

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 437-18(3): VICTIM SERVICES PROGRAM ISSUES AND REVIEW

October 24, 2018

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My question is for the Minister of Justice, who is responsible for victim services for this government. Can the Minister explain if there is a plan to expand the current community-based victim services offered through 10 coordinators to all of our communities, and, if not, why not? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Justice.

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Member opposite for his questions. There was a review in 2014 of victim service coordinators, and I can advise that this program started out in the late 1990s, with funding initially in two communities in the NWT, Yellowknife and Fort Smith. The Government of the Northwest Territories now provides funding for 11 community-based victim services workers in eight communities, including Yellowknife, Fort Smith, Inuvik, Fort Simpson, Behchoko, Fort Good Hope, Tulita, and Hay River. Workers in those communities also provide victim services to surrounding communities through telephone outreach or in person if necessary.

MR. O'REILLY: I would like to thank the Minister for that information, but I don't think he really answered my question, which was whether we are going to complete this network of community-based victim services in all of the communities we have? It's my understanding, the victim services coordinators, they don't necessarily have access to funding to assist victims or to travel to victims to provide support for basic functions such as getting ready for court appearances. Expenditures seem to require approval of justice staff here, in Yellowknife, who don't seem to be available on a 24/7 basis. Can the Minister explain how victim services coordinators access the Victims of Crime Emergency Fund and whether support is available 24/7?

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: In addition to community-based funding, the NWT Victim Services program administers the Victims of Crime Emergency Fund. This fund is intended to assist victims of serious violent crime. It can fund emergency expenses resulting from experiencing serious crime, as well as up to six sessions of emergency counselling with private counsellors to help victims. Secondary victims also deal with the consequences of victimization.

Victim services are provided on a 24/7 basis, but it is not always possible to provide emergency funding at all hours of the day. However, the practice is to provide emergency funding as soon as possible. As I mentioned in my prior answer, we do provide funding for 11 community-based victim services workers in eight communities. I don't know whether we could expand to all communities, but as I mentioned earlier, they do travel to communities outside of the eight.

MR. O'REILLY: I would like to thank the Minister for that information, and we will talk more about completing the network.

The exact duties and job descriptions of the victim services coordinators are not clear, as our government delivers these services through third parties in various communities. It is my understanding that some of these individuals perform many functions above and beyond the call of duty, including cleaning up crime scenes.

Can the Minister explain exactly what type of supports are available for these coordinators and whether there has ever been a review of the effectiveness of these supports?

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: We do understand that the victim support workers do an incredible job, and it can be particularly difficult. Support for the program, in order to recruit new workers, was another recommendation referred to in the 2014 report.

They do get annual training opportunities, so there is ongoing training that does take place, and in addition, every year the department holds a significant annual training event, where the training provided is typically as a result of victim services providers' requests. Examples include child court accompaniment, critical incident stress debriefing, compassion fatigue, and self-care.

There is ongoing training, they do receive training, and also, these meetings would assist them in that they can speak with their peers and learn from them.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I would like to thank the Minister for that. I was hoping to hear, though, about whether there is professional counselling available for the coordinators.

The community-based approach to victim services makes a lot of sense, and it has been in place, as the Minister said, since 1996, but clearly, the network of supports and coordinators has never been completed. It is unclear how often reviews have been conducted on victim services. The Minister mentioned a 2014 report. Perhaps he could table that in the House.

Could the Minister tell us, though, is he prepared to conduct a comprehensive review of victim services in the next year, 2019-2020? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: I can advise that, in addition to the programs and training that I mentioned earlier, that, starting this year, we are able also to start providing mental health supports above what the employers might provide.

The Member opposite mentioned the 2014 report. I haven't actually read the report. However, five years will have gone by by early next year, and we are currently looking at conducting a follow-up next year. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.