



**2025/26 SESSION**  
of the  
**BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**  
**OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT**

**9 MARCH 2026**

*(Sitting number 29 of the 2025-2026 Session)*

*(pages 2337-2432)*

**Hon. Dennis P. Lister, Jr., JP, MP**  
**Speaker**

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9 MARCH 2026  
10:03 AM**

*Sitting Number 29 of the 2025/2026 Session*

*[Hon. Dennis P. Lister, Jr., Speaker, in the Chair]*

**The Speaker:** Good morning, Members.

I trust everyone had a good weekend. And we are going to have the Clerk lead us in prayer once the Sergeant secures us there.

Thank you, Sarge.

### PRAYERS

*[Prayers read by Mr. Somner, Clerk]*

**The Speaker:** Amen. Thank you, Mr. Clerk.  
Members, the House is now in session.

*[Gavel]*

### CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

**The Speaker:** Members, the Minutes of the 6th of March have been deferred.

*[Minutes of 6 March 2026 deferred]*

### MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR

**The Speaker:** There are none.

### ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER OR MEMBER PRESIDING

#### APOLOGIES

**The Speaker:** We have been informed that Honourable Member Christopher Famous will be absent today.

### MESSAGES FROM THE SENATE

**The Speaker:** There are none.

### PAPERS AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS TO THE HOUSE

**The Speaker:** There's one this morning in the name of the Minister of Economy and Labour.  
Minister.

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Good morning.

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2023—2027

#### STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly, the Economic Development Strategy 2023-2027, Strategic Priority 1: Local and International Business Retention and Expansion, 2023 to 2027 update.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

### PETITIONS

**The Speaker:** There are none.

### STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS AND JUNIOR MINISTERS

**The Speaker:** There are three Statements this morning. The first is in the name of the Minister of National Security.  
Minister.

**Hon. Michael A. Weeks:** Good morning, Mr. Speaker—

**The Speaker:** Good Morning.

**Hon. Michael A. Weeks:**—colleagues, and the listening public.

#### MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY RECRUITMENT ACROSS THE UNIFORMED SERVICES AND DEPARTMENTS, UPDATE

**Hon. Michael A. Weeks:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to provide this Honourable House with an [update on the recruitment efforts](#) currently underway across the uniformed services and departments that fall under the remit of the Ministry of National Security.

Ensuring that our services remain properly staffed, professionally trained, and operationally ready is essential to maintaining public safety and national security. The Ministry therefore continues to work closely with each department to support recruitment

initiatives, address existing vacancies, and ensure that Bermuda's essential services remain capable of responding to the needs of our community.

Mr. Speaker, across the Ministry, recruitment activity remains active and ongoing. While we continue to see strong interest from members of the public who wish to serve, the reality of uniformed and operational roles is that candidates must meet rigorous standards. Physical fitness, medical suitability, psychological assessments, background vetting, and professional competency are all critical components of the selection process. As a result, while application numbers are often high, the number of candidates who ultimately meet the full suitability requirements is more limited.

Mr. Speaker, at the same time, the Ministry must continue to manage natural workforce turnover, including mandatory retirements within several services. This makes it necessary to maintain a steady recruitment effort to ensure operational continuity and maintain the capabilities required to serve the public.

Within the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service, there are currently 11 uniformed officer vacancies, comprising nine firefighter posts and two Lieutenant positions. The Service recently completed a recruitment process in which 16 applicants were interviewed. From this pool, nine recruits were successfully selected and will commence training on the 1st of April 2026. This intake will increase frontline firefighting capacity while the Service prepares for a further recruitment exercise later this year to address anticipated retirements and maintain appropriate staffing levels.

Mr. Speaker, the Bermuda Police Service (BPS) continues to progress with two active Recruit Foundation Courses as part of its ongoing recruitment programme. Recruit Foundation Course 86 currently has 17 active applicants and is in the final medical assessment stage, with reports expected by the end of March 2026. Once these clearances are completed, the cohort is expected to commence training in May 2026.

Recruit Foundation Course 87 currently has 27 active applicants who are progressing through the recruitment process, with vetting, medical assessments, and interviews still to be completed. At present, the Bermuda Police Service has approximately 47 vacancies. While the Service aims to onboard as many suitable candidates as possible through the current recruitment cycles, final intake numbers will depend on the successful completion of all suitability requirements.

