

**ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE**

**QUESTION 103-19(2): VICTIM SERVICES PROGRAM ISSUES AND REVIEW**

**February 27, 2020**

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. My questions are for the Minister of Justice, who is responsible for Victim Services for this government. Can the Minister tell us about the comprehensive review of Victim Services, who carried out this work, and when it will be available to MLAs and the public? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Minister of Justice.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The evaluation is currently underway. It is not complete yet. Right now, I am anticipating it will be received by the end of April to myself, and I will then endeavour to have it to the Members of this House as quickly as possible thereafter. Thank you.

**MR. O'REILLY:** I want to thank the Minister for that. I do not think I heard who is actually doing the study, but maybe she can throw that in with the next response. The exact duties and job descriptions of the Victim Services coordinators, they are not very clear. These are delivered 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. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** I apologize to the Member. I had missed that part. The review is being done by FWCO Management Consultants. Now, with respect, Mr. Speaker, to the work being done by Victim Services providers in the communities, I have had the opportunity of working directly, prior to being in this role, with some of the individuals who provide Victim Services. They do do tremendous work. They do often go above beyond.

As for cleaning up crime scenes, that is the very first time I have ever heard that, and I would certainly hope I can speak to the Member further if that is, in fact, the case. That said, with respect to generally their duties and the supports, I am assured that the current review that is underway will consider whether or not our Victim Services workers are being given adequate supports and what more might need to be done, if anything, to better support them.

**MR. O'REILLY:** I want to thank the Minister for that. I can assure her that is what I heard first-hand, directly from a constituent who had to serve in that capacity before. The community-based approach to Victim Services makes a lot of sense, of course. It has been in place since 1996, but clearly, the network of supports and coordinators has never been completed. As I understand it, there are 11 coordinators in eight communities. Can the Minister tell us if there are plans to expand these services to all of our communities, and when will that happen?

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** At this point, between now and April, we will be waiting on the review to determine whether or not there needs to be an expansion. In the meantime, Victim Services workers do provide assistance by phone, though certainly I have no illusions; that is not the same as being in person. Again, Mr. Speaker, I will be waiting on that review to determine whether or not some further action needs to be taken to expand or how else we might better support victims of crime across the territories.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister. Member for Frame Lake.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that. Can the Minister tell us, though, whether there are any specific plans now to improve Victim Services here in the Northwest Territories, and what will those improvements look like, hint, hint, budget 2020-2021? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** I am alive to the fact that, in fact, there has been some increase to the budget of the Victim Services provision here in the Northwest Territories. In the most recently tabled main estimates, there has been an increase of \$240,000 to Victim Services. That is the first increase to victim-services based funding in many, many years and will help better support the provision of those services. One other note is that we are also improving the supports that we give to our Victim Services workers, that there is a small pool of funding provided through federal funding. That helps provide enhanced health supports. Because these are partners in the communities, they are not necessarily given the opportunity or do not necessarily within their employment have enhanced or expanded health benefits. There is some funding available for these workers should they need additional, whether it is psychological supports, counselling, or otherwise. That is coordinated through the Department of Justice. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.