

QUESTION 10-19(1): CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to make my first questions today to the Minister of Health and Social Services on child and family services. What has happened in the past is we have had a number of audits from the Auditor General which were scathing of the treatment of children in care. There is no issue that requires greater oversight and accountability than when the state takes a person's child.

My concern is that what happens in this Assembly is at times we get the reports and a lot of noise is made, and then there is some media, and then it falls off, often between audits or between election cycles. My first question to the Minister is: can you provide an update on where we are in responding to the last report on the Auditor General in regards to child and family services? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Yellowknife North. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. DIANE THOM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was just advised by my Premier that the Cabinet committee for the Premier will come up with a Cabinet committee for child and families right after the Christmas break.

MR. JOHNSON: The Department of Health and Social Services presently has a quality improvement progress tracker that allows you to see a number of the tasks and responses to the audit. I commend the department for creating this tracker. It really should be how all of our actions are measured and available to the public.

However, I think there is a larger question. The audit is largely of whether we are complying with our own policies, which is step one. It is not always whether those are the right policies. My question to the Minister though is: does the Minister know if the work for a third audit has begun?

HON. DIANE THOM: The Auditor General of Canada is not currently conducting a third audit of the child and family services system. If the Auditor General called for another review of the child and family services system, the Department would fully engage and integrate the findings as part of our continuous improvement framework.

I want to assure the Member that we take the review of quality seriously. That is why we have our own separate quality review and internal audit process. This quality review process is ongoing, and we have started our internal audits. We anticipate that the internal audits will be done by the spring of 2020.

MR. JOHNSON: I believe that it is important that we are doing our own internal audits as well as a much longer discussion which I hope is brought to Committee, of whether not only are we complying with our own policies but whether they are the correct policies that ultimately will lower the number of children in care.

My question to the Minister is whether those internal audits will be shared with Members and brought to Committee.

HON. DIANE THOM: Just in reference back to the actual Auditor General's report, the Department has accepted the recommendations. The plan was publicized and released in August of 2019. To date, approximately 33 percent of the action plan, action items in the quality improvement plan, have been completed.

MR. SPEAKER: The time for oral questions has expired, but I will allow the Member to ask his remaining supplemental question. The Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am not sure that I got a reply there on whether the internal audits would be shared with Committee. My question to the Minister is: can you provide a timeline on when those internal audits will be done, and what is the process in responding to our own internal audits that is planned?

HON. DIANE THOM: I will work with the Member to ensure I get him the dates and the release of the information. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.



JAN 10 2020

MR. RYLUND JOHNSON
MLA, YELLOWKNIFE NORTH

Oral Question 10-19(1): Child and Family Services

This letter is in follow up to the Oral Question you raised on December 10, 2019 regarding Child and Family Services (CFS).

The Department of Health and Social Services (Department) is currently completing the internal audit cycle for the 2018-2019 fiscal year. Departmental audits cover key areas of compliance to Standards of Child and Family Service practice. It is anticipated that these onsite regional audits will be completed by March 2020. We will compile and share the audit results with each region to allow Health and Social Services Authorities with opportunity to offer strategies in response to the findings. These results and strategies will be integrated with the results of Authority-led *quality reviews*.

Quality Reviews are conducted quarterly and are aimed at identified practice process. Together, the findings of the *Department Audits* and the *Authority-led Quality Reviews* form a compliment of analysis that serve to inform the Quality Improvement Plan Process. We anticipate this roll-up to be completed by mid-June 2020.

The CFS Quality Improvement Plan is a working document which is intended to offer guidance and direction in key areas of system improvement. It articulates action on issues identified through *internal audits*, *quality reviews*, the 2018 Auditor General Report, Standing Committee on Government Operations and feedback from staff, Indigenous Governments, Foster Family Coalition of the NWT, and other stakeholders. The plan is updated and monitored in a continuous cycle of quality improvement.

A summary document of the 2018-2019 internal audit will be created and included in the Annual Report of the Director of Child and Family Services. The Department can provide a confidential briefing on the internal audits to Standing Committee, along with the summary document. As the audit covers the time period of April 1, 2018 to March 31, 2019, we will also provide context for what occurred during that fiscal year and more recent results of the quality reviews.

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It is anticipated that this confidential briefing could be offered in mid-June 2020.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "DThom". The letters are cursive and connected.

Diane Thom
Minister of Health and Social Services

c Mr. Tim Mercer
Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

Mr. David Hastings
Legislative Coordinator
Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs