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Building *Nunavut* Together
Nunavut iuqatigiingniq
Bâtir le *Nunavut* ensemble

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Department of Education
Ilinniaqtuliqiyikkut
Ministère de l'Éducation



Minister's Speaking Notes

Department of Education's Opening Remarks

Standing Committee on Legislation

Public Hearings on Bill 25

9:15 a.m., Monday, 25 November 2019

Iqaluit, Nunavut

Honourable David Joanasie

Minister of Education

Ullaakut, good morning, bonjour.

Mr. Chair and fellow members of the committee, I am pleased to appear in front of the Standing Committee on Legislation as part of the public hearings on Bill 25, An Act to Amend the *Education Act* and the *Inuit Language Protection Act*.

Mr. Chair, I would like to thank you and the committee for the invitation to discuss the amendments found in Bill 25. I have prepared reports on inclusive education and language of instruction as requested by the members and have shared copies of them along with my opening comments.

Nunavut is a young territory. It is our responsibility as Members of the Legislative Assembly to make sure young people can achieve their goals by providing the tools necessary for success.

Our education system is the very foundation where young people can build their futures. As MLAs, legislation is one of the best tools we have to help Nunavummiut improve their lives. With Bill 25, students **will** receive better inclusive education. A quality Inuktitut language curriculum for all grades **will** continue to grow. There **will** be stronger supports for the Coalition of Nunavut District Education Authorities and local District Education Authorities (DEAs). And the duties of principals, school staff, DEAs, and the Minister **will** better reflect the specific needs of our communities and territory as a whole. Together, we can provide the tools and skills our young people need for a rapidly changing world – while holding true to Nunavut’s language, culture and identity.

Because education affects everyone in the territory, many Nunavummiut are taking time from their busy lives to watch these hearings. I hope they find these hearings informative and I thank them for their continuing involvement in the education system. It matters and it is appreciated.

Mr. Chair, I am pleased that the committee has invited key education stakeholders as witnesses to these hearings. All of these witnesses participated in the many consultations that have taken place across the territory in preparation of this bill. I thank them all for their feedback and recommendations, and for appearing before the committee over the next few days.

I would like to also thank staff from the Department of Education, the Department of Culture and Heritage, and the Department of Justice for their continued support throughout these hearings.

Mr. Chair, I would like to introduce Kathy Okpik, Deputy Minister for the Department of Education, and Melissa Alexander, Manager of Planning, Reporting, and Evaluation, who are accompanying me today.

Mr. Chair, our communities are each different and have specific needs, values and resources that must be considered when creating legislation. These specific and unique differences must be preserved and strengthened through our education system.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 25 seeks to overcome these differences between our communities through an education system that balances the need for local autonomy, with the responsibility to provide every Nunavut student with the same high-quality level of learning.

In a similar way, Nunavummiut elected all of us, the 22 members of the Nunavut Legislative Assembly, to represent our communities' distinct point of view and to raise their specific concerns. But we also need to balance those local concerns and perspectives with the needs of the territory as a whole.

To guide the balance between local and territorial concerns, MLAs came to an agreement on what the Government of Nunavut's

priorities and goals should be. These were stated in the mandate document *Turaaqtavut*, which we released in March 2018.

Under *Sivummuaqpalliajjutivut*, we've committed to "provide education and training that prepares children, youth, and adult learners for positive contributions to society and for meaningful employment."

MLAs agreed that one way to meet this goal was by committing to amend the *Education Act* and the *Inuit Language Protection Act* to ensure quality schooling and to improve student outcomes. This was the **only legislation** we committed to amending and prioritizing during this mandate.

Mr. Chair, in 2008, when the *Education Act* and the *Inuit Language Protection Act* became law, they became two of Nunavut's most important pieces of legislation. They have laid the foundation for delivering the knowledge and skills youth need for a bright future,

while also protecting and revitalizing Inuit culture, values, language, and identity.

This is why, as Minister for the Departments of Education and Culture and Heritage, I knew amending these *Acts* would stir passion within Nunavummiut.