Mr. Speaker, the BPS intends to commence its next local recruitment cycle for Recruit Foundation Course 88 in April 2026. The Bermuda Police Service is also developing a pool of suitably qualified overseas applicants who may be called upon, where necessary, to supplement local recruitment. Maintaining such a pipeline allows the Service to respond more efficiently to operational staffing requirements while continuing to prioritise the recruitment and development of Bermudians.

Mr. Speaker, the Royal Bermuda Regiment also continues to maintain an active recruitment pipeline. The Regiment recently completed a recruitment round that resulted in 22 successful candidates commencing recruit camp in February of this year. In addition, there are currently 25 potential recruits within the active recruitment pool.

The next intake is scheduled for the 5th of July 2026. The Regiment currently has 44 unfilled part-time positions as well as two full-time staff posts. Recruitment efforts therefore remain ongoing to ensure that the Regiment maintains the numbers required to fulfil its important national roles, including domestic operations and support to civil authorities.

Mr. Speaker, within the Department of National Drug Control, there are currently 11 vacant posts across a range of clinical and treatment support roles. The Department has already received approval for the recruitment of an overseas addiction counsellor who is presently awaiting onboarding.

Mr. Speaker, several additional positions, including addiction counsellors, treatment coordinator, and clinical coordinator roles, have been advertised and are progressing through the interview process during March of this year. Temporary relief arrangements are currently in place to ensure continuity of service while permanent appointments are finalised.

In addition, three addiction treatment support workers are scheduled to commence employment on the 1st of April 2026. These appointments will increase the Department's capacity to deliver treatment and recovery services. The Department also continues to benefit from the support of a senior clinical contractor who is assisting with clinical supervision, programme development, and preparations for CARF accreditation.

Mr. Speaker, the Customs Department also continues to advance its recruitment efforts to support Bermuda's border security operations. The Department currently reports 52 uniformed officer vacancies, of which 14 posts are funded. Customs is presently conducting a recruitment exercise to hire 20 new officers from a pool of 238 applicants.

Fitness testing has recently been conducted, with additional stages including drug testing, medical examinations, and interviews scheduled to take place during the coming weeks. Subject to successful completion of these stages, the Department anticipates that the next group of recruits will commence training on the 1st of June 2026.

The Department most recently passed out 13 new officers and plans to conduct another recruitment campaign in August 2026 to continue increasing operational staffing.

Mr. Speaker, taken together, these recruitment activities demonstrate that sustained work is underway across the Ministry to maintain the staffing and operational readiness of Bermuda's security and public safety services. While recruitment within these fields is demanding and highly selective, the continued interest

shown by members of the public reflects the strong sense of service that exists within our community.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to recognise that maintaining capable operational services is not achieved through a single recruitment exercise.

It requires continuous workforce planning, ongoing recruitment pipelines, and a commitment to training and professional development. As retirements occur and operational demands evolve, the Ministry must remain proactive in ensuring that the next generation of officers, firefighters, and public safety professionals are prepared to step forward and serve.

The Ministry of National Security will therefore continue working closely with its departments to support recruitment, develop training pathways, and ensure that each service has the personnel it requires to carry out its mandate effectively. Our objective remains clear: to maintain capable services that can protect our borders, support our communities, and respond effectively in times of emergency.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge the men and women who serve within these departments. Their work often takes place out of the public eye, yet it is essential to the safety and stability of our Island. The Government remains committed to supporting them by ensuring that their services are properly staffed and equipped to carry out their responsibilities.

Recruitment efforts will continue throughout the coming months, and the Ministry will remain focused on ensuring that Bermuda's public safety services are prepared to meet the needs of our community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Thank you, Minister.

Members, the next Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister of Economy and Labour.

Minister?

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2023—2027**

### **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION**

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I laid before this Honourable House a progress report on the [Economic Development Strategy 2023-2027](#).

The Economic Development Strategy is Bermuda's roadmap for strengthening and diversifying the economy, creating opportunity for Bermudians, and building a more secure and inclusive future. Economic development shapes the cost of living and the services Bermudians rely on. This report sets out what has been delivered, what is underway, and what comes next.

