

KEVIN O'REILLY—MLA FRAME LAKE

Access to Justice

Committee of the Whole—2016-2017 Operating Budget Review

Dept. of Justice—June 23, 2016

MR. O'REILLY: Mr. Chair, when I look at page 274, program detail, there are cuts between what was in the mains for 2015-16 and 2016-17 for court workers, legal aid commission, and the Yellowknife Legal Aid Clinic. Even the Somba K'e Legal Aid Clinic, there's a small decrease there. So, with this decrease in expenditures for legal aid services, how are we actually improving access to justice, which is in our mandate? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister Sebert.

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: Mr. Chair, if I could go through the list in some detail, if we could look first at the Community Legal Aid Clinic, the variance is due to a transfer of a new phone system to TSC, budget and reductions and savings from a new Voice-over-Internet-Protocol system, so it's a technical improvement that leads to the saving.

With respect to court workers, the Main Estimates of \$1,084,000, the variance is due to the elimination of the court worker position in Fort McPherson, which had not been filled for some time. Legal aid commission, again its improvement it's technology, it appears; variance is due to reductions in private Bar fees, savings from the new Voice-over-Internet-Protocol system and transfer of a new phone system.

Office of the children's lawyer, variance is due to transfer of a new phone system. Somba K'e Legal Aid Clinic, variance is due to a new phone system, again. That would appear to be the case also with the Yellowknife Legal Aid Clinic. It appears, in our view, that there's not really a reduction in service; there's some efficiencies that have led to these reductions. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Minister Sebert. Any further questions, Mr. O'Reilly?

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I'm all for efficiencies. Does the department then have any specific plans on how it is going to monitor access to justice? What specific indicators? Is there going to be satisfaction surveys? I don't know. What are the specific plans of the department to actually monitor and track access to justice and how the department is going to improve on that over the term of this Assembly? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister Sebert.

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: Mr. Chair, I know that the legal aid commission does monitor, in the sense of, when there's complaints and everything, that there are complaints about lawyers or service, it does go to the commission. I can advise that, with respect to family law, which was a great concern because several years ago there were very lengthy wait times, up to nine months or a year -- and I now understand that the wait list for family law clients is around 90 days, so three months. Urgent matters, of course, are assigned to counsel right away. So they do monitor client satisfaction, if I can put it that way, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Minister Sebert. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I have no further questions, just a quick comment: that I'm still trying to understand how closing the legal aid clinic in the Delta Beaufort, closing court registry, and closing the court library actually improves access to justice, but that's more of a statement. Thanks, Mr. Chair.