LEGISLATURE

House to debate emergency home care

Liberals to table private member's bill today

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THE TELEGRAM

The opposition keeps asking and the health minister keeps saying, 'not yet.'

Emergency home care for people who can't afford to pay their share has plagued the government in question period at the House of Assembly all week.

Later today, the House will debate a private member's bill introduced by Opposition House leader Kelvin Parsons Monday.

The bill will "urge government to immediately implement emergency measures to lessen the financial burden facing those requiring home care."

Low-income drug program a model?

During question period Tuesday, NDP Leader Lorraine Michael asked Health Minister Ross Wiseman to use the low-income prescription drug program as a model to help people who can't afford home care in the short term.

Wiseman replied the current formula has been around for a long time and he doesn't want to change anything until his department finishes its evaluation, which he said will contain significant changes.

"We want to do it right, Mr. Speaker, we just don't want to do it in a piecemeal fashion," Wiseman said.

"Our financial assessment tool is one of the cornerstone pieces of that (review) and when we've got the analysis completely done and we're ready to move forward, then and only then will we make any change."

Time factor questioned

Outside the House reporters asked Wiseman why the review was taking so long, especially when the justice minister is reviewing the entire adult justice system in two months.

The minister repeated that he wants to take the time to get it right.

Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones also spoke outside the House Tuesday.

She said the bill, to be debated later today, will ask the government to use the same formula that would qualify seniors for an income benefit to also be used to qualify people for 10 hours a week of free home care until a new model is in place.

Michael spoke outside the House after question period on Monday when the issue first came up.

Michael asked the minister Monday why the government wasn't doing anything about the emergency situations.

Wiseman answered by saying hospitals around the province deal with emergencies every day.

"This is not a game to me, when I'm in (the House)," Michael, who was visibly angry, said Monday. "And when he gets up and gives those kind of answers, to me that's game-playing. Well, I don't game-play with the lives of people."

Michael said a similar situation occurred in her riding where a woman was taking care of her husband and couldn't get home care because it would have cost too much.

The man has since died because of his illness.

"I cannot believe that we have a government saying ... with all the money that we have, that he is refusing to recognize there (are) some people in dire straits and he is refusing to recognize that," said Michael who wants something done for people in the short term.

"In the long term I think we should be doing what every other province in the country does.

"Home care is based on need. It's not based on assessment of income," said Michael.

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