



Ministerial Brief

By

**The Hon. Patricia Gordon-Pamplin, JP, MP
Minister of Home Affairs**

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“Current Status of Bermudians travelling on Bermuda Passports to the United States”

Mr. Speaker, we recently became aware that some Bermudians were experiencing additional questions or delays at some United States borders. We must clarify that this situation specifically affects persons who received passports printed after May 2016. The British Overseas Territories Citizen (BOTC) Bermuda passports affected are those printed by Her Majesty’s Passport Office (HMPO) in the United Kingdom. BOTC Bermuda passports that were printed by the Bermuda Passport Office, Department of Immigration are not affected. This problem also does not affect any BOTC Bermuda passport holder who is being processed at the LF Wade International Airport. U.S. Customs and Border Protection (USCBP) officials at the LF Wade International Airport are fully aware of the new designation for Bermudians in the new BOTC Bermuda passports and are able to routinely process visa-free entry to the United States from Bermuda, per their standard practice.

BOTC Bermuda passport holders who are specifically affected are those who may be trying to board airlines in other countries and are disembarking in the United States; or persons who have arrived at the US borders and are being processed. To our knowledge this is occurring periodically and not with every traveller. However, we are concerned that the complaints may begin to occur more frequently.

Mr. Speaker, the new BOTC Bermuda passport is readable and contains a biometric chip. However, the code that is causing the problem is “GBD” as opposed to “BMU” which used to be the code included on the passport data page. On the passports printed by the Bermuda Passport Office, the code, “BMU” appeared at the top of the data page as “the code of the issuing state” and was also the first three digit code in the machine readable line. This code has now been replaced with “GBD” which is the same code used for all overseas territories. It should be noted that most other overseas territories require a visa which adds to the confusion.

Mr. Speaker, I must stress that the decision to transfer the printing was not a decision made by Bermuda. As our passports are British passports, the edict came from HMPO and the transfer process has been on-going since 2010. I have also been advised that the concern regarding the change from “BMU” to “GBD” was raised with HMPO by the Bermuda Passport Office in their deliberations. Unfortunately the concerns were ignored.

Mr. Speaker, since we became aware of the problems, we have been in discussions with HMPO, the Deputy Governor, the U.S. Consul General, and USCBP (Bermuda Office), with the aim of resolving the problem. In addition, the Honourable Premier has spoken to His Excellency, the Governor. The Premier’s concern led him to send a letter to the Minister responsible for the Overseas

Territories, Baroness Anelay, expressing his desire that this issue be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Mr. Speaker, obtaining a U.S. visa could reduce or eliminate additional questions at international borders due to the elimination of Bermuda's unique designation code. I must add that this situation is not due to any changes in USCBP procedures and U.S Immigration Law relating to Bermudians' admission into the United States. The decision to apply for a visa is up to each individual traveller. Each traveller, while contemplating whether they should apply for a U.S. visa, should also give due consideration to the fact that the U.S. Consulate has processing timelines that they adhere to. Prospective applicants should follow instructions on the U.S. Consulate's website: <https://bm.usconsulate.gov/visas/>.

Mr. Speaker, It is our fervent belief that actions taken by HMPO should not render our citizens less advantaged than what we enjoyed prior to this change. Therefore you can be assured that my Ministry is working assiduously to find options that may assist in eliminating this problem. I will continue to keep this Honourable House and the general public apprised of any further developments. However, until a resolution is achieved, I would advise travellers with a BOTC Bermuda passport issued after May 2016 may be asked to obtain a U.S. visa. In such cases, they are advised to cooperate with the authorities of various countries to avoid extreme delays in their travel plans.

Thank you **Mr. Speaker.**