



NORTHWEST TERRITORIES  
**LEGISLATIVE  
ASSEMBLY**

**1<sup>st</sup> Session**

**Day 44**

**20<sup>th</sup> Assembly**

**HANSARD**

**Thursday, February 13, 2025**

Pages 1785 - 1844

**The Honourable Shane Thompson, Speaker**

# Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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**Hon. Shane Thompson**  
(Nahendeh)

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Published under the authority of the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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**YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES****Thursday, February 13, 2025****Members Present**

Hon. Caitlin Cleveland, Mr. Edjericon, Mr. Hawkins, Hon. Lucy Kuptana, Hon. Jay Macdonald, Hon. Vince McKay, Mr. McNeely, Ms. Morgan, Mr. Morse, Mr. Nerysoo, Ms. Reid, Mr. Rodgers, Hon. Lesa Semmler, Mr. Testart, Hon. Shane Thompson, Hon. Caroline Wawzonek, Mrs. Weyallon Armstrong, Mrs. Yakeleya

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

**Prayer or Reflection**

---Prayer

**SPEAKER (HON. SHANE THOMPSON):**

Good afternoon, Colleagues. Please join me in thanking Elder Shirley Elias for the opening song today.

Colleagues, before we begin today, I would like to take a moment to thank the grade 1 and two students from Itlo Ecole who visited us earlier today. As a part of Indigenous languages month, these students were here to sing a special rendition of I love you, in Wiliideh dialect, dedicated to our incredible interpreters. It was wonderful to see these young people and hear their beautiful voices early this morning.

The students were gifted a book from our Inuktitut interpreter Susie Napayk-Short called Kids, Cubs and Calves, which she authored. Thank you, Susie. Colleagues, please join me in thanking these students for being here today and for honouring our Indigenous languages.

Now, Colleagues, let's get ready to rumble. I mean, let's get down to business. Ministers' statements. Minister of ECE I believe it is

**Ministers' Statements**

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 94-20(1):  
CELEBRATING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Mr. Speaker, I'd like to start my statement today in Inuvialuktun. [Translation] Mr. Speaker, "let us speak together." That is the theme of this year's Indigenous Languages Month, which we celebrate every February. This month, we encourage residents to speak together in homes, in classrooms and in communities. Indigenous Languages Month is a time to honour and celebrate Indigenous languages. This year's theme emphasizes the collective responsibility in revitalizing our Indigenous languages. Every conversation in an Indigenous language strengthens its future.

Mr. Speaker, for generations, colonial policies sought to erase Indigenous languages. That legacy remains, but Indigenous governments, language advocates, and communities continue their work to preserve and promote their languages. The Government of the Northwest Territories stands with them, recognizing that real Reconciliation demands action. [Translation Ends].

Mr. Speaker, I owe a huge amount of gratitude to Beverly Amos for translating that for me today. And to Lillian Elias who joins us here in the House every day, for helping me learn some words. She's always incredibly patient with me and I am forever grateful for her language patience with me, and also her heart in this House.

Mr. Speaker, our Mentor-Apprentice Program is one example of how we support language learning. Each mentor and apprentice pair spend nine months together doing everyday activities like cooking, fishing, having tea, using their Indigenous language only. Last year, 57 pairs accomplished 200 hours of language immersion, developing more fluent Indigenous language speakers in the Northwest Territories. Over five years, 117 participants have completed their hours. I congratulate all participants for "living life in the language," and I encourage residents to apply before the end of this month for our next intake, Mr. Speaker.

Our commitment extends to schools. Last year, 39 Northwest Territories schools offered Indigenous language programming as a second language. Our Indigenous Languages Secretariat worked with education bodies to implement the Indigenous Languages and Education Handbook, strengthening quality culture and language-based programming. We also launched the Indigenous Language Instructor Employment Plan, creating new trainee positions where learners develop fluency and instructional skills. Five schools in the Beaufort Delta and Deh Cho regions participated in the pilot, and I would like to see it expanded.

Since 2018, 61 Indigenous language revitalization scholarships have been awarded, including 11 last year. These \$5,000

scholarships help students offset the costs of their studies that contribute to revitalizing Indigenous languages.

Mr. Speaker, I am also pleased to announce that this year, the GNWT will release the first edition of the Indigenous Languages Services Standards. These standards will guide public servants in meeting Indigenous language service delivery requirements under the Official Languages Act. Every resident has the right to access public services in an official language, and the new standards will help the GNWT fulfill this right.

Mr. Speaker, we have made progress, but we cannot be complacent. Indigenous languages persist thanks to generations of resilience, and we must ensure their survival. The Government of the Northwest Territories remains committed to revitalizing Indigenous languages alongside Indigenous champions, elders, and educators. I thank and recognize the Indigenous language speakers who are bringing the language forward for the next generations. Let us continue to speak together. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Quyananni.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Ministers' statements. Minister responsible for Infrastructure.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 95-20(1):  
REGIONAL SUPPORT FOR SUPPLY CHAIN  
SUCCESS

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the work being done by our regional and divisional staff when it comes to supporting supply chain success in the territory. As you know, our resupply operations on the Mackenzie River faced significant challenges last season due to low water levels, disrupting the transportation of goods and fuel to communities in the Sahtu. The Government of the Northwest Territories, through the Department of Infrastructure's fuel services division, oversees the Petroleum Products Program, which manages the purchase, transport, and storage of fuel in 16 communities not served by the private sector.

We recognize that communities relying on private suppliers are equally vulnerable to fluctuating fuel costs when transportation is disrupted. To address this, the GNWT provided an air freight subsidy to Norman Wells, helping to mitigate rising fuel costs for consumers until the Mackenzie Valley Winter Road became operational for the winter resupply season.

Mr. Speaker, the increased efforts of regional airport staff to support fuel airlifts were also

instrumental in ensuring the Sahtu communities had the fuel they needed before the winter road could open. This winter resupply season is an important one, particularly for those communities.

Normal traffic movement of fuel along the Mackenzie Valley Winter Road sees about 130 truckloads per season. This season, the region can expect to see 600 truckloads, a 460 percent increase in fuel trips alone. Fuel resupply efforts in the Sahtu communities serviced by our fuel services division account for 250 of these truckloads, and the rest are private sector fuel.

In addition, we expect to see a significant increase in traffic to complete the backlogged delivery of dry goods to communities impacted by the unprecedented low water conditions. We have been working very closely with our contractors and the private sector to support resupply planning and to ensure consistent communication between all parties.

Mr. Speaker, these efforts put extra pressure on our regional and divisional staff, as well as on our contractors to maintain, construct, and monitor a winter road system to support an anticipated record number of vehicles. Such an increase in traffic, especially heavy-duty trucks, has great potential to further compromise the integrity and longevity of our winter road system that is largely dependent on weather conditions. Though spells of warmer temperatures may be welcomed by some Northerners, they are not favourable to variables to help our winter roads.

In response to this, the Department is taking several precautions for the safety of Northwest Territories drivers and a successful resupply to communities along the Mackenzie Valley Winter Road. Our efforts include additional flooding of ice crossings during construction to extend their operational window and increasing bearing capacity, widening the winter road, where possible, and clearing wildfire debris. We are also increasing maintenance to ensure the efficiency of truck traffic and increasing monitoring in order to address any problems quickly.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize the proactive approach taken by our staff, and the willingness of contractors and communities to collaborate, often stretching their resources and taking on more work sometimes on short and unpredictable notice.

And, Mr. Speaker, as resupply operations in the Sahtu have just recently begun, I would also like to thank our regional and divisional staff, as well as the partnerships that we have with contractors and communities of these

continued efforts to build and preserve a winter road system that supports so many aspects of northern life. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Infrastructure. Ministers' statements. Members' statements. Member from Great Slave.

### Members' Statements

#### MEMBER'S STATEMENT 494-20(1): BUILDING SHELTER CAPACITY FUND

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week, Members received a letter from the Family Violence Shelter Network seeking assistance to reinstate funding for the annual building shelter capacity fund in the 2025-2026 Budget. The network is a partnership between YWCA-NWT in Yellowknife, safe homes projects in Fort Good Hope and Fort Simpson, and family violence shelters in Inuvik, Tuktoyaktuk, Hay River, and Fort Smith. The shelter capacity fund slated to be cut is in the amount of \$100,000. These funds are vital to the work the network does to train and build capacity of shelter staff to meet GNWT service standards.

Mr. Speaker, as you might imagine, this kind of work is emotionally intense, and as such the sector deals with high turnover. Training of all kinds, from basic family violence 101 training to risk management to trauma informed practice, is a continual need of both the management and frontline level.

Mr. Speaker, when I was president of YWCA-NWT, getting safe homes out of the pilot project stage and into more of our smaller communities was a tangible way that NGOs and Indigenous governments are collaborating to help address the needs of family violence survivors and address trauma. Shelters and safe homes are a desperately needed service across the territory. We don't have cut a small amount of money that is an investment in positive outcomes and impacts for our residents up and down the Valley. Mr. Speaker, I will have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Great Slave. Members' statements. Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

#### MEMBER'S STATEMENT 495-20(1): AURORA COLLEGE COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTRE CLOSURES

**MR. EDJERICON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, education is a treaty right and a greater access to education, especially in small communities across the territory, like communities in my riding of Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

It is clear part of the process towards true reconciliation.

Many of my colleagues have spoken in this House about Aurora College closing 19 community learning centres this June. Their constituents are angry and so are mine. The decision to take all of us by surprise because there were no consultations about these closures. According to the most recent public accounts, the Government of the Northwest Territories provided Aurora College nearly \$46 million in grants and contributions in 2024. The GNWT can say that Aurora College made these decisions on their own, but they appointed the board and provided them with their funding, so the buck stops with the Cabinet.

For example, my constituents of Fort Resolution have one of the larger learning centres. It is a standalone building with two classrooms, computer lab, an office, and a common area, two washrooms, and a kitchenette, and a janitor room. A lot more could be done with these spaces yet now it's closing. If Aurora College is closing learning centres because they were underused, that is because the college's programming only centered to a small group of community. Judging by the unanimous criticism from my community members regarding these closures, they wanted improvement, not closures.

Mr. Speaker, I suggest either increasing the fine tuning the amount of programming offered to each of the most people possible in our small communities or transfer the responsibility for these buildings to the communities and make them traditional knowledge learning centres. At the constituents meeting of Lutselk'e last month, I heard many passionate ideas to that effect. They say that if Aurora College cannot be maintained, then the GNWT should transfer them to the communities yet still maintain the full funding, including for programming and operational management. I agree, after all, communities know what is best for their people in education.

Mr. Speaker, we must respect the rights to education enshrined in our treaties and should be doing more for Indigenous communities, not less, and the GNWT needs to face up to the responsibility for education and more specifically the responsibility to keep these education centres open. Mr. Speaker, I will have questions for the Minister for culture and employment later on. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh. Members' statements. Member from the Sahtu.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 496-20(1):  
INNOVATION IN RESPONSE TO AURORA  
COLLEGE COMMUNITY  
LEARNING CENTRES CLOSURES

**MR. McNEELY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Community learning centres innovation. Mr. Speaker, with the closure of the community learning centres brings new innovation. These centres have skilled and educated instructors who can enhance the capacity of current GNWT training initiatives. The regional community learning centres strategy proposes establishing three centralized community learning hubs in Hay River, Fort Simpson, and Norman Wells. Mr. Speaker, these regional centres could merge with the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs school of community government by broadening and centralizing training resources and funding. We can create a more streamlined and effective approach to community learning.

Mr. Speaker, these hubs could serve approximately 18 communities across the Sahtu, South Slave, and Deh Cho regions. They could tailor their programs to meet local and regional needs offering training for infrastructure projects and responding to the regional employment opportunities. This is particularly crucial as our communities try to advance and engage in diverse economic activities.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot build community capacity by removing essential staff and closing the doors. Our employed people need shorter, targeted courses that fit with their work and family schedules. These regional centres will provide education where people live, eliminating barriers, and allowing our people to balance their studies with jobs and family responsibilities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Later I will have questions to the appropriate Minister.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from the Sahtu. Members' statements. Member from Mackenzie Delta.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 497-20(1):  
DILAPIDATED HOUSING IN SMALL  
COMMUNITIES

**MR. NERYSOO:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to talk about the beauty of our smaller communities within the Northwest Territories. The smaller communities have a lot to offer in terms of knowledge, culture, respect, and the kindness of its residents. That is until one comes upon the abandoned buildings, an eyesore to the community that belongs to Housing NWT. These buildings are no longer inhabitable because they have no windows, no

doors, the interior is beyond repair, while others are the remains of a fire.

Mr. Speaker, every community within the Northwest Territories tries to play its role in building the economy of the NWT. Tourism is the only resource that some of these communities have to depend on to be part of the economy. But when visitors come to these smaller communities and the first thing they see is one of these buildings, this gives a bad perception of our beautiful communities.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what is so ironic about this situation?

If one of these buildings belonged to one of the local residents of the community, they would be asked to remove the building. If the resident did not comply with the request, they would be charged property tax along with accumulated interest, yet the government can leave them there for years without being penalized.

Mr. Speaker, the communities within my riding of the Mackenzie Delta have to deal with this on a daily basis. Buildings are not only an eyesore to the community and its residents but also a hazard, especially to the younger children of the community.

Mr. Speaker, when we deal with serious circumstances regarding the safety of our communities, we tend to wait until an accident happens, then we act to address the situation. So before an accident happens, let's remove these government-owned buildings and make our communities beautiful again. I will have questions for the Minister responsible for Housing NWT. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Mackenzie Delta. Members' statements. Member from the Deh Cho.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 498-20(1):  
OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIGENOUS  
EMPLOYEES OF THE GOVERNMENT OF  
THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently, there has been discussion in the House and in the media about the Government of the Northwest Territories' affirmative action policy and the proposed changes that are coming later this year. Today I would like to talk about other programs in place for prospective and current Indigenous employees.

The Indigenous Career Gateway Program, which targets Indigenous aboriginal candidates for entry level and training opportunities within the Government of the Northwest Territories, and the Indigenous Development and Training Program provides skills training or work



experience for career advancement. Mr. Speaker, I have heard from constituents that they face barriers in gaining employment in the public service and if they are already employed by the GNWT, it is difficult to move into senior positions.

While it is great that we have these programs on paper, I would like to know how they are being implemented in GNWT departments, boards, and agencies. It's important that we see Indigenous representation in the public service, and it's important that we see it in all levels within the organization, not just entry level positions. The GNWT must hire Indigenous students and allow more time for candidates to apply for jobs. I will have questions for the Minister of Finance at the appropriate time. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from the Deh Cho. Members' statements. Member from Range Lake.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 499-20(1):  
ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE CHILDCARE

**MR. TESTART:** Mr. Speaker, it is often said it takes a village to raise a child, but what if that village didn't have access to the services and resources necessary for that child? Every community needs the right services for every age and every stage, and it's the responsibility of good governance to maintain the quality and access to those services. \$10 a day daycare came in place -- it was announced in 2021 to be fully implemented in 2026. This is great. This ensures our constituents have access to childcare because for too long families have been priced out of these services in the North. These efforts have been welcomed by all, especially me as a parent with young kids. It definitely helps. And we feel the difference immediately. Because accessible, affordable care not only provides endless benefits to young children as they develop but the working parents as well who have more time to participate in the economy and provide for their families.

We need to ensure that the Canada-wide early learning and childcare plan is smoothly rolled out. But unfortunately, I'm hearing from both Range Lake families and their childcare providers that they have entrusted the care of their children to that daycares and day homes are struggling with our current policies, and the consequences are more children are being left behind. That's why parents are asking me why the Department of Education, Culture and Employment has not been adequately funding them so that their needs are met. As a result, the Yellowknife Daycare Association's ability to operate their services effectively is diminishing,

Mr. Speaker. Valuable opportunities for children in their care have been limited by forced cuts to essential services like after school snacks, field trips, and other things that families rely on.

Mr. Speaker, without proper funding, YKDA may eventually be unable to continue offering subsidized services to families. As a parent, I can speak for us all when I say we Northerners cannot afford for their withdrawal from the subsidy program. All the work that's accomplished to date would amount to nothing, forcing families to pay full rates, and at the mercy of cost of any increases. We need the Minister to understand this clearly and make real changes. We've had this debate on the floor of the House before. We voted millions more dollars for the department to make this program a success. How much more is it going to take? How do we help these families? I'll have questions for the Minister later today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Members' statements. Member from Yellowknife North.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 500-20(1):  
STATE OF CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to express my concern today about the well-being of the children in this territory, specifically those involved with child and family services. I've been waiting to speak about this until I felt I had solid solutions to propose, but this is a tough one. That might be one reason that no one particularly likes to talk about this. It's depressing, it makes us feel hopeless, and it's easy to ignore because these children are not the ones emailing and calling our constituency offices, and yet these are likely the most vulnerable of our community members. They have so little opportunity to control what is happening to them, to control the direction of their lives, and that's not fair.

According to the last annual report by child and family services, we had 106 children and youth in permanent care of the state and 45 in temporary care. While at first glance, things seemed to be improving with 40 percent fewer children in permanent care compared to a decade ago, we suddenly have many more children being put into plan of care agreements. And even though this is listed as a preventive measure, it's become very common for social workers to use these agreements to remove children from their homes on a temporary basis with much less oversight than if they were formally apprehended. While plan of care committees are supposed to involve family and community members, in practice, the

committee seemed to mostly involve simply the social worker and the parent who may feel pressured or not have the resources to dispute the conditions written up by CFS.

It's also worth pointing out that the majority of the reports of mistreatment, which can lead to these apprehensions, are related to neglect, which is often rooted in poverty. And no child should ever be removed from their family due to poverty.

Meanwhile, we keep hearing about the government's attempts to transform the CFS system, but what I see is a lot of focus on improving processes, frameworks, programs. What I would rather see is us trying to put children and youth themselves at the centre of our strategy and hold ourselves accountable for better outcomes in their lives.

We speak a lot in this House about the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and for good reason, but we rarely speak about the UN convention on the rights of the child. What if we built into our legislation that children's rights must be heard, and they should have as much control as possible over their lives? Mr. Speaker, I don't have all the answers, but I do feel it's important to keep the vulnerable children of this territory in our sights. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. Members' statements. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 501-20(1):  
IMPLEMENTATION OF NORTHWEST  
TERRITORIES EARLY LEARNING AND  
CHILDCARE AGREEMENT

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I had the pleasure, if not honour certainly, to speak to the executive directors of the Centre for Northern Families daycare, the Montessori daycare, and the Yellowknife daycare as well, Mr. Speaker. Although I didn't get a chance to speak to the YWCA daycare, I still feel for their plight and their concerns will be in my statement as well.

Mr. Speaker, the ladies quite eloquently, and I'll say firmly and clearly, made it very clear their challenges of staying alive in the sense of a business are being impeded by the government-imposed wage grid. Now, the wage grid may have helped some but it doesn't help all, and what it does is it boxes these daycares, that are so necessary to help and flourish and nourish our young people, that the government is getting into the business of controlling these daycares. Now if you don't sign on, you can go at it alone, but that also comes with financial impediments and, if

anything, it's perceived as there's no way to move forward if you don't. So in other words, they're boxed into a corner. If I was outside the House, I'd say ah, it's a threat of bureaucracy, but in the House, I'd say they're boxed into a corner.

Mr. Speaker, the frustrating part is they're imposed on the grid, and they can't do their business. But even worse on that is they're told you have to work within the constraints we've created. So what are the constraints? Low money but high control, okay. So the choice of them paying their employees properly comes to them, and the government's attitude is we'll just find money by fundraising.

Well, it might be easy to set up a lemonade stand and then get a hundred bucks by the end of the week, but when we're talking about thousands and thousands of dollars, Mr. Speaker, you just can't set up a lemonade stand or sell chocolates in every case.

Mr. Speaker, the government needs to step up. If it's going to get into the financial control -- or financially in bed with the day homes and daycares, they have to have the full picture and take responsibility. So what's left? These three daycares had told me that they are at financial risk by the summer. Again, controlled and created by the government. Mr. Speaker, this is frustrating. They cannot charge extra fees. They're told they're not allowed to. They have to find it from pennies from heaven. And when they sit there and tell me summer students are paid higher than the imposed wages, they ask themselves who is in charge and how are they really helping. Mr. Speaker, I'll have questions for the Minister later today about trying to fix, if not reverse this problem, and we can find a better way. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. Members' statements. Member from Monfwi.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 502-20(1):  
LAND TITLE TRANSFERS FOR PRIVATE  
HOMES

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Mr. Speaker, today I'm going to be talking about land transfer or title transfer. I want to draw some attention to a problem people face getting certificates of title transferred in Tlicho region.

Mr. Speaker, there are people in my riding who are living in houses on land they should rightfully own but they cannot get a certificate of title to prove their ownership. There are about over 50 members in Tlicho region. They live in a house for over 20 years with no legal title of ownership. This then would make the person or

a person, people, a squatter, and this is a shame. There's over 50 of them in my region alone. Some constituents have said that their house, a house without any liens or mortgages, that they lived for years -- that they have lived in it for years which would qualify for community home repairs, is still in the name of deceased parents.

I have heard from elders who wish to transfer title for their house to family members while they are still able to do so, but they need support to navigate the system, whether that means help with the land titles office, the Department of Justice, the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs. Mr. Speaker, my constituents say they were told to get a lawyer to deal with these matters, but people need more directions and they need money to pay for legal fees. It's range from \$10,000 to \$40,000 to settle a land title claim. The land titles office does not issue leases or grant title to property. It is responsible only for the registration of ownership to privately owned surveyed land.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the Government of the Northwest Territories has different programs in place to help with these types of problems, but residents need more information and more help. Mr. Speaker, I will be preparing a written question for the Minister of Justice on this matter. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Monfwi. Members' statements.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 503-20(1):  
HAND GAMES TOURNAMENTS

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** Good afternoon, Colleagues. This is a statement I prepared for last fall session, but I didn't get a chance to do it.

Last summer, some of you had the opportunity to see various hand game tournaments across the NWT and are happening now. As some of you know, it is amazing to watch. You can feel the energy and excitement in the venue. The hand games were played years ago as a form of gambling among friends and different groups. Often the games were played to gamble for bullets, furs, dogs, toboggans, or match sticks. Today, hand games are played in cultural centres, gyms, community halls or outside, all over the NWT as a friendly competition fostering community pride. The hand game is based on a simple concept of hiding and guessing of objects using elaborate hand signals and gestures to both find the object and hide the object. This is all done with the sound of the drum. Some say it is not physical, but I have seen games that last for

hours and at the end, both teams are sweating and exhausted. However, winning or losing, you are grateful to compete against one another.

This past summer, a team from Fort Liard, Fort Nelson, and an elder from Fort Providence competed at the Charlie Zoe Nitsiza Hand Games Tournament in Whati. The tournament started on June 28th and finished on June 30th after midnight. There were 51 teams competing throughout the weekend. As the 51 teams battled it out throughout the weekend, we finally saw it get down to the last eight teams on Sunday evening. The team managed to stay on the A side bracket until Sunday afternoon when they were dropped to the B side bracket by the team from Deline. This added to the challenge for them getting to the final. Fortunately, they eliminated the remaining teams on the B side to make it to the final to compete against the A side Team Deline. The captain of the team told me about the message they got from the Deline captain, We're glad to see you in the final. Sure enough, they did meet in the final. In the end, the team came in second. The captain would like to say a big mashi cho to his teammates. It was an amazing time.

In closing, hand games are a healing sport and that is why people are attracted to it. It soothes the soul and it's reconnected you with your ancestors. Congratulations to the teams and the teams that are competing last weekend in Fort McPherson, and I think they're competing in Deline this weekend. So thank you very much.

Members' statements. Motions. Member from Yellowknife North.

**Motions**

MOTION 46-20(1):  
EXTENDED ADJOURNMENT OF THE  
HOUSE TO FEBRUARY 25, 2025

**MS. MORGAN:** I MOVE, seconded by the honourable Member for Thebacha, that notwithstanding Rule 2.1, when the House adjourns on Thursday, February 13th, 2025, it shall be adjourned until Tuesday, February 25th, 2025;

AND FURTHER, that any time prior to February 25th, 2025, if the Speaker is satisfied after consultation with the Executive Council and Members of the Legislative Assembly that the public interest requires that the House should meet at an earlier time during the adjournment, the Speaker may give notice;

AND THEREUPON, the House shall meet at the time stated in such notice and shall transact its business as it has been duly adjourned to that time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. To the motion.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Question.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Question has been called. All those in favour? Opposed? Abstentions? The motion's carried.

---Carried

Motions. Returns to oral questions. Recognition of visitors in the gallery Member from Range Lake.

### Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to recognize a page from the Range Lake riding today, Ahmed Saad, and it's also his birthday. So thank you for being here on this very special day. I'd also like to recognize my friend Hawa Dumbuya-Sesay, she's the executive director of the YWCA, and everyone else who's come to watch our proceedings today from that organization. You do great work in our communities, and we're happy to support you here. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** We won't embarrass him because he's not in the hall right now, but I was going to say we could sing him a happy birthday.

Recognition of visitors in the hall -- or recognition from the gallery. Well, here we go. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Let's do Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Mr. Speaker, I'd like to recognize several visitors in the gallery who are part of the Family Violence Shelter Network. As mentioned, Hawa Dumbuya-Sesay, who is the executive director of YWCA-NWT; Sherri Tambour, program manager, Hay River Family Support Centre; Donna Rogers, executive director, Inuvik Transition House Society; Terry Esogak, a shelter worker, Inuvik Transition House Society; Sandra Elias, Aimagunga Women's Shelter, Tuktoyaktuk; Brenda T'seleie-Pierrot, safe home coordinator, Fort Good Hope with the YWCA; and, Amy Fraser, victim services coordinator and safe home lead from Lutselk'e First Nation, as well as their wonderful advocacy staff member from the Y, Megan Brackenbury. Welcome today, and thank you for being with us.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from the Sahtu.

**MR. McNEELY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too would like to recognize Brenda T'seleie-Pierrot, the safe home worker in Fort Good Hope. Mahsi.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

**MR. EDJERICON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too would like to welcome everyone in the gallery from the family violence shelter. Mahsi for being here and thank you for the good work you guys do. Mahsi.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from the Deh Cho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Being this is our last day, I'd like to recognize the Dene Zhatie translator Sarah Gargan and Mary Jane Cazon, as well as Hawa Dumbuya. I worked with Hawa when we worked with the Native Women's for victim services. Welcome. And also to Sherri Tambour from Hay River Reserve. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from the Deh Cho. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First I want to start off by recognizing the Mildred Hall pages. Mildred Hall is the school in the downtown of Yellowknife, and it's a wonderful school. I send both of my kids there. And the attendees of our pages from that school today are Jackson Gorman and Tyrell Cook-Gargan is a constituent of mine. As well as I'll follow the Member from Deh Cho's lead, I wish to also recognize one particular translator. She happens to be my favorite, and coincidentally a constituent, so I'm not saying that they're tied together, but Ms. Sarah Cleary. She is one of my favorite friends. Thank you very much.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Monfwi.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to acknowledge and recognize our Tlicho interpreters Maro Rose Sundberg and Jonas Lafferty. I know Jonas is probably not here with us, but my condolences for the loss of his younger brother. And all the interpreters that are here, that are working and preserving our Indigenous language. They are the language keepers, and so I would like to recognize. And we're going to be taking a week break and that we all have a safe travel. And I would like to recognize all the ladies over here from the women's society. And also I hope I get

it right Elaine, Ms. Boucher. She is the executive director for the Native Women's Association. So I hope I got the name right but she's over there smiling. So I would like to recognize her. She's a hardworking lady who is keeping the office going at the native women's office, so I just wanted to recognize her and all the other group that's there advocating for our vulnerable. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Nunakput.

**HON. LUCY KUPTANA:** Mr. Speaker, it's not often I get a constituent from Nunakput here in the gallery, so I'd like to recognize Sandra, Sandra Elias, from the Aimayunga Women's Shelter in Tuktoyaktuk, so welcome Sandra and the entire shelter network. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Nunakput. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Hay River South.

**HON. VINCE McKAY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't see anybody back there, but I heard we have a resident from Hay River up there, Sherri Tambour, so I'd like to acknowledge her. And also acknowledge once again and say thanks to our pages, acknowledge Adele Russell and Molly Campbell for being here. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Hay River South. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Yellowknife South.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, at least two residents of Yellowknife South here. I'm not sure, I can't see who is behind me, so I hope I don't miss anyone. But happy to recognize Nicole Sock who is a resident of Yellowknife South here in the gallery today. And, also, we have a page here from Yellowknife South, Quinian Boettger who is joining us and offering us much assistance. I promise to send extra notes today, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife South. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also just wanted to acknowledge one of our pages who is from Yellowknife North, Jackson Gorman, and he's also my neighbour, so I'll just embarrass him once again. But thanks to all the pages for all your hard work this week.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Mackenzie Delta.

**MR. NERYSOO:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to recognize all the translators who are doing a very good job during our sittings, especially to our Gwich'in translators, Eleanor Firth and her sister -- jeez, I even forgot her name. Her sister, they both do an exceptional job there. They're young ladies that carry on the language. Her name is Karen, sorry. Welcome. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Mackenzie Delta. Recognition of visitors in the gallery.

I'd like to recognize Amy Fraser, a great advocate in Fort Simpson. She's also the chair for the DEA, hint, hint, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. She's up there. And as well as Mary Jane Cazon, our translator for Dene Zhatie from Fort Simpson.

Recognition of visitors in the gallery -- oh, sorry. Kicking it into fast gear; sorry about that. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. If we missed anyone in the gallery today, welcome to your chamber. I hope you are enjoying the proceedings. It is always nice to have people in the gallery to see us work. You guys put us here, so thank you very much for the honour.

Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Replies to the Budget Address, Day 6 of 7. Acknowledgements. Member from the Sahtu.

## Acknowledgements

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT 11-20(1): SAHTU RECIPIENTS OF 2024-2025 INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION SCHOLARSHIPS

**MR. McNEELY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure to do this acknowledgement.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to acknowledge four Indigenous Language Revitalization Scholarship recipients for 2024-2025 from the Sahtu region --

- Samantha K'ai Kenny;
- Jennie Vandermeer;
- Marie Speakman; and,
- Karen Menacho.

-- have each received a \$5,000 scholarship from the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. Thank you.

These recipients are advancing the preservation of Sahtu Dene Kede. Two currently live in the Sahtu region, while two others are Sahtu Dene Kede speakers with

roots in the Deline community. Their commitment demonstrates our people's vital role in strengthening our cultural heritage.

The Indigenous Language Revitalization Scholarship supports students dedicated to language preservation in the Northwest Territories. Through their work, Samantha, Jennie, Marie, and Karen help ensure future generations' access to our ancestral languages and cultural knowledge.

Congratulations to these deserving recipients. Their work strengthens both the Sahtu region and Indigenous language preservation across the Northwest Territories. Mahsi.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from the Sahtu. Acknowledgements. Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

### Oral Questions

#### QUESTION 507-20(1): IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE AGREEMENT

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to follow up on my statement which is my concerns about how daycares are paid -- or sorry, structurally paid through the grid formula created by the Department of ECE; and furthermore, Mr. Speaker, the challenge, of course, is that when a person with ten years of experience is paid less than a summer student, or even a grocery clerk, we have to start asking ourselves who are we serving in that particular thing.

Mr. Speaker, my question specifically to the Minister of education comes down to this: Given the immediacy of the urgency of the financial ability of all of these daycares, I would ask the Minister would she convene a small conference of executive directors and presidents or chairs of each society to have a conversation to hear directly their financial stresses and how they are presenting solutions that can get to solvent daycares as opposed to where they're going right now which is insolvent daycares. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we have the Northwest Territories Early Childhood Association which is made up of both daycares and day homes and their representatives which is in constant contact with ECE. I have also had the opportunity to meet with that organization,

and my last words to them was I'm more than happy to get together anytime. I'm also more than happy to get together with daycare providers. I have had outreach now as of last night from YK Daycare Association, and any time that, for example, the YK -- sorry, the YWCA has reached out to me, I have certainly taken them up on the opportunity to sit down. Thank you.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Mr. Speaker, I'm asking the Minister would she convene an immediate meeting and host a discussion with them about trying to solve their financial challenges, because right now they cannot afford to keep their doors open any longer, people are turning jobs down in the Northwest Territories because they know there are no spots, and they're losing employees to other jobs because they cannot pay them outside of the wage grid. Mr. Speaker, would the Minister call for an immediate discussion with these people? Thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have heard from the YK Daycare Association, and I'm very happy to meet with them. I'm very happy to meet with any organization that would like to sit down, and they also have constant access as well to ECE, to their early childhood coordinators, and I know that the director of early childhood and learning has also met with people. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Final supplementary. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Mr. Speaker, the Minister keeps avoiding the question by saying how nice she is by saying I meet with this person and -- sure, that's great. But it's time to get the people in the room so you can hear their one major concern, the grid, and the grid it controls them, and it leads to the funding problem that they're facing.

Mr. Speaker, I ask again would the Minister call a meeting on behalf of -- or with all the daycares and their executive directors to sit down and get their one ask, help them with the wage grid? Thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to meet with daycares on the Member's terms. I'm going to meet with the daycares on their terms. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Oral questions. Member from Range Lake.

QUESTION 508-20(1):  
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NORTHWEST  
TERRITORIES EARLY LEARNING AND  
CHILDCARE AGREEMENT

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too would like to ask questions about our early childcare -- or early learning childcare arrangements. The Yellowknife Daycare Association is bringing concerns forward about funding. Day homes are bringing concerns about funding. I know the Minister is a passionate advocate of this. We've brought this up on the floor now. The issue is funding, there's not enough of it. How does the Minister intend to solve this problem? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, certainly I am hearing the words of Members this week. I am hearing the words of parents. And I am hearing the words of childcare providers as well. So what I can say, Mr. Speaker, is this conversation really revolves around the regulations. The regulations were set through extensive feedback from operators. And some examples -- well, I won't get into examples of some of those things that ended up in there. What I will say, though, is that there is a commitment to review the regulations after the first year. I understand from the Members that is there's not enough money in the system. I can acknowledge that from this House here, that acknowledgement has been made and there has been continuous beefing up, so to speak, and additions made to that budget to try to rectify that. So certainly working -- ensuring working with operators and ensuring that they understand the regulations, first and foremost, and figuring out how we can kind of work through the regulations especially that are coming from the federal government to make sure that we can keep sustainable childcare in the Northwest Territories. Thank you.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, last budget, we voted an additional \$3.5 million to support this program, and I understand that money has not been spent. Can the Minister explain why that money is not getting out to daycare providers where we intended it to go. Thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Member for that question. So there was \$3.5 million that was negotiated by Members in the fall of last year that was specific for daycare workers. Those dollars required the completion of the wage grid. As for the wage grid, the wage

grid has a reliance on levels of education to determine where people fit within the wage grid. And so what we were asked for through the consultations on that wage grid was to not start rolling the dollars out until people per childcare facility had completed either their certification and gotten their paperwork in, so some people weren't receiving back pay and some people were. So people will receive the back pay right through this whole fiscal year, so they won't be -- no dollars will be held back if it comes at a later date, but we wanted to respect the fact that there is consistent pay or desire for consistent pay throughout childcare facilities. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Final supplementary. Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know the Minister has been -- the centres are asking for that so there's consistency, and that's reasonable. But why is it taking so long to get this grid together, Mr. Speaker? We're talking about slow government. This is a year, and the money is still sitting there. So are people doing this off the side of their desk, or is this a commitment -- or is this a focus of the department to get this out and get this money spent where it needs to support families with young kids? Because that's what this money's intended for, Mr. Speaker, and it's what this House voted for. Thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the wage grid is done. It's in regulation. So the process that's happening now is people are either providing their degree paperwork or their diploma paperwork and going through that certification process. People who don't have any post-secondary education are required to complete that 54-hour modularized course that the Member and I spoke of earlier in this sitting, and so there -- some people are in the process of still completing that coursework. And as we talked about earlier, ECE is happy to also support people to complete that work and help them through it. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Oral questions. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

QUESTION 509-20(1):  
AURORA COLLEGE COMMUNITY  
LEARNING CENTRES CLOSURES

**MR. EDJERICON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I just want to say that education is a treaty right, and small communities do matter. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of ECE confirm whether Aurora College or the departments are discussing transferring responsibility for

learning centres to Indigenous governments and also in Fort Resolution and Lutselk'e? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we're working with the college, as I've said before in this House, to understand their plans for future delivery of adult literacy and basic education. So part of that engagement will be communicating with Indigenous governments around future delivery of adult education to ensure that residents and communities are supported. And Indigenous governments, I can confirm again, some have reached out to both the department and I on their future use and expectation of how they'd like to see the facilities used. So this will all kind of be part of that go-forward plan, and I really am a strong component of us being creative in what that looks like and flexible as well. Thank you.

**MR. EDJERICON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister of ECE also explain who currently owns the learning centre in Fort Resolution and Lutselk'e? Thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I can confirm that the community learning centre in Fort Resolution is currently owned by the GNWT. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Final supplementary. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

**MR. EDJERICON:** Mr. Speaker, can the Minister also commit to using their learning centre building in Fort Resolution as a traditional knowledge learning centre, also in Lutselk'e? Thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I said to the Member I'm very happy to have these conversations, but to be honest I think having these conversations are a huge opportunity for the territory in figuring out what really is needed within communities, and I'm excited to be able to kind of share with this House what that next step looks like and certainly won't be doing that in isolation on my own. This is certainly a Northwest Territories conversation and, more specifically, a community conversation, and I really look forward to having those. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Oral questions. Member from the Sahtu.

QUESTION 510-20(1):  
INNOVATION IN RESPONSE TO AURORA  
COLLEGE COMMUNITY LEARNING  
CENTRES CLOSURES

**MR. McNEELY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is directed to the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs, further to my statement.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister advise whether the Department of ECE or the Aurora College board has considered a partnership with the department of MACA school of community government to broaden training? Mahsi.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from the Sahtu. Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

**HON. VINCE McKAY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Having just received this report that was given to me by the Member, you know, it's an interesting concept. What I can say right now is no departments have communicated in regard to his Member's statement. Thank you.

**MR. McNEELY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I apologize to the Minister in getting this request in late here. However, we can move on.

My second question, Mr. Speaker, can the Minister commit to asking the Aurora College board to consider adopting a new regional community learning centre strategy run from centres in Hay River, Fort Simpson, and Norman Wells? Mahsi.

**HON. VINCE McKAY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think this is an interesting concept. I think there's an opportunity, and there's been a few brought up over the last little while, but I think there's opportunities to use these community learning centres, and I think it's also an opportunity for my department to sit down with ECE and discuss other opportunities and maybe something comes along the lines as what the Minister's statement was getting at and the document that he provided me with earlier. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs. Final supplementary. Member from the Sahtu.

**MR. McNEELY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thanks to the Minister for acknowledging that we're open for advancing forward on a model designed by community participation.

My third question there, Mr. Speaker, can the Minister commit to asking the Aurora board to consider reassigning the current full-time community adult educators who previously



taught at community learning centres, or CLCs, in small communities? Mahsi.

**HON. VINCE McKAY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just about had me confused too with Minister of education here, but.

Our community learning development centre specializes in a lot of municipal community government training. We specialize in -- the department specializes in the water treatment plant operating certificate, community government learning. So that's, you know, basically all we do within the community governance side so I'm interested in, you know, potentially sitting down with either departments and trying to figure out an opportunity to expand these and maybe working together with ECE to figure out how we can incorporate these. But at this time, I'm not able to basically commit to go to Aurora College board to take over these CLCs and anything like that. So thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs. Oral questions. Member from Great Slave.