That is why one year ago, in September 2018, my department set out on public consultations for the *Education Act* and the *Inuit Language Protection Act*. We offered a set of proposed amendments to begin the conversation with Nunavummiut and we were eager to listen to their thoughts.

The proposed amendments were based around four goals to make sure these two *Acts* continued to effectively deliver the quality education our youth need and deserve:

1. Creating a better balance of roles and responsibilities between the DEAs and the Minister;

2. Supporting local DEAs to ensure they have the capacity to meet their mandated obligations;
3. Extending bilingual education deadlines to address the need for Inuktitut speaking teachers and to support language of instruction in the classroom; and
4. Increasing consistency in the delivery of education programs across the territory so all students have access to the same level of programs and supports - regardless of the community they live in.

Because of the importance of amending the *Education Act* and the *Inuit Language Protection Act*, the Department set the ambitious target of consulting every community in Nunavut. This was necessary because these Acts affect the lives of all Nunavummiut.

We wanted to make sure everyone's ideas and opinions from all 25 communities were heard. We felt that all Nunavummiut needed the

opportunity to provide their feedback and concerns on changes to these two important pieces of legislation.

Despite the size of Nunavut, I am happy to say we achieved this goal.

By the time we visited our last community in January 2019, the consultation team, with representatives from the Coalition of Nunavut District Education Authorities and Nunavut Tunngavik, Inc., met with over 800 Nunavummiut. This included DEA members, partner agencies, parents, students, teachers and youth groups. I truly appreciate the warm welcome we received from these communities.

Over the five months of consultations, the diversity of experiences, perspectives and ideas told by Nunavummiut helped to give us a better understanding of the issues and concerns related to the

Education Act, the *Inuit Language Protection Act* and the education system as a whole.

Students said that they wanted to be well-prepared for any future opportunities, whether it was going on to post-secondary education or entering the job market right away. At the same time, our students rightfully want to retain their culture and language. One Grade 11 student in Baker Lake told us:

“Once we get into higher grades from elementary schools, we start to forget what we learned in Inuktitut because there are not many academic Inuktitut teachers for high school.”

DEA members repeatedly told us that they strive to make sure that Inuit language and culture remain strong within their schools, but they are challenged by the amount of time and effort needed to do this effectively. The Gjoa Haven District Education Authority explained that:

“We do our best to fulfill all our obligations under the *[Education] Act* but the DEA portfolio is overwhelming and enough for a full-time job. We are not always fully aware of our responsibilities under the *Act* and more training and support is needed.”

Inuit educators in Nunavut’s middle and high schools explained that they need more support and resources to teach students Inuktitut. A Cape Dorset teacher explained at their community consultation that:

“Being an Inuk teacher in high school is hard. Not many Inuktitut resources are available in high school for all grade levels.”

All the feedback my department received from these consultations confirmed that we need adjustments to the foundation of our

education system. To make sure Nunavut children and youth have a bright future, changes to the *Education Act* and the *Inuit Language Protection Act* are required.

It is a challenging task to propose amendments that will be universally liked by a broad and diverse population. As I said earlier, it is tough balancing local concerns with the needs of the entire territory.

I want to assure everyone that the input provided by Nunavummiut has been carefully considered and is reflected in the proposed amendments found in Bill 25. My department did its best to produce a bill that responds to the many voices of Nunavummiut.

I know there are Nunavummiut who do not like everything proposed in Bill 25. However, this Bill strikes a balance within the diverse needs of our education system.

Based on our goals for education, I am sure Mr. Chair, that you and the committee will see that the amendments proposed in Bill 25 will further strengthen the foundation of the *Education Act* and the *Inuit Language Protection Act*.

Mr. Chair, before I begin explaining more specifically some of the amendments found in Bill 25, I would like to let you and the members of the committee know that the Bill we are discussing today is only one chapter in a longer story that goes back six years.

In 2013, the Office of the Auditor General of Canada (OAG) conducted the first major review of the *Education Act* since it became law in 2008.

Their report found that the implementation of the *Education Act* was a major undertaking for the Government of Nunavut, especially with regards to bilingual education. Fully achieving all aspects of the *Act* would require significant time, long-term effort, the creation of

new resources, and the involvement of multiple stakeholders, including DEAs, parents, students and communities.

