBITRATIONS

[23-P-03045 GNWT - Nurse Practitioners Resp. Pay - December 2024](#)

[23-P-03007 GNWT - Agency Nurses Consent Award Re: 2004 MOU - April 2024](#)

[22-P-03007 GNWT - Agency Nurses - Follow Up - February 2023](#)

[23-E-03012 GNWT - Labour Market Supplement \(LMS\) - February 2023](#)

[HRHSSA - Policy Grievance Education Allowance - August 2022](#)

[HRHSSA - S. MacKay Preliminary Objection - May 2022](#)

[17-P-02096 GNWT - NTHSSA Employer Policy-Directives - July 2021.pdf](#)

[13-P-01601 HRHSSA - Distribution of Overtime Policy Grievance - February 2016.pdf](#)

DIRECTLY WITH GNWT

This list does not include all of the quarterly Senior Joint Consultation meetings between the GNWT & UNW, where healthcare and social services have been discussed for many years.

It also does not include all of the improvements to Appendix A10 (Healthcare Workers) that were negotiated by the UNW in almost every collective agreement over the last 20 years.

The majority of improvements to benefits in the collective agreement in the last round of negotiations were for healthcare workers.