



Ministerial Statement by

**THE HON. JASON P. HAYWARD, JP, MP**

**THE MINISTER OF ECONOMY & LABOUR**

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**Processing of British Overseas Territory Citizen (BOTC)  
Bermuda Passports**

**July 1, 2022**

**Mr. Speaker,**

I rise before this Honorable House to provide an update on Passport processing. Several weeks ago, the Bermuda public was advised of passport processing delays of 11 weeks. As the Minister responsible for the Department of Immigration, today I will:

- i. provide an overview of the operational challenge before us;
- ii. outline steps we are taking to address this issue; and
- iii. report on a new and more realistic timeline for processing passports.

First and foremost, I want to apologise for the continued delays in processing British Overseas Territories Citizen (BOTC) Bermuda passports which are now exceeding the 11 week timeframe.

**Mr. Speaker,**

I recognise and appreciate that the processing delays interfere with Bermudians' ability to plan and book travel. In some cases, despite applications submitted early, travel plans have had to change. Many have been disappointed by the service output, and I want to assure you this is being addressed.

I empathize deeply with Bermuda passport holders who are experiencing first-hand the frustration and inconvenience of the delays in passport processing. The issues are real and impact on our daily lives. I know of individuals who will miss weddings, graduations, family gatherings, training courses and business meetings, all because they don't have their passport. I see these individuals as I go through my daily life. I receive the phone calls and emails. I am aware of these serious and important concerns and can assure you that I know that we must do better.

## **Operational Challenges**

**Mr. Speaker,**

It is no secret that the Department of Immigration has long had operational challenges and has experienced backlogs from time to time. Since mid-way through the pandemic, the Department noticed a marked increase in passport applications after a long period of lower than normal overseas travel.

However, now the current volume of passport applications is not sustainable given the number of staff who process passports at the Department of Immigration. In particular, since March 2022,

the number of applications has **quadrupled** and continues to increase as more Bermudians desire to travel during the summer. With approximately two years of restrictive travel, the desire to get off “the rock” is certainly understandable and necessary.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Operational challenges within the Department of Immigration present consistent pressure as the Bermuda passport team does its best to move applications along. I want to remind the public that Bermuda passports are no longer approved or printed in Bermuda. In 2016, the UK Government unilaterally removed Bermuda’s ability to print passports. As a result, passport applications are sent to Her Majesty’s Passport Office (HMPO) in the UK, which manages this process.

HMPO can and have made changes, two of which, introduced in 2016 and 2021, were significant to the process, and each British Overseas Territory was required to comply:

1. As of August 2016, before we can send applications to HMPO, the Bermuda passport team are required to identify how each applicant is entitled to a BOTC passport.
2. More recently, in August 2021, the team must also determine whether an applicant is a dual British citizen or not.

With both changes, there is a requirement to enter detailed information in the passport application system so that HMPO can readily assess each applicant and carry the process through to printing the passport book.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The highlighted changes require diligence, attention to detail, and an ability to accurately interpret the British Nationality Act 1981 as matched with each applicant's demographic profile. Erring in identifying entitlement and dual citizenship can have a more significant impact on future applications for a BOTC Bermuda passport.

Before August 2016, the remit to identify entitlement was left to only a few staff of the Bermuda passport team. Before August 2021, there was no requirement to know about British citizenship. Now the entire team must be knowledgeable, and this required training and, in some cases, work-shadowing. The process of verification has created an administrative challenge which is exasperated by the high volume of applications that have been submitted to the Department.

### **Additional Resources**

**Mr. Speaker,**

Noting the resource challenges that the Department currently faces, the Department will seek to onboard additional staff to assist with the current high volume of applications. The Ministry has received approval from the Ministry of Finance to onboard additional staff to assist with the administrative processing of passports.

Over the long-term, it is anticipated that a permanent solution to the Department's general challenges and specific passport processing challenges would include an organizational review, a Departmental Reorganization, additional resources,

implementation of an improved and final technology solution. It still remains the Government's primary aim to have passport processing returned to Bermuda.

I will now provide an update on the new processing timeline for passport applications.

## **New Processing Timeline**

**Mr. Speaker,**

The current processing times have, in some cases, been up to 20 weeks. It is anticipated that with the addition of new staff the process will return 11 weeks.

Lastly, let me discuss the parameters for emergency passports.

## **Emergency Passport Applications**

**Mr. Speaker,**

While the need for emergency travel may arise, the Bermuda passport team undertake each request on a case-by-case basis with the goal of reserving its stock of emergency passport books for bona fide emergencies.

The reasons for issuing emergency BOTC Bermuda passports are limited because we utilize the guidelines of HMPO. Additionally, it is important that we adhere to the guidelines as best as possible because of the limited supply emergency travel documents (ETDs) that the Department of Immigration has in stock. The Department of Immigration has been advised by

HMPO that once the current stock of ETDs have been exhausted we will not be receiving any additional ETDs.

**Mr. Speaker,**

In closing, I again apologise to the Bermuda public for the passport processing delays and all the inconveniences they have caused. Despite this, I want to reassure you that the Department of Immigration remains committed to resolving these challenges so that passports are issued as soon as possible.

Thank you.