Mr. Speaker, I will begin with Strategic Priority 1: Local and International Business Retention and Expansion, which focuses on retaining and expanding existing businesses by removing barriers to investment and jobs and keeping Bermuda efficient, trusted, and competitive as global conditions evolve.

Key highlights include:

- expanded progress on residential and urban development within Bermuda's Economic Empowerment Zones, where the Urban Development Authority has identified 31 priority sites and developed conceptual designs that could deliver nearly 350 new residential units;
- the Bermuda Business Development Agency strengthening Bermuda's global competitiveness through enhanced industry engagement, targeted market research, and international outreach promoting the Island's trust, FinTech, and asset-management sectors; and,
- [complementing] these efforts, the Bermuda Tourism Authority has expanded immersive cultural, culinary, and heritage offerings, such as guided tours, Art Month, Restaurant Week, and live entertainment, contributing to higher cultural-experience satisfaction and increased off-season visitation.

Mr. Speaker, to start, the Bermuda Business Development Agency (BDA), has now transitioned to an investment promotion agency, and is working with industry leaders to understand what would make Bermuda more competitive. It structured its workstreams to focus on three main pillars: Established (being financial services, insurance and risk), Proactive (high net worth services, legal and regtech, and [infrastructure]), and Edge/Aspirational (the blue economy). These pillars are undergoing the next stage of intensive analysis to ensure the correct priorities, sectors and markets are set.

The Bermuda Business Development Agency has also been working to strengthen Bermuda's presence right where investment decisions are made, building relationships with those who shape fund structures and alternative investments, and ensuring that Bermuda's advantages are consistently presented. The goal is straightforward: to increase high-quality business activity and investment flows by showing up [consistently], with clarity, and with the right partners at the table.

Mr. Speaker, alongside market-facing work, competitiveness also depends on Bermuda's capacity to house the people within our economy. That is why significant work has been led by the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation (BEDC) and the Urban Development Authority (UDA) to drive residential development and regeneration through Approved Residential Schemes in the Economic Empowerment Zones.

This work has moved well beyond policy and into active delivery, including Island-wide mapping of

development opportunities, updated needs and demand analysis, and early design concepts to shorten the path from interest to construction.

Mr. Speaker, to unlock development at pace, and because revitalising Hamilton and increasing the supply of housing in and around the city supports business activity and reduces pressure on the rental market, the Approved Residential Schemes programme now includes the City of Hamilton—the Approved Hamilton Residential Scheme (AHRS). One Approved Hamilton Residential Scheme application has been approved, and more are in process. In addition, the BEDC has introduced the Approved Residential Scheme Kick-start Programme, a guarantee-backed programme that aims to reduce financial risk and to support lending for major residential and mixed-use projects in all four of the Island's EEZs.

It is worth noting that many units across the Island remain empty simply because the renovation costs place refurbishment out of reach for many homeowners. The Private Sector Refurbishment Programme is bringing empty units back into use by offering up to \$125,000 in interest-free support for [refurbishment], repaid from rental income. To date, 48 landlords have registered interest, and 32 properties have been assessed.

Mr. Speaker, Strategic Priority 1 also includes support for local business growth and entrepreneurship, and the BEDC is delivering a range of support products for that purpose. More broadly, the BEDC is targeting the barriers that often block small business success, including costs, finance, skills, and access to markets. This is delivered through concessions, financing support, incubator and education programmes, infrastructure support, and networking.

Promoting Bermuda's development opportunities is also key to progressing economic development. In 2025, the BEDC and Urban Development Authority (UDA) hosted the first Bermuda Infrastructure and Development Summit during International Economic Development Week, convening local and international stakeholders to identify opportunities, gaps, and solutions.

To support cost reduction and build capacity in the sector, the UDA also convened the 2025 BUILD Mixer, bringing international expertise on alternative building methods together with local stakeholders and site visits.

Mr. Speaker, competitiveness also depends on a strong visitor economy and reliability of public services, and work is strengthening access and improving visitor experience year round.

