



Government of Bermuda

Ministry of Social Development and Seniors

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

by

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Minister of Social Development and Seniors**

Ministry of Social Development and Seniors Projects

Friday, 23rd July 2021

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to update this honorable House on the important project work that is being undertaken by the Ministry of Social Development and Seniors.

Mr. Speaker, I will provide updates on the extension of the UN Convention on the rights of persons with Disabilities to Bermuda, the Children's Commission, Litigation Guardians, independent living, a Senior's Strategy, assisting the homeless and our engagement with the Third sector.

Mr. Speaker, this Honourable House will recall that the Ministry of Social Development and Seniors was created on the 9th October 2020. The Ministry comprises the Department of Child and Family Services; Ageing and Disability Services; the K. Margaret Carter Center and also has responsibility for the Human Rights Commission and Charities.

Mr. Speaker, the 2020 throne speech stated that this Government would seek the extension to Bermuda of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, reaffirming that all persons, irrespective of their type of disability, must enjoy fundamental human rights and freedoms.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform that technical officers have conducted a thorough review of the necessary articles of the convention to determine Bermuda's current compliance and what is required to meet full compliance. It should be noted that compliance is Island wide and not limited to Government Departments and services. The good news is that Bermuda is compliant in many areas but there is still much work to be done.

Mr. Speaker, I will provide further updates as this initiative progresses.

Mr. Speaker, the 2020 throne speech also advised that this Government would replace the Child Care Placement Board with a Children's Commission, whose remit will be to advocate for the children in care, promoting best practice policy, programmes and service responses to meet their needs.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform that we have conducted a review of the role of Children's Commissions in other jurisdictions and have also reached out to key stakeholders in Bermuda for their views on the proposed Children's Commission which I am currently considering.

Mr. Speaker, I plan to bring legislation forward this year to give effect to the Children's Commission.

Mr. Speaker, in tandem with this work, we are collaborating with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and have engaged consultants to conduct a review of the Litigation Guardian and Counsel services provided for under the Children Act 1998 as well as training.

Mr. Speaker, to assist us in reviewing the litigation guardian service and any improvements that can be made, two highly experienced court professionals will be working with us over the next 9 months. They will be supporting Bermuda to determine the model that works for us, taking into account the experiences of other jurisdictions. Their role is supportive and advisory.

Mr. Speaker, they are currently meeting with key stakeholders in Bermuda about how the litigation guardian service can be improved so as to provide the best possible service to children, young people and the courts.

Mr. Speaker, they will also deliver a 6-month training programme on the Litigation Guardian service. The training will be open to all professionals, including the litigation guardians themselves of course, litigation counsel, members of the judiciary and social workers. This is not an exclusive list and there are some key individuals who will also benefit from being involved in this programme.

Mr. Speaker, the 2020 throne speech also stated that this Government would fill the void that exists when young people “age out” of Government care, the Government will establish Independent Living Coordinators who will devise individual plans for our young people coming out of care, to provide affordable housing options, post-secondary education and career advice as well as access to physical and mental healthcare.

Mr. Speaker, at age 18, children in care of the Director, most of whom have spent the majority of their childhood with the department of child and family services are now expected to shift from being dependent on support from the Department to young adults dependent on themselves virtually overnight. Some have little to no support from their family. It is important the Department of Child and Family Services continue to provide support services needed if agreed to; to prevent adverse outcomes such as such as early parenthood, involvement with the criminal justice system, poverty, homelessness, and dependence on financial assistance.

Mr. Speaker, in order to reduce the barriers for successful transition to adulthood and invest in the success of these young people, the Department of Child and Family services has developed an independent living programme. This programme is designed specifically for children aging out of their care who at age eighteen (18) do not have an identified transition plan. Consideration will be given to those children who were involved with DCFS and aged out within the previous eighteen (18) months based on an established criteria.

Mr. Speaker, the independent living programme will provide stable housing and intensive support and guidance to assist these young persons in developing the life skills necessary to become successful and productive citizens. Programme deliverables will ensure the young person has stable housing, support in educational and vocational training, attains money management skills, support the young person in building and maintaining healthy relationships and lifelong connections with

caring adults, establish connections to medical and social/ emotional resources and assist the young person in securing and maintaining employment.

Mr. Speaker, collaboration will take place with workforce development to have the independent living programme participants engage with career development officers as a mandatory requirement for employment readiness via their personal employment plan. This will also be a requirement for financial assistance eligibility under the new financial assistance reform.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Child and Family Services is working with the Ministry of Public Works to identify a physical location for the male participants of the independent living programme. Five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000) has been allocated in this financial year for the property. The Haven is the identified residential location for the female programme participants. Under a memorandum of understanding, the upper level of its bay view property will be dedicated for use by the independent living programme.

Mr. Speaker, the independent living programme will be operational twenty-four (24) hours. There will be professional staff (independent living coordinators) and support staff engaged to implement the programme. Staff will come onboard trained in working with young persons with complex needs and will be equipped to deliver programming in accordance with best practice standards on youth independent living services. Having staff who understand trauma informed, strength based service delivery and the performance quality improvement process will ensure a seamless and successful implementation of a quality programme.

Mr. Speaker, the original timeline for this programme was scheduled for April 1, 2021, with an official launch/operational date of June 2021. However, as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic and its restrictions, the timeline for the launch has been pushed back. The revised launch date is set for September 2021.

Mr. Speaker, this Ministry is also developing a National Seniors strategy to meet the needs of the growing Senior's population in Bermuda to enable Bermudians to age well with dignity and respect. I look forward to bringing the strategy to this Honourable House in due course.

Mr. Speaker, one of the most vulnerable groups in our community are the homeless or those that are unsheltered. These are individuals or families who lack stable and appropriate housing. The economic effects of covid have added to the numbers of

unsheltered who were particularly challenged during the recent Shelter in place phases.

Mr. Speaker, this Government is cognizant of the challenges of the unsheltered and is helping. This includes the initiatives being managed by my colleague, the Honorable David Burch, Minister of Public Works under the short term economic stimulus package. Some one million six hundred thousand dollars (\$1,600,000) in Bermuda Housing Corporation projects that will produce 17 residential units. This is adding much needed units to the housing stock of the BHC who provide a significant service to those needing affordable housing.

Mr. Speaker, this Ministry is this year providing some five hundred and fifty thousand (\$550,000) in direct grant funds to support the operations at the emergency shelter on North Street for the unsheltered. My Honourable colleague is replacing the emergency housing shelter on North Street with a new facility this year which will provide a modern and more suitable facility to those most in need.

Mr. Speaker, this Ministry provides a further two million and fifty thousand dollars (\$2,050,000) in grants to assist with housing for seniors and other vulnerable groups. This combined with the work and funds provided by other entities within Government including financial assistance ensure that those most in need are helped and will continue to be helped.

Mr. Speaker, we will continue to fine tune our response to assisting the unsheltered and collaborate with the third sector to ensure that resources are directed to those most in need.

Mr. Speaker, in closing I would like to thank those organisations in the third sector who have worked so hard to provide assistance to the most vulnerable in our community during this very challenging time.

Mr. Speaker, I had regular meetings with them as we moved through each phase of the reopening of Bermuda to get updates on the challenges that their clients and their organisations were facing. Their selfless work to help Bermudians in need is heartwarming and I encourage my fellow Bermudians, if you cannot give financial support to these entities, please give of your time.

Mr. Speaker, I will continue to collaborate with the third sector groups to ensure that this Government is fully aware of the challenges faced by the third sector and their clients.

Thank you, **Mr. Speaker.**