

Standing Committee on
Accountability and Oversight



Report on the 2024-2025 Main Estimates

20th Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly

Chair: Mr. Denny Rodgers

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ACCOUNTABILITY AND OVERSIGHT**

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May 29, 2024

SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Speaker:

Your Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight is pleased to provide its *Report on the 2024-2025 Main Estimates* and commends it to the House.



Mr. Denny Rodgers
Chairperson

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ACCOUNTABILITY AND OVERSIGHT**

REPORT ON THE 2024-2025 MAIN ESTIMATES

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ACCOUNTABILITY AND OVERSIGHT**

REPORT ON the 2024-2025 MAIN ESTIMATES

INTRODUCTION

The Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight (Committee) of the 20th Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories is charged with the responsibility of providing oversight over the business and budget operations of the Government of the Northwest Territories.

The purpose of this report is twofold:

1. To provide publicly the position of the Committee in their review of the proposed 2024-2025 Main Estimates tabled by the Government of the Northwest Territories on May 24, 2024; and
2. To identify key policy initiatives and goals that the Government should look to advance through their Business Plans.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Intent of the Report:

The Mandate of the Committee, which is comprised of all 11 Regular Members, is to provide oversight and accountability into government budgets and operations. We are tasked to lead negotiations of the proposed Main Estimates to ensure that outcomes can be achieved, and accountability is maximized.

The Committee wishes to note that this is the first time that a Report on Main Estimates has been brought into the House. The intent of this report is to draw public attention to what has historically occurred behind closed doors and for the public to better understand how a finalized operations budget occurs through the consensus system.

Regular Members form the majority of the House and it is our role to hold the Government to account and ensure that the budget and policy direction of the government are reflective of our shared priorities. Providing The Committees position on the Governments budget and policy direction is intended to bring forward conversations that regularly occur through in-camera discussions between Executive Council and Regular Members. The

Committee will present our positions according to the agreed upon Priorities of the 20th Assembly. It is through this new process that additional transparency and accountability can be brought forward for all Members of this House.

Suitability, Accessibility, and Affordability of Housing:

Housing remains the top priority of the 20th Assembly. The Committee was disappointed to see that the 2024-2025 Main Estimates reflected a decrease in total operations funding for Housing Northwest Territories by 13 million dollars¹. This decrease does not accurately reflect how this Assembly has chosen its priorities. Housing is a key concern for all regions and communities throughout the Northwest Territories. Although an operations budget is before The Committee, we will be seeking a commitment to provide 200 million dollars in capital funding for Housing Northwest Territories over the life of the 20th Assembly.

The Committee is also seeking a commitment for Housing Northwest Territories and Health and Social Services to provide budgeted initiatives that enhance assisted living options for people with disabilities and supportive living options for vulnerable populations. Only by supporting non-profit organizations and Indigenous Governments in the development of housing options for these vulnerable residents can we see positive changes. Another gap on the housing spectrum could be addressed by cooperative housing Initiatives. The Committee is asking that the Government provide resident-led efforts to protect homes and neighbourhoods by creating incentives for and investment in housing cooperatives.

Ultimately, The Committee believes there is a need to support our municipalities by transferring land to be used for additional opportunities for housing. Too many of our municipalities face barriers in meeting the current legislated requirements that would allow lands to be transferred to their authority. The Committee is seeking a commitment for the development of a legislative proposal from the Department of Environment and Climate Change that streamlines the current challenges posed to municipalities in their abilities to access lands, including the current requirements that a community must develop controls to manage the land, create a community plan, and that parcels must be surveyed prior to transfer. The current requirements far exceed the capacity of municipalities to access land within their boundaries and change is needed.

A Strong Economic Foundation:

The Committee acknowledges the need to build capacity amongst all residents of the Northwest Territories to support a strong economic foundation. This begins with a call for the Department of Education, Culture and Employment to explicitly include an action in their Business Plan to improve outcomes in basic literacy and numeracy for JK-12 Students. The importance of supporting the Aurora College Transformation captures the bookend of this need as The Committee has a strong desire to see investment into the

¹ Government of the Northwest Territories (May 24, 2024) 2024-2025 Main Estimates. Pg 379 Accessed: [Here](#)

transformation to ensure it can be successful in our effort to build our labour market capacity.

The Committee is also concerned with the proposed reductions of 1.1 million dollars to the Small Community Employment Program. The Small Community Employment Program is a key program that creates employment within our communities so that they can support economic activity in a sustainable manner². This program should be restored to its previous funding level and include new parameters that ensure all funding is provided to small communities, as opposed to regional centers.

The same sentiment is made for the Community Access Program. The Committee feels that this program, which provides financial contributions towards the construction or maintenance of access roads, trails, docks and wharves, should be reinstated to 1.5 million dollars³. Although there may be implementation challenges with the current scope of the program, this funding is key to support community initiatives such as ice roads. Moreover, this funding should be expanded towards feasibility studies that enable communities to determine how they approach infrastructure needs.

The Committee remains committed to reducing our reliance on carbon intensive fuels. We are calling for the publication of a plan that outlines how the utility regulator, the three electrical utilities, the territorial government, and interested Indigenous governments will work together to develop a short, medium and long-term roadmap. This should include appropriate planning, regulatory, and policy tools to enable the transformation of the Northwest Territories electrical system over the coming decades in alignment with climate goals and building greater energy independence in the Northwest Territories.

The Committee acknowledges that there is a need for a regulatory streamlining. Calling on the 2020 Environmental Audit to be prioritized, funded and implemented will support our goal in providing a strong regulatory regime that gives our resources sector the certainty that they require.

Access to healthcare and addressing effects of trauma:

The Committee acknowledges that improving the accessibility and quality of healthcare is a multifaceted and complex issue. The Committee also acknowledges that frontline healthcare staff are key to improving the working conditions and culture of our healthcare system. We are fortunate to have so many hard working and dedicated staff that can support innovative solutions for our healthcare system. Strategically advancing the territorial healthcare workforce plan and establishing an Office of Practitioner Experience are all tangible actions that can support our current system. The Committee is calling on the Department of Health and Social Services to look internally through job evaluation and labour market incentives to create a more attractive healthcare workplace. These actions will help support the retention and recruitment of healthcare professionals.

² Government of the Northwest Territories (May 24, 2024) 2024-2025 Main Estimates. Pg 54 Accessed: [Here](#)

³ Government of the Northwest Territories (May 24, 2024) 2024-2025 Main Estimates. Pg 271 Accessed: [Here](#)

Reducing critical funding for innovative programs such as the midwifery expansion program or including income testing for Extended Health Benefits (EHB) is not the way to improve access to healthcare. The Committee is strongly advocating to reinstate the \$990,000 for the midwifery program and the creation of an action plan that allows midwives to support communities throughout the Northwest Territories and remove income testing from EHB⁴. There is a key opportunity to expand the Family Medicine Residency Program from two to four residents per year by the end of this Assembly to build local healthcare capacity. The Committee will advocate for these actions to be advanced to support this priority and our healthcare system.

The Committee has concerns that the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Stabilization Fund remains at only \$700,000 and believes that this should be increased to 1 million dollars annually to better support NGOs and the critical work they do⁵. Further, to support stability and acknowledge the vital role of the NGO sector, funding should be awarded using multi-year contributions to NGOs. The territorial government has received concrete recommendations on how to better support NGOs. Therefore, The Committee is requesting funding for the implementation of the “Strengthening the Non-Profit and Charitable Sector External Advisory Committee Final Report”.

Safe residents and Communities:

The Committee has heard the Government’s position that municipalities have a responsibility in emergency management; however, we have not yet seen corresponding financial resources from the territorial government to support emergency preparedness and public safety efforts for municipalities that will build their capacity. The Committee is seeking a commitment to adopt a more equitable funding formula that equalizes the gap for communities across the Northwest Territories and offers more meaningful support for emergency management preparedness.

To support safe communities and residents, we need to ensure that communities have appropriate access to RCMP services, that legislation, such as the *Residential Tenancies Act*, is modernized, and that our legal services, such as the Office of the Children’s Lawyer, can continue to be supported.

Conclusion:

To support the Priorities of the 20th Assembly, The Committee has put forward a combination policy direction and budgetary requests to Executive Council. We know that through engagement between The Committee and Executive Council, we can build on the successes of previous Assemblies by showing collaboration and consensus decision making can succeed.

⁴ Government of the Northwest Territories (May 24, 2024) 2024-2025 Main Estimates. Pg 205 Accessed: [Here](#)

⁵ Government of the Northwest Territories (May 24, 2024) 2024-2025 Main Estimates. Pg 392 Accessed: [Here](#)

DEPARTMENTAL OVERVIEWS

The Committee has summarized its recommendations on policy commitments and budgetary changes in response to the Government of the Northwest Territories proposed 2024-2025 Main Estimates below:

Education, Culture and Employment:

- Provide an update to the Business Plan targets that highlights the need to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes amongst JK-12 students;
- Restore the Small Community Employment Program Fund to its 2023-2024 funding levels while changing the program to ensure only small communities, and not regional centres, can access the funding pot;
- Aurora College Transformation:
 - Reinstate the \$500,000 to fund the Centre for Learning, Teaching, and Innovation and provide an additional 1 million dollars to fund the Aurora College transition team.

Environment and Climate Change:

- Create new legislation in the life of this Assembly that will support the transfer of Commissioner's land within municipalities, excluding lands currently under interim land withdrawal and Indigenous lands, resources, and self-government agreements. This legislation should streamline the current challenges posed to municipalities to access lands, including the current requirements that a community must develop controls to manage the land, create a community plan, and that parcels must be surveyed prior to transfer.
- A commitment to establish in the Business Plan how the Department will prioritize, action, and implement changes recommended in the 2020 Environmental Audit, recognizing that most recommendations are likely to carry into the 2025 audit.

