



October 19, 2023

Via Email Only  
[ghickes@assembly.nu.ca](mailto:ghickes@assembly.nu.ca)

Mr. George Hickes, Chair  
Standing Committee on Oversight of Government Operations and Public Accounts

Dear Mr. Hickes,

**Re: Commitments to follow-up to questions posed during the hearings dated September 19 & 20, 2023**

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Please accept this correspondence in response to the oral questions posed by members of the Committee on Oversight of Government Operations and Public Accounts during Televised Hearings September 18-19, 2023.

- 1. To verify discrepancies about the number of children in foster care. The Department of Family Services reported 222 children in foster care in our annual report March 31, 2023. There seems to be discrepancies between that figure and the Office of the Auditor General's (OAG) report (180 children as of Aug 2022).**

The variations in reported numbers of children in foster care stem from the fluidity of the data, subject to frequent changes on a weekly basis. An example of this is when a child comes into care of the department under a 72-hour apprehension, the children are briefly included in the count, even if only temporarily in care. In addition, if a child or youth is being supported through a Plan of Care Agreement and living with other family members, when the department is supporting them financially and if that financial status changes, they would not be listed on our current occupancy reports, thus impacting fluctuation of numbers. As outlined in the OAG audit, the absence of a real-time, continuous tracking system impacts the ability to provide accurate and up-to-date information across the entire territory. Consequently, these figures are subject to fluctuations, making it challenging to establish a static representation of the current state of the foster care system. We are hopeful that with the implementation of the Matrix Software and a strengthened training framework, we will be able to provide accurate information in real time. However, these numbers will still fluctuate due to the nature of child welfare services.



**2. Concerns and children aging out of the system and repatriation: Family Services to provide the total number of people Out-of-Territory since 1999 and how many have been since repatriated or what is their current status?**

As emphasized in the OAG audit, the department has lacked the capability to effectively collect and monitor information responsive to this line of inquiry. The intention of the Matrix System will be to collect, track and monitor information going forward. **Appendix A** provides the number of children, youth, and adults in residential care outside of the territory for 2019-2023. We cannot provide accurate data from 1999 on, and the information we have on individual repatriations are held in physical files in communities, many of these in paper format and was not historically tracked.

**3. To verify whether youth Out-of-Territory are still considered Nunavut residents if they have lived outside of Nunavut for numerous years?**

Family Services does not have authority to revoke residency status for individuals. The Department of Health defines a permanent resident of Nunavut as someone whose primary place of residence is in Nunavut. If we adopt this definition, youth who are Out-of-Territory would still be recognized as Nunavut residents. When accessing health services in southern jurisdictions, the child or youth may receive a health care card in the jurisdiction they reside and are receiving services. The reason behind this is to provide receiving jurisdictions with the ability to bill Nunavut for services provided.

**4. Level of cultural orientation at facilities (group homes, foster homes and Out-of-Territory)**

The extent of cultural orientation at group homes, foster homes, and out-of-territory placements varies, primarily influenced by the proximity to cultural resources surrounding these facilities. Notably, locations like Ottawa and Winnipeg, which host a significant number of Inuit agencies, benefit from stronger accessibility to cultural resources. In contrast, Saskatchewan may not offer the same level of accessibility.

Regarding internal processes, there is no standardized family wellness cultural orientation to support these establishments. Typically, the responsibility falls on contractors to provide this training to their staff, but this is often inadequately followed up in my experience.

Some facilities have proactively collaborated with Inuit agencies, demonstrating a commitment to cultural understanding. However, others have not taken such initiatives. As a territorial team, there is a need to establish a more robust system to ensure cultural competence is a measurable component for all staff and contract resources. One



potential avenue is exploring support models like the Quality-of-Life secretariat, which previously provided cultural training to staff in the Government of Nunavut. Additionally, leveraging information and support from organizations like Tungasuvvingat Inuit and Nunavut Tunngavik could further enhance cultural competence efforts.

## 5. How do we support families during visits of their children?

The Department of Family Services facilitates travel and accommodations for either the child or youth to visit family or for family members to visit the child or youth. During these visits, tailored to the circumstances that led the youth to be in a facility, families have the opportunity to learn how to support the young person upon their return to the community to facilitate repatriation. This support spans various aspects, including behavior, medical needs, and mental health.

Family visits also serve as a platform for professionals involved in the youth's care to provide updates on their progress. Depending on the situation, it may involve the family learning about the medical care the youth is receiving.

Locally, the department provides transport, check-ins, and meals during visits. The department has recently initiated efforts to enhance the experience by incorporating celebrations or dinners when a child or adult comes into the community for a visit.