QUESTION 511-20(1):  
SHELTER NETWORK FUNDING AND  
TRAINING

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in Committee of the Whole, the Minister of health said that this \$100,000 of funding that was cut to the shelter network had to do with their ability to do online training. So my question is, does the Minister believe that training in trauma-informed practices can sufficiently be done through Zoom? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Great Slave. Minister of Health and Social Services.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this funding was -- I believe has been around for a bit, and what it has been used historically was for training. Recently, most recently, this -- the portion of this funding was used to develop online training modules and so, therefore, you know, we all know in this House, you know, many of us have used virtual meeting spaces, virtual tools to do a lot of our meetings. You know, I have meetings on many things right across Canada with other health Ministers. The other piece of this is that this work on the modules, training modules, are fully paid for, so they will be highlighted, the first two modules, and the rest of the modules are still to be developed, but that -- like I said, those are fully paid for. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So the shelter network funding is used for more than training. It's also used for sector-based meetings and gatherings in person. Does the Minister believe that in-person connections for a sensitive sector such as this are not necessary? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My staff have just recently, as of February 7th, met with the shelter network and have reported to me that the shelter network has used this funding to have face-to-face meetings, multiple face-to-face meetings throughout the year. In recent discussion with the shelter network, the staff have confirmed that the biggest gap by the loss of this funding is around these in-person meetings. I understand that it's not ideal for face-to-face meetings. You know, we have a huge geographic territory, and the cost of moving people around in the territory has become significant. And so trauma informed training can be appropriate for virtual environments, but the department is also committed to working with -- you know, to supporting the networks to find ways for them to support each other in their communities, within their own networks, within the community networks. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister responsible for Health and Social Services. Final supplementary. Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, the building shelter capacity funding for the \$100,000 that we're talking about today was not used to develop the training that the Minister talked about earlier. That's separate funding that the YWCA secured through Women's Shelter Canada.

But my question to the Minister would be that, you know, since the NWT has the second highest rate of family-based violence in the country, families turn to shelters and safe homes more than we want them to, Mr. Speaker. Will the Minister commit to working with the Minister to reinstate this funding? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yes, this is a very sensitive topic for many families in the Northwest Territories, myself personally, Mr. Speaker. However, when we have funds with -- that we are supporting many NGOs throughout the Northwest Territories and many different sectors, we have -- you know, we look at how we're getting the funding. And one of the things that we've had to do is look at how we're getting funding and so, currently, the

department invests \$3.85 million annually to fund the family violence shelters in the Northwest Territories. Through the department, they also fund \$1.36 million to support funding to the shelters. And so, you know, there's a lot of money going into the shelters. And we can say with all of our NGOs that, yes, it's probably not enough. Every single NGO and the work that they do could use more money, you know, and I think that's the thing that we're trying to do, is we're trying to use every little federal piece of dollars that we can do, find, to support some of those NGOs. So although, you know -- what I'd like to say is that we are continuing to find ways to work together with NGOs and to support them but, however, you know, this is the funding that has been allocated for this year. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Oral questions. Member from Mackenzie Delta.

QUESTION 512-20(1):  
REMEDICATION AND DEMOLITION OF  
HOUSING NORTHWEST TERRITORIES  
UNITS IN MACKENZIE DELTA

**MR. NERYSOO:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Further to my Member's statement, there's a number of houses that are beyond repair within the Northwest Territories specifically referring to the Mackenzie Delta ridings. Does the department know how much of these houses that are not liveable anymore that belong to Housing NWT that are situated in the three communities of the Mackenzie Delta riding? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Mackenzie Delta. Minister responsible for Housing NWT.

**HON. LUCY KUPTANA:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Member for the question. His concern is my concern because living in small community, you drive around, you walk around, you see many units within the community that are boarded up or that have no windows or busted up windows. So this is something that we are working towards as Housing NWT is working within our community, working with Indigenous governments, to either remediate or demolish or modernize these homes.

So in terms of the question from the Member, we have 293 units in the Mackenzie Delta riding. 265 are occupied. We have one that is surplus, approved for demo. We have four that are approved for sale. We have three that are ready for occupancy. Four, repairs in progress. And we have 16 that require repairs. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. NERYSOO:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Minister for the detailed answer. You know, we have companies within the region of Mackenzie Delta that can conduct these demolitions. Will the Minister look at acting on the concern and have these hazards removed before an accident happens? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. LUCY KUPTANA:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I completely agree that we need to remove many of these boarded up or derelict buildings. The situation is it's hard to get money for housing. It's even more difficult to remediate or demolish older housing units. Our budget for Housing NWT is \$500,000 a year. We have 2900 units across the North. It costs up to \$50,000 to remediate or demolish a unit considering the contaminants or the age of the unit, the space within the solid waste site, and sometimes we have to ship that material south. So it could be difficult but we are willing to look at partnerships. We are willing to look at arrangements. So thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister responsible for Housing NWT. Final supplementary. Member from Mackenzie Delta.

**MR. NERYSOO:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, it is quite hard to look at removing some of these units because of the contaminants that are in there but, you know, they work with the Indigenous governments, with these local contractors, maybe something -- we can find something out.

Can the Minister commit to a timeframe as to when these projects can commence within the Mackenzie Delta region; hopefully this calendar year. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. LUCY KUPTANA:** Mr. Speaker, I'm willing to commit to meet with the Member to discuss this further. We do have funding available. It's called the community housing initiative funding. We could work with Indigenous governments or local government or bands to look at some of these opportunities and perhaps advance them in his riding. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister responsible for Housing NWT. Oral questions. Member from the Deh Cho.

QUESTION 513-20(1):  
EFFECTIVENESS OF INDIGENOUS  
EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS IN THE PUBLIC  
SERVICE

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Further to my Member's statement, the questions, how many Indigenous employees

have been hired through the career gateway program in the last fiscal year, specifically in the Deh Cho riding? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Deh Cho. Minister of Finance.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd be very happy to get that breakdown of information. The career development program -- or gateway program has been quite successful. It's now went from being undersubscribed to oversubscribed which is a problem we like to have. But I don't have the numbers in front of me. I will certainly get them to the Member quite quickly. Thank you.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does the Department of Finance track how many Indigenous employees enter the public service through the career gateway program tracking their progressions into senior positions in the public service? In other words, are we seeing development and succession for these employees? Thank you.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do track, again, folks who are coming in through the Indigenous Career Gateway Program. The degree to which we might be tracking their succession thereafter that, I'll have to double check, Mr. Speaker. I can say that only as recently as June of 2023, until then we did not have a formal succession plan within the human resources, not even a formal strategic plan for human resources. So I appreciate the question. That's exactly getting to one of the things we are trying to now do, and we do now have, as I say, a succession planning document focused on ensuring that we are, in fact, bringing Indigenous employees through succession planning so that they are moving through exactly that. So I suspect we are, based on that, doing that tracking, and I'll get those numbers, assuming they're available, to the Member. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Finance. Final supplementary. Member from Deh Cho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. What other approaches is the GNWT taking to reduce barriers to Indigenous recruitment and retention into the public service? Thank you.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we had launched a few years ago the Indigenous Recruitment and Retention Framework of it and that had two key goals associated with it. The one is to increase Indigenous representation, full stop, in the public service. A number of goals and a number of actions therein, everything from creating and

ensuring that there's employment opportunities, that there are no barriers, speaking with the Indigenous Employees Advisory Committee about what barriers they may observe, putting in Indigenous employment plans for every department. Different departments have different types of needs, different types of employees. ECC employees out on the ground might have very different circumstances from ITI, and wanted to get at what barriers this are for each department in not having more representation.

The second goal, Mr. Speaker, is to increase Indigenous leadership. So, Mr. Speaker, what I'd like to suggest is I'll commit to getting an update on where we are with all of those action items and have that to the Member or to the House. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Finance. Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife North.

QUESTION 514-20(1):  
CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES PLAN OF  
CARE AGREEMENTS

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Health and Social Services following up on my statement.

So child and family services has a category called neglect which is one basis for reporting mistreatment to CFS and sometimes results in apprehension of children from their homes. Is there a clear definition of neglect either in legislation or policy? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. Minister of Health and Social Services.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'll have to follow up with the Member. Thank you.

**MS. MORGAN:** Fair enough. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do look forward to the answer on that, actually.

And with regard to plan of care agreements, they're listed as a preventative measure and yet they're increasingly used to remove children temporarily from their homes, but that can be for up to two years. So what is the Minister doing to ensure that there is proper oversight and proper legal protections for children and their families who are subject to plan of care agreements? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, plan of care agreements are not necessarily agreements that remove children from their home. Plan of care

agreements within the child and family services are where the family agrees that child and family services will support the family. Depending on their situation, you know, I can't speak to when it's deemed necessary to remove that child from the home. If they're -- you know, but the reason that a lot of the plan of cares have gone up is because more people are accessing support which, in my eyes, is what I've been trying to say, even as a Regular Member, is that this program should be more supportive and the way to access services within this is to meet with a child and family services worker, to be assessed, to get the support, and work with a family preservation worker. Sometimes there are, you know, situations where, you know, family members may want to better themselves and they go away, and those children stay with family members. So thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Final supplementary. Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I look forward to following up with the Minister about that one too. Will the Minister commit to having her department look at implementing the UN convention on the rights of the child so that all decisions to remove a child from their parents are reviewed by a court -- that's in Article 9 -- and a child's right to be heard is applied. That's Article 12. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am glad to take that information back to discuss with the department. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

QUESTION 515-20(1):  
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NORTHWEST  
TERRITORIES EARLY LEARNING AND  
CHILDCARE AGREEMENT

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Raising the childcare issue is an interesting one, especially because we're getting e-mails real time here at the desk.

Mr. Speaker, my question back to the Minister is what -- or sorry, my question to the Minister with respect to the overall bigger picture of the issue here is what type of ability does the Minister have to reset the wage grids within the regulations as currently designed? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the wage grid for centre-based ELCC staff outlines a minimum hourly wage, and so it sets the base of what people can get paid and then the wage grid does identify if people have different levels of education that it would go -- that minimum would go up. However, any additional wages on top of that would have to be borne by the service provider. Thank you.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Well, there's a couple problems, Mr. Speaker. One is it's the grid that's the problem and the fact that it's setting a floor but also a ceiling in some cases. So it depends on where you're sitting, Mr. Speaker.

I'm asking the Minister because the money -- the funding is tied also to the grid, the funding each daycare gets, this negatively impacts those who have had different scales and are told to maintain them at the upper scales so the funding gap then starts to widen. Mr. Speaker, what can the Minister do to address the funding gap that is caused directly by this grid. Thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, the wage gap does not have a ceiling. So it sets the minimum hourly; it does not set the maximum. What it does do, however, or what the whole program does do, is it stipulates what parents can charge to families, and so that's where we're running into an issue here. It also stipulates, as we explored yesterday, that parents can't charge, you know, like, a membership fee, for example, because that fee would then have to be deducted from the fee that parents are charged. So what can we do?

There is, you know, always the nuclear option which is removing ourselves from the program, but that would come at a huge cost to families in the Northwest Territories. Right now, the contributions from the territorial government are \$13.3 million annually and from the federal government are \$20.5 million annually. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Final supplementary. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Mr. Speaker, the reason I ask for a meeting of the minds so one-off deals aren't happening, Mr. Speaker, or some daycares are being told what they want to hear but then another being told elsewhere.

Mr. Speaker, in short, they're losing employees because the grid is controlling their funding and the daycares are facing closure, probably by summer. I had asked three of them, and they were saying that's the right timeframe; we're going to run out of money. So, Mr. Speaker, when programs are being cut, outings are being cut, food is being cut, what can the Minister do to stop that tragedy? Thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Mr. Speaker, meetings with childcare providers are already happening. This is something that I take very seriously. I want our sector to have that stability. I think what would also be helpful, because it did come up yesterday and I do have more information, it was in regards to the ability for operators to have a contingency fund. There is the ability of them to have that with some restrictions, and they can identify -- sorry, there is a three-month cap on ELC ECE funding that can be used for a contingency fund. It says that the three-month equivalent can only equate to approximately 25 percent of a centre's annual operating expenses. And this is much greater than, for example, schools can hang onto. So I did want to stipulate that.

Another piece that was brought up as a concern was around fundraising. And so absolutely, there is an ability for people to -- or centres to be able to accept voluntary donations, fundraising, or third-party funding, and that are some of the pieces that we'll be exploring. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Oral questions. Member from Range Lake.

QUESTION 516-20(1):  
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NORTHWEST  
TERRITORIES EARLY LEARNING AND  
CHILDCARE AGREEMENT

**MR. TESTART:** Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, an ongoing narrative for day homes in the Northwest Territories is that they're rolling in cash and are a bunch of fat cats compared to daycare centre workers and they're being held in direct contrast to one another. But ECE's own numbers show that day homes make \$22 an hour, the lowest spot on the pay grid. So day homes are asking me why does this narrative continue, why are day homes -- the financial limitations and their spot on the pay grid not a concern to the department? I'd like to ask the Minister that. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I've never used any of the words that the Member has just outlined, neither has the department, and I see day homes as a necessary and a very much well used aspect of our childcare sector in the Northwest Territories. Thank you.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, day homes are asking for more flexibility. In Alberta, the regulations do allow for voluntary fees at the discretion of the operator, things like food, outings, late fees, extended hours. Can the Minister agree to allow for voluntary fees at day homes and daycare centres in the Northwest Territories? Thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I absolutely want people to be able to access anything that we are allowed to within the contract that we have signed with the federal government. One of the pieces of that is us being able to maintain that \$10 a day fee for families. Certainly, the Government of Alberta does have deeper pockets than us, and so I would commit to looking into that and where that discrepancy comes from. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Final supplementary. Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. It's not a discrepancy, Mr. Speaker. It's -- I acknowledge the Minister will look into it and I thank her for that. But it's not a discrepancy. It's a regulation that allows to them to do it. So they signed on to the Canada-wide agreement, they're part of it, so will the Minister commit to reviewing the regs and reporting back to this House? Thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Mr. Speaker, if I -- I guess the word I should have used instead of discrepancy was difference. I'm acknowledging that there is a difference between Alberta's regulations and our regulations and said to the Member that I would look into why that ability for Alberta to be different than us exists, and I am certainly committed to figuring this out. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

Oral questions. Written questions. Returns to written questions. Replies to the Commissioner's Address. Petitions. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills. Reports of Standing and Special Committees.

Tabling of documents. Minister of Infrastructure.

### Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 291-20(1):  
ANNUAL REPORT TO THE LEGISLATIVE  
ASSEMBLY UNDER THE  
TRANSPORTATION OF DANGEROUS  
GOODS ACT

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following document: Annual Report to the Legislative Assembly under the Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Infrastructure. Tabling of documents. Notices of Motion. Notices of Motion for the First Reading of Bills. First Reading of Bills. Second Reading of Bills.

Colleagues, we will take a brief break.

---SHORT RECESS

**MR. SPEAKER:** Consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters, Tabled Document 275-20(1), with Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh in the chair.

### Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Calling committee to order. I now call the Committee of the Whole to order. What is the wish of the committee? I'm going to go to the Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, the committee wishes to consider Tabled Document 275-20(1), 2025-2026 Main Estimates, the Department of Health and Social Services and, time permitting, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Does committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Committee, we will proceed with the first item. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, Department of Health and Social Services, February 13, 2025. Committee, we have agreed to consider Tabled Document 275-20(1), Main Estimates 2025-2026.

We will now consider the Department of Health and Social Services. Does the Minister of Health and Social Services wish to bring in witnesses into the House?

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Yes.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Sergeant-at-Arms, please escort the witnesses into the chamber.

Thank you. Would the Minister please introduce her witnesses.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I have ADM Mathison to my right, and the deputy minister Joanne Cecchetto to my left.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Welcome. Committee, we will resume where we left off yesterday. We were considering health and social services programs, Department of Health and Social Services. This key activity begins on page 203 with information items on page 209. Are there any questions? I will begin with the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So I -- yeah, to pick up where I left off yesterday, it feels like it's been years, following up on my question about programs for children and youth given the gap left by the closures of the residential treatment centres for children and youth. Can the Minister actually point to how much money in the budget is being allocated to support healing programs, treatment programs for children and youth. Is that a line that can be summarized?

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. We don't have that level of detail here.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go back to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair. I had a question about the line item community, culture and innovation. So there is a significant drop in that budget. It's about half of what it was the last two years. Can the Minister explain why the drastic reduction in that line item. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, that northern wellness agreement, that's being renegotiated right now, so that is why there's a reduction so those funds come

directly out of that northern wellness, so as soon as those -- that agreement is finalized, then that number will change. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you for that; that does make sense. Sometimes we are caught in between funding agreements here.

Okay. Under the population and public health services line -- well, it's more in the business plan. There's a note in the business plan that there will be some kind of a transformation of the public health system. Can the Minister explain what will be involved in transforming the public health system. I mean, not all the details but what's the idea behind it. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, during -- the word we don't like to use -- COVID, there were a lot of areas within our systems that we -- like, that we did not have -- that we needed to look at after going through what we had to go through and in detail, I can pass it on to the deputy minister to kind of give some little bit more in depth on what is happening in that area now, if I may, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the deputy minister.

**MS. JOANNE CECCHETTO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will also take us back in a little bit of time that when NTHSSA was established, one of the areas was our public health entity was not actually devolved to the NTHSSA from the function that happens at the Department of Health and Social Services. So some of the work that happens in pop health, or otherwise known as public health in our department, does straddle ministry and operations, and then as the Minister had noted, during COVID it became very apparent that we do need to do some work around roles and responsibilities and functions. So to transform our public health, our population health system, it really is about working with our health authorities to ensure that the functions are aligned with the appropriate entity, and so that is what that work is about.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go back to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Okay, And just to clarify, the idea is that population and public health will continue to straddle HSS and the health

authorities or that it will be transferred entirely to the health authority? I understand that roles and responsibilities need to get sorted out, but is the intention that those roles and responsibilities will continue to straddle the two? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Yes, thank you. There will still be roles within the ministry and the department as well as, you know, actually -- and so there will be -- within the authorities, there will be more clarified roles and who's doing -- and the operations and so, yes, there will be still authority -- or a department straddling of how they work together. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Is there a way we can monitor whether or not we've done a good job at this? I know there's a lot of things around reforming health care and systems that it's hard to point to a specific tangible outcome but at some point, we have to know whether we've done it well or not, right, whether we've achieved our goal of transforming the system in a positive way. Are there indicators that you can point to, or is the plan to sort of survey stakeholders and staff, or how will we know whether we've done the job that we set out to do in this case? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** If I may get a clarification, are you just speaking specifically in this -- in the public health section? Okay. If I may, I'll pass it on to the deputy minister.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the deputy minister.

**MS. JOANNE CECCHETTO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, as we -- as the Minister has noted, while we wouldn't transfer all of the functions completely to the three health authorities for pop health or public health, because there are functions that do need to continue in the ministry from a strategic perspective as an example, and so as that function is transitioning, we will continue to monitor the success of that. At the end of the day, one of the challenges, from a client outcome perspective, when it comes to population health that shouldn't necessarily be -- that shouldn't change in the sense that it's really about how programs and services are delivered. And at the end of the day, the outcomes for clients

should not be impacted by the health authority and the department determining roles and responsibilities, because ultimately the services that are being delivered to clients will continue to exist. So I'm not sure if that helps provide a bit of explanation.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Yeah, thanks for that. I mean, I guess what I was getting at was are we expecting to save money at the end of the day by sorting out some of the roles and responsibilities? Are we expecting to have more effective responses, for example, to outbreaks of certain contagious infections or diseases and can we set some indicators that can show that we will have improvements in, like, how quickly we can contain, you know, contagious outbreaks of something or other, or get test kits to communities, or are we going to be saving money? Are any of those things included in the indicators of monitoring what we're trying to do? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, within public health and population health, the main goal is to have people working in the frontline for the health promotion piece. You know, we go out -- when you look at, you know, the things that fall under there, is immunization. We need to make sure that, you know, people -- our immunization rates are up so that means that we're seeing less of those diseases. When we think about population health in that same area is TB. You know, we had a -- like we talked about, we had a recent TB break. We should be able to manage those and better -- you know, on our surveillance and so doing more surveillance. So how it will be measured is we will see decrease in, you know, communicable diseases and that goes from all of those things that our vaccinations provide. And so if there is ways to, you know -- if it is -- it's not necessarily a cost saving thing. It's more an efficient of how people are working within the system so that they're better being able to reduce those instances. So better client outcomes. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Okay, thank you for that. That is good to hear confirmation that those kinds of tangible outcomes to people's health and how outbreaks are contained, that that will be monitored and included.

