



**Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee Report
28-20(1): Report on Bill 27: An Act to Amend the Protection Against Family Violence Act**

Background

Bill 27: An Act to Amend the Protection Against Family Violence Act received assent in the Northwest Territories (NWT) Legislative Assembly on October 31, 2025. The *Protection Against Family Violence Act* (the “Act”) provides protections to residents of the Northwest Territories who are threatened with, or victims of, family violence. The Act defines what constitutes family violence and identifies who can apply for Emergency Protection Orders which can be obtained 24 hours a day, seven days a week from a Justice of the Peace who is satisfied that family violence has taken place or that there is an immediate danger of family violence. The Act also allows for Protection Orders, more long-term orders that are available from the Supreme Court after family violence has occurred.

The Standing Committee on Social Development (the “Standing Committee”) conducted a review of Bill 27 and tabled its subsequent report in the Legislative Assembly on October 23, 2025. In addition to the motions to amend the Bill outlined in the report, Standing Committee also made 15 recommendations that largely fall outside the scope of this legislative initiative. The GNWT response to these recommendations is set out below. The GNWT thanks the Standing Committee for its recommendations.

The following is the GNWT response to the recommendations contained in *Committee Report 28-20(1): Report on Bill 27: An Act to Amend the Protection Against Family Violence Act*.

Recommendation 1

“The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends the Government of the Northwest Territories provide a detailed overview of what funds are currently available for culturally appropriate social programs, frontline services, and capital infrastructure designed to prevent or mitigate family violence in the Northwest Territories.”

GNWT Response:

Currently, the National Action Plan to End Gender Based Violence (“National Action Plan”) funded project from the federal department of Women and Gender Equality provides \$4,118,000.00 annually to support culturally appropriate social programs, frontline services, and capital infrastructure designed to prevent or mitigate all forms of gender-based violence, including family violence in the NWT. The funding for the National Action Plan ends in March 2027 and Women and Gender Equality Canada has assured the provinces and territories that this funding will continue for the next five (5) years (to 2032).

The Department of Health and Social Services (HSS) invests \$3.4M annually to fund NWT family violence shelters in five communities: Tuktoyaktuk, Inuvik, Fort Smith, Hay River and Yellowknife. Additionally, \$356,000 is invested annually to support programming for children who have witnessed violence, awareness activities and social marketing. Together, these investments are part of a larger GNWT effort to prevent and mitigate the impacts of family violence in NWT communities.

The Department of Justice in partnership with the federal government invests over \$3M annually to support community-based programming to prevent or mitigate family, intimate partner and gender based violence in over ten communities and all regions of the NWT: 10 regionally and community based victim service programs, the Men’s Healing Fund, the territory wide Independent Legal Advice and Representation program, and the territory wide Emergency Protection Order (EPO) program.

Recommendation 2

“The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends the Government of the Northwest Territories develop and make public a costed, measurable, and time-bound strategy for addressing each of the pillars listed in the Reclaiming the Capable Person: We are all Capable Persons when we have Community: A Strategic Framework for Addressing Family Violence in the Northwest Territories by the end of the 2026 fiscal year.”

GNWT Response:

Work is underway to develop a comprehensive NWT Family Violence Action Plan that incorporates all GNWT departments’ efforts and will accompany the strategic framework. As this work continues, budget allocations will be included as well as clear measurable indicators.

The NWT Action Plan will be outlined with specific actions under each pillar, with pillars derived from the federal National Action Plan. The NWT Action Plan will include timelines and performance indicators. Once the NWT Action Plan is completed and approved, it will be made publicly available and will include annual reporting for clear accountability and progress tracking over time.

Recommendation 3

“The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories allocate significant new funding to support the provision and expansion of domestic violence shelters and safe homes across the Northwest Territories. This investment is necessary in light of the recent expansion of eligibility for Emergency Protection Orders. The Standing Committee on Social Development further recommends that these funds be included in the 2026–2027 Main Estimates and Business Planning Process.”

