

**KEVIN O'REILLY—MLA FRAME LAKE**  
**Income Assistance Changes**  
**Committee of the Whole—2018-2019 Operating Budget Review**  
**Dept. of Education, Culture and Employment—February 21, 2018**

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. My questions are going to be kind of similar to my colleague's from Yellowknife Centre, but I am going to be asking about income assistance. It is on page 46. There is an increase from 2017-2018 to 2018-2019. It is maybe about \$1.75 million. Can the Minister explain this change and what, if any, parts of income assistance have been increased and why? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**HON. ALFRED MOSES:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. We did have an uptake in income assistance clients. Sometimes the rent that we do pay for income assistance clients also pays into that, and then, also, there are utility increases that are covered under the department that sometimes do increase, as well, so those are all reflected in that increase on that line item. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. So, as I understand it, within income assistance there is some provision for cost of food, cost of clothing and so on. For any of those sorts of components, is there any provision in here for an increase in any of those parts of income assistance? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

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

**HON. ALFRED MOSES:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. No, there are no changes to the rates. With our income assistance clients, it is on a case-by-case basis, and it is to cover off the most basic needs for anyone who is on income assistance. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. Yes, that is, I guess, what I was kind of worried about. So what triggers a review of any of those sort of rates for income assistance? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

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

**HON. ALFRED MOSES:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. As I have mentioned in the House, all the programs within ECE, we always review them. I am not sure what would trigger a review of the income assistance rates, but we believe that we do provide income assistance adequately on a case-by-case basis. Mind you, income assistance is the last resort for our residents who have tried every other avenue for getting some financial stability or other resources before coming to income assistance. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Mr. Chair, and I appreciate the response from the Minister. I certainly understand that income assistance is sort of the place of last resort, but I am a

bit perturbed to hear that the Minister says he does not know what triggers a review. If the Minister does not know, who does know? Are reviews done every five years, every 10 years, 30 years? Is there a regular review cycle? Maybe I will start with that, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

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

**HON. ALFRED MOSES:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess one of the triggers that we have seen most recently was the Canada Child Benefit. That triggered us to review our income assistance, which also made us look at our own NWT Child Benefit. Those both made enhancements to the program, so, as I mentioned, our low- to modest-income families are getting more dollars. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that sometimes those triggers might be external. You know, I guess another example is for those people who work, the Minister does appoint a minimum wage committee that gives him some advice. There seems to be a regular cycle for that. Why don't we have some sort of regular cycle for review of income assistance rates and payments? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

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

**HON. ALFRED MOSES:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess we do provide a lot of funding to our most vulnerable residents in the Northwest Territories. If you look at the line item there, it is in the millions, and, if you look over the last few years, there has always been an increase. We have to make sure that we are reflective in terms of taking care of rent, taking care of utilities, food, clothing for these families. We do that on a case-by-case basis. I think the program is working well. There are triggers, external triggers, that provide us to make changes to our income assistance. Currently, we do look at it regularly, but, to make changes, I think what we have here is adequate. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. Yes, I appreciate the comments from the Minister. I am sure that a number of our citizens who are on income assistance might not agree with the Minister in terms of whether it is adequate. I realize it is \$31 million of our budget, but maybe I will just cut this short. Is the Minister prepared to look at some sort of scheduled review of income assistance rates as he does for the minimum wage? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**HON. ALFRED MOSES:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, I am prepared to take a look at it, have those discussions with my staff, but also bring that to Cabinet. This one is always one that we are always going to have a very high line item in. We have made some other improvements, as we talked about earlier in this House, with the Small Community Employment Program, getting jobs into the communities, other areas that other departments provide, such as housing and other benefits as a government to our residents in the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Mr. Chair, and I appreciate that commitment from the Minister. I am sure he will be happy to work with the Standing Committee on Social Development to look at that issue. I want to thank him for the commitment. It took us a while to get there, but that is what I was hoping to hear. Thanks, Mr. Chair. That is all I have.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely):** Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister, did you want to reply?

**HON. ALFRED MOSES:** No. Just that, as a government, we have supported our most vulnerable residents in the Northwest Territories when they needed assistance and help, and we will continue to do so. Thank you, Mr. Chair.