

KEVIN O'REILLY—MLA FRAME LAKE
Legal Services
Committee of the Whole—2017-2018 Operating Budget Review
Dept. of Justice—February 23, 2017

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, committee.

We will now proceed to the next activity, legal services. The activity description is found on page 267. The activity details is on 268. Active positions information item is found on page 269. I will remind committee to specify the page on which your items can be found when asking questions. Does committee have any questions or comments? Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I believe this is the section where we would find the closure of the Beaufort Delta Legal Aid Clinic. Is that correct? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: Yes, I believe that's correct. Thank you.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. In an effort to increase access to justice here, I think this would result in a reduction of \$102,000. Is that correct, Mr. Chair? Thank you.

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

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: Yes, that's correct as to the amount. Thank you.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. So I thought the Minister was actually going to agree to the first part of my question there as well. So maybe he can just tell us a little bit more about why we have to close the Legal Aid clinic in the Beaufort Delta and how that contributes towards improving access to justice. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: Yes, Mr. Chair, there had been a clinic for some time up in Inuvik and initially there were several lawyers up there, at one point as many as three, I believe. However, it was a different circumstance because there was a resident judge in the community, the Crown attorneys had an office in the community, and there was the Legal Aid office.

As time went by, it became increasingly difficult, in fact near impossible, to staff the office, in particular with criminal lawyers, which was the greatest need. There have not been criminal lawyers up there for I think at least 10 years. So there was a family law lawyer up there whose position was transferred to Yellowknife. So yes, it probably would be better to have clinics in the communities, but the younger lawyers seem to like the bright lights of Yellowknife. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. So if someone needs Legal Aid service and they're in Inuvik or Tuktoyaktuk, how do they actually get it, then? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: Well, with respect to the criminal law cases, the courts, of course, go on circuit and at least in some of the communities I believe the lawyers go in a day or so early. Obviously, it's not ideal, but it is the system we've been using for many, many years. The courts do visit virtually every community, so certainly there couldn't have been community clinics in every community. At least when I was involved, we used to go up to Inuvik a day or so before court started so we could interview people. As I say, not the ideal circumstance, but we simply could not staff the clinic in Inuvik properly. Thank you.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that response. So how do we actually improve access to justice for these people? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: I'd like to point out that we do now have an outreach program, which has been developed over the last month or years so that this is somebody who is often going out to the community not at the same time as the court. She tends to deal with many non-criminal matters but that is a way in which we are bringing justice to the communities. Thank you, Mr. Chair.