I just want to turn my last little bit here to community mental wellness and addictions recovery. So does this line item include detox; you know, either detox beds in facilities or detox services offered in some other way? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I will pass that to the ADM for the detail in that section.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go back to the ADM.

**MS. JEANNIE MATHISON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I believe the funding associated with detox beds would be captured under the hospital services line, because that's where they're existing. But it is in this activity for sure. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Next on my list to speak is the Member from Great Slave

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd also like to ask some questions about population and public health services.

As the Minister knows, there has been difficulty keeping the level of staff needed to provide COVID and flu vaccinations outside of the flu clinic that I think happened here in Yellowknife in November. I've also had constituents reach out and say, you know, I want to get vaccinations for travel, and that's not a possibility right now. I think that that was work to be resolved recently, which is great. So I guess my question is how are we planning to build capacity in vaccinations? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, you know, I think with what happened with the reduced services and what happened within Yellowknife, we've had a couple of times where we've had reduced services in the public health unit and where they've had to focus their staff were to make -- ensuring that, you know, children immunizations, routine immunizations were being completed, as well as working on the TB situation that we currently had. As well as they've had vacancies. However, I do know that there are some -- they are in the process of bringing on some new staff in that area. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Great Slave.



**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you to the Minister for that. When it comes to outbreaks, which of course we don't want to see but, you know, have seen as recently as last year with the TB outbreaks as the Minister mentioned, how are we addressing surge capacity for public health to go out and address outbreaks as they arise? That's an area of concern I'm hearing about. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, the way that they are dealing with surge capacity in a situation like that is that they would reduce services and so that they can target to a situation like this, that this is a communicable disease, this is something that is, you know, potentially, if not dealt with right away, you know, and as -- I know that the Minister of Finance had details on what those costs were and how many people were involved with a case that just happened recently in Yellowknife, and so the amount of service and contact tracing and then directly observed therapy and all of those things they take -- they have to be done by the staff. And so the way that we have to deal with it is through decreasing services in some times in some areas that are nonurgent, so that is traditionally how it's done. And that's how it's done in our smallest of communities. When we have surge capacity of people that are coming in, a lot of our health centres end up -- and many people who live in small communities know this -- that we end up having to decrease services to just emergency services only in those communities, so there is no other services provided, and that's traditionally how we have had to deal with it. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. When small communities do have outbreaks of disease, how do we reallocate our staffing to adequately address those needs, and what are the impacts in the system for staffing? I realize that's really kind of a big question, but I guess I -- maybe the Minister could follow up with any standard operating procedures. I'm just curious. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I know that -- and I can speak to the region that I previously am from -- shortage of staffing and movement of nurses, movement of staff to different regions, you know, when we

have -- whether we have an outbreak or, you know, I mean, or when there's -- there is, you know, different things going on in the community, we know some of our communities that have higher numbers of staff and when they're at a capacity when we can't get in nurses, we will move nurses around from one health centre to another and, you know. And more recently, you know, we find we have to look at casual nurses, contract nurses, which are not necessarily agency nurses that go out to the health centres but term nurses, locum CHNs that we have in our rosters that will go out and do short-term contracts in the health centres to help and to support when there's low numbers of nurses in those communities. So that's how we do it. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So with the revitalization of public health that the Member for Yellowknife North was asking about earlier, will there be a contemplation of adequate staffing levels throughout the system so that surge maybe doesn't have such a strong impact on various regional centres when required? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, when we have surge capacity, these are unpredictable time -- like, when they happen. So normally we would just use the staff on hand, overtime, and other contract nurses if we can from the department. Like, we would just move people around. And so that's within this public health reform that -- you know, the nurses that are working in public health, the one thing that we only have is we only have nurses that work in public health here in Yellowknife and I believe in Fort Smith, in Hay River, and in Inuvik, and the duties of public health are -- we rely on CHNs, community health nurses, in those other communities that are health centres to do those duties on top of all of their other duties. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go back to the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just more of a comment, really, and then I'll cede my time. But I'm hoping, and I look forward to primary care reform possibly increasing this line item so that prevention is more of the equation. I hope the Minister shares this sentiment. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do apologize if I'm repeating any questions here. I was trying to follow along with all the other Members.

But the community clinics and health centres, I notice there's a pretty significant increase there. Can the Minister just give a quick summary of what's happening there.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll turn it over to the ADM for that detail.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the ADM.

**MS. JEANNIE MATHISON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The majority of that increase is due to three specific areas, two of which relate to negotiated agreements for compensation and benefits so that collective bargaining with the UNW, that's a big factor in that, totalling \$6.9 million. And then there's the ratification of the agreement with the physicians for a total of \$3 million. And then there's about \$14 million that got added to reflect funding to address physicians, supplies, relocation costs, things that the NTHSSA had been incurring that had been contributing to their deficit in recent years, and we've now allocated funding to those areas. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**MR. MORSE:** I really appreciate that. And similarly, the community, culture and innovation is cut almost perfectly in half. Can they just give a quick description of what's behind that.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, that's due to the renegotiation of the Northern Wellness Agreement. So once we have that agreement finalized, that the money will go back there. So it's just because we're in -- by the time the budget is done, the agreement ended and so we're in negotiations for the future agreement, multi-year agreement. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. My apologies, I'm not quite sure I understand what the Minister is telling us there. So this item is not actually being reduced, it's just showing as

reduced in the budget? Or can you better explain what's meant by the answer.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, so the way that it shows in the budget is reduction because the Northern Wellness Agreement hadn't been signed, hadn't been done, finalized by the time the process to have the budget and so it -- as it looks like it's reduced, there is -- there is no changes in positions or anything like that because of the agreement came after, the new agreement.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Okay, so to be clear, no reduction in service there.

Similarly, population and public health services, there's a \$1.2 million cut. Is there a service cut associated with that? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I will pass that on to the ADM for the detail.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the ADM.

**MS. JEANNIE MATHISON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's similar reasoning for that reduction. It's actually made up of two agreements, that reduction. One is health system investments where there's a sunset of time limited funding for one-time projects associated with sexual health as well as cultural safety and antiracism. And then the second one is there is an allocation in that budget that is funded through the Northern Wellness Agreement as well, and once that agreement gets renegotiated, which is currently in process, that will fix that gap there again. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The next item is just in the top line of the second paragraph there on page 205, compensation and benefits is reducing by about \$2 million. Is this, again, a service level cut of any sort, or can the department help us understand what that -- what's associated with that funding decrease. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** For that level of detail, I'll go to the ADM if it's okay.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the ADM.

**MS. JEANNIE MATHISON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. No service cuts. The line items below, the expenditure category there are just showing the types of costs that are being reduced from areas above. And so the Northern Wellness Agreement is the same answer. The Northern Wellness Agreement was actually funding compensation and benefits for positions which, when the agreement gets renegotiated, will be returned to the budget. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for all those answers, explaining those various adjustments in there.

The next question is can the Minister explain what progress has been made in investigating the feasibility of adding an Office of the Practitioner Experience?

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, we brought that back to the -- I believe the committee, or we responded; I can't recall. When we had the conversation with NTHSSA, I know that we are working on our new people strategy and so that we were looking at incorporating ways to work with all of our staff within the NTHSSA through that people strategy. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Those are all the questions I have from this section. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So I'm curious about the funding to health and social services authorities, \$370 million. Can the Minister clarify just how this whole budgeting process works for the authorities? Because on the floor of the House, we heard that the budget comes after the mains and I'm still a bit befuddled by this because we do have an information item later that we'll get into that has some numbers there, but we also have this new piece of information that the Minister has not actually received the working budget and, I

mean, this is a much longer conversation that gets into how we fund the health authorities through supplementary appropriations that get higher and higher every year. So can the minister kind of straighten out this budgeting question. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am going to give that to the ADM to try and explain how that works, and see if that helps. Thanks.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the ADM.

**MS. JEANNIE MATHISON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the process has been as such for at least 20 plus years of my time, and so this document here is how the department intends to spend its money, and it intends to spend its money by giving some of that money to the health authorities for them to deliver services. In doing that, we provide the health authorities with a target for which, you know, the money that we're planning to give them and what we want to give them the money for, then we request that they develop a budget, a detailed budget, that they submit to us by February 15th of every year. We do a review process of that budget at the same time as we're reviewing the budget and the budget is getting reviewed here in the House for the main estimates so that by the time the main estimates gets approved, which gives us permission to give the funding to the authorities, we also can then tie the two together and we have authority's detailed budget reconciled with the funding that we're planning to give them so we have the detail of how the actual money is getting spent. So hopefully that clears it up. But the idea is that the authority budgets that gets submitted are approved shortly after the main estimates are approved, both of which need to occur before April 1st of the year to comply with the Financial Administration Act. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. That does make sense. Thank you. So the detail, though, that we are -- again, I know I'm jumping ahead but it's just an information item, but, like, the detail we have in that information item, is that your estimates, or is it -- like, what -- sorry, what -- where are we getting these numbers from? Is it from last year's actuals, or is it your estimates based on what you're giving to the authorities based on what you believe there needs to be? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** I'm going to give that to the ADM so I don't bungle that all up and confuse everybody.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, I'll go to the ADM.

**MS. JEANNIE MATHISON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. They are estimates, but it's related to the work that we've done with the authorities over the year in advance which feeds into the forced growth, like any funding requests, any supplementary funding requests, those are all factored into the number that we determine is needed to give to the authority to address the areas that have been identified in the information item. So it's kind of an evolving process, but it's meant to be reflective of what the authorities need to deliver the services that they're being asked to deliver. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair. So do you reconcile -- sorry, to the Minister. Does the Minister reconcile that -- like, the line items in the information item to the actual budget that will be presented to the Minister by the authorities before February 15th? So, like, we see what's here in this book. When they get the other document, do they -- when is that reconciliation? Is it after this is approved, or does that all happen before April 1st? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, that is what exactly is going to be happening right now between the department and NTHSSA. They go back and forth and reconcile where -- like, you'll see, like if you look at health and social programs, so the allocation for the \$370 million to go for health and social programs, they will have a detail between the department finance and the NTHSSA's finance to reconcile where they're spending those dollars within this department. And so when you go through the future sections that there's every section that they have, they have details and that comes to us, and then I approve it to move forward as long as it's within all of the things that we've approved through sups that carry on into the next year and the budget that -- whatever the budget that is approved. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. And it all makes sense, the public accounts at the end, the end of the year, so I'm not worried about, like, the money not being accounted for. It's more if we are -- I guess if, let's say, we negotiate for a hundred more nurses or something like that, which is a large number, but if we say you're going to give us that and it's a billion dollars, we're having very well compensated nurses; where would you put that? Like, how would we know as MLAs that that money that we are voting for you is going to go to the authority and being spent in that way? Just because we don't have that level of detail. Is it through a specific contribution like on the page here, or would it be just grant funding that -- authorities funding and you work with them to figure out how to spend it to meet that commitment? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I'm going to, if I may, pass that on to the ADM. She can explain that, how that works.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the ADM.

**MS. JEANNIE MATHISON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And so that process that the Minister spoke about, about budget review and approval, that is exactly the process where if we had funding for a hundred new nurses and we had it in the budget when we were -- when we'd be looking at the authority's budget, we'd be looking for have they allocated the money to those hundred positions, and that's part of -- that influences the recommendation for approval.

The other thing that I think is important for us, and I missed mentioning it earlier when I was speaking about the process, is once we get a recommendation to the Minister on approving the budget and she approves the budget, we then enter into a contribution agreement with each authority that lays out specifically reminding that this is the money that you're being given, this is what the money is for, these are your reporting requirements, please submit your variance reports by this date, please submit your audited financial statements by this date, please do other performance indicators by this date. It's a very comprehensive document that kind of lays out what's required of them in the year ahead. And through that variance reporting is where we then keep an eye on is the money being spent, you know, as it was directed to be spent. And it's an ongoing

iterative process that then informs the next budget development the next year. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. So just for absolute certainty, the Minister does approve all spending at NTHSSA or any other authority at the end of the day? Thank you. It is the Minister who gets final approval of those budgets? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, once they -- once the department has done all of the checks and balances and then I meet with them and it falls within line with whatever that we have approved through our process, then -- and once I get the recommendation that everything has been checked and balanced, and then I approve it, and then the finance team does do the monitoring of that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. Is this number inclusive, then, of the public administrator's salary and compensation? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you. No, it's not.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. Where can I find that? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, the department is incurring that cost. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** And where are they incurring it? If we passed that section, my apologies. I'm just wondering, like, where we can see that represented in these estimates. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you. I will have the ADM answer that exact question.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the ADM.

**MS. JEANNIE MATHISON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the section for that would be admin and support services is where we would incur that expense. Because this budget was developed prior to the bringing on of the public administrator, that budget item is not actually reflected in here. So thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. Next on my list I have is the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to follow up on the question I was starting to ask about detox.

So can the Minister clarify whether the funding that we have for detox, is it all federally funded, or do we put some of our own money into detox services? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, that's all bilateral funding that we received.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And so how many detox beds are we funded by the feds to offer, or is it -- have we committed to a certain number of beds or a certain amount of services; what exactly have we committed to with that federal funding? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I -- to get into the detail, the way that funding goes for -- so detox would be in hospital and those would be funded positions that would be added -- allocated to -- and I believe it is the -- like, Stanton, and I think in Beaufort Delta -- or Hay River, yes.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. How many operational detox beds do we have -- well, how many detox beds do we have operational at the moment? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, the way that this works is that it's at per needs. So if a person is requiring it, now we have extra staff that we can use to dedicate that person to being able to provide detox. And so normally up until now, all of our hospitals did do this in some shape or form. They -- you know, when people were coming in, they were detoxing them. Sometimes there would be admissions when people were needing detox before going to the hospital. But these would never have been funded. So they were always just on top of being an admission into the hospital. And now we have designated funding so that way -- so when people -- when we talk about beds, we're talking about the number of nurses being able to provide that one-on-one care that might need for those residents. And I know over the three-year period, the agreement has 24 FTEs to be added for this initiative. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Okay, thank you for that clarification. And so is it understood, then, that anyone going to the Stanton Hospital or the Inuvik Hospital that requires detox that it will be available to them if they go in, or have we had examples of where there's more demand than we can actually meet with the current level of staffing and funding that we have? Thank you, Mr. Chair. For detox specifically.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, and I appreciate the questions from the Member. And I think it is -- it is one of the areas where it's difficult because I think on any given day, you know, if somebody is choosing to want to withdraw, manage, and detox from -- so normally, you'd be -- you know, you may be working with a physician, may be working within -- with counsellors, getting ready for, going to treatment, so a lot of times these may -- they may be, you know, scheduled. It's not necessarily that, you know, people will just show up to emerge and want detox. So it is being able to provide this service when it's part of their plan of care, and I think it's more of a coordinated care. But, again, like I mentioned, it is dedicated funding so that when the time has come, we are able to support that within our facilities. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And can the Minister clarify, for those with alcohol dependency, who may be in the hospital for other reasons, who are not ready or wanting to detox -- I think we had in the past, but do we still currently offer some kind of managed alcohol program to inpatients in the hospital who need, you know, to avoid, you know, withdrawal systems that could be even more harmful to their health? Do we have a managed alcohol program for those patients who are not in a position to detox? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, when somebody is admitted and they're known to, you know, if they're -- say, if they're admitted for something else, like pneumonia and all that, their history is taken into account and so they would manage their -- them within their plan of care during their admission and however that would be -- you know, whether it is through medication management, it would be part of their admission process. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go back to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Okay, so just to be clear, can the Minister confirm that we are not forcing people to detox in the hospital if they're not ready or wanting to just to be a patient in the hospital? There's no need for that because we have other ways that we can manage their alcohol dependency within the hospital; can the Minister confirm that's where we're at? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, you know, this -- you know, I think the thing is that we're getting way, way down into the details of how people are admitted. And physicians, you know, when they have somebody coming into the hospital being in admission, they will manage them according to their plan of care to their -- whatever their issue or condition is. Where alcohol management is more where we support is at the community level through -- like, only one of our programs. But I know that taking that into account that, you know, we are looking at other ways that we ensure that through our systems, you know -- and the Member, I think, has also brought it up, if not this Member, other Members, you know, when we have patients that are struggling with addictions and they are in one of our -- like, in our managed alcohol

program and if they have to travel for certain things, we have recognized that we need to do more work on supporting those individuals as outpatient but not necessarily, you know, the inpatient management of alcohol withdrawal during -- you know, the priority would be to -- if they were admitted, would be to their condition that they're being admitted for. And then secondary they would be making sure that they are managing those symptoms of their -- if they are withdrawing. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll have to follow up with the Minister later to dig into that. And just finally, switching to a different topic.

So it was mentioned a few minutes ago that some of the health -- or NTHSSA's deficit has now been allocated to some of the items on this list to help relieve some of the deficit from the health authority. How is it decided what costs end up under the health authority's budget versus what ends up under this budget; can they just transfer all their deficit to this budget and then be done with it? We solved our deficit. Like, or what are the criteria that say, no, that has to go into the health authority's budget or that has to go under HSS's budget? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm not sure if I understand the question. I think what -- if you're referring to that we are dealing with deficits because we were reallocating funding this year to put towards the deficit, so if you -- for example, there was -- when we renegotiated the last NIHB agreement, the money that we were allocating to NIHB from GNWT funds, we were able to put that towards some of the deficit because the special allotment through NIHB, the third party agreement, paid for the thing that it's been -- that we've been paying for for years. And so we were able to negotiate NIHB to pay for NIHB where we -- so we were able to keep that funding for -- and reallocate it to things that were historically ongoing drivers of the deficit. So things that continue to drive the deficit up that we were able to reallocate that funding to that so that it would bring our deficit down. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair. I think I understand if the Minister is saying that if we're getting, like, a new federal funding source, then we can help use that to bring down the deficit, and then the numbers are going to show up in these things. But I guess what I would be afraid of is that if it's still the GNWT footing the bill but we're just shifting sort of the blame, so to speak, it used to be under the health authority's deficit budget and then they solved their deficit by just putting the money under something the GNWT's responsible for paying -- well, HSS is responsible for paying for directly under their operations budget. But I can understand if it's a matter of we get new funding coming in from the feds, and we're trying to channel that money through. I'll leave that there. Thank you, Mr. Chair, for your patience.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. Is there any further questions from Members? Seeing none. Thank you.

Please turn to page 205, Health and Social Services, health and social services programs, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$446,079,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Moving to the long-term and continuing care services beginning on page 210 with information items on page 213. Are there any questions? I'm going to go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to ask a high-level question first because it may explain all of the cuts. But I notice there's about a \$10 million reduction here; can the Minister explain that. And does that \$10 million reduction explain everything that's being cut there similar to some of the items I asked about in the previous item?

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, that is the cost share agreements with the First Nations/Inuit home and community care sunset funding because we were in the same situation, like, with the other agreements. We have a couple agreements that happened partway through this year. So that's not reflected in here so that's why it shows up as a decrease. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that. So the Minister can confirm that we're not facing any service cuts this year for these items?

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** That is correct.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just also some questions on page 212. The Member for Great Slave doesn't need to point out that I was being given an unlimited clock there.

Mr. Chair, so just on page 212 there, there's an almost \$9 million -- or there is a \$9 million reduction of health and social services authorities funding. There's a cut to the respite fund. There's a cut to the seniors' fund. Are all those explained by the same answer that the Minister gave me just a minute ago there?

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, for that detail, I will go to the ADM.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the ADM.

**MS. JEANNIE MATHISON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, same answer. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair. So just to confirm and make 100 percent sure, we're not looking at service cuts for respite, seniors, or anything related to the long-term care? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** That is correct.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's all the questions I have for this section.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Is there any further questions? Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Okay, so my question is about the substance use addictions program - health outreach and harm reduction program. It looks like there was funding from Health Canada two years ago?

The last funding I see here is from 2023-2024, and to support street involved individuals in the NWT, improve access to supports for vulnerable -- we're not -- oh, I'm on page 208. Oh, we skipped right over grants, contributions and transfers? Okay, I guess I'm not allowed to go back?

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Members, we need unanimous consent for the Member to go back to the last key activity. Any nays? Okay. Please proceed.