Airlift has strengthened over the past two years, causing total airline seats to go up by 51 per cent and more than doubling in origin markets. In 2025, the Ministry of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport formally tasked the Bermuda Tourism Authority (BTA) to lead the Air Service Development Committee to coordinate and execute Bermuda's airlift strategy. As

such, the BTA continues to work closely with key stakeholders to ensure that airlift expansion aligns with visitor demand and supports the long-term sustainability of routes.

Looking ahead, the BTA is undertaking a detailed assessment of the incremental airlift requirements to support the re-opening of the Fairmont Southampton.

The BTA is also shifting the visitor offer towards guided experiences led by local interpreters, supported by year-round arts, culture, sports, and heritage programming. Visitor satisfaction in 2025 increased by 15 per cent.

To strengthen service standards and support the hospitality workforce, the BTA launched AnchorBDA, which more than 250 people have completed. AnchorBDA is part of BTA+, an online learning platform that has so far offered 400 courses to over 895 users.

Mr. Speaker, in agriculture, practical steps have been taken to support local production and resilience with technical assistance, better infrastructure, and targeted policy improvements.

The Integrated Agriculture Strategy is advancing food and nutritional resilience by modernising infrastructure and strengthening services to farmers. Key deliverables include the completion of an arable land audit, upgraded post-harvest storage capacity, and modernised inspection and surveillance capability. Furthermore, work is ongoing that ensures the Agricultural Service Centre remains fully operational and ready to support farmers.

Mr. Speaker, regarding the blue economy, important planning work has progressed. The draft Marine Spatial Plan is completed, and the draft Blue Economy Strategy has been prepared. Next steps depend on drafting and enacting the Marine Development Act, which will provide the framework to take both documents forward. Indeed, Honourable Members will recall that the Marine Resources Enforcement Strategy was laid in the House last Friday to address protections for existing protected areas.

Mr. Speaker, the House will also be aware of my recent announcement of Bermuda's FinTech Strategy, which sets out a clear plan to grow this sector responsibly and ensure that Bermudians benefit from the opportunities that it creates.

Bermuda's FinTech Strategy is focused on adoption, trust, and Bermudian opportunity. Over the review period, licensing activity under the Digital Asset Business Act (DABA) has increased significantly, alongside continued growth in innovative insurer licences, reflecting sustained international interest in Bermuda's regulated offerings. Notably, companies holding the most mature form of DABA authorisation, the Class F (Full) licence, increased from eight in 2022 to 18 in 2024. At the first quarter of [2025], the Bermuda Monetary Authority had issued a total of 39 digital assets licences and 14 insurtech licences across all Class types.

Maintaining an efficient, business-friendly operating environment remains essential. As recently as two weeks ago, the BDA launched the Bermuda Leadership Exchange stakeholder series to align joint activities and communications and to use stakeholder insight to strengthen competitiveness and ease of doing business.

Mr. Speaker, this concludes my update on Strategic Priority 1: Local and International Business Retention and Expansion.

My next update to this Honourable House will cover the next two Strategic Priorities—2: Business Attraction and Investment Promotion and 3: Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Thank you, Minister.

Members, the next Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister of Home Affairs.

Minister.

**Hon. Alexa Lightbourne:** Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Good morning.

**Hon. Alexa Lightbourne:** Thank you very much.

#### **CARICOM—BERMUDA'S NEXT STEPS**

**Hon. Alexa Lightbourne:** Good morning to this Honourable House and to the listening audience.

Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning to signal to this Honourable House that today the Ministry of Home Affairs will release its Green Paper on Bermuda's Application for full membership in the Caribbean community.

Mr. Speaker, this represents an invitation to the people of Bermuda to examine the evidence, weigh the arguments, and share their thoughts with this Government.

Mr. Speaker, the Green Paper examines how Bermuda can move from the margins of regional decision-making to its centre. It sets out the strategic framework, the historical context, the constitutional constraints, the costs, and the benefits of full [\[CARICOM membership\]](#). It presents the implications plainly. And it invites the scrutiny of every Bermudian.

Today the public is invited to tune in to Government social media channels as we launch the public consultation.

Mr. Speaker, the Government has been transparent about its intentions. The Honourable Premier has tasked the Ministry of Home Affairs with leading this work, and the Ministry has adopted a two-phased approach.

