



Government of Bermuda

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

by

The Hon. Tinée Furbert, JP, MP
Minister of Social Development and Seniors

National Child Safeguarding Policy
Working Together to Safeguard Children

Friday, 19th May 2023

Mr. Speaker,

This morning I rise to inform my Honourable colleagues and the public about the development of a National Child Safeguarding Policy, entitled: *“Working Together to Safeguard Children”* which is a guidance document for the Bermuda National Child Safeguarding Committee and sets direction for their mandate and work.

Mr. Speaker,

Let me first provide a brief historical backdrop on the origin of developing this Policy. During the Joint Ministerial Council held in 2015, it was agreed that Overseas Territories should lead a national response to child safeguarding to reiterate the commitment to delivering a zero-tolerance approach to child abuse in all its forms, and do everything that can be done to prevent harm, support victims and bring offenders to justice. It was also agreed that the UK Government and the Overseas Territories would work together and prioritize the safeguarding of children.

Mr. Speaker,

To ensure children’s needs are at the heart of the safeguarding system and environments are created in which all children have an equal opportunity to thrive, a child-centred and coordinated approach to safeguarding children needed to be

adopted. This approach requires the collaboration of multi-agencies through the sharing of information and the undertaking of robust risk assessments.

Mr. Speaker,

In 2017, the formulation of a National Child Safeguarding Committee was approved and later in 2019, in alignment with section 11A of the Children Act 1998, under the leadership of the Hon. Kathy Lynn Simmons JP, MP and the Ministry of Legal Affairs established a National Child Safeguarding Committee, which demonstrated Bermuda's commitment to guaranteeing a collaborative approach towards child safeguarding.

Mr. Speaker,

The National Child Safeguarding Committee comprises of the following members:

- Solicitor General;
- Director of Child and Family Services;
- Director of Court Services;
- Commissioner of Police;
- Director of Public Prosecutions;
- Permanent Secretary of the Ministry responsible for Child and Family Services;
- Commissioner of Prisons;
- Commissioner of Education; and,
- The Chief Medical Officer.

Recently I appointed a representative of the Bermuda Hospitals Board, the Clinical Director of the Intellectual Disabilities Programme to join the Committee, Mrs. Morrisa Rogers.

Mr. Speaker, the National Child Safeguarding Committee has three broad aims:

1. To coordinate the Bermuda Government's response to child safeguarding by drawing on cross-department knowledge, skills and expertise through a collaborative approach and align with constitutional and legislative responsibilities;
2. To develop effective multi-agency working to safeguard children from all forms of abuse through comprehensive policies established from best practice; and,

3. To foster collaboration with community partners and strengthen safeguarding, protection and prevention systems through a zero-tolerance approach to child abuse.

However, **Mr. Speaker,**

The overall purpose of the Child Safeguarding Committee is to develop a national plan of action. This plan of action includes making recommendations on effective mechanisms that will cause the authorities in Bermuda such as Government Ministries, Departments; Quangos; and child-focused Agencies to function in unison and develop the needed legislation, policies, procedures and activities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker,

In 2017, the UK Foreign Commonwealth Office (FCO) supported the visit of two FCO Consultants to the Island to share with the National Safeguarding Committee the work undertaken in the UK for child safeguarding. A mini conference for all agencies represented on the Committee was held at the Bermuda Underwater Exploration Institute where the Consultants made several presentations. It was the information shared at this mini conference that steered the subsequent development of a National Child Safeguarding Policy.

Mr. Speaker,

The Deputy Solicitor General who was Acting Chair of the National Child Safeguarding Committee at that time held a series of subsequent meetings with the Committee members to strategically develop a policy gathering input from all agency representatives.

The Director of Public Prosecutions who was then Acting as Legal Advisor to the Attorney General collated all the information from committee members and structured what is now the first-ever National Child Safeguarding Committee Policy for Bermuda, entitled *“Working Together to Safeguard Children”*.

Mr. Speaker,

The Policy is structured around three broad objectives:

1. To strengthen the Legislative Framework;
2. To strengthen the Collaborative Framework; and,
3. To strengthen the Community Protection Framework.

Each of these Frameworks comprises specific recommendations to amend legislation or for the Committee to implement and/or execute activities collaboratively to safeguard and promote the well-being of our children in Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker,

The implementation of the National Child Safeguarding Policy will place Bermuda in a better position when we have to report on compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Mr. Speaker,

The Child Safeguarding Policy will be placed on the Ministry's website at www.gov.bm . As such, I encourage my Honourable colleagues, the general public and the community at large to read the *Policy - Working Together to Safeguard Children*. We must all be agents of change and be proactive in preventing our children from all forms of abuse.

Mr. Speaker,

In closing, I extend my sincere thanks to Child Safeguarding Committee members for their diligence in working collaboratively to bring this Policy to fruition. The Government of Bermuda remains steadfast in providing our children with the protections that are necessary to safeguard them so they feel safe and can flourish to become productive members of our community. The future of our island is dependent on our children so let us work together to safeguard them now for their future destinies.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker!