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Concerns Regarding the Student Financial Assistance Program

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am going to speak today about student financial assistance and some of the problems that constituents of mine and many others are having with the way in which policies and rules are enforced.

I have a constituent who ventured south to attend college for the first time last fall, after attending school here from kindergarten to Grade 12. This person was enrolled in six courses in the first semester. When they realized six courses were too much for them to handle, it was too late to withdraw. This young person gave it their best attempt and passed three of the six courses. They then went on and passed all of their courses in the second semester.

This individual came back to Yellowknife for the summer to find employment and to earn some money to go back to school. What they found when they returned home was a letter from Education, Culture and Employment advising them that: a) they are on suspension for one year; and b) they would have to pay back the money that was given to them from the previous year. Talk about a low blow for a student that is planning on going back to school.

Mr. Speaker, this young person who, as I said, has gone to school their entire career, kindergarten to Grade 12, in the North, is trying to get an education to come back to the North to be a productive citizen here. They can accept the fact that they are on suspension for SFA; that is one thing. Mr. Speaker, what they can't accept is the fact that they are being ordered to repay these loans while still at school.

Mr. Speaker, I find it unacceptable that students are being asked to repay loans when they are still at school. This is unfair to these students who are really only trying to better themselves with an education. It is quite a nice gesture by the Government of the Northwest Territories to waive interest charges for the first year. However, a \$5500 bill to a student is too much for most to handle or for most to cope with.

There has to be a better way to address concerns like the one I have mentioned, and other colleagues before me have spoken about the same concern. It is not a new problem. The appeals process goes by the book. I am suggesting that the department not be so rigid, Mr. Speaker, and show some flexibility and show some compassion to the students who find themselves in this unfortunate type of situation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.