In the first phase, Mr. Speaker, we consulted directly with stakeholders across a broad cross-section of Bermuda's civic, sporting, cultural, labour, and business institutions. We met with the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation, the West [Indian]

Association of Bermuda, the Bermuda Public Services Union, the Bermuda Cricket Board, the Bermuda Olympic Association, the Bermuda Credit Union, Citizens Uprooting Racism in Bermuda, the Ministry of National Security, the One Bermuda Alliance and more. Their input collectively shaped this document.

Mr. Speaker, we also added a question in the 4th Quarter of the Omnibus Survey to gather baseline sentiment and capture the views of a representative sample of Bermudians. The areas that made full CARICOM membership a viable direction for the Government to take were identified as food security, climate resilience, energy resilience, health care and public safety, and education and training opportunities.

These are the daily concerns of Bermudian families. They are the same issues that occupy the centre of CARICOM's regional agenda. And they are the same issues that were discussed at the 50th CARICOM Heads of Government Conference in Basseterre, St. Kitts and Nevis, just two weeks ago. Bermuda was not in the room when those discussions took place and now the second phase of this consultation des begin because the Green Paper invites the public to read, to question, and to respond.

Over the coming months, the Ministry will engage directly with stakeholders across the community to share information and, more importantly, to listen. The Green Paper invites the public to consider and respond on matters ranging from whether Bermuda should seek a greater role in CARICOM's engagement with international partners, to what concerns Bermudians may have about deeper integration.

The Government will accept written submissions through the Ministry of Home Affairs. Details of the submission process, public meetings, and the timeline for the Government's response will be published separately. The public is invited for a launch which will begin today at 1:00 pm.

Mr. Speaker, some will ask: why now? The answer is that the world has changed around us, and the terms of our participation have not kept pace.

Almost 23 years ago, former Premier Dame Jennifer Smith brought a historic motion to the House of Assembly that set Bermuda on the path to CARICOM Associate Membership. Bermuda became an Associate Member in 2003, following the Conference of Heads of Government decision at its Thirteenth Inter-Sessional Meeting in Belize City in February 2002.

The Agreement between Caribbean community and the Government of Bermuda established tiers of participation, observer status at meetings of the Conference of Heads [of Government] and the Community Council of Ministers; participation without vote in the deliberations of most [subsidiary] bodies; and explicit exclusion from the Council for Foreign and Community Relations, known as COFCOR, and from all discussions relating to foreign policy in any organ of the community.

Mr. Speaker, that decision was right for its time. Associate Membership gave us a framework for regional cooperation, and we have used it. Our uniformed services train alongside their Caribbean counterparts. Caribbean utility crews helped restore Bermuda's power after Hurricane Fabian. The Bermuda Regiment deployed to support Caribbean recovery after Hurricanes Ivan, Irma, and Maria. We compete in the CARIFTA Games. We sent eighteen artists, musicians, and Gombey dancers to CARIFESTA in Barbados in 2025.

But Associate Membership has reached its structural limits. We are in the room but not at the table. We participate but we do not decide. And as the challenges facing small island economies intensify, the gap between attendance and partnership grows wider.

Mr. Speaker, 90 per cent of what Bermudians eat comes from overseas. Ninety-eight per cent of our electricity is generated from imported fuel. When global shipping is disrupted or fuel prices rise, the cost of groceries, electricity, and transport rises with it. These are the same pressures felt across the Caribbean. CARICOM members are confronting them collectively. However, Bermuda is on the sidelines of those conversations. The Green Paper asks us to consider if we want to remain outside of those conversations.

Mr. Speaker, before I speak to the contents of the Green Paper, I must speak to the story it tells. Because the question of CARICOM is not only a question of policy. It is a question of identity.

Our history has never been solitary. For more than three centuries, Bermudian vessels sailed the Caribbean Sea. From the 1660s, our seafarers worked the salt pans of the Turks Islands. Our shipwrights, many of them enslaved, built some of the fastest sloops in the Atlantic. Our families put down roots from Grand Turk to Kingston and are found on both sides of that historic connection to this day.

The connections to St. Kitts and Nevis run particularly deep. More than half of Bermuda's population traces ancestral roots to those Islands. The Honorary Consul for St. Kitts and Nevis has documented that hundreds came to Bermuda for work after the decline of the slavery-based sugar industry, with emigration increasing from 1875 as workers came to build Watford Bridge and later the Royal Naval Dockyard.