**MS. MORGAN:** Sorry, thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm not used to seeing so many pages together in a package.

Okay. I see that that was funded by Health Canada in 2023-2024, so -- the description's on page 208 there, and then -- but there was no funding for last year, and there's no funding indicated for this year. Is that a program that we have tried to renew from Health Canada? Are we seeking more federal funding for this kind of initiative? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will have to get back to the Member. We don't have that detail from that year in our budget stuff. So we will have to be -- we'll have to get back to committee on where that funding came from and why it's changed in the future budgets. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** That's fine. I can follow up with the Minister later. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Is there any further questions? Okay, no further questions. Please turn to page 211.

Health and Social Services, long-term and continuing care services, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$66,878,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. Just I have some questions on long-term care. In -- sorry, I'm just wondering if every long-term care bed that we have at the Liwego'ati Building is filled? Thank you.



**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, in the Liwego'ati Building, they are -- the extended care beds are filled, I believe, and we are currently in the process of filling, I believe, 17 -- 17 of the beds as the funding that we have allocated -- has been allocated within that to open up those 17 beds. So the plan with Liwego'ati is to open up those beds in -- as we need to, like in sections so that we can onboard staff. And so right now the department is on -- is staffed, and they are admitting new patients into -- or new clients into -- new residents into the 17 beds that are currently there now. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. So the process has started to admit people to those 17 beds; is that what I heard? I guess I'm looking for like out of 17, how many are filled? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you. The process right now is that they are using the waitlist to go through and reach out to each of those individuals that are on the waitlist. For further detail, I know that they are -- I don't know have the level of detail of how many beds currently. I know that the last update I had where they were in the process of filling those beds. But I can -- if the deputy minister has any more information, I can, if I may, pass it to the deputy minister.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the deputy minister.

**MS. JOANNE CECCHETTO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, just to build on what the Minister has noted, each of the clients that are coming in to -- from the waitlist into long-term care require quite an extensive assessment. We want to make sure that they are well supported. And so that process to fill those 17 beds is not something that happens on day one as an example. So as the Minister said, those numbers change on a daily basis and it will take likely, I would imagine, a number of weeks to ensure that each of those clients have the proper assessment and then therefore set up with the supports that they need.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. So when was the facility opened I guess? Like, when -- for these -- because did it just happen and we're bringing these parents on board? My understanding is those -- the long-term care beds have been empty for quite some time so when do we start admitting -- sorry, when were we able to admit long-term care patients? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you. I think within this last week is when they started to -- the process of it of admitting patients -- or residents into the long-term care beds. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. So is this -- is this reducing the gridlock at Stanton I guess? Is that going to be a benefit to seeing these patients go? Because I understand many of those patients are in extended care at the Stanton Hospital. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, it may. It may take some of those ALC patients if they are currently been assessed and gone through the territorial application process for the long-term care. As all of the clients that go into long-term care have to have their assessment and go through the process to be added to the waitlist and so therefore they work with those families and those residents that are in beds that have altered level of care. So in parts, it could be. I don't have the detail of if that means all of the ALC patients that are taking beds in Stanton or any of our hospitals. And, again, it's based on their need and so -- I'll leave it at that, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. Yeah, I would like to see -- I understand this is one of the issues contributing to the gridlock at Stanton. So I would like to see any progress on getting these -- those folks moved out.

What is the average assessment time for someone to be processed -- or to be assessed for a long-term care bed? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, one of the things that we -- just so that people are aware, like, even the patients that are in the hospital that are at an altered level of care, they may not have as high needs as some people that are living in their homes and so they may not be priority. They also -- long-term care is -- it is the person's choice to go into long-term care and therefore this is one of the things that we are taking back and we are looking at because it's not only gridlock in -- I mean, they're not all altered level care. It's just in Stanton. They're in Hay River. I recently was there. They're in Inuvik. And so they're in all of our acute care facilities. And so this is something that we are looking at on how to work with those families. And I know that's gone back to each authority to work with those families on going through the process. And the process can be -- you know, it has to be assessment by the nurse and then a physician and whatever their needs are, and then their application gets -- and then I think the territorial application committee meets monthly. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Okay, thank you. I mean, it does sound more involved. And I wonder if there's a way we can work to expedite things or at least find a place to move, maybe an interstitial thing so it's not quite long-term care. I know we have that, but it's taking place in hospitals right now and that's leading to some of these issues.

Is the -- given that there's still a need for long-term care at these -- the Inuvik, Hay River, Yellowknife, does the department plan to reduce any of the long-term care spaces either through -- that's offered through the authority or that's provided privately or through NGOs? Is there a plan to reduce any of those spaces? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. As of right now, there is no -- the plan right now is the bed projections. And I know that we should have those bed projections soon. And so we'll base -- you know, we move forward as to what our bed projections are and how -- and the changes that we are providing, more home support work in certain communities, which is decreasing the need for those individuals and those people that don't need to go into long-term care as soon -- you know, so it actually helps them stay in their communities longer. So based on the next bed projection, you know, we'll look at what our numbers are,

and I'm more than happy to share that information and work with committee on providing more information around how that process works after we get the bed projections. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay. Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. When does the Minister anticipate the bed projections will be due and -- well, actually shared with Members? That's probably a better timeline. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I've been told that they'll be ready in April, and then we'll review them. And so once the department has taken a look at what those projections are, then I can let committee know and reach out to committee and be able to provide information on that. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. Nothing further.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Is there any further questions from Members? Seeing none.

Health and Social Services, long-term and continuing care services, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$66,878,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. Moving on to out of territory services beginning on page 214. Are there any questions? I'll go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, I'm interested in understanding the difference between the funding that is going to the health and social services authorities on this and then the funding that's being spent by HSS. So does this mean that we are spending on residential care, for example, \$96 million? Or can they just explain the difference between the \$97 million that's contained over here and then the \$46 million. So do we have -- yeah, I think I'm asking the question in such a way that makes sense, but I'm just trying to understand how much in total we're spending on sending people out of the territory for care. Is it actually those numbers cumulatively, or are they separate things?

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am going to pass that over to the ADM if that's okay to explain that math.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the ADM.

**MS. JEANNIE MATHISON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the \$97 million is made up of those items above, 51 of which is for residential care. And then if you come below to grants and contributions, of that 51, 46 of that goes to the authorities to deliver the out of territory placements for adults. And \$6 million -- the remaining \$6 million, \$5 million/6, is under contracted services, and that is administered by the department and it's for southern placements for children out of territory. So the money that goes to the authorities is the \$46 million and is specifically for adults. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you to staff, that does help me better understand that. So the \$46 million that we see on the other page is contained within the \$51 million so it's not a cumulative number. Yeah, okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. And that is the only question I had on this page. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. Any other further questions? Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So on page 215, our facility-based addictions treatment, it looks like the number for 2023-2024 was about \$5.3 million, and then last year, about \$3 million was spent, and then the exact same number was estimated for this year. Is this number -- does it fluctuate based on demand, or do we just have a set amount that we can allocate to this and, you know, we can't offer any more if there's more demand for facility-based addictions treatment. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, this is -- this is services that we -- so when you look at the actuals from 2023-2024 and the mains from last year, that is what was budgeted but that's not what we spent. I know that we had come back for -- we had additionally had to come back for a sup to pay for that. This is something that fluctuates. Our numbers are increasing for accessing facility-based treatment. We actually -- over the

years, you know, there were calls for reducing barriers to access to treatment and so over the work, there's been a lot of work working with different ways to access treatment, reducing the barriers, going through different providers. And so there has been more of an uptake and an increase on addictions treatment, facility-based treatment.

So one of the things that we continue to see is that our -- you know, we're actually looking at how this -- how we're doing this, and -- you know, and I think the big piece is that we want to be able to provide care for those who need the specific care, but we also have to take a look on the cost. But no, we have never turned anyone away that has been referred to services so those costs continue to add to our deficit. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So is there a particular reason to think that the number for this coming fiscal year would be around \$3 million if -- at least in the last two years, it's consistently been significantly higher than that. On what basis are we estimating this year will stay at around \$3 million? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. To the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, you know, we are looking at this and we have -- we are doing some work around this. And so the money that has been allocated to this, you know, we -- in order for us to know exactly what services we're going to provide and how we're going to provide them and, you know, we are looking at this program in particular, so right now, how it is is that it's just what was averaged last year. We are -- you know, that's what's going to be budgeted for this year. However, you know, we'll be -- like I said, we'll be looking at ways that we can -- with this funding and how we can support people. Not necessarily everybody does travel. You know, we've been providing more and more funding to Indigenous groups. You know, more Indigenous groups are setting up more facilities within their regions. And so those options, we are looking at utilizing and -- like, with working with -- those other programs that NIHB offers for treatment services so that, you know, there's more options out there, and those ones that are provided to First Nations and Inuit, people choose if they want to go to that, you know, then it doesn't necessarily add to the costs that we are. So we're working to look at all the different options to make sure that, you know, we're

being -- trying to see what the actual costs and what the needs are. While I know that this is -- it's a topic that we all have had ongoing conversations about with facility-based treatment, there is -- we're in the process as well as -- in the RFP process, I believe right now, for renewing our contracts in the south. So thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thanks to the Minister for that. That is great to hear that we are better supporting facilities or on-the-land programs closer to home that we can offer to people instead of having to go away for facility-based addictions treatment. I know for some people that might be the best thing, but for others it might not be.

I would love if we could sort of monitor this over time given that one of the priorities of the Assembly is addressing the effects of trauma and addressing addictions in better ways. So I know that it's -- a lot of these programs are offered by partners, and we don't necessarily have direct control, but out of the things that we support and fund, I would love to see some reporting and monitoring on if there's a noted upswing in people seeking options closer to home and having to rely less on southern facility-based treatments. That's all for now. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. Any further questions from Members? Okay, thank you.

Continuing on to page 215, Health and Social Services, out of the territory services, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$97,013,000. Does committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Moving on to supplementary health and benefits beginning on page 217. Are there any questions? I'm going to go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, my first question is does the department have an update regarding the recent changes that they made to the extended health benefits program; are more residents now accessing the program? What kind of data have they been able to pull over the past year since changing the program?

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, what we have seen is we've had -- what I do have is December 20th, we have 794 individuals that are registered for this benefit. And to the statistics on this is we've seen some member -- like some people who were previously on the program within it that they've chosen not to continue with it as the deductible might be more than what they were actually spending. And so, say for instance, somebody who had a \$600 deductible, maybe it was equivalent that their medications only added up to that so there was no need for them to pay the deductible to just get the same amount. So some are not. So these are things that we are -- we are monitoring. And we do know that there are 366 new clients that are -- have been added to this so that is -- that is a good thing, and -- but this program, like I said, it is in its first year so we haven't even completed one year yet, and that's not until September, and I have committed to bringing back any information back to the Regular Members and committee within -- like, within the six months after that one year just to be able to provide any -- how it's going over this first year.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So 366 new clients. So those are 366 new individuals. Does that represent a growth of 366 clients over what was there before? So how many were registered prior to the change, I guess. Because you're saying there's 794 registered now, how many were registered before? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you. Before when it was a specific disease, there were 1200 accessing the program. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair. So I'm a little bit confused if that's the case. We have 366 new clients. I'd have to do some very quick math to figure out what 1200 minus 794 is, but it soundings like there's been a significant decrease in registration for the program. So can the Minister explain what's going on with the numbers there. Is there another program that people have fallen into; can the Minister just help us understand.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, as this program is the payer of last resort and some people who previously may have had other insurances because -- and due to the specific disease, you know, they may have had one of the specific diseases or a dependent that had one of the specific diseases on that file that would have made them eligible, that person eligible for this program, and so therefore due to the way that it's calculated based on -- I think it's net? Net income and the 30 bands, then they -- you know, they chose -- maybe they -- then that's the thing is that -- and for those that -- when I've talked to back to the department is those individuals chose that it's more expensive or it's equivalent to the prescription because once you're over band, band one, it is for prescriptions and supply -- medical supplies for extended health benefits. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The next question I have is I note that the budget item hasn't changed year over year. One of the cases made by the department when this change was being proposed is that it would help potentially save money. I'm just wondering, the budget hasn't reduced, can the department comment on whether the goals of the changes for the program have actually been achieved; has it changed anything substantively, or are we kind of ending up right back where we started with a different program that's covering less people but costing us the same? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, the department, at the same time that they're doing this, they're also working on the product listing agreements, so those are medications and things like that that they're getting lower costs for medications, and so that is one of the reasons why we've been able to keep the costs down and in within extended health benefits on the prescription side. And just to also add note to the -- there are members and people that may not have needed supplies or -- so when, say, somebody that would traditionally use the extended health benefits and they were for supplies and things like that and maybe it was a big ticket item due to, you know, one of the things and they may not need that, so they may not want to pay the deductible until they actually need that. So that's what this program is. It's kind of like how -- you know, when you think of how some of our other Sun Life and you put in for your glasses and your

glasses cost \$300, but they keep the deductible, and so sometimes it wasn't -- in some of the instances that I've been told is that it was -- they just chose not to do that. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Can the Minister answer the question maybe a little bit more directly, just have we actually saved money? Has the program achieved what it was seeking out to do? I mean, the department gave MLAs a bunch of different reasons why this change was needed. I'm just curious if we've actually achieved a change, or if we're spending the same amount of money, we seem to be covering a few new people but less overall. I'm having a hard time understanding kind of what benefits have come from the change. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, we are halfway through this year, so some of the changes that, you know, that also have been taken on, like I said, the product listing agreements -- and the ADM can speak more in detail to some of those things that have happened behind -- that are ongoing alongside that helps to bring down these costs. But right now where we are is we're halfway through this year and so, you know, we're not going to know the full outcome and being able to answer all of the Member's questions until we actually have a full year of going through this and then be able to analyze any of that. But if I may, to speak to more of what other things that are going on that's keeping and working to keep those costs down, the ADM can answer those questions. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the ADM.

**MS. JEANNIE MATHISON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So currently, and as the Minister said, we're only halfway through the year, this year, and we are expecting the program for this year to be within budget. And while costs are still significantly being -- are increasing, there's lots of inflation on the cost of drugs and supplies, there is an extra effort in negotiating those product licensing agreements to get us the lower rates for all the products that are being purchased. And it is doing what we want it to do. It's keeping us within budget.

In addition, the rollout of the new program has also done what we expected it to do in that some people will choose not to register for the

program because they do have access to other benefits and weren't accessing them previously or realized that the deductible that they needed to pay is more than what they actually need to pay for their drugs on an annual basis. So that is also having a factor in helping us stay within budget. Yeah, so I think that's it for now, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So it's the department's opinion effectively that this budget would be going up if not for the changes that were made? Nodding heads is good enough for me, Mr. Chair. And I'm out of my time. So thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. Next on my list I got is Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. So in your evaluation of this -- of extended health benefits, are you going to be speaking to beneficiaries who are now paying deductibles or more deductibles and engaging that feedback, I guess? Like, is there a client satisfaction survey that is going into this work, or are we just looking for a dollar by dollar analysis? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, what I will say is that we are only halfway through this year from this -- when this change was I think -- believe September 3rd. So we will continue to -- I mean, we -- we will have the data, and once the year is up we will analyze the data, and we will look at -- like, I committed to providing to committee once we've analyzed the data on what's -- like, how the program was over the last year, you know, we'll provide that information to committee. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. Are you going to collect, like, the user experience or beneficiary experience as part of that data collection? That's what I'm looking for. Because, you know, we hear from constituents who are paying more now than they were before and, I mean, it sound great, right, that people have found new ways to lower their costs and accessing other benefits and everything's really working out really well, but I keep hearing from -- again, I have a constituent who texts me just about every month to remind me how much more he

is paying, and that's -- that's -- and that's not the only information I get, Mr. Chair. So I'm just wondering are you capturing the experience of beneficiaries who are now experiencing those hardships? Just so we can get a sense of how clients are experiencing this. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Minister. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I know that there has been -- I mean, the health admin office does deal directly with the clients and has been keeping, you know, the information that we will be needing to look at through this process. And once we get to the year and we analyze the data, we'll go forward on -- as to what further analysis that we need to do. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. Do you know how much -- like, if you had maintained the old system but added the new client base, do you know what the cost for that -- the cost of the program would be? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. No, because it's on a basis where people are utilizing supplies, they're utilizing medication, the cost of medication, you know, their prescription changes. They've left -- clients have left. New clients have come to the territories. People migrate from this program into the seniors' benefit program. So there's a lot of different moving pieces to this. So that is not something that we can say that we have offhand. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay. Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. No, that's fair. That's a difficult question to answer. Can the Minister remind me how many clients have fallen off? I know there's 366 new clients but how many have fallen off from previously registered? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you. I think -- I believe of the 1200 people that were accessing benefits before, we have 794 and -- again, and 300 that were 429 of them on the last information I have were previous clients, and many -- like I said, before the program was is if you were a specific disease, you didn't even have to go through other insurances. And so now the program has been so that you're the

user of last resort of the extended health benefits. So those that have previously been on them have been accessing, you know -- may have chosen to use their own insurance if they have work insurance and things like that if there were -- like, say, for instance, they work for the government, they will use their government insurance first. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. I guess I -- I wish that had kind of been explained ahead of time because it's a very reasonable idea that, like, the changes to the system are just using other insurance providers first and that would, I think, help sell this a lot more. But that being said, some people I know who work as public servants are still paying more. So public health care insurance plans don't cover everything, and there's still a need for these extended health benefits. What would it take for -- like, what kind of assessment would it take to lower the cost -- or to restore the benefits to the place they were? Because what I'm afraid of it is like last time, there was a fight over this and I, and other Members, were not happy with how this shook out. But the guarantee the Minister was like, don't worry, we'll look at it, and we'll come back and talk to you. But are you just -- is the Minister just going to come back and be, like, here are the numbers and we're going to continue? Because I think we're looking for a real, you know, give and take here. Like, is there a possibility that we can restore extended health benefits and take the edge off constituents who are paying more now than they were before? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm not sure if I understand the question. We still have -- everybody can still apply through extended health benefits. There are -- if they choose to -- you know, based on their income threshold and their net income, there has been things put in place where they can -- you know, instead of paying that lump sum right at the beginning, we made -- I've made an exception right off the bat that they could do it through monthly installments if they know -- like, some people, if they know that their prescriptions are -- and they're going to be utilizing this program, they can pay the deductible right off the bat, and they can do it over the year. So that was offered to anybody who provided that, and we have -- I think the last time we've -- I followed up on that that there was one person that was doing that. But that is an option and it is -- and then in the information that goes to the clients so that way if it is -- you know, to be able

to come up with that full deductible right off the bat when they apply that they can break it down over the year. So thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. Well, I guess to be clear, so I have a constituent who is paying \$4,000 more a year that he didn't before. So before the change to the program, he was paying zero dollars. Now he's paying \$4,000. So how do we get to a point where he's back to zero? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, based -- I mean, I'm not going to go into the details of the program here right now. I mean, I know that, as we said, we will be doing the review. Somebody who's paying \$4,000 in a deductible is probably at the top end of the grid, and the bands were -- you know, I mean, I think the lowest band is \$58,000 a year for, I think, band 10 that we talked about last year, and it's also based on how many people are in their household. You know, if there's -- if there's an adult. If there's children, then that's taken in account of what -- and it's based on their take home. It's not based on their gross; it's based on their take home. So that would be in one of the highest brackets I would say. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Yes, thank you. Well, I mean, I don't think we'll have a satisfactory answer here. What I'm looking at is, like, are we going -- is this going to be a negotiation or is this going to be an ongoing negotiation around, like, is this program working for our constituents, or is it going to be we've decided it is, here's the information, good bye, right? Like, I'm seeing if there's a willingness from the Minister to work to reconsider this decision. Because, again, I appreciate the challenges of health care sustainability and all that goes into that, but benefits to constituents that lower the cost of living in the Northwest Territories directly are really important, and I don't want to see them given up lightly, and I want to fight for this. So is the Minister willing to reconsider this after the review is done? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, like I said in this House, I will wait until after we see the results of the first year of the review. We'll see, you know, the uptake.

We'll be able to have the data. We'll be able to figure -- like, look at the difference of the clients that were on -- you know, that chose not to.