GNWT Response:

HSS invests \$3.433 million annually through the Health and Social Services Authorities to fund NWT family violence shelters in five communities: Tuktoyaktuk, Inuvik, Fort Smith, Hay River and Yellowknife.

An additional \$274,000 is available to support the following family violence initiatives:

- Family Violence Awareness (Month)
- YWCA: Project Child Recovery Program
- Children Who Witness Abuse Initiatives
- Awareness Activities
- Other initiatives related to gender-based violence

The HSS budget also includes \$782,000 through the National Action Plan on Gender Based Violence on an annual basis, until March 31, 2027, and \$125,000 through the Crisis Hotlines Responding to Gender-Based Violence until March 31, 2026. Through the National Action Plan on Gender Based Violence, additional funds provide enhanced funds to shelters to support:

- \$500,000 for shelter enhancement
- \$200,000 to conduct a feasibility study on existing shelter infrastructure needs and subsequent renovations
- \$82,000 to support the expansion of the What Will It Take campaign, with a focus specifically on youth
- \$125,000 through Women and Gender Equality to support upgrades to crisis lines at the shelters

There is no plan to expand funding for family violence shelters, as the average occupancy rate in 2024/25 across shelters remained below 50%. Shelter operators have identified pressures related to individuals requiring longer term or transitional housing, including instances where shelters are accessed in the context of homelessness. In response, HSS has updated its monitoring tools to better capture this information and support improved understanding of shelter usage trends.

HSS does not play a role in the implementation of safe homes in the NWT. To date, these have been federally funded and HSS is interested to learn more about the federal government's intentions regarding ongoing funding for these resources.

Recommendation 4

“The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends the Government of the Northwest Territories expand transitional housing and shelter supports for men (e.g. providing multi-year funding to the Bailey House at the Salvation Army – Yellowknife) who are removed from homes due to Emergency Protection Orders and who are seeking to recover from violent behaviours, including supporting group housing models in small communities, similar to those initiated by Fort Good Hope.”

GNWT Response:

A Way Home, the GNWT's strategy to address homelessness, recognizes the need to expand and fill gaps in the northern housing continuum. Community driven discussions on functional zero targets will aid the GNWT in understanding what resources and supports communities want to prioritize to reach functional zero and how various sub-populations experiencing homelessness will be addressed in these discussions.

Recommendation 5

“The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends the Government of the Northwest Territories, specifically the departments of Health and Social Services, Education, Culture and Employment, and Justice, increase education for young people and parents about the long-term impacts of family violence and the limitations of short-term legal interventions such as Emergency Protection Orders. This should be achieved through innovative age-appropriate education for children, early intervention programs for young people, integration of family violence education into Career and Life Management classes or the Healthy Family Programs, or other community-based education methods.”

GNWT Response:

Emergency Protection Orders (EPOs) are a legal tool that forms one part of overall safety planning to support individual and family survivors of family violence. The Department of Justice contracts the YWCA NWT to provide 24-hour support assisting victims of violence to access Emergency Protection Orders. Under this contract the YWCA NWT provides outreach and training about EPOs covering:

- *Protection Against Family Violence Act*,
- cycles and types of abuse,
- family violence dynamics,
- elements of an EPO,
- protections EPOs can offer,
- eligibility for EPOs,
- the process for obtaining an EPO and impacts of having an EPO in place,
- what happens when an EPO or other protection orders under the *Protection Against Family Violence Act* are breached.

The Department of Justice can work with the YWCA NWT and the Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) to determine whether the current training or information sharing can also be offered to schools through school presentations.

ECE acknowledges the Standing Committee on Social Development’s recommendation to enhance education for young people and parents on the long-term impacts of family violence. The *Safe Schools Regulations* under the *Education Act* require education bodies to ensure a safe, equitable, and inclusive environment for all schools. Schools are required to establish Safe School Plans to ensure that policies and procedures are in place to keep students and staff safe.

