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Collection of Unpaid Fines for Traffic Violations

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have made a commitment to speak during this session about an issue that has affected a number of citizens recently here in the city of Yellowknife who, for various reasons, haven't paid traffic fines. Handcuffing homeless mothers and throwing them into jail for three days is just not a good way to collect fines, Mr. Speaker.

As a recent Supreme Court ruling has shown, this practice is actually illegal. This was unbeknownst to the City of Yellowknife municipal enforcement division, as they have been arresting people for the past nine years for unpaid fines. As we understand it, the City of Yellowknife has instructed its municipal enforcement officers not to act on any further warrants for committal arising from municipal bylaw or territorial legislation. This is the right thing for the City to do, Mr. Speaker.

In light of the recent decision, the Territorial Court will not issue a warrant for committal until a judicial hearing takes place. A summons will also have to be issued and served on the person affected before the hearing can take place. Issuing and serving a summons is a time consuming exercise, Mr. Speaker. On average, it's estimated to take one half to three quarters of an hour, and each hearing will take an equivalent amount of time.

For fines in the range of \$20 to \$200, it's just not a prudent or a cost effective means of collection. I also feel that the Department of Transportation has an obligation to the people of the Northwest Territories to advise them, in writing, prior to the expiration of their driver's licenses, or the expiration of their registration, especially given the fact that licenses, Mr. Speaker, expire every five years and people can often forget about renewals.

The Department of Transportation has to make the necessary legislative or policy changes required to facilitate outstanding municipal and territorial traffic violation fines being registered with the motor vehicles registry. To me, this is just a commonsense approach of letting people know they owe fines, and it is an effective means of collection. When an individual would go to renew a license or registration, they would be notified that they have outstanding violations. Without paying the fine, they could not renew registrations or licenses.

Mr. Speaker, given the recent court decision, this is something the Department of Transportation has to get to work on immediately. Thank you.

---Applause