

NDP Caucus News

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O’Leary Pushes for Support for Mothers and Babies Exposed to Substances

Today in the House of Assembly, NDP MHA Sheilagh O’Leary (St. John’s East-Quidi Vidi) advocated during Question Period for more support for pregnant mothers who use substances and their babies to access the support they need to thrive.

In our province, expectant mothers who use substances are facing significant barriers to care because of stigma. Instead of being met with support, many are navigating fear and judgment – forced to fight for access to the medical and social services they and their babies need, while worrying that seeking help could lead to separation through the foster system.

O’Leary is calling on government to take meaningful action to reduce this stigma and ensure the right supports are in place, so mothers can access care without fear and families can stay together.

“Speaker, Dr. Anne Drover, a pediatrician and associate professor at Memorial University, says stigma is preventing pregnant women who use substances from getting help for both mother and baby. She says the first step would be to ensure safe housing with the necessary support in place to keep mother and baby together and healthy and out of the foster care system,” said O’Leary.

“What is the Minister doing to reduce this stigma, and will there be funding in the upcoming budget specifically for this issue?”

Dr. Drover also noted in a *CBC News* article that an estimated 50 to 60 babies are born exposed to substances each year in Newfoundland and Labrador. However, this figure is only an estimate, as there is no comprehensive, standardized data collection in place.

The lack of accurate tracking makes it difficult to determine the true scope of the issue, and directly impacts the level of support, funding, and education required to respond effectively. O’Leary says government should be taking clear steps to collect this data, so decisions are based on a complete and accurate picture of need.

“I ask the Minister: will you commit to ensuring that this data is being tracked so that we can better support expectant mothers who use substances?” O’Leary asked.

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