When their report was released, the OAG did not make any recommendations to amend the Act. However, it did state publicly for the first time that there were many areas of concern, such as:

- How inclusive education required more support from the department;
- How DEAs were expressing that they were having difficulties performing their assigned duties;
- How the pace of developing teaching resources for new curriculum had been slow, contributing to the department's inability to meet the bilingual education timelines; and
- How the shortage of qualified Inuktitut-speaking teachers was delaying progress toward meeting the bilingual education timelines.

From 2014-2015, there was a second major review of the *Education Act* carried out by Nunavut's Special Committee to Review the *Education Act*.

As part of this review, the Special Committee consulted Nunavummiut in three ways, by written submission, public meetings, and a public hearing at the Nunavut Legislature.

The Special Committee received 38 total written submissions from 24 individuals, 9 DEAs and 5 organizations, including Nunavut Tunngavik, Inc., the Coalition of Nunavut District Education Authorities (CNDEA) and the Nunavut Teachers' Association (NTA).

The public meetings were held in four communities—Baker Lake, Kugluktuk, Pond Inlet, and Iqaluit.

During the formal hearings at the Legislative Assembly, the Special Committee wanted to examine specific issues that were raised through the written submissions and the public meetings.

Representatives from the Department of Education, NTI, the CNDEA and the NTA appeared as witnesses during the hearings.

Based on its extensive review and consultations, the Special Committee tabled its Final Report on the *Education Act* with 23 recommendations for amending the *Act*.

Mr. Chair, I would like to note some of the recommendations provided by Nunavut's Special Committee:

- redefining the roles and responsibilities of the DEA Coalition to ensure it has a clear mandate;
- focusing on providing and implementing a consistent program and curriculum across all regions to ensure that students in every community had access to the same education program;

- providing the resources to ensure early childhood programs are made available in every community;
- supporting local DEAs to ensure they have the capacity to meet their mandated obligations;
- strengthening inclusive education to ensure students are provided with the supports they need in the classroom; and
- extending bilingual education deadlines.

Mr. Chair, I would like to pause here to note that as a government department, we take our direction from Nunavummiut, as voiced through the Legislative Assembly. It was for this reason, that we used the 23 recommendations provided by the members of the 4th Legislative Assembly to guide our work on proposed amendments to the *Education Act* and the *Inuit Language Protection Act*.

Beginning in May 2016, the department held two rounds of public consultations on proposed amendments to the *Acts*. Ten

consultations were held in eight communities. Regional meetings were held with representatives of the DEAs and targeted meetings were held with education partners, including NTI and the CNDEA.

Based on the feedback provided by Nunavummiut, the Department made significant revisions to its initial proposals. This required the submission of a new legislative proposal.

A few of the changes the Department made in direct response to Nunavummiut feedback included:

- Dropping the proposal to delete bilingual education deadlines;
- Dropping the proposal of having a single bilingual education model;
- Dropping the proposal to have a single territory-wide calendar;

- Dropping the proposal to limit DEAs' role in principal annual performance;
- Providing DEAs with the choice to deliver early childhood education programs directly;
- Proposing a Council of DEAs with clear accountabilities and increased responsibilities to the local DEAs;
- Introducing the concept of a skilled Inuit cultural expert to account for the reality that elders are in high demand across the territory; and
- Increasing departmental accountability on the implementation of bilingual education and inclusive education in its annual reporting requirements.

In April 2017, the Department tabled Bill 37. As we all know, Bill 37 died on the Order Paper upon dissolution of the 4th Legislative Assembly.

Despite this, our government still saw amendments to the *Education Act* and the *Inuit Language Protection Act* as necessary to address the challenges facing our education system.

When I introduced Bill 25 in June 2019, I made sure significant efforts were made to address the ideas, recommendations and comments made over six years of review and consultation.

Mr. Chair, Bills 37 and 25 significantly differ in many key areas.