Mr. Speaker, our most celebrated cultural tradition carries this connection in its bones. The Gombey is Bermuda's distinct art form, recognised by UNESCO in 1970. But it did not emerge in isolation. The Gombey tradition shares direct lineage with the Masquerade dance troupes of St. Kitts and Nevis. The same head-dresses. The same masks. The same capes decorated with mirrors, ribbons, and bells. The same drums.

Modern day Gombey costumes originated with the influx of Caribbean workers mainly from St. Kitts, Nevis and Antigua in the 1920s and 1930s. When a Gombey Troupe dances through the streets of

Hamilton it carries three centuries of Caribbean connection with every step.

When the British Parliament passed the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833, Bermuda and Antigua became the first colonies to implement full emancipation. Over 1,900 enslaved persons were freed on the Turks Island alone. Six months later, the American slave ship *Enterprise* was blown into Hamilton harbour carrying 85 enslaved men, women and children. A formerly enslaved Bermudian by the name of Richard Tucker served as Captain with a writ of *habeas corpus*. The Supreme Court convened at 9:00 pm and asked each person individually whether they wished to return to the United States or remain in Bermuda as free people. Seventy-two chose that freedom.

That act of liberation did not happen in isolation. It was part of a chain that stretched through The Bahamas, through the wider Caribbean, and into the conscience of the abolition movement. Bermuda's story is a Caribbean's story, and it always has been.

And yet, Mr. Speaker, during our consultations, we heard something that must be placed on the parliamentary record. We heard from Bermudians whose parents deliberately concealed their Caribbean heritage from their own children. They did this not out of shame, but out of fear. Fear that acknowledging where they came from would make their children targets. Fear rooted in a colonial narrative that told us we are not like them.

And so, the question becomes, *Who benefits from that narrative?* Not our families. Not our children and not Bermuda.

Division has kept us small. Connection makes us strong.

Mr. Speaker, I will turn to what this Green Paper sets before the people of Bermuda. The Paper is organised into five chapters, and it begins with an explanation of what CARICOM is, how it functions, and what full membership entails. It addresses Bermuda's constitutional status as a British Overseas Territory and the constraints that status places on our participation. It sets out the history of Bermuda's relationship with CARICOM across nearly thirty years of engagement. It examines the tangible benefits of full membership in the areas that matter most to most Bermudians: cost of living, trade and economic opportunities, climate resilience, health care and education, and cultural connection. And it presents the results of the stakeholder consultations and the Omnibus Survey.

The Paper is direct about costs. Bermuda's current annual contribution as an Associate Member, the indicative contribution as a Full Member would be approximately 0.16 per cent of Bermuda's 2025/26 annual expenditure. The Government's position is that Bermuda's financial contribution should reflect the terms of the membership that we are able to accept, and the final figure will be determined through further negotiation.

Mr. Speaker, the Paper is also direct about protections. Bermuda retaining full authority over its immigration framework and labour market. The existing work permit system remains in place. The Bermuda Government's approach to the [Caribbean] Single Market and Economy is measured and phased. Bermuda's regulatory authority over financial services will not be compromised. These are commitments stated plainly in the Green Paper for every Bermudian to read.

Mr. Speaker, the Green Paper sets out what Bermuda brings to the table. Enhanced participation is not a one-way request.

Bermuda is the world's risk capital, home to a sophisticated insurance and reinsurance market of direct benefit to Caribbean nations facing increasing climate-related losses. Bermuda pioneered the regulatory framework for digital assets through the Digital Asset Business Act 2018 and is now developing AI governance frameworks.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda's participation strengthens CARICOM's collective negotiating weight and extends its greater geographic footprint into the mid-Atlantic. This is a partnership of mutual benefit.

Mr. Speaker, I will just briefly share with this Honourable House what I witnessed at the 50th Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads [of Government of CARICOM], that took place 24 to 27 February. The Conference was themed "Beyond Words: Action Today for a Thriving, Sustainable CARICOM." For the first time in over a decade, every [CARICOM] Head of Government was present.