However, such initiatives require adequate staffing and funding to materialize, ensuring that connections are maintained, and individuals feel loved, supported, and honored by their families and friends.

## 6. How do we support people with separation from their communities and culture when Out-of-Territory?

Standards to support individuals experiencing separation from their communities and culture when placed Out-of-Territory have been developed and are continuously improving as staffing and training is secured. The challenge lies in the need for enhanced support in effectively managing files from a distance.

One avenue of support is through Individual Care Plans, intended for all clients in care. Including culture and Inuit Societal Values ingrained in plans of care is necessary. Inuit Community Liaison Officers are vital to supporting children, youth, and adults in southern jurisdictions. Establishing relationships through the care plan for the youth is seen as a vital component of the long-term plan.



A systematic approach is currently taken, aiming for caseworkers to maintain constant communication with Out-of-Territory clients, with at least a monthly video or phone call. Plans are underway for these caseworkers to visit clients at least once a year. The department has undertaken these steps to address the gaps and facilitate a sense of connection and cultural support for individuals placed Out-of-Territory.

While efforts are made to build plans around continued cultural connection, there is an awareness that it sometimes gets overlooked, particularly in regions where Child and Family Services Workers manage caseloads. Despite challenges, some care providers have attempted to provide country food and relevant cultural exposure, and placements are being considered based on the proximity to the individual home community.

Noteworthy is the encouragement of families to put together care packages, including country food, for Out-of-Territory service users, with Family Services covering shipping fees.

**7. Vacancy rate of regional office in Iqaluit – how many social worker positions are filled and vacant? What is the caseload of social workers in Iqaluit (total number of cases assigned per person)?**

As of October 1, 2023, the current staffing situation at the Iqaluit office for social workers position is as follows:

There are 10 social worker indeterminate positions, all of which have been filled, and no vacancies exist.

Among the indeterminate positions, there are two supervisors, and an additional social worker is currently serving in an acting supervisory role.

Our office has eight social workers on Casual Service Agreements.

Overall, there are 18 social workers in the Iqaluit office. Out of these, 12 are actively managing files under the *Child and Family Services Act*, while others are engaged in overseeing group home activities, adult files, and Out-of-Territory files.

Presently, the caseload per worker in Iqaluit ranges from 15 to 18 files, reflecting a significant decrease from the 30 to 40 files per case worker reported one year ago. The complexity of cases, deeply rooted in the legacy of historical trauma due to colonization, poses a challenge in developing a Nunavut specific case analysis.



The goal is to have a team of 25 social workers (Iqaluit): 18 to manage client files, thereby reducing the workload to 10 cases or fewer per social worker. This number will fluctuate as previously stated. It's important to note that for each child client, which is how one case file is represented in reports, there is a family who also needs a team. Social workers support upwards of 60 individuals within their caseload when we approach this from a family centre approach.

The remaining seven social workers will be allocated to provide specialized support for agencies such as the Qikiqtani General Hospital, schools, and the boarding home/shelters.

As of the latest update, there are no vacant social worker positions in the regional office in Iqaluit.

**8. What are the criteria for foster homes? Any flexibility / exceptions? If there's room for exceptions and special measures regarding foster homes, for instance, a potential new foster parents may not have the recommended room to welcome a child, but they are willing to foster and help.**

Exceptions to the criteria for foster homes are considered on a case-by-case basis, demonstrating a level of flexibility within the process. For instance, a foster parent with a historical criminal record, especially if there have been no incidents for a number of years, can be discussed with the director or management team, and exceptions may be made. The overarching principle is to maintain flexibility while ensuring that the child's well-being is not jeopardized in any way, be it emotionally, developmentally, or physically. When a criminal record is flagged, a disclosure of the details surrounding the occurrence is obtained. Subsequently, a meeting is typically arranged with the individual to openly discuss the nature of the record, the circumstances surrounding the incident, and the positive changes in the person's life since then. This interview process aims to evaluate the individual's honesty about the conviction, their efforts toward personal improvement, and the likelihood of recidivism. These evaluations are conducted on a case-by-case basis, with decisions made collaboratively with the front-line team and management. Addressing the issue of room and space in foster homes, it is acknowledged that overcrowded living conditions are unfortunately a community standard for many families. Exceptions are made for homes that may lack proper space, especially if placing the child in such a home is deemed to be in their best interest. In some instances, decisions are based on minimizing the likelihood of traumatic effects. For example, if children are found sleeping on a bare floor without blankets, moving them to a home with a bed and proper bedding is considered a significant improvement. This underscores the challenging realities that Family Services encounters regularly.