The thing is if they haven't applied and we don't know -- like, if they were in the old system of the -- and if they haven't applied, then we don't know what the difference is going to be so that kind of data, people didn't apply on the extended health benefits because they are in a higher tax bracket or, you know, then they -- we won't be able to analyze the data on how many people and what their costs were because that's also data that we will have to take in account. So I'm -- I'll just leave it at that, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So my questions to start are about medical travel benefits. I am looking here at the line item on page 218 of the mains, and I can see that the actuals in 2023-2024 were just below \$30 million, and then the revised for 2024-2025 slightly over \$24 million, and now we're estimating for 2025-2026 going ahead at \$8.8 million. So my question is if this is another one of those items that we have a base amount and then we adjust as necessary, or are we restricting benefits? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, if I can get the ADM can explain that. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the ADM.

**MS. JEANNIE MATHISON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So this one is a little bit of a varied answer. So in 2023-2024, we had an almost \$30 million expense, and part of that was related to getting supplementary funding because our costs were higher. In 2024-2025 Main Estimates, the budget we have is \$19 million. The revised main estimates show \$24 million because it reflects \$5 million that was added to the budget for federal funding. The territorial health investment fund allocates \$5 million for medical travel. The change to 2025-2026 is because of the negotiations that the Minister spoke about with Indigenous Services Canada related to the non-insured health benefit and where we were able to negotiate additional funding into that agreement which allowed us the opportunity to move \$15 million to address other pressures within the health care system. So that \$15 million is now funded by third party, and the money is moved elsewhere in the budget for

authority pressures that had been historically impacting their deficit. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you for that answer. I do have one more question about that line item. Can you please provide the rationale for the budget reallocations from medical travel funding to the health and social services authorities funding. Just curious how this will help with the administration of medical travel. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, as I mentioned earlier that the reallocation of the medical travel funding at the NTHSSA to other pressure areas throughout their authorities is because we were able to get the funding through the NIHB agreement to actually pay for things that were for NIHB. We have been offsetting NIHB costs for many, many, many years, and so this last -- this last couple years, we were able to negotiate a special allotment fund to pay for a big portion of that, and so we were able to use -- because that's one of the things that was a deficit driver. When we got that additional funds from NIHB, we took the money that we had always allocated extra to pay for NIHB as a government, as GNWT, and then put that back into the health authorities where those pressures were historically happening in their system. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. I guess I'm misunderstanding or misstating my question. The item on page 218 is listed as an HSS expenditure but then on page 219, it looks like it's shifting to the health authorities, so the -- to my mind, this \$8.8 million is moving from the department to the authorities to deliver, or am I misunderstanding? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the ADM.

**MS. JEANNIE MATHISON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah, so the money that's identified in the medical travel benefits line there, where it's the \$8 million, it is money that's going to the health authorities for the -- to NTHSSA for the delivery of administration of medical travel. And if you look down below the line under expenditure category grants and contributions, you see the \$8 million. That's reflective of the contribution that's going to the NTHSSA which



is repeated, then, on page 219. It's the same. So the money is actually staying within the health authority within the NTHSSA. It's just being redirected from medical travel where it's no longer needed because ISC is now filling the gap to those other pressure areas in the authority where there had been historically deficits. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. Go back to the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** So the \$8.8 million is going towards other deficits. What are we spending on medical travel? I'm lost in the sauce, Mr. Chair. Thanks.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go back to the ADM.

**MS. JEANNIE MATHISON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The \$8 million is going to medical travel. The \$15 million, that's the difference between 2024-2025 and 2025-2026, has been shown elsewhere in the budget. And I can let you know about the things that those things moved to, which we've kind of already passed over, but there are things like leases, occupational health and safety positions, infection prevention and control positions, records management, some of the increase staffing in ICU and the emergency departments for Inuvik and Stanton. Those are things that have been, for a number of years, contributing to the historical deficit in the authorities which we've been monitoring, and so they were things that rose to the top when \$15 million was identified and we were able to reallocate that funding over to those pressure areas. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go back to the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And great, I'm so glad that you're able to relieve some of those pressures. My question specifically is the \$8.8 million which is allocated from -- what I understand from HSS to the health authorities, that's always allocated that way? It was never administered by HSS; it's always been administered by the health authorities? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** That is correct.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go back to the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Perfect, now I understand. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Nothing further.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. Are there any further questions from Members? I'm going to go the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I wanted to ask just about the medical travel review that is underway of the medical travel benefit policy. I understand that there's much bigger questions to be asked about what drives medical travel, and sometimes unnecessary medical travel, and that work is being done more by the health care system sustainability unit and maybe also the public administrator. I'm not sure. But this is an attempt to modernize the policy. So one thing that has been suggested to me could help save some costs is letting those who want to or are able to book their own medical travel, book their own flights or accommodations. Often they could do it further in advance and get a better deal or, you know, just save the trouble of having someone in government do all the bookings that they could just do themselves. Is that something that's being considered as part of the medical travel policy review? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. That is one of the parts that we are looking at. Because as long as somebody -- once they're approved for medical travel, normally we'll go through our processes, and so what part of that is making sure, like, you know, anyone who's travelling from A to B, this is the -- this is what will allow for -- you know, coming up with a standard of what those costs could potentially be that we would normally reimburse for. And so I think there's -- then that's why I said it's a more of a modernization. It's being able to do things different and to allow for more flexibility but still -- but within a policy so that way it's not just going to be -- there's still going to be parameters around it, and then -- but the main thing is is that sometimes people don't realize is that any medical travel has to be approved for medical travel before they can book because then if it's not approved for medical travel and they go and they -- and then it's not reimbursable, right? So that's work that will be laid out through this modernization and making sure that we are -- we are making sure that those standards and those things are in place before we roll out anything new, yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go back to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. That is good news; it's good to hear. I think there is

opportunity to save a lot of costs in that area by allowing more flexibility and allowing people to just sort of do it themselves, not just the cost of flight which might -- people might be able to find a better deal but, you know, when the system is so bogged down and people find out, like, less than 24 hours ahead of time that they're going to travel, and you inevitably end up having people miss flights and miss appointments, and then there's even more costs piled on top of -- for having to rebook. And so, I mean, I think it just kind of snowballs the costs and added strain on the system. So I think by adding more flexibility and allowing people to, you know, do the work themselves could really be beneficial in the long run. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah, I just wanted to make one last comment on that is that, you know, there are -- you know, in one instances, yes, it's fine for those that -- but we need to make sure that we have a system in place that it is fair and, you know, and that not everybody can just book a ticket and book a hotel room. And we hear that a lot, especially when we have, like, elders who are coming from communities and, you know, they get put into a hotel or, you know, they -- so we have to make sure that this process is -- there's an equitable process for it. We also want to make sure that, you know, making sure that when things are -- service standards are set in place so that the things that you talk about that travel is not -- and there's always going to be those instances where you see a doctor and then all of a sudden it's like, no, you need to go, and so, you know, we -- those are last minute bookings, and those are things that we can't help. Just the nature of where we live. But it is all those pieces, and it's trying to also making sure as why people are travelling and when they're travelling and if that follow-up is necessary to have to travel, or can it be done in your community, can it be done virtually, can it be done when the nurses or the doctors visiting. It doesn't necessarily have to be somebody who has to fly all the way back to Edmonton because the doctor told me I needed to see you in six weeks and then you get there, and it's a two minute appointment and say, oh, you shouldn't -- I didn't realize you were coming from the Northwest Territories. So we are making sure that those kind of things -- and that's at the authority level because they're the ones that deal directly with the clients, making sure that there are checks and balances in place as who's travelling, why they're travelling, when they're travelling, and should they, you know -- and is there other opportunities within our system that we can make sure that they're

getting the services that they need. So that is a bigger piece of why it's not just a policy review. It's probably more policies. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Were there any further questions? Okay, thank you. Next on my list I have here is the Member from Deh Cho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm trying to figure out how to word what I need to say. When people get sent out for medical travel, I guess going back to how things are done and needing to recognize how Indigenous people live and how we know that when a person is going through a medical condition, say cancer or something that might be detrimental and if they have a family member with them, we know that studies show that people heal faster, they heal well, they heal faster knowing that somebody's with them.

So I wanted to ask, like, for even with -- especially for older people, is the new changes that are coming going to include having elders have escorts travel with them especially if they have to -- if they're leaving a small -- one of the small remote communities by plane and a family member can't go -- well, the way it is now is that nobody can get on the plane with -- an escort cannot get on the plane with a person, and having to come to a unfamiliar place and -- so I wanted to know if that was going to change with this new renewal because we're here to -- we're here to represent the people that we got elected to represent and not so much this government. So I would really -- like, I would like to see that, something like that put in place, that's going to be -- so our people are supported from our smaller communities in a better way. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I appreciate the question and the comments, and I know that is part of what is also in this medical travel review is the escorts, and I've -- you know, I've heard from the Member. You know, I've raised the same issues. I've heard it from the Council of Leaders. I think I've heard it from every Indigenous community that I've travelled into with MLAs. And so, yes, this is part of the review, and I know that we need to consider when people are travelling from small communities, elders, language, the situation that they're going for, all of those things, and within that process trying to come up with a policy that, you know, incorporates all of that for when, you know, people -- the practitioners that are sending them so they are clear on, you

know, some more areas as to what -- who can be approved for going. So those will all be measured.

However, with medevacs, it's a different situation. I think that's the one thing that people -- it's a struggle because when people are travelling in medevacs, the priority in a medevac is the patient, and so sometimes those medevacs don't have the room or don't have the capacity. And, you know, depending on the situation, there has been times where escorts have been allowed to get on the plane, depending on that. Those are case by case, though. It depends on the team. It depends on what the situation is. It doesn't always happen, and it's not something that we have, like, set things. But I do believe that we are reviewing our -- because we don't currently -- when we talk about escorts, non-medical escorts are to travel for that person on a scheduled appointment to get them from A to B. It's not, you know -- and that's why you look at it, the checklist of why people are travelling, it has mobility issues, language, because you need somebody with you if there's a language barrier. If it's a minor. You know, there's very few, but when it's a medevac, it's not considered a -- you're not a non-medical escort during medevac because the medevac team is the escort. They're a medical escort, and they're going to a facility. So this is one of the things that we struggle with because through that process when somebody is medevaced and if it's an infant, automatically they'll send next -- on the next flight or, you know, if a child or a minor under 18 because they need a decision maker or somebody there to help with them. So those are the situations. So anything else, like, if there's circumstances, they are measured as exceptions, and -- you know, and NIHB tends to be more exception when there's more of a compassion escort. But those go through NIHB, and then we have to wait to get the approval before we can provide the travel as we are the administrators of NIHB. So we wait for that approval to come back and then medical travel staff cannot book it until, you know, they get the approvals to travel, so.

There are many circumstances around medical travel, and I think over the years it's not necessarily that, you know, my physician said. We all want -- you know, we all understand that when people are sick, you know, but the nature of our demographics, it's really difficult. And, you know -- and I think last time we seen the moving of patients, I think it was about 46,000 people we moved in a year and then additionally to that, with escorts, half of them are, I believe. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Member from the Deh Cho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I wanted to ask if -- because we're get -- the public administrator, they're going to do -- is this a correct statement that I'm going to make that the public administrator's going to be reviewing all the policies and all the stuff and making adjustments where needed? Because if that's the case, will they be -- will he be advising or consulting with the Indigenous communities? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. If it's -- relates to medical travel, the medical travel review is actually being led by, I think, the department and working with the medical travel team within NTHSSA, I believe. So that is where the bulk of that is happening. It's not necessarily the PA. The PA is more of an overall -- works with the executive and to fulfill the mandate that's been given to him by myself, Minister. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Deh Cho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Now, will the people that are organizing the -- or redeveloping or relooking at the medical travel, will they be consulting with health care professionals and providers in the communities? Because you got to find a better way of how to work with the people otherwise we're going to keep getting the calls, we're going to keep getting the calls from people that say this is not working, this is not working, this is not working. We need to find some solutions to make things work better for the people that we represent in the Northwest Territories and the ones that are specifically, I guess, dealing with NTHSSA. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, most definitely that is -- we will -- we are going to be -- the work that we do, you know -- and I think the thing is that when people say, you know, told me a hundred times that this is a problem, we have all of that, the work is being added, every BF that every Member has sent to me, we have that as statistical data to help generate what the main issues are of our medical travel program. Also, the data that's been going into the -- like, Office of the Client Experience, especially through the Indigenous patient advocates, they have been tacking data, and medical travel is probably the highest on the list, so we have the most robust data on the issues, especially from the communities, small communities, people that are having to

travel more. I mean, you know, when people travel from Yellowknife to Edmonton, yes, but when people are travelling from small communities -- like, I recently travelled into the Sahtu. We have heard from the Member from Sahtu and the community that, you know, going into Yellowknife -- or going into Norman Wells, you know, there's issues between there and the community and getting to Yellowknife. So all that information is -- has been portrayed back to the department and is gearing the work that they're doing, so it's kind of like their -- it's their checklist that they have to kind of work within. So I just want to make sure that everybody knows that I truly have heard residents and Members of all of these concerns, especially when it relates to seniors.

We have the Indigenous advisory board that's part of our health unit that has representatives from all our Indigenous governments. We work and we hear this from the -- I've heard it from the Council of Leaders. So all of you that have leaders that sit at the Council of Leaders, I've heard it from them as well, and I'm continuously having to give updates to them as well and just where we're at. So I just want to make sure that Members know that I'm committed to making sure that we're not just going to do band-aid things. We're going to put together a good proposal. I mean, that's the thing is the work that needs to be done needs to be done, and it's going to take some time. And, you know, I don't want to rush it because it needs to have all the pieces in place. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. Are there any further questions? Seeing none, please turn to page 218.

Health and Social Services, supplementary health benefits, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$24,964,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. There are additional information items on page 220 to 224. Are there any questions? Seeing no further questions. Okay, did Mackenzie Delta have your hand up? Oh, sorry. Okay, I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So I've noticed in a couple of the health authorities -- well, specifically both NTHSSA and the Tlicho Community Services Agencies -- the amount allocated for administration, specifically, has really leapt dramatically this year as compared to last year and the year before. So with NTHSSA, we've gone from about \$13 million to suddenly \$18.5 million for administration. The TCSA, we've

gone from -- well, two years ago, it was \$783,000, and now we're up to \$1.5 million. I know that we've talked earlier about cost increases related to the collective agreement.

Is that all this is, is that the costs of administration are soaring so much -- or spiking so much higher than the cost of everything else because of the collective agreement, or is there some other reason; are we adding positions or doing something new in administration in the health authorities? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, a lot of it is within the health authority, especially NTHSSA, a big chunk of it is the collective agreement. But, however, as I mentioned before, this is the way health budget works. It's kind of -- so remember I was talking about that \$14 million and we reallocated it, and so some of -- there's other funding that we have that we reallocated to historic deficits so those positions may have not come up before and now they're actually funded positions. So they're going in as funded positions, and I -- if I may, I mean, if you want the details of that, I can turn it over to the ADM.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the ADM.

**MS. JEANNIE MATHISON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just some detail at a high level is the funding that I spoke about before around the reallocation of the \$15 million to health system pressures and the new money that got added to the budget for this 2025-2026 year, as well to address the health system pressures, are largely for things on administrative nature that have been creating deficits. For example, records management, those positions had been existing, but we had not put budget to them, so they had been creating deficit. Occupational health and safety staff, infection prevention and control, temporary accommodations for -- or accommodations for temporary staff. There had been lease costs that have also been historically contributing to the deficit for the authorities. Largely, those are administrative type things. So there is a good chunk of that money that's showing up in that administrative line. But the other piece of it is exactly as you described being the collective agreement increases for the staff that are considered administrative in nature as well. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I do think the public administrator has his work cut out for him in terms of sorting through the budgets if there's a lot of -- I'm sure there's way more things in there but, you know, that have certainly been done but unfunded, and there's sort of money shifting around. Without even changing service levels or what we're doing, there's already lots of shifting around of numbers in these budgets.

Okay. The only other sort of main topic I wanted to ask about, in terms of community clinics and health centres, can the Minister tell us how many communities do we have in the territory that doesn't even have a community health centre at all? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Nine, we have nine health cabins in the Northwest Territories. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Is the department -- especially given that we're focusing on primary care and there's attempts at primary care reform, is the department looking at how we can try to put at least a community health nurse in every single community in the territory? Is that a goal that we have; is that something we're looking at? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. What I can do right now is I will -- what I can say right now is that we are doing a review of our model of care throughout our community health centres, and I've also asked them to look at how we are supporting those communities, those health cabin communities in some of those small communities and then ensuring that they're getting -- they're getting some care. But at this time right now, that -- during that review, you know, one of the things that I've always said in this House is that we need to make sure that our most vulnerable people, and especially in our small communities -- and that does include those communities that have health cabins and how we're supporting them. At this time, I won't commit to what kind of staffing will go into any of those positions because that would be a bigger conversation. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do look forward to that bigger conversation. I think it's quite urgent. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from the Deh Cho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Of those nine health cabins that you talked about -- that the Minister talked about, is one of them in Kakisa? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Yes, that's correct.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from the Deh Cho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Is there one in Enterprise? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** I don't know if we consider it -- it's a satellite because their proximity to Hay River so if you want to consider it a -- but I don't -- the services we currently have, that would be considered one.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Deh Cho Member.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** I don't know, but I think I asked you this -- I think I asked the Minister. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think I asked the Minister about this before, but members from Kakisa have to travel out to either Fort Providence or Hay River, and Enterprise is probably to Hay River, because they don't have medical services in their little communities.

I guess I'm trying to figure out is how can they be compensated or if they have some kind of a health issue and they go to Hay River or Providence, is medical travel going to cover their cost to travel to the health centre in Fort Providence? Like, say, somebody got really sick in Kakisa and they had to drive to either Hay River or Fort Providence because they have no services in Kakisa, the person that administers -- I don't know, maybe it's just Tylenol, in Kakisa -- is not able to diagnose them him or anything or check them out or anything or -- so they make the decision to leave the community, does the person that takes care of the health cabin approve their travel to Hay River or to Fort Providence? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, we do have community health workers in the health cabins, and they have some minimal training to be able to do the minimal assessment - temperature, blood pressure, and then they will consult with -- and I believe Kakisa is through Fort Providence. And so if there is -- and if they believe that they get approval and they need to travel or they either wait until the nurse travels to Kakisa, and if they need to travel sooner than if they get approval, then if they have to drive they can claim their kilometers or, you know, like, through that process. I can get more detail -- and I think I've asked -- I think -- that's the thing is, I've asked there to be more of a clear process from the department to be able to work with NTHSSA on that process so that way we can have -- so, you know, when people are coming to MLAs or when they look for that information, that it's clearly -- the process is clear, because one time -- when people travel on their own, then -- without being approved to travel, then they don't get their travel approved, like, through medical travel. So -- and that does come up sometimes when -- especially from people from the small communities around Yellowknife and they come and they make their way here without any approval from the health centres, and then they want to stay at the boarding home and then it's not allowed because that's a medical travel boarding home. So there is -- so we need to clarify. And I have that on -- to be done.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Member from Deh Cho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you to the Minister for that. It's very important for people in the -- you know, to have some kind of assurance or to know for sure that this is what they can do and the -- I don't know if it's called CHR, the person that provides the care in the health cabins, to know this information so they could pass it on to their community residents so everybody's aware. You know, more information is better than nothing, so if can you clarify that and get that organized for them, that would be really good. Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's more of a comment than a question. And I have nothing further. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Any further general comments? Okay, seeing none. Thank you.

Moving on to seeing no further questions, committee, I will now call the department summary on Health and Social Services, operations expenditure, total department 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$704,240,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Thank you, Minister, and thank you to the witnesses for appearing before us.

Sergeant-at-Arms, please escort the witnesses from the chamber.

Okay, committee, we will now move on to the next department but before we do, we'll take a short recess and give the translator a chance to rest. Thank you.

---SHORT RECESS

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Committee, we have agreed to consider Tabled Document 275-20(1), 2025-2026 Main Estimates. We will now consider the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. Does the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment wish to bring in witnesses into the House?

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Yes, please, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Does committee agree? Thank you. Sergeant-at-Arms, please escort the witnesses into the chambers.

Okay, would the Minister please introduce her witnesses.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, to my left is Jamie Fulford, deputy minister of Education, Culture and Employment. And to my right is Terri-Lynn Locke-Setter who is the assistant deputy minister of corporate services.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Welcome.

Committee has agreed to forego general comments. Does the committee agree to proceed to the detail contained in the tabled documents? Committee, agreed?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Committee, we will defer the department summary and review of the estimates by activity summary beginning with corporate management starting on page 36 with information items on page 38. Are there any questions? Okay, I got a Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I assume this is as good a place as any to be asking business plan related questions; can I confirm that?

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Sure, Mr. Chair, whatever works best for you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. The first thing I'd like to ask about is just, you know, I see some new targets in the business plan, and I want to say first and foremost that I am happy to see those targets. I think that was one of my comments last year is that I felt, you know, we had to actually articulate what we were trying to achieve.

One thing I want to ask about, I mean, the targets are still quite vague. For post-secondary, it just says we want to increase them; it doesn't say how much, so it's -- the target is an increased, but it isn't a target, again, and in some cases, you know, the target is maintain or increase students. So I get to ask kind of an overarching plan, I mean, do we have -- can the Minister describe to me what the plan is for workforce development particularly related to the mandate commitment of growing and enhancing the northern workforce. What is the plan, because the business plan is a bit vague about it. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, the plan includes not just, you know, one avenue or one item. It includes many different -- like, a suite of supports for residents, and that's everything from, you know, our wage subsidies and supports for employers so that people can do on the job training. That also includes our wage subsidy, for example, for apprentices and creating additional pathways for people to access things like apprenticeship. It includes things, for example, like our transition to the BC curriculum in order to ensure that students are supported to get to a level of wanting and being able to achieve post-secondary as well. I would say there's also pieces of that within ITI and some of the work that is being done on that side which I'm happy to speak to when we get to that department as well. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And so I mean fundamentally speaking, do we have a plan related to this mandate item? Like, do we have -- how do I say this. I mean, are we measuring our northern workforce, determining

what is preventing it from growing, and implementing a targeted plan to grow it? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Absolutely, Mr. Chair, that is largely based on our Skills 4 Success plan. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll leave that as my comments on the business plan for now. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. This is a very perhaps silly question but on page 37 of the mains, the fees and payments line under expenditure category has gone up since 2023-2024. Can the -- and I've looked throughout the various functions of BC, and it seems to be going up through most of them. So can the Minister explain what fees and payments going up means? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, if the Member will just give me one quick second, I would be delighted, and there's no such thing as a silly question.

So historically we have an under spend of fees and payments. These typically go to costs for fees, licensing permits, registrations for workshop, development and training within the department. So as I said, historically we had an under spend of fees and payments and so that's what -- that's the difference that we are largely seeing there. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, yeah, that was just sort of a general question throughout the department, so I appreciate that.

Going to the business plan, much like my colleague from Frame Lake, I have a sort of a wider picture question. I know the department is working to revitalize/amend the Education Act. I'm curious if the Minister can speak to what kind of process they are looking at to develop that legislation with Indigenous partners. Is it going to be through the process convention that is established for lands and resources

legislation, or will it be a new process? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, no, it won't be a mirror of that process, but it will be a collaborative process. We've already undergone the part of the process where we have approached Council of Leaders and Council of Leaders' participants, many of which have provided us with names of officials who will be part of a working group that will work collaboratively with the department on that. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And when might a draft outline of process conventions be available for a review by this House? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, that's the first order of business, is deciding how we would like to work together and to give us an idea of kind of how that will look from start to finish, I'd like to be able to pass to the deputy minister.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the deputy minister.

**MR. JAMIE FULFORD:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So as the Minister mentioned, we're just initiating with the Council of Leaders and striking a working group to begin that work. We expect that there will be many similarities from what I believe the Members are familiar with when it comes to legislation -- land and resource management legislation that goes through the IGC. This is a little bit of a different and new project, and we expect that we'll have to engage at each step along the way as we're kind of striking new ground there. But that'll include engagement not only with Indigenous governments but with the education bodies themselves and others. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So is the Minister and Cabinet envisioning that this process will be perhaps, for lack of better term, a pilot project for legislation that deals with the social envelope, is it going to be more widely expansive, or is it only for the Education Act and you'll take lessons learned moving ahead? I mean, I realize this is all theoretical but I'm just

curious from sort of like a 30,000-foot view. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, certainly this is the first piece of social legislation in the Northwest Territories that will be collaboratively drafted by -- or sorry, with Indigenous governments, and so this is -- it's certainly not lost on me that this is a great opportunity to show how we can work on such an important part -- important piece of legislation together.

I also think that in order to do this work justice, it has to be done collaboratively in the Northwest Territories, and so not only is this an opportunity but it's something that really is a requirement for us to be able to move forward in really the spirit and light of what we expect not only from ourselves in this room but also what residents expect of us.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Turning to a different part of your business plan, under housing, the priority of housing, ECE has noted that you will complete a review of ECE's lands, reserves, and surplus, and all surplus land will be identified by the end of March of 2026. Is there a reason for why it's taking that long? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, not only do we have to make sure that we go out and we itemize all those pieces, we also need to make sure that we're conferring with our body partners on this. But in the meantime, we have had successes recently as far as taking pieces of land that are earmarked as ECE pieces of land and repurposing them. A great example of that is the skills training centre within the community of Fort Good Hope is going on what was traditionally a piece of ECE land that we were able to work with the community on and is now being turned into a training centre. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So identifying surplus land, does that mean there's no inventory prior to this business plan commitment of surplus land of ECE? Thank you, Mr. Chair.



**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, there's certainly an inventory but as we know, there are different ideas or different dreams that we all have of how we'd like to see land in the territory used, and so ensuring that we're working collaboratively with our education body partners is paramount in this process. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you. I don't think I have anything further for this section. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from the Sahtu.

**MR. McNEELY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. My question is related to the Indigenous Services Canada. Can the Minister provide how many existing contribution agreements is in place, and if so, if that information could be provided? That'll help explain some of these numbers that we're seeing. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm wondering if the Member can provide more information about specifically what section he's in within, and then we can speak directly to those sections. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Member from the Sahtu.

**MR. McNEELY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's on page 34. There's a Partnership Initiative Agreement - North Slave Regional Training Partnership, and it makes reference to a three-year project with ISC, and I'm just wondering if there's any more of these agreements with that particular Indigenous Services Canada department. If so, if that information could be provided. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. On this -- on that line of questioning, we're not quite there at this time, but if the Minister wants to go ahead and answer that question, thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So within the section the Member is speaking of, the only agreement with Canada is the one for the North Slave. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from the Sahtu.

**MR. McNEELY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. My next question is I recall in the last Assembly there was quite a number of contributions made by Skills Canada for specific projects accessed by a number of Indigenous governments, and I'm just wondering if Skills Canada still exists, and if so, if there's any access to capital there from this government through different education initiatives, training initiatives? But I'm really not too sure if Skills Canada still exists; I'm just curious if the Minister has any knowledge on the existence of Skills Canada. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, Skills Canada does still exist as does Skills NWT, and we make a contribution agreement to Skills NWT every year, and that's a cost shared agreement, and it is \$155,000 between the GNWT and the federal government that is provided through contribution agreement to Skills NWT.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from the Sahtu.

**MR. McNEELY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have got nothing further.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. Is there any further questions? Okay, no further questions. Please turn to page 37.

Education, Culture and Employment, corporate management, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$13,295,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Moving on to early learning beginning on page 39 with information items on page 43. Are there any questions? I'm going to go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I mean, this is certainly something we've been talking about in the House quite a bit, today, yesterday, but I thought I might be able to get into it a little bit more during budget.

So although there was an increase in the 2024-2025 Mains, clearly we're still hearing a lot of concerns from operators about the ELCC funding, the certification processes involved, the proposed wage grid. Does the Minister have confidence that they can sufficiently support this sector and, indeed, achieve their goal of

growing the sector with the current funding models given these challenges? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much. Mr. Chair, I'm going to be very honest with you, I know the Member knows that, you know, there was asks today on the floor of the House for talks and conversations, and so without having committed to those conversations and without having had them to date, because I've been here in this House, you know, it's -- I don't think it's fair of me to fully answer that question. What I can say is that with the funding that we've been allocated by this House, and the funding that we've been allocated by the federal government and under the regulations of the agreement that we have with the federal government, we are absolutely doing our darnedest to see the growth of a sustainable sector. Our childcare sector's incredibly important in the Northwest Territories. We cannot grow a strong economic foundation, which is our priority, without it. So I am absolutely committed to making sure that we have just that. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I appreciate those comments from the Minister and obviously, you know, she's been busy with us so she can only do so much with one -- I don't know what I'm trying to say here. But there's only one Caitlin. And she's in this building right now so she can't meet so maybe we should wrap so she can go off to her meetings.

But I guess I just wanted to highlight, you know, for the Minister and her staff, you know, this area's a high priority for me. Certainly growing spaces is the big one. You know, in my riding, it's something that I heard from a lot of parents about. There's a lot of people in Yellowknife, and I'm sure outside of Yellowknife, are facing even more difficult circumstances, who just want to be able to find a space for their children. And as the Member for Great Slave pointed out yesterday, or the other day, that the Hunger Games reference was a bit of an unfortunately apt analogy there in that, you know, families are really fighting. And you know, I've been hearing stories about people signing their unborn children up for daycare just knowing how long the waitlist is. So somebody gets pregnant, and they're on the list because they know that they're going to be waiting a minimum of a year to find out. So certainly we need to be working with our operators, finding out what they need, and I personally am willing and very interested

to hear from the Minister what comes out of those talks and what is needed to help grow this sector, to put them in the position where they want to grow or they want to increase the number of spaces because what they've told me is that -- you know, speaking to one operator in particular -- they were very clear with me -- we would love to double our capacity but we can't do it if we're not being given the money that we need to operate effectively. And so I just wanted to make sure that those comments made it to the floor.

I think that we've had a lot of good discussions in the House over the past couple days about this, and I think we've made it clear to staff where our priority lies on this and so I don't need to belabour the point further but did want my comments on the record. I think that's it for this section for me for now. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Is there any further questions from Members? I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. My question is just about there are active positions, so there's an increase in one position in headquarters in early learning. Can you explain what -- why that position is needed in headquarters? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, that's manager of capital planning. It came with the ELC agreement with Canada, so it's fully funded and is to help us be able to distribute the funds through our infrastructure fund that we received from the Government of Canada. And it is a term position. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go back to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Okay, thank you for that explanation. That is helpful. That's all I have for this item. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from the Sahtu.

**MR. McNEELY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm looking at the active positions page there. When I look at the Sahtu and the Deh Cho, together these two regions make up one-third of the territorial communities and we've only allowed, for the last couple of years, one position. So I'm just wondering with the amount of schools in these two regions is there any

future plans to expand on the personnel or staff in those two areas? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, so this section here is the early learning section so it is the staff that help support early learning and childcare, and they are not -- they're just -- the education section is farther along, so that would speak to those positions. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from the Sahtu.

**MR. McNEELY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll ask that question again. Yes, I understand this is the early learning section of the schools. Is there any plans to increase the early learning sections of these schools in these two particular regions? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, we were certainly looking for all opportunities to support new childcare spaces within the territory. At this time I know that, for example, Norman Wells is looking at a new space, and they've been very active in conversations with the Department of Education, Culture and Employment; and in addition, Industry, Tourism and Investment is kind of all hands on deck to see how we can support that understanding how critically important these new spaces are to parents across the territory. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go back to the Member from the Sahtu.

**MR. McNEELY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. In this area of the estimates we're talking about, the children, can the Minister expand on the upcoming year and the school food program that is being planned, maybe explain a little bit more information on the new fiscal year food program for the schools? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. So that funding would be found in the education section because it will be delivered to the education bodies through contribution agreement. So we have received that funding now from the Government of Canada, and we are in the process of putting together each of those contribution agreements with our education bodies to ensure that those dollars flow out the door as quickly as possible.

I also think it's worth noting here that there is 100 percent carryover with those dollars between this year and next year knowing that we are so close to the end of the fiscal year, so we don't want schools to feel like they need to rush out and spend all of their money in the next month and a half here and know that they have time to do that. The action plan that is driving what those contribution agreements are was drafted with education bodies, so education bodies had really the autonomy of deciding how they wanted to spend those dollars and, luckily, Canada was very flexible in how those dollars got spent within communities as well. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from the Sahtu.

**MR. McNEELY:** Nothing further, Mr. Chair. I'm really glad to hear that; that's good news. Mahsi.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from the Deh Cho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm looking at as well as the active positions for the Deh Cho. It says it's one half-time, part-time position. Why is it part-time and not full-time? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, I'll pass to the deputy minister in a moment here to provide more information on regional staffing. But these staff are to support our early learning and childcare system users across the territory, so people setting up day homes or people setting up childcare facilities. And through yourself, Mr. Chair, if you're comfortable, I'd like to pass it to the deputy minister.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** I'll go to the deputy minister.

**MR. JAMIE FULFORD:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And those -- the need for those positions is based on the workload that they're responsible for, so not having the details in front of me that would be the basis for it being a part-time versus a full-time position. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from the Deh Cho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. How many communities does this program service? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Sorry, Mr. Speaker. Can the Member please repeat the question.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go back to the Member from the Deh Cho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** How many -- thank you, Mr. Chair. How many of the communities in the Deh Cho does this program service? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, can I pass to the deputy minister, please.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the deputy minister.

**MR. JAMIE FULFORD:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the position serves all of the communities in the Deh Cho, but the workload is based on how many early learning childcare centres or the demand on that position, so what that might be telling us is that we need more early learning childcare centres in the Deh Cho, if I can put it that way.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** And, Mr. Chair, if I might add (audio).

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Sorry. The Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. These regional allocations, of course, are based on the regions as the GNWT does and not our electoral boundary regions. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Deh Cho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you. So there's quite a bit of communities in the Deh Cho if you look at the whole Deh Cho as Nahendeh and the Deh Cho together. For half-time position for all of those communities, it must be -- it really must be a lot of work for this part-time individual. So the question is if you were to add another position in there, hypothetically, would it be -- can the person -- well, right now because people -- everybody is centered in Fort Simpson, and I would like to have some jobs put in the communities in my riding in the Deh Cho riding, not so much the whole of the Deh Cho but is there a possibility for that to happen if should there be another position put in place? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, as like with every department, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment also adheres to the remote work policy and if there was an opportunity to staff a position and it could be done from another place, then the department would certainly consider it.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from the Deh Cho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Nothing further, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay. Thank you. Any questions from Members? I'm going to go to the Member from Monfwi.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** We know that early learning is very important in -- especially in small communities because the education outcome is really poor. It's not good. It's not good compared to the larger regional centres. So I see here for 2023 to current, there's a huge jump for grants and contributions. If the Minister can explain why there's a huge increase.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, those are tied to our Canada-NWT Canada-wide early learning and childcare agreements, and both the childcare agreement that handles wage subsidy and operations costs and also the one for the infrastructure funding, and those dollars flow directly from education, culture and employment into day homes or childcare centre providers. So those are the grants and contributions that are happening as directly to the childcare providers.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Monfwi.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** I know that in the regional centre they have -- you know, like, listening to my colleagues, there's a lot of issues with early learning and childcare, especially childcare, you know. I, you know, listening to them, there's a major issue. So how much of this are being spent in the regions? Like, for example, the region I represent and there's the Deh Cho, Sahtu, and Delta, because we've all been saying that, you know, education outcome is not really that good and then early learning is really important. Is there a breakdown somewhere in the budget where

how much of that money is being spent to the region? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, any licensed operator of an early learning or childcare facility, whether it's a day home or a daycare, would have access to this funding. And I should say this, the grants and contributions also does include the \$3.5 million that was negotiated by Regular Members in the fall, and so that money is included in there as well. I have -- I don't have a breakdown that would tell me exactly what portion of that is going to Tlicho on hand with me here today but can say that, you know, anywhere where there's a licensed childcare provider, they're receiving funding from this pocket. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Monfwi.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Similar to what my colleague said about the Deh Cho and Sahtu, they have position for the active positions, and there's nothing here shown for Tlicho. Is it because of the agreement between GNWT and Tlicho government with regarding staffing?

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the individual who would be my subject matter expert on that one is waiting in the dark little room to my right.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Can I ask the Sergeant-at-Arms to switch the witnesses from the dark room.

Thank you. Thank you for switching out the witness. And I'm sorry for keeping you in the dark. I'd like to go to the ADM.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, and as the ADM was coming into the room, she did mention to me that those staff are housed in the North Slave office. So that would be here in Yellowknife.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Member from Monfwi.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Is there any plan in the future, maybe within this, to transfer any of those positions to Tlicho region? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, at this point there's no specific plan to move staff around to regions. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Monfwi.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Well, thank you, that's good to know. But you know and I know and the ADM does know about the education outcome in small communities, and especially in Tlicho region, you know, and we've been saying that, and the early learning is very important. So it would be nice in the future to see if we can have one of -- or a position from North Slave region be transferred to Tlicho region. Yeah, but here you identify regional allocations and Tlicho region, you identify Tlicho region so it would be nice if we can have one of the -- this position transferred to Tlicho region. Or if not, give the position to Tlicho government because they are dealing with early learning and childcare too as well. That's more of a comment, so it's up to her.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Minister to her comment.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** I absolutely heard the Member and very much appreciate her comment.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. Any further questions? Okay, I'm going to go back to the Member from Monfwi.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Okay. So if you agree with me, then hopefully next fiscal year we will see one of these North Slave region -- North Slave positions transferred to Tlicho region, in the near future, within the lifetime of this 20th Assembly. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, as I said, appreciate the Member's comment. As far as staffing that's not something that we, as Ministers, you know, ask for that to be moved around, but certainly the deputy minister and the assistant deputy minister are here as well. The positions do work to serve multiple communities. There are three early childhood consultants in Yellowknife, and they are responsible for visiting Tlicho communities and my understanding is they do visit frequently. And these are staff who help set up daycares, help set up day homes, and I understand through conversations with the Member, even in our last Assembly about the childcare facility that is in Behchoko, that is very well used by members of the community, and

the Member does speak very highly of that facility.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. Is there any further questions from Monfwi?

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** I'm sure my colleague over here from traditional use Nedhe-Wiilideh would probably see -- like to see one of those positions in his riding, and I would like to see one in my riding, and then I think there's only, like, Yellowknife. Yellowknife is supposed to be a headquarter. But I would like to see one of those positions, and I'm sure he would like to see one in his riding as well, so. And, you know, I mean, this is a really important for early learning, especially for children in JK. We will benefit. Our students will benefit from it. So that's why I'm just asking that. I think we need -- I would like to see those positions transferred to outside of Yellowknife. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay. Go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I've certainly heard the Member. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Any further comments from the Member from Monfwi?

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Here the part-time, we don't even have anything for part-time too as well. We have full-time but nothing for part-time. And even for North Slave, you know, like there's nothing there. So it would be nice if there was something, like even part-time, instead of a visiting worker. We just need somebody there long term to help improve the education outcome for our students. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Go back to the -- do you want to respond?

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** No, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I've heard the Member in regards to staffing concerns. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Any further -- that's it? Okay, thank you. Any further questions? Seeing none. No further questions, please turn to page 40.

Education, Culture and Employment, early learning, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$35,894,000. Does committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Moving on to education beginning on page 44 with information items on page 48. Are there any questions? I'm going to go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, my first question is for the first line item on page 45 here, junior kindergarten to grade 12 education system services. I note that it's declined in the past three years from \$10 million all the way down to \$4 million. So can the department explain to us what is the story with these cuts over subsequent years?

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, you see quite a large difference here, and what is it is there's a sunset of the education renewal and innovation ERI funding. There's also -- we used to do training where we would fly classroom assistants from small communities into Yellowknife to do training together. And what we learned from education bodies is that was very disruptive to the students that they were, in fact, supporting in the classroom so we switched to a virtual model. We also have -- sorry, just quickly looking here.

Oh, sorry, we also do have the mental health and wellness, the school-based mental health and wellness that used to be found in here, and has subsequently been moved to another line item.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. My next question is related to the next page, on page 46 here. Aurora College transformation I notice we've also subsequently declined that item. And as we knew, MLAs kind of negotiated extra money into there, and now it is gone.