ECE coordinates in-service training on healthy relationships programming through a contract with the University of Western Ontario’s Centre for School Mental Health. In-service training provided includes ‘The Fourth R’ and ‘Healthy Relationships Program’, as well as the ‘Healthy Relationships Program for 2SLGBTQIA+ Youth’ that may be implemented in Gender and Sexuality Alliances or 2SLGBTQIA+ youth group settings. The Fourth R consists of a comprehensive, school-based program designed to include students, teachers, parents, and the community in reducing violence and risk behaviours, and applies a youth-focused, harm-reduction strategy that encompasses knowledge, positive relationship skills, and decision-making.

ECE is also developing a Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Education Project, which will provide training, curriculum and resources on GBV for NWT school staff and students. This project supports commitments in the National Action Plan, specifically Pillar 2.3 which focuses on equipping service providers, including educators, with training and resources to recognize, prevent and respond to GBV.

The GBV Education Project is on track to be completed by April 2026. Key progress to date includes:

- Completion of the development phase, with foundational resources drafted: NWT Educators' Guide to GBV, *ConnectEd* online course, lesson plans on consent and safety, and digital one-pagers.
- Completed draft learning outcomes linking GBV prevention and awareness to Health and Life Skills curriculum.
- Ongoing cross-departmental collaboration with EIA and HSS, to ensure cultural safety and alignment with the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls for Justice, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and GNWT GBV initiatives.

Under the Healthy Family Program, HSS has a Business Plan commitment to implement review for a revised approach to early intervention service delivery and training.

Recommendation 6

"The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends the Government of the Northwest Territories provide new funds to non-profit and charitable organizations in the Northwest Territories for developing and distributing education materials to communities on the use of Emergency Protection Orders and Protection Orders and long-term solutions to addressing family violence."

GNWT Response:

The Department of Justice agrees with this recommendation. Under the EPO contract, the YWCA NWT provides outreach and training to increase awareness and understanding about the use of EPOs. The Department's Community Justice Division can work with the YWCA NWT to refresh current EPO education and awareness materials and actions to support family violence safety planning for distribution.

Recommendation 7

"The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends the Government of the Northwest Territories initiate a comprehensive review of the entire Emergency Protection Order and Protection Order system using Section 16.1 of the *Protection Against Family Violence Act*."

GNWT Response:

In 2020, the YWCA contracted researchers with Aurora College who completed a comprehensive review of the EPO system. *The Nature of EPOs in the Northwest Territories, Canada: A Case Study* was a one-year, territorial wide study, that examined the legal process of EPO use across the NWT justice

system, as well as the impact of EPOs on family violence across the NWT on individuals, families and communities. The study included interviews with EPO applicants, frontline service providers and RCMP members, observations of Supreme Court proceedings, as well as the review of court transcripts and EPO files held by the YWCA NWT as the operator of the program. The comprehensive review report incorporated five main recommendations that continue to guide the work of the Department of Justice, the YWCA and the RCMP.

A follow up EPO study is currently underway and will be conducted by the same Aurora College researchers. The follow-up research study funded by Hoti Ts'eeda will focus on the contributing factors and pathways that lead to EPOs being denied. The research study is anticipated to start in the winter of 2026 for a period of one year. The Department of Justice is a member of EPO Research Advisory Committee which also includes representatives from the YWCA NWT and Alison McAteer House, Hoti Ts'eeda, Aurora College, and the Native Women's Association-Yellowknife Victims Services. RCMP "G" Division has also been invited to join the advisory committee. It is anticipated that the follow-up research study will provide further considerations for improving EPOs processes which in turn will improve outcomes for survivors.

Recommendation 8

"The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends the Government of the Northwest Territories formally respond to each of the recommendations of the 2020 case study done by the YWCA on the effectiveness of Emergency Protection Orders in the NWT, including:

1. Improve EPO service delivery and consistency through the development of EPO training which shall include NWT specific education and awareness of EPOs, for service providers including lawyers, RCMP and Justices of the Peace.
2. Improve risk assessment tools for repeat severe and violent offenders to establish the best form of protection, particularly in remote communities without police presence.
3. Develop an effective tracking system for EPOs that are breached, the circumstances surrounding the breach, outcome and consequences of the breach.
4. Strengthen effective safety planning strategies that include trauma-informed training for lawyers, RCMP, Justices of the Peace and Victim Service Workers, particularly in remote communities without police presence.
5. Provide an effective tracking system for EPO breaches, the circumstances surrounding breaches and the outcomes, to improve the current system.
6. Explore legal advice or representation for EPOs.