We are no longer proposing to change the wording in the *Inuit Language Protection Act* regarding the rights of parents to have their children receive Inuit Language instruction in schools. My Department firmly believes that parents should be able to exercise their right to high quality Inuktut education for their children, and that students have access to instruction in their first language.

In Bill 37, the Department initially proposed to change the wording, so that parents were limited to having their child receive the *majority* of instruction in the Inuit language, rather than Inuit Language instruction in general. Based on the feedback of Nunavummiut, we are no longer proposing to amend this fundamental parental right.

Bill 25 takes a phased implementation approach to the delivery of Inuit Language Arts instruction for grades 4 to 12, up to 2039. These timelines take into consideration curriculum development, student resources, teacher training and assessment methods. These are the essential elements needed to support successful Inuit language instruction in the classroom.

In 2017, the Department proposed to extend bilingual education deadlines to 2029 for Grades 4 to 9 and to monitor capacity to implement Grades 10 to 12.

Throughout consultations on Bill 25, we repeatedly heard from Nunavummiut that the pace of Inuktitut curriculum and resource development has been slow, and that to truly support Inuktitut-speaking teachers and students, we needed to provide them with the same level of curriculum, resources, and tools as their English and French speaking counterparts.

I know some Nunavummiut have expressed concern with our proposal to focus on Inuit Language Arts in Bill 25. I have heard the concerns that the timelines are too long; that they are not ambitious enough; and they do not address our urgent need for Inuktitut-speaking teachers.

Mr. Chair, I would like to respond to these concerns directly.

As we travelled across the territory meeting with Nunavummiut, we heard great concern over language loss among our youth at home and in the school.

We heard confusion expressed by teachers, parents and students about the dialectal differences within their communities and the impact this has on learning.

We heard the need for a holistic approach to Inuit language instruction.

As a department, we gave careful consideration to the development of our timelines for Inuit Language instruction.

Our decision to focus on Inuktitut Language Arts for first and second language learners came after careful consideration on the most effective way to prevent further language loss, encourage language retention in our schools and support each of the language of instruction models.

Our implementation plans for language of instruction will support schools across the territory whether they are in communities that are experiencing significant language loss or communities where Inuktitut is the first language.

Our teams at the department work hard to develop made-in-Nunavut curriculum, based on Inuit Qaujjimajatuqangit and there are many steps involved in this process;

Our curriculum team first conducts a needs-assessment including research, cross-jurisdictional scans, and review by subject area specialists.

Following the initial needs assessment and research, expert working groups are established and include a variety of stakeholders, such as the Department of Culture and Heritage, Inuit Uqausinginnik Taiguusiliuqtiit, Elders, and teachers. The intent of the working group is to identify which outcomes, competencies, activities should be included in the curriculum, as well as what should be produced by our other divisions, such as

the development of teacher guides, classroom assessment tools, and student materials.

After further internal collaboration and outcome testing in a classroom, the draft curriculum is written to incorporate Nunavut specific learning goals, outcomes, skills, and knowledge. The curriculum is then rigorously field tested in a selection of schools, and feedback from the field tests is incorporated. The process can take between 2-3 years for each curriculum, plus additional time for assessments, resources and training, but results in better and more relevant courses for Nunavummiut.

A good example of made in Nunavut curriculum is our grade 10 social studies courses. The courses were created following the curriculum development process, and several of the courses were written in Inuktitut first, then translated into English. All 4 modules in the grade 10 social studies curriculum were designed with an Inuit Qaujimagajatuqangit foundation, and cover themes such as

residential schools, Inuit land claim processes, and governance. Mr. Chair, we are very proud of the curriculum we are producing. We know our plans for language of instruction implementation require qualified bilingual teachers to deliver Inuit Language instruction. As a department, we have done a significant amount of work to create the conditions necessary to develop and support bilingual teachers.

Beginning in 2015, our Department conducted a feasibility study that looked at establishing a university in Nunavut. A Strategic Advisory Committee was established with representatives from the Departments of Family Services and Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs, Nunavut Arctic College, NTI, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, and Agnico Eagle.

The Advisory Committee provided insights and guidance on a wide range of issues on the establishment of a university in Nunavut, including student recruitment; support and retention; language and

culture; and institutional governance. Together, they recommended that the best option for Nunavut was a joint partnership between Nunavut Arctic College and an existing university.

A selection committee was then established from this group and included representatives from the Department of Education, NAC and NTI.

Mr. Chairperson, I am proud to say that our joint efforts have resulted in a 10-year strategic partnership with Memorial University of Newfoundland.

A major focus of this partnership is the delivery of a re-focused Nunavut Teacher Education Program, an initiative I am proud to say was supported by the Department of Education, realizing the needs of our education system and the need to foster Inuktitut.

The re-focused program incorporates Inuktitut language and culture to ensure that graduates are prepared to enter Nunavut's bilingual teaching system. The first year of the refreshed NTEP began this September of 2019.

After completion of the first year, learners will receive a *Nunavummi Inuktitut Uqariuqsatittijunirmut Ilinniarniq* certificate. Learners who complete the second year will be entitled to a language specialist diploma and will be qualified to work in our schools. Learners who complete the program will be prepared to obtain their bachelors of education.

This ladder approach to teacher certification will support the professional development of Inuit entering the teaching profession.

Mr. Chair, I am confident that the Nunavut Teachers' Education Program is the best way we can develop the next generation of

Inuktitut speaking teachers. My department will continue to support this made-in-Nunavut program.

Mr. Chairperson, we have also made considerable efforts to develop new initiatives and programs to support Inuit employment in our schools and throughout our department.

My department has recently developed and implemented *Sivummuakpaallirutiksat*, to provide our Inuit employees an opportunity to take a paid education leave for professional development and advancement in their careers.

We continue to deliver courses in the Certificate in Educational Leadership program entirely in Inuktitut. This certificate is a requirement for educators seeking to become leaders within our school system.

Additionally, we are reviewing our teacher certification regulations to ensure there are laddering opportunities and clear pathways into the classroom for the next generation of Inuit teachers.

We have increased the salaries of language specialists to make sure they are paid the same as all teachers in the classroom.

All of these actions will form the basis of our 10-year Educator Retention and Recruitment Strategy, reference to which has been included in Bill 25.

Mr. Chairperson, we are no longer proposing to establish a DEA Council to replace the Coalition of Nunavut DEAs.

In Bill 37, the Department initially proposed the creation of an independent DEA Council with greater legal, financial and operational responsibilities to support the work of the local DEAs.

The idea of this Council was originally proposed as a way to provide DEAs with an independent organizing body that would support DEAs in their day-to-day work.

The need for additional support and resources was a message we had heard clearly from DEA members across the territory.

It's a need that still exists today.

The delivery of education is a shared responsibility between the Department and DEAs.

DEAs ensure that the school budget is being managed effectively, that school attendance and *Inuuqatigiitsiarniq* policies are in place, that local programs are being delivered to students to reflect the local culture and language of the community.

My department knows that supporting DEAs means supporting students, principals and teachers in the classrooms.

Throughout the consultation process for Bill 25, we heard repeatedly from the CNDEA that the idea of establishing a Council to better support and represent the DEAs was an attempt by the Department to centralize authority without accountability.

Mr. Chairperson, we heard that the Coalition was developed in Nunavut by DEAs for DEAs. To acknowledge this home grown agency, we are now proposing to strengthen the Coalition in the legislation by providing them with more funding and more responsibilities to support local DEAs.

Mr. Chair, many other changes were made to the Bill in response to feedback we received from Nunavummiut. These include:

1. Nine school calendars (three for each region) instead of the previously proposed three calendars. We heard that the seasonal variations across the territory required the need for more than just one calendar per region. DEAs want their school calendars to have greater flexibility to respond to these seasonal differences. We listened.
2. DEAs maintain authority over principal appointment and re-appointment panel instead of the Department taking over the process. We heard clearly from DEAs that principals are leaders in the schools and the communities. We listened. DEAs are well placed to maintain this authority given their presence at the local level.
3. Local education program enhancements (local programs) courses can be offered by DEAs at all grade levels. The Department had previously proposed limiting courses to Grades 10-12 under Bill 37. We heard clearly that the education system needs to reflect and incorporate the principles of *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* so that students can

successfully learn to navigate the world with a strong sense of their Inuit heritage and culture. We listened. Local programs are the best method of ensuring that this opportunity is in place.

4. DEAs will be able to make other modifications to the curriculum in order to incorporate Inuit Societal Values and *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* principles in the classroom.
5. DEAs will have an enhanced role on the inclusive education review board. DEAs expressed a desire to maintain some involvement in inclusive education decisions as they are likely to have the confidence of parents and can act as liaisons between the school and parents, advocating on behalf of students. We listened.

Mr. Chair, I would also like to take some time to speak directly to the issue of social promotion. We've heard this issue come up in every community across the territory.

Nunavummiut feel as though students are graduating without the required academic courses and skills needed to pursue post-secondary studies programs.

Mr. Chair, let me make it perfectly clear: my department does not support the practice of social promotion.

Our policy on student placement, promotion and retention allows the school team to retain students at their current grade level if a parent requests it or if a student has missed a substantial amount of instructional time.

The department is also developing classroom based assessment tools for teachers to determine how well students are achieving learning outcomes.

Nunavut has a system of inclusive education that entitles all students to receive the supports they need to succeed in school based on their unique strengths and challenges as learners.

We have heard the concerns that the system needs improvement. We are actively taking steps to strengthen our system on inclusive education. As part of our strategy, we are:

- Laying the foundation through our proposed amendments to inclusive education in the Bill and clearly defining the roles and expectations of school staff, parents, DEAs and students in the legislation;
- Establishing a Student Achievement Division dedicated to overseeing the implementation of policies, procedures, and standards for inclusive education;
- Supporting a multi-disciplinary team of specialists that provides education support services to all communities, including a behaviour and social emotional learning

coordinator; a counselling development coordinator; a deaf and hard of hearing specialist; and student assessment and evaluation coordinators.

- Allocating additional funding to the installation of sound field equipment in all K-12 learning spaces in Nunavut to support students with hearing loss;
- Partnering with the Department of Health to ensure students are properly diagnosed and receive the education support services they require in school;
- Developing tools and resources for school staff, including an Individual Student Support Plan Handbook that outlines the process for planning, developing, implementing, monitoring and revising Individual Student Support Plans and tools to help teach students skills in relaxation, positive thinking, and mindfulness; and

- Providing ongoing training through annual conferences to Student Support Teachers, Principals and *Ilinniarvimmi Inuusilirijit*.

My department has done significant work to strengthen our system of inclusive education to improve the educational outcomes of our students.

Mr. Chair, we will continue to actively review, update and evaluate our programs, resources, policies and initiatives to ensure that Nunavut's inclusive education system is responsive to the needs of our students.

We won't see the results of the proposed amendments immediately. It will take several years and the combined efforts of our education partners before we see the outcomes of these legislative amendments.

That should not be a reason to **not** make these amendments.

It should be a reason to make these amendments **now, before more time is lost.**

To feel a sense of urgency as a government to take decisive action now for the future of Nunavummiut.

My department has worked tirelessly since enacting the *Education Act* in 2008 to strengthen the foundation of our education system and to improve the student experience, their academic potential and ultimately – their futures.

Despite the progress we've made since 2008, we **know** there is still much work to do. We **know** this will take time. We **know** it will take patience. We **know** it will take parents, teachers, students, community members and the passion of Nunavummiut.

Sustainable improvements in Nunavut's education system will require the combined efforts of all of us.

As Members of the Legislative Assembly, we developed our vision for education and expressed it in *Turaaqtavut*. We know what we must do, and we now have an achievable, resourced, time-specific plan.

As a government, we committed to amending the *Education Act* and the *Inuit Language Protection Act*, and to ensure quality education and improved student outcomes.

Let us say together, as Members of the Legislative Assembly, that we will achieve our goals for education.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I thank everyone here for their passion, their dedication and their commitment to Nunavummiut and our territory's future.

I look forward to the questions and comments from the members and witnesses.