

Foster Family Coalition of the NWT

Response by Kevin O'Reilly, Candidate for MLA Frame Lake

1. As a Member of the 19th Legislative Assembly, will you work to ensure the territorial government implements changes in response to the 2018 Auditor General's Report on the Child & Family Services in the NWT during the first year of the 19th Legislative Assembly?

Yes. Although I was not a member of the Standing Committee's that dealt with the Auditor General's report and the Departmental response, I participated in those meetings to listen, learn and ask questions. I will continue to push for firm commitments from the candidates who wish to serve as Premier. I will also work to ensure that the response to the audit is one of the priorities for the next Assembly and that it be incorporated into Cabinet's mandate. Regular reports on progress and performance should be made to the Legislature and public.

2. Please state the actions that you will take in the 19th Legislative Assembly that will improve the welfare of children and youth in care in the territory.

Repeated reviews of the child and family services function point to the inadequacy of the financial and human resources devoted to child and family services. We must finally ensure the department has the money to do the job, and I will push for this budgetary priority in the first operating budget of the new assembly. During the audit review, I also raised the issue of how the NWT is the only jurisdictions in Canada without a Child and Youth Advocate. I support the establishment of a Child and Youth Advocate for the NWT. There needs to be a better link and coordination between the fostering and adoption steams of children and youth in care. I also support midwifery, universal childcare, a greater overall investment in our education system, and improvements to our income support programs. These are all part of a comprehensive approach to build healthy families.

3. How will you ensure that the voices of children, youth, foster caregivers, adoptive families, and biological families involved with Health and Social Services are heard?

All provincial/territorial jurisdictions in Canada except the NWT have a Child and Youth Advocate. Given the continuing failure to meet the legal requirements for child and family services functions, an Advocate must be created as an arms-length champion for children, youth, foster caregivers, adoptive families, and biological families. I will also push for regular reporting to Standing Committee and the public on fulfilment of the recommendations of the Auditor General's recommendations, including consultations with key stakeholders such as the Foster Family Coalition. Stronger support for the Foster Family Coalition is also required to ensure they can provide the advice and support required by foster parents and families.

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