The Standing Committee on Social Development further recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories share details about the progress, timelines, milestones, and funding required to address and implement these recommendations with Committee."

GNWT Response:

The Department of Justice agrees with these recommendations and has been working with the YWCA NWT and other key stakeholders to address the recommendations, many of which have already been actioned. This work is ongoing, and the GNWT will require additional time to prepare a status update,

which will be shared with the Standing Committee once completed. The Department will share the requested information with Standing Committee once it has been compiled.

Recommendation 9

“The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends the Government of the Northwest Territories deliver regular, interactive training on the Emergency Protection Order system and other components of the *Protection Against Family Violence Act*. This training should:

1. Be trauma-informed and culturally aware.
2. Be provided bi-annually to key system stakeholders, including Justices of the Peace, RCMP, the YWCA Northwest Territories, and others.
3. Include guidance on the types of evidence accepted to prove a breach of an Order, and how to clearly communicate this to Applicants.
4. Incorporate survivor and advocate perspectives, with a focus on the lived realities in rural and remote communities.”

GNWT Response:

The Department of Justice works with the RCMP to ensure the provision of trauma informed services to survivors. Service providers, including the YWCA NWT, are invited to participate in GNWT training sessions on trauma informed practices and in the online *Living Well Together – Indigenous Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity Training*. The Commanding Officer of the RCMP’s “G” Division has mandated that all NWT Members take this training. In addition, the RCMP has its own training, and “G” Division members take part in a Cultural Awareness and Humility Course designed to “increase knowledge, enhance self awareness, and strengthen the skills” of police and public safety professionals who work both directly and indirectly with different cultures. RCMP “G” Division employees also take courses for trauma-informed policing approaches and missing persons investigations, as well as training on Consent Law and Common Sexual Assault Myths. Recently, the Yellowknife Women’s Society (YKWS) and RCMP “G” Division have committed to working together to conduct a *Community Lens Review* of the RCMP cultural training program by the YKWS. RCMP also lead the Sexual Assault Investigations Review Committee (SAIRC) to examine RCMP sexual assault investigation practices in closed cases and make case-specific recommendations for improvement. SAIRC is comprised of non-governmental organizations from across the NWT. Some of the cases reviewed by the SAIRC may also have involved an EPO.

Under the current EPO agreement, the YWCA NWT is required to provide outreach and training that covers EPOs and safety planning to all stakeholder groups including “G” Division members on a voluntary basis, Department of Justice staff and Victim Services workers. The training is available to anyone who would like it, including the public, and is informed by YWCA NWT clients, meaning primarily Indigenous peoples of the NWT. The training covers:

- *Protection Against Family Violence Act*,
- Cycles and types of abuse,
- Family violence dynamics,
- Elements of an EPO,

- Protections EPOs can offer,
- Eligibility for EPOs,
- The process for obtaining an EPO and effects after an EPO is in place, and
- What happens when an EPO or other protection order under the *Protection Against Family Violence Act* are breached.

The Department will continue to work with the YWCA and other stakeholders to identify, coordinate and participate in applicable training.

To respect the constitutional principle of judicial independence, the delivery of judicial education in the NWT as in all provinces and territories is determined and managed by the judiciary itself to promote the efficiency, uniformity, and quality of judicial services. All training to Justices of the Peace falls under the sole discretion of the Chief Judge of the Territorial Court of the Northwest Territories.

Recommendation 10

“The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends the Government of the Northwest conduct research on the appropriate duration and flexibility of Emergency Protection Orders under the *Protection Against Family Violence Act*, and in alignment with the Government of the Northwest Territories’ recommendation in the Reclaiming the Capable Person: We are all Capable Persons when we have Community: A Strategic Framework for Addressing Family Violence in the Northwest Territories to allow for Emergency Protection Orders to be amended extrajudicially and make any necessary legislative amendments without delay. The Standing committee on Social Development further recommends that provisions and measures be developed to prevent Emergency Protection Order variations from being made under duress or intimidation, drawing on practices in other jurisdictions such as Manitoba and Nunavut.”

GNWT Response:

Further research and amendment of the *Protection Against Family Violence Act* is not currently one of the Legislative Priorities established by Executive Council for consideration during the remainder of the 20th Assembly.

Recommendation 11

“The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends the Government of the Northwest Territories expand the authority to issue Emergency Protection Orders to a wider range of designated Officers and to add more Officers to cover critical delivery gaps in communities. This change is intended to improve timely access to Emergency Protection Orders for individuals who need immediate protection.”

GNWT Response:

As the YWCA NWT is designated under the Act to support EPO applications, the Department of Justice contracts the YWCA NWT to provide to residents of all NWT communities information and practical

help with applying for an EPO, as well as support after an EPO is in place or has been denied. There are other designates including the RCMP that may support EPO applications to the courts on behalf of applicants for an EPO. These are also set out in the Act and accompanying regulations.

EPOs are court orders and as such must be made by a designated justice under the Act (meaning a Justice of the Peace or a Judge of the Territorial Court) and reviewed by a Judge of the Supreme Court of the NWT. RCMP are designated to provide notice of the order to the respondent as prescribed under the Regulations or in accordance with the requirements for the service of documents under the Rules of the Supreme Court of the Northwest Territories. Further research on, and amendment to, the *Protection Against Family Violence Act* and Regulations is not currently one of the Legislative Priorities being considered for the remainder of the 20th Assembly as established by Executive Council.

Recommendation 12

“The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends the Government of the Northwest Territories conduct a comprehensive review of elder abuse, including research to understand its scope, analysis of the existing legislative framework, and development of an appropriate legislative framework to address identified gaps. This may include introducing a dedicated Adult Protection Act to ensure that elders receive timely and appropriate protection.”

GNWT Response:

As there are capacity issues in undertaking a comprehensive review of this nature, GNWT departments are focused on practical actions to protect Elders from abuse. The Department of HSS has a Business Plan commitment to develop training for GNWT and NGO service providers on Elder abuse. This is anticipated to be launched early in 2026-2027. The Office of the Public Trustee and the Legal Aid Commission Outreach Service are working together to develop updated information brochures and guides around Powers of Attorney, estates and trusteeships for public release in 2026. Outreach presentations, both virtual and in person will also be set up to help inform NWT residents about these matters as well as about fraud, scams and the prevention of financial abuse of Elders.

Recommendation 13

“The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories review the current limitation to the tort of stalking which is six years and determine an appropriate limitation period for the tort of stalking and make any necessary legislative amendments.”

GNWT Response:

Further research and amendment of the *Protection Against Family Violence Act* is not currently one of the Legislative Priorities being considered for the remainder of the 20th Assembly as established by Executive Council.

Recommendation 14

“The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories collaborate with the Northwest Territories judiciary to assess whether Emergency Protection Orders are being reviewed within the legislated three-day timeframe. If reviews are not occurring as required, the Committee recommends that corrective measures be implemented without delay and that any identified interventions be reported back to the Committee. This assessment should include data collection and analysis to determine the extent of delays, their underlying causes, and appropriate solutions.”

GNWT Response:

The GNWT Department of Justice is available to assist in the administration of the independent Courts of the Northwest Territories at their request only and cannot initiate any collaboration on an assessment of their systems or activities. The GNWT must respect the fundamental separation of powers of the three distinct branches of government, which is at the core of responsible government – the Legislative Assembly, the Executive Branch and the independent Judicial Branch. Any request of this nature should be made directly to the Courts with due consideration of the respective roles of the Judiciary and of the Legislative Assembly.

Recommendation 15

“The Standing Committee recommends the GNWT provide a response to this report within 120 days.”

GNWT Response:

The GNWT is pleased to provide this response to the Standing Committee on Social Development.