

MEMBER'S STATEMENT – OCTOBER 24, 2008 – GREAT SLAVE

NWT MIDWIFERY PROGRAM

Thank you, Mr. Speaker

I recently attended an open house for the Yellowknife Health and Social Services Association's Midwifery Program. The event was well-attended and highlighted the value of midwives in the NWT.

There are currently three midwives practicing in the Northwest Territories, two in Fort Smith and one in Yellowknife, N'Diloh and Dettah. The Midwifery Profession Act, proclaimed in 2005, provides for the licensing, registration and regulation of Registered Midwives in the NWT. Midwives have been active intermittently in Yellowknife since 2006 and in Fort Smith for over ten years.

Midwives are health care professionals who provide low-risk women with the necessary support, care and advice during pregnancy, labour, delivery and after birth. Their care includes preventative measures, detection of complications in mother and child, and accessing further medical assistance if there is a need.

The midwife has an important role as a health counsellor and educator, not only for the mother, but also her family and community. Midwives may practise in any setting, such as homes, clinics or hospitals. Women in a midwife's care do not normally see a physician unless complications arise. That reduces the workload on general practitioners currently performing routine examinations on expectant mothers.

Obstetricians and gynaecologists are open to partnerships with midwives to make sure that mother and child receive quality care.

Mr. Speaker, midwifery is publicly funded in five jurisdictions, including the NWT. The Province of Alberta has recently allowed insurance coverage to midwifery services. In Holland, England and New Zealand, midwives manage 70% or more of all births, compared to only 3% in Canada. There is growing popularity for midwives here, and an increasing number of expectant mothers are being turned away due to limited funding for midwifery programs. Since January 2008, 16 Yellowknife women have been declined midwifery service due to lack of space.

Yellowknife Health and Social Services has funding for only one midwife position, although there is clear public support for more. Yellowknife Health and Social Services is committed to the success of a sustainable midwifery program. The midwife works closely with obstetricians, family physicians, nurses and has regular contact with the midwives in Fort Smith. Clients can call upon the midwife 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, unless she is off call or on annual or educational leave. The midwife is presently responsible for 26 women requiring various types of care, and fills her quota of new clients every month. Mr. Speaker, a detailed list of her responsibilities demonstrates the wide range of services provided by a midwife and helps us understand how highly women in the community value her care.

Mr. Speaker, at the appropriate time I will be asking the Minister responsible for Health and Social Services some questions on the midwife program in Yellowknife.