**9. What communities hold interagency meetings, are there any communities that really stand out to Health as well as Family Services in terms of being really successful at addressing child protection issues and, if there are, why do they stand out?**

Interagency meetings are vital to a collaborative, wrap around approach to support young people, families, and community in Nunavut. Depending on the community, and the availability of staff, some communities have formal meetings, some informal, and others on a case-by case basis, and some not at all. Some communities hold interagency meetings that include Family Services, Health, Mental Health, RCMP, Housing and the Hamlet. Challenges to regular interagency meetings persist due to high staff turnover across different agencies. Despite these difficulties, both Family Services and Health staff, operating independently from other agencies, actively make an effort to conduct regular check-ins. It has been observed that in cases where there are long-term staff members, whether casual or indeterminate positions, there tends to be a noticeable improvement in the quality of relationships over time. Family Services acknowledges that interagency meetings are best practice and have shown to foster trust and collaboration between the service providers. In child protection situations and interventions, a child-centre approach is taken in which Health and Family Services and the RCMP work together to address the immediate safety/ health concerns and investigation. Going forward, other partners can be included in the wider support plan. Each community has their own strengths and challenges in addressing child protection issues with the existing resources and capacity available to them.

**10. Can you describe the difference between the safety assessment and risk assessment?**

Risk assessment involves gathering and analyzing information to figure out how likely it is that certain factors in a family situation could lead to harm to a child or youth in the future.

1. Safety assessments are used to evaluate the immediate threat of harm to the child.
2. Risk assessments are focused on potential harm in the future.

**11. With the knowledge that reunification is ultimately the hope when we are helping children navigate their lives, how often are parents, when appropriate, allowed to check in with their children who are in foster care? That's in-territory and outside-of-territory. How does it happen in-territory and how does it happen when children are in care out of territory? How many visits do parents get, again, when appropriate, recognizing that sometimes it might not be safe for the check-ins to happen? How often do they happen, how do they happen and who supports that?**



The frequency of family visits for children in care depends on the reasons for the child being in care and whether there are court-imposed conditions. Some parents can only be with their children under the complete supervision of a social worker, and the regularity of these visits depends on the availability of both the parent and the social worker. There are other arrangements where visits are more flexible, and parents can request visits as often as they like. These visits can occur at home, in the community, or out on the land. There are variations between these examples, but in all cases, the social worker, family resource worker, or case aid shares the responsibility of ensuring regular access for the family to the child or youth.

Out-of-territory youth/children/family visits are supported twice a year, with the possibility of more visits depending on the circumstances. Unless there are specific protection issues restricting contact with parents, we encourage open communication between the family and those in our care. We make efforts to use technology for communication when appropriate, and caregivers ensure that communication occurs regularly.

Visits for children in care within the community are determined by the level of risk and the current situation. If families are progressing well, there's a focus on reunification or strengthening the family, and weekend home visits may be appropriate. If there are protection factors, visits might take place in the office or other secure area as deemed suitable.

## **12. What was the outcome of Family Services' past funding requests for Family Wellness Division made prior to the release of the OAG report?**

Family Services submitted four funding requests for fiscal year 2022-23 under the Family Wellness Division. The outcomes of these requests are as follows:

- 1. Residential Care (additional funds):**
  - Approved: \$3.7 million
- 2. Family Violence Shelters (additional funds):**
  - Approved: \$1.5 million
- 3. Quality Improvement Capacity (two positions - Critical Incident Response & Debriefing Specialist, Quality Improvement Manager):**
  - Approved: \$300,000
- 4. Client Liaison Officers (3 positions in Edmonton, Winnipeg & Ottawa):**
  - Approved: \$240,000



Family Services submitted four funding requests for 2021-22 under the Family Wellness Division. The outcomes of these requests are as follows:

**1. Residential Care (additional funds):**

- Approved: \$2.7 million

**2. Quality Improvement Capacity (two positions - Critical Incident Response and Debriefing Specialist, Quality Improvement Manager):**

- Not approved

**3. Community Youth Advisory Councils (funding for communities to strengthen or establish youth advisory committees)**

- Not approved

**4. Manager, Family Violence Program (Reprofile of current position)**

- Not approved

Family Services submitted four funding requests for the fiscal year 2020-21 under the Family Wellness Division. The outcomes of these requests are as follows:

**1. Family Violence Shelters (additional funds):**

- Approved: \$1.6 million

**2. Youth Crisis Centre Funding (additional funds):**

- Approved: \$300,000

**3. Foster Parent Support Increase Initiatives and Foster Children Wellness Program (Foster Care Rate Increase and one position)**

- Not Approved

**4. Residential Care (additional funds):**

- Approved: \$2 million

**5. Client Information System Maintenance (new modules)**

- Not approved- Reason: Client Information System not yet gone into production

**6. Office of the Public Guardian increase Operations and Maintenance Costs (three positions and inhouse legal counsel)**

- Approved: \$ 500,000





**13. What is the current staffing levels department-wide, as well as the staffing levels (number of positions and vacancy) on counsellors and social work broken down by regions please.**

Attached as Appendix B.

**14. Naujaat social workers update.**

The housing allocation for the Community Social Services Worker position in Naujaat has been secured, facilitating the continuation of the hiring process. Presently, the position is in the recruitment phase and undergoing screening.

I would like to thank committee members for your thoughtful inquiries during the Standing Committee's Televised Hearings. I appreciate the depth of your questions. Thank you for your support, diligence, and commitment to addressing these crucial matters. Our dedication to transparency and accountability within our department remains steadfast and we are available to answer any further questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Ellsworth  
Deputy Minister

## APPENDIX A- 2019-2023 Persons Out of Territory

2019-20

OUT OF TERRITORY PLACEMENT	ADULT	GUARDIANSHIP
	COUNT	COUNT
South Baffin	3	19
North Baffin	3	13
Kivalliq	4	32
Kitikmeot	6	24
<b>TOTAL</b>	16	88

2020-21

OUT OF TERRITORY PLACEMENT	ADULT	GUARDIANSHIP
	COUNT	COUNT
South Baffin	6	19
North Baffin	2	11
Kivalliq	4	35
Kitikmeot	4	22
<b>TOTAL</b>	16	87

2021-22

OUT OF TERRITORY PLACEMENT	ADULT	GUARDIANSHIP
	COUNT	COUNT
South Baffin	2	19
North Baffin	2	9
Kivalliq	0	38
Kitikmeot	0	33
<b>TOTAL</b>	4	99

2022-23

OUT OF TERRITORY PLACEMENT	ADULT	GUARDIANSHIP
	COUNT	COUNT
South Baffin	2	19
North Baffin	5	10
Kivalliq	7	29
Kitikmeot	15	24
<b>TOTAL</b>	29	82

CHILD/YOUTH	TOTAL OOT
COUNT	COUNT
11	33
26	42
27	63
14	44
<b>78</b>	<b>182</b>

CHILD/YOUTH	TOTAL OOT
COUNT	COUNT
18	43
21	34
29	68
17	43
<b>85</b>	<b>188</b>

CHILD/YOUTH	TOTAL OOT
COUNT	COUNT
18	39
21	32
26	64
12	45
<b>77</b>	<b>180</b>

CHILD/YOUTH	TOTAL OOT
COUNT	COUNT
19	40
24	39
32	68
14	53
<b>89</b>	<b>200</b>

**APPENDIX B- 2019-2023 Vacancy Report for Front Line Workers as of August 31 2023**

CSSW	Filled			Casuals							Comment
	Funded	Filled	Vacant	Inuit	Non Inuit	Funded	Unfunded	Inuit	Non Inuit	Casual total	
<b>SOUTH BAFFIN</b>											
Iqaluit	9	9	0	2	7	0	6	0	6	6	
Kimmirut	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	
Kinngait	2	0	2	0	0	2	2	0	4	4	
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>	
<b>NORTH BAFFIN</b>											
Arctic Bay	1	1	0		1	0	0			0	
Clyde River	1	1	0		1	0	0			0	
Grise Fiord	1	1	0	1		0	0			0	
Sanirajak	1	0	1			0	0			0	
Igloolik	2	0	2			2	0		2	2	
Pangnirtung	2	0	2			1	1		2	2	
Pond Inlet	2	1	1	1		1	1		2	2	
Qikiqtarjuaq	1	1	0		1	0	1		1	1	
Resolute Bay	1	1	0		1	0	0			0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	
<b>KIVALLIQ</b>											
Arviat	3	1	2		1	0	0			0	
Baker Lake	2	1	1	1		1	1		2	2	
Chesterfield Inlet	1	0	1	1		0	0			0	
Coral Harbour	1	0	1			1	0		1	1	
Nauyasat	1	1	0			0	0			0	
Rankin Inlet	5	5	0	4	1	0	1		1	1	
Sanikiluaq	1	0	1			1	0		1	1	
Whale Cove	1	1	0	1		0	0			0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	
<b>KITIKMEOT</b>											
Cambridge Bay	2	1	1			1	1		2	2	
Gjoa Haven	1	1	0			0	0			0	
Kugaaruk	1	0	1			1	0		1	1	
Kugluktuk	2	2	0			0	1		1	1	
Taloyoak	2	1	1			1	0		1	1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	
<b>CSSW TOTAL</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>28</b>	