Executive and Indigenous Affairs:

- A commitment to realign all measures within the Business Plan to match the measures laid out in the Homelessness Strategy.
- Establish Services NWT with offices in all regional centres and Yellowknife by 2027-2028 while also working to enhance the services offered by Government Service Officers to build more single-window access points for Government services throughout the territory.

- Restructure and reissue the Request For Proposals for the OneGov project to give opportunities for Northern contractors to advance this work.
- Provide for a costed implementation plan of the Strengthening the Non-Profit and Charitable Sector External Advisory Committee Final Report

Finance:

- Ensure a revenue neutral carbon pricing regime which itemizes how revenues are then reallocated through public reporting.
- Create a strategy to reduce TSC chargebacks by 10 percent across the Government of the Northwest Territories.
- Create a plan that allows for a Tłıchǵ Administrative Region for operations and capital planning purposes, removing it from the North Slave region.

Health and Social Services

- Removing income testing for the new Extended Health Benefits.
- Restore the proposed \$990,000 reduction to the Department of Health and Social Services and the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority regarding midwifery and further, develop a model for traveling midwives that ultimately reduces the costs of medical travel for residents⁶.
- A commitment to increase the Medical Residency Program from two residents to four residents by 2027-2028.
- Complete new internal job evaluations for all frontline healthcare staff.
- Create a new Labour Market Supplement program for frontline staff.
- Waive the current practice standards for foreign credentials for internationally educated nurses.
- Provide a plan to phase out private healthcare agency nurses by 2026-2027.
- Establish clear targets for Indigenous healthcare training and recruitment of staff.
- Examine and estimate the costs to introduce an Office of Practitioner Experience in the Northwest Territories healthcare system.
- Commitment to expand on the existing Government of the Northwest Territories Physician Workforce Plan by creating an overall Healthcare Workforce Plan that contains:
 - An updated territorial model of physician services that is formalized and funded;
 - An effective Territorial Primary Care Model based on equitable access and continuity; and

⁶ Government of the Northwest Territories (May 24, 2024) 2024-2025 Main Estimates. Accessed: [Here](#)

- A re-evaluation of the health systems leadership model.
- Provide a proposal for the creation of a Dialysis Unit and CT Scan equipment and operations at the Inuvik Hospital.
- Provide options and costing for a mobile X-Ray machine for small Communities.
- An increase to support not only transitional housing for individuals in recovery of addictions but to also work with Housing Northwest Territories to increase assisted living options for adults with disabilities.

Housing NWT:

- A commitment to invest 200 million dollars in the capital plans for Housing until fiscal year 2028-2029.
- Provide cost estimates to the Business Plan commitment that pledges to help NGOs stabilize their funding, particularly for those running supportive living facilities to keep vulnerable populations housed.
- Encourage better upkeep of public housing units by supporting resident-led collective efforts to protect their homes and neighbourhoods through the creation of incentives for housing cooperatives.

Industry Tourism and Investment:

- Provide an update to the Business Plan that sets goals to increase the value of income, employment and dollars spent on all film productions taking place in the NWT.

Infrastructure:

- Restore the Community Access Program Funding to 2023-2024 levels. Furthermore, ensure that this program can be made to be more flexible to support feasibility studies such as the creation of ice roads.
- Provide a costed plan that outlines how the utility regulator, the three electrical utilities, the Government of the Northwest Territories and interested Indigenous Governments will work together to develop a short, medium and long-term roadmap with appropriate planning, regulatory, and policy tools to enable the transformation of the Northwest Territories electricity system over the coming decades in alignment with climate goals and building greater energy independence in the Northwest Territories.
- Restore the Manager, Enterprise Records Management position at \$113,000.
- Restore the Electric Bike Rebate of \$10,000.

- Restore the Community Government Retrofits Program of \$190,000 to support energy audits and energy retrofits of community government facilities.

Justice:

- Advance the currently proposed timeline for changes to the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* with a legislative proposal by the winter sitting of 2025.
- Provide a legislative proposal that aims to modernize the *Residential Tenancies Act* by the winter sitting of 2025.
- Restore the Office of the Children's Lawyer by eliminating the reduction of \$200,000.
- Provide a plan to allow for a joint RCMP detachment for Gameti and Wekweètì.

Municipal and Community Affairs

- It has been highlighted that the Municipal Funding Gap under the current formula cannot be closed or reduced without substantial investment. The Committee is seeking a commitment to adopt a more equitable funding formula that equalizes the gap for communities across the Northwest Territories. This funding formula should fund models and new contributions which capture:
 - Operations and Maintenance;
 - Water and Waste;
 - Capital;
 - New contributions for Municipal Emergency Preparedness and Public Safety; and,
 - Ability to implement ground ambulance services to interested communities.
- Increase the annual Non-Governmental Stabilization Fund from \$700,000 to 1 million dollars. Further to this increase, ensure that all NGO funding and contribution agreements are multi-year agreements moving forward, and that the Government works to address inflationary pressures on NGOs through these agreements.

CONCLUSION

This concludes the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight's Report on the 2024-2025 Main Estimates. Members acknowledge through ongoing dialogue with the Executive Council we will work together to advance and finalize a budget that can better support the residents of the Northwest Territories.