So the first question is not actually about the cut. Mr. Speaker -- or sorry, Mr. Chair, when is transformation of Aurora College to a polytechnic expected to be complete? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, the Aurora College mandate -- well, I believe, has now gone out. I believe it's all in our in-boxes. Thank you very much. And so that mandate agreement commits Aurora College to 2027.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Just a reminder, I'm just a chairman, so anyway. Thank you. I'm going to go back to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** No one thinks any less of you for it, Mr. Chair.

So knowing that we've got a number of years left, I feel like it's very obvious to point out that we're in 2025, and yet the funding has been completely cut. And so if the transformation is not scheduled to be complete for another two years, what is going to be funding the transformation and how are we going to be successful? How is the Minister ensuring that we are setting this institution up to succeed this time knowing that we already missed the rollout date of 2025 that was supposed to happen? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, I'm -- the funding was not cut. There's still very much a line item in there for post-secondary.

In regards to what was cut, there was a subset of the Aurora College transformation initiative, and that was funding from CIRNAC. There was also funding that then through budget negotiations that Members did put back in, so it nearly matched the sunset of funding from CIRNAC. So CIRNAC sunset was \$581,000, and then Members negotiated \$500,000 for it.

In that line item, there's also a carry forward of building Skills 4 Success of \$100,000. There's also some amortization adjustments. And there is in addition to that some reductions in adult literacy as well.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I think, you know, I could go on and on about the Aurora College, but maybe we'll save that for some Members' statements in the next couple weeks.

Because I do -- I am genuinely curious, knowing that the mandate's out, to question the Minister about how they plan for that to be successful this time considering the previous mandate did not succeed.

The literacy funding item, I notice there's a fairly significant cut, and that seems to be over and above the closure of the community learning centres. So, overall, adult literacy is taking some big hits in this budget. Can the Minister

explain to us the rationale for this? Is this a program that wasn't succeeding? Has the Minister's department simply given up on adult literacy? What are we trying to achieve with this cut here? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Mr. Chair, adult literacy is very much still within the mandate of the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. This cut was due to fiscal sustainability, but this is an opportunity that we are taking to review adult literacy and basic education across the territory and how that funding was being used. We still have contribution agreements, like I've spoken about on the floor of the House, in the life of this sitting here to NWT Literacy, and then we also do have our literacy fund that are still available to communities and to community organizations, but we will be conducting a review of adult literacy and basic education in the life of this Assembly.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go back to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And the way it's described in this -- in the budget is funding to organizations to deliver literacy programs. So what organizations specifically are losing out with this cut?

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to pass to assistant deputy minister Barnett-Aikman.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the ADM.

**MS. SHANNON BARNETT-AIKMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Apart from that reduction, we do fund literacy initiatives through the NWT Literacy Council at roughly \$900,000, to the NWT Disabilities Council at \$200,000, to Inclusion NWT at \$85,000, and also provide funding to the broader community literacy development fund which provides financial assistance to community organizations to deliver locally developed programs that are responsive to their residents' needs.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So just to be clear, were staff listing the organizations that are losing money this year? Is that -- she kind

of characterized it as those are the organizations we fund; I was asking who is losing money.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, that would just be Aurora College.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Member from Great Slave -- sorry, Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a lot of lakes around here; it's easy to mix them up.

The other question that I have Mr. Speaker -- or sorry, Mr. Chair, is other post-secondary institutions. So there's funding for College Nordique and the Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning. I note that there is no funding in that line item this year. Does this mean that we are not making any contributions to Dechinta or College Nordique, or is there more to that story? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, we have made contribution agreements for years now to College Nordique and Dechinta, but they're unfunded, so you wouldn't find them in line items here because we just see the value in them, and we find ways to make it work. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Maybe the Minister could help enlighten me as to how we come up with money for something that is unfunded and if we are coming up with that money, why on earth are we not simply just putting it in the budget? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, in order to do something like that, what I would be -- and stop me any time if somebody else would like to take this one. But I would have to go to FMB and specifically request for those line items if I wanted to do it where it appeared in the budget on its own line items. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, with the last minute that I've got here, maybe perhaps what I'll do is, you know, I thought the Member for Yellowknife North made an excellent case for Dechinta in her Member's statement the other day, and certainly I met with this organization, and what the -- what the president of that organization highlighted for me is just that any money that went to Dechinta, particularly in additional money, the things that they could do with dedicated funding would be to employ elders, employ educators, but in particular people -- knowledge holders, Indigenous knowledge holders, up and down the Mackenzie Valley. And I think that is exactly the kind of thing, that kind of employment, that many members from our communities speak to. So I think that the payoff for funding Dechinta would be huge, and I think it would be dollar for dollar a very good investment, so I just want to make that case. I should probably do a Member's statement of my own on it. And I'm out of time. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. Next on the list I have is the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Earlier the Minister highlighted that the wellness counsellor is -- the wellness program for school-based mental health and wellness counsellors is captured in this activity. Could she tell me which line item that would be? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much. Sorry, just one moment, please.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** (audio) back to (audio).

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to make sure that I was telling truths over here. It's found in the inclusive schooling line item.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go back to the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Great, thank you. That's what I anticipated, but I just wanted to make sure. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

So as the Minister knows, as all Yellowknife MLAs know, there is great interest in our communities' schools around this program and its success. So can the Minister tell me how many schools in the NWT have these programs and what the uptake is? Thank you, Mr. Chair.



**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, every single school in the Northwest Territories participates in this program in one form or another. So if the Member wants further details, I'd be more than happy to share them.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay. Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Yes, thank you. If the Minister has maybe high level data around the percentage of students that are accessing this program, that would be great. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, the way that it was restructured was that 55 percent of the funding would come from education, culture and employment, and that funding was focused on things like wellness support workers or personal support workers, or it could be through Indigenous counsellors within schools. It was really up to the schools to determine what that looked like at the end of the day. The only ask from ECE is that there was component -- a component of prevention that was within it and so that it wasn't exclusive to clinical care for one-on-one experiences, that mental health really does become a part of the whole education experience for students that we're talking about it, that we are educating students and making them aware that absolutely everybody has mental health because we all have brains and so we all have an onus to take care of our brains, just like we take care of our bodies. And so it would in that case really be 100 percent of the student body in some way, shape, or form. As far as numbers for the clinical side of it, that would come from health and social services. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I can appreciate that, and it's nice to have a wholistic approach for all children and teens going to school.

I guess, then, my question becomes, you know, how are we measuring the success of these programs and how will we know that they're accomplishing what we want them to be doing which is, you know, helping our youth with their mental health and as -- I know as the Minister has heard, it's not the greatest right now, so. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So when I sit down with education bodies, we always talk about this program every time I'm in front of them. This program is incredibly important to me, and I also see this program as a living program because as we change and as our demographic changes and as our student body changes over the years, the needs are very clearly going to change as well. So I think it's important that we continue to talk about this program and that it continue to evolve.

And so this year, we're working with education bodies to collect more detailed data on specific types of programs that they are running and specific groups of students that they're working with. So while, you know, there might be larger themes that schools are looking at, they also might have initiatives through smaller group work that they're doing as well, so really working to, after this year, create a baseline that we have in the Northwest Territories and base some of our measurements on that baseline that we're in the process of creating because, as the Member knows, we've just made these adjustments to the program so we need to start with a new baseline. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And, yeah, I appreciate that. It's important to know where we're starting so we can know where we're going.

When does the Minister feel that she might have that baseline a little bit more on firm ground? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, the school year ends in June but, of course, it takes time for schools to be able to compile data. They've got a lot of data that we are starting to share now. And so we're looking at working towards early next school year for that type of baseline. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go back to the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that, and I look forward to when the Minister can share that information with this side of the House.

Just really quickly, and because I think nobody necessarily asks about it but it's something I'm very passionate about, can the Minister tell me is -- public library services, are they -- is usage staying static; are we expanding programs and services? What's the story that she can tell about our public library system in the Northwest Territories? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I'd love to pass to the assistant deputy minister, and if the Member wants more detailed information, always happy to have offline conversations with the Member or we can follow up depending on where the questions go. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the ADM.

**MS. TERRI-LYNN LOCKE-SETTER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, thank you for the question. Public libraries are continuing to move along as they typically have. We continue to offer the variety of programs that we have offered in recent years. There is some internal conversation beginning in terms of how do we expand recognizing the more digital age that we continue to live in. Nothing that's reflected necessarily in the mains binder but just in terms of how do we look to expand services recognizing the service technologies that are available today that weren't even five years ago. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And, yeah, just correct me if my understanding is incorrect, but it's my understanding that the city of Yellowknife is really the only public library in the Northwest Territories -- has the only public library in the Northwest Territories that is not funded by this line item. So every other public library is funded in this line item, is that correct? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I might need to follow up unless -- we will follow up with the Member on that one, and we will have to bring back that information. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go back to the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, that was my lived experience as a library staff at the city of Yellowknife many, many years ago. I'm pretty sure it's still the same, but I could be wrong.

So I guess my question, then, becomes if we want to expand public library services and really, you know, make sure we're supporting literacy in every facet of our territory, including adult literacy, of course how we expand those services and how we deliver those services, I think is a really great question to be engaging with the NWT Association of Librarians, and I would really encourage the Minister to speak with that group if she hasn't already. And that's my soapbox for the moment. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. Next on my list is the Member from the Deh Cho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Looking at the mental health, you said it's part of inclusive schooling. How many mental health workers are in the Deh Cho region for the schools? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, the -- sorry, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

So if the Member is looking for information on the clinicians, that would be with health and social services, and then in regards to staffing from the ECE side, we have a number of positions. We have a regional mental wellness coordinator. And then in Fort Providence, we also have a mental wellness student support worker and an Indigenous health and wellness worker. And then in Kakisa, we have staffing in progress for an Indigenous health and wellness elder. And, sorry, just the way it is -- in K'atlodeeche, there is a contracted counselling services in place, but there's also staffing in progress for a wellness worker. And then in -- did I miss -- no, I think I'm good. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to Member from the Deh Cho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Okay, that's good. I was looking for that, because we did have one in Fort Providence before, and she left, and I thought -- I wasn't sure if there was one hired since then, and that's good if there has been because it's very important for the children at the school to have some kind of mental supports if, you know -- in the smaller communities, we're dealing with a lot of

negative impacts, and these impacts must be affecting the children that are going to school which affects their education levels and stuff. So the mental health piece of it is very important for the communities.

I guess I wanted to know -- but as long as -- like, there's one there. So the other question I had was for -- I don't know if we're on that one yet but treaty simulation, what is that?

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, that is funding that was awarded to the Gordan Foundation. And treaty simulations are an experience that allow participants to negotiate and implement treaties firsthand to -- sorry, to understand what it would be like to do that and to participate in that. And so they're learning from treaty experts, making new connections. It's often youth working together. So it was a grant afforded to Gordan Foundation to be able to carry out this work. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Member from the Deh Cho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So it doesn't look like it's funded anymore, correct? Because it says the actuals from 2023-2024 is 26, and then it goes from the mains there's nothing, nothing, nothing. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So it was a one-off grant that was awarded to the Gordan Foundation to help support work that they did, and they participated in experts -- sorry, they supported youth to participate in that program, and they had experts from the territory as well that had experience in treaty negotiations sit at the table with these youth and were able to do this. It was done in 2023 and a pretty remarkable experience for these youths. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from the Deh Cho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Like, you said it was really remarkable thing to do and it would be good for the kids to know, in the North, what the treaties are and how they work. So is there future plans to have it -- to do something like that again or to get some more funding for that? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, it wasn't ECE that organized it. It was the Gordan Foundation that organized this work. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go back to the Member from the Deh Cho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you. I don't have any more questions. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Monfwi.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you. Inclusive schooling, there's a change in -- from previous to upcoming budget. If the Minister can explain why there's an increase. I mean, it is good, but I just -- I think I would like to know why, if the Minister can explain why there's a change within the budget.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, within that line item, we had the movement of our school-based mental health and wellness over -- that was moved -- that was previously in our junior kindergarten to grade 12 education system services, and it was moved down into the inclusive schooling section, and then in addition to that, we also have adjustments due to the UNW and the NWTTA collective agreements. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Monfwi.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** (audio) section. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** You're good? Okay. Thank you. Is there any other Members? I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I wanted to start by just following up on my colleague's line of questioning from Great Slave on the school-based mental health counsellors.

So can the Minister confirm, is the program now set -- I know there was a lot of changes, a lot of flux happening for a while because it was changed rather suddenly at the beginning of a school year -- I guess it was probably the beginning of the school year for 2023-2024, and so there was a lot of kind of not knowing what it was going to look like next, how it was all going to shake out. Is it fully shaken out now? Is it like what we see now is what we're

going to get for school-based mental health counsellors, or is it still a work in progress? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, the program is settling in to where it's at right now but as I explained as well to the Member for Great Slave, I think it's important that we always have a dialogue with education bodies to understand how the program is rolling out. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. Go back to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Okay, thank you for that. And we can follow up further at a later time about that program.

But I also wanted to talk about the line item for the teachers' association, NWTTA professional improvement. Looks like there's a tiny decrease in that, and I wondered if the Minister can explain whether there have been any reductions related to NWTTA professional development or improvement? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So this line item here, there's no reductions. It's related to -- sorry, student enrolment, I believe, and -- but there's no reductions in it.

Thank you. I just wanted to add to that. It is tied, though, to teacher salaries. And so if, say, a teacher has more years of experience then they would be in a higher salary grid, and so that would see some fluctuation there.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go back to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Now, I'd heard directly from the teachers' association that they were concerned about ECE kind of whittling away at professional development and mentorship opportunities for teachers. And I'm not sure exactly where that might show up in this budget but they mentioned, for example, the New to the North orientation. So teachers that are coming up here and new to the North, they got a more sort of in-depth orientation to the North and helped them get settled in which would be good for the teachers themselves to have a welcome -- a warm welcome and also really good for communities that they might

become based in for them to have a better orientation and sense of the North and its history and its people.

Another one mentioned was the education leadership program. Specifically, that's for principals and that being whittled down.

And they also mentioned that the mentorship program for new teachers or teachers who are just starting out in their careers as being whittled away so that the program no longer pays for substitute teachers, so they have to kind of do it on their own time.

Can the Minister speak to any of those kind of reductions in opportunities for teacher professional development. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, for that level of detail and to be able to kind of give the Member a really robust response, I'd like to pass to the assistant deputy minister, please.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to ADM.

**MS. TERRI-LYNN LOCKE-SETTER:** Thank you. For that mentorship, that was always internally within ECE. It doesn't have a specific budget line. And we did see reductions from the portion of the budget through fiscal sustainability that did fund that particular program. That said, we do continue to provide some funding to education bodies but, ultimately, they -- it is the money that is awarded to them through the specifics of the collective agreement. So it's only the departmental reduction that has taken place. What that means, though, is that education bodies then have a bit more autonomy in how they are supporting new teachers in that mentorship approach in line with the budgets that they have available at the regional level. They can still use various professional development days for closures, strengthening teacher, instructional practice, school closed days for students as well. Those are all available options that education bodies are sometimes accessing to ensure that there's noncontact or noninstructional time when new teachers are able to work with their mentoring more experienced teacher.

The New to the North educators conference is the conference that typically was done in person to support new hires who were typically coming into the NWT from outside of our jurisdiction. The budget for that was -- did sunset due to the particular education renewal

initiative is where that was funded through, and that money did sunset. However, we do acknowledge that that is a fairly valuable experience and are currently looking at how to possibly pivot to provide that through a virtual mechanism in some way that is meaningful. That is also true of the education leadership program which is a requirement in our Act for NWT principals, and that program continues to be offered through a hybrid approach of in person and online. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair. It does seem like this is a common theme of switching, where possible, in-person programs and opportunities to online and, you know, there's a bigger debate to be had there. I know that we do need to save on travel costs, which are getting increasingly expensive, but that some things, they're -- it's hard to replace the value of face-to-face interactions, especially when people are just meeting each other for the first time.

So thanks for that information, though. I wanted to ask about the northern distance learning under grants and contributions. It looks like this has been implemented in partnership with the Beaufort Delta Division Educational Council. And I know the money being offered is the same as last year but it looks like there was a significant cut from the year before, from 2023-2024. Can the Minister explain whether -- like, what happened between 2023-2024 to lead to that reduction and why that's sort of being maintained. Was something exceptional happening in 2023 that required the increase in funding, or are we just doing the program at a lower scale now indefinitely? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So Mr. Chair, there's a few things within that line item. The first is a sunset of funding through the education renewal and innovation funding. And then there is also -- sorry, cost savings that we realized through a change in the technology platform that we're using. And then we also, just in similar to the conversation we've just had about teachers, there was a bridging experience program that was part of this, and that there was also rolled back to a virtual experience in order to try and really extend our dollars as far as possible.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go back to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Okay, thanks to the Minister for that explanation.

Next I'm wondering what is happening -- if she can similarly explain what's happened with minority language education and instruction. Again, I understand that the amount for this year is the same as last year but, again, there was a reduction from the previous year, so I'm just wondering where that program is at. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I'm just pulling this up here, so Mr. Chair, the actuals were higher because of the sunset of complementary funding from the Canada-NWT cooperation agreement on minority language education and second official language instruction. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Okay, I can leave that for now. And just, finally, under the JK to 12 education system services, it's still hard to understand why there's such big fluctuations in that number. Like, 2023-2024 was over \$10 million. Now we're looking at \$4.8 million. It was \$6.5 million last year. Is this due to changes in enrolments, like school funding formula, or can the Minister try to explain better why there's such big fluctuations in that line item. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, there is quite a significant number that's under the actuals that's not reflected in the following years. And so what we're seeing there, and the reason that the subsequent numbers are so different, is there is \$2 million -- sorry, lowered by \$2 million due to sunset of education renewal and innovation funding. And then there's also fiscal sustainability reductions, and those fiscal sustainability reductions were what I was referring to with that switch to virtual training. And then there's -- there was also a significant overspend in that year due to unfunded litigation costs. So we do, once in a while within the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, go to court. There's also some teacher certification rulings as well as unfunded

position costs as well associated and involved in that actual figure. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I move that the chair rise and report progress.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Sorry, I just want to read in the section and I'll come back to you in a second.

No further questions, please turn to page 45. Education, Culture and Employment, education, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$250,985,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you again, Mr. Chair. I move that the chair rise and report progress. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay. There is a motion on the floor to report progress. The motion is in order and non-debatable. All those in favour? All those opposed? Motion carried.

---Carried

I will now rise and report progress.

Sergeant-at-Arms, please escort the witnesses out of the chamber. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Report of Committee of the Whole. Member from the Tu Nedhe-Wiliideh.

### Report of Committee of the Whole

**MR. EDJERICON:** Mr. Speaker, your committee has been considering Tabled Document 275-20(1) and would like to report progress. And Mr. Speaker, I move the Report of the Committee of the Whole be concurred with. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiliideh. Can I have a seconder? Member from Frame Lake. All in favour? Opposed? Abstentions?

---Carried

Reports on the Committee of the Whole. Third reading of bills. Orders of the day, Mr. Clerk.

### Orders of the Day

**DEPUTY CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Harjot Sidhu):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Orders of the day for Tuesday, February 25th, 2025, at 1:30 p.m.

1. Prayer or Reflection
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
5. Replies to the Budget Address (Day 7 of 7)
6. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
7. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
8. Returns to Oral Questions
  - Oral Question 475-20(1), Budgeting Process for Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority
9. Acknowledgements
10. Oral Questions
11. Written Questions
12. Returns to Written Questions
13. Replies to the Commissioner's Address
14. Petitions
15. Tabling of Documents
16. Notices of Motion
17. Motions
18. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
19. First Reading of Bills
20. Second Reading of Bills
21. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters
  - Bill 12, Business Day Statute Law Amendment Act
  - Tabled Document 275-20(1), 2025-2026 Main Estimates
22. Report of Committee of the Whole
23. Third Reading of Bills
24. Orders of the Day

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Clerk. This House stands adjourned until Tuesday, February 25th, 2025, at 1:30 p.m.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 7:41 p.m.