The Premier and I attended and we participated in the Opening Ceremony and in bilateral engagements with Overseas Territories leaders. The benefits of attendance were significant and we strengthened bilateral relationships. We engaged directly with regional leaders and we advanced Bermuda's profile within the Community. These are the relationships that open doors for Bermudian businesses, students, and institutions.

Mr. Speaker, our presence demonstrated the seriousness with which this Government approaches regional engagement and the evolution of our membership journey.

However, on 25 February, the US Secretary of State Marco Rubio attended the Conference. It was the first visit by a US Secretary of State to a CARICOM Heads meeting in approximately a decade. Secretary Rubio engaged CARICOM leaders on matters of direct consequence to Bermuda: regional security cooperation, energy partnerships, economic growth, trade and investment, combating illicit trafficking, and the future of US-Caribbean relations in a period of significant geopolitical realignment.

All Overseas Territories were informed that the substantive engagement [session] between Secretary Rubio and CARICOM leaders would not be open to their attendance or participation. Mr. Speaker, Bermuda, was in the building, but not in the room.

The resulting joint statements committed parties to comprehensive US-CARICOM Cooperation Framework on investment, trade and disaster recovery. These are issues that affect Bermudian lives directly. Bermuda had no voice in shaping that framework.

The US-CARICOM engagement alone makes the case for why Associate Membership is no longer sufficient. But it is not the only example. Bermuda is also excluded from CARICOM's collective efforts to build and strengthen economic relationships with Africa, Saudi Arabia, India, the UAE, Colombia, [and] Brazil. The comprehensive economic partnership is negotiated, and Bermuda is not eligible within any of these.

Mr. Speaker, this House should understand the constitutional framework clearly. Bermuda's status as a British Overseas Territory means the UK retains responsibility for external defence, and security. The Governor holds reserved powers under section 60(1) of the Bermuda Constitution Order 1968.

The UK has progressively expanded Bermuda's authority to engage regionally. In 2016, a Letter of Entrustment, requested by the OBA Administration, granted general authority to conclude agreements with [Caribbean] regional organisations.

Mr. Speaker, I draw to the attention of this House an important fact. The 2016 Entrustment was sought and secured by the One Bermuda Alliance Government. The 2024 Entrustment was secured by this Government. The pursuit of stronger CARICOM ties is not a partisan initiative. It has bipartisan precedent. Both Governments have recognised the value of this engagement. It is a commitment that reflects the settled judgment of successive Bermuda Governments.

We recognise the 2024 Letter comes with conditions and Bermuda's representative must abstain on issues bearing directly on external relations, defence, or security. Any proposed membership text must be submitted to the FCDO for review, and a further Letter of Entrustment will be required before Bermuda can formally accede. In January 2026, the UK provided additional guidance in terms of our treaty as well as the provisions included.

These constraints are real, and the Green Paper addresses them in detail. But they do not prevent Bermuda from deepening our relationship. The vast majority of CARICOM's practical work, in health, education, trade, food security, climate resilience, digital infrastructure, and cultural cooperation, falls within Bermuda's delegated authority.

Our Caribbean neighbours are themselves America's trading partners, security allies, and neighbours. Deepening our partnership with them does not diminish our relationships with Washington and London.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard the concerns and take them very seriously. We also take seriously the responsibility to distinguish concern from fear, and fear from fiction.

Some Bermudians say that they will lose their jobs. But the Green Paper is clear: Bermuda will retain its full control over immigration and work permits. Full membership does not grant CARICOM nationals the right to live or work here. The work permit system stays in place.

Some say international companies will leave. The Green Paper is clear: Bermuda's economic substance requirements, its world-class regulatory environment, and its concentration of global expertise in re-insurance, FinTech, and professional services are the reasons companies operate here. Membership in CARICOM does not change any of that.

Mr. Speaker, fearmongering has run its course, and the Green Paper replaces speculation with evidence. It replaces anxiety with information. It puts every claim to the test of fact. I say to every Bermudian to read the Paper, examine it, and challenge it. Bring your hopes and your scepticism. That is exactly what this process is designed for.

Mr. Speaker, this consultation places the people of Bermuda in the driver's seat because too often in our history, decisions about our place in the world have been made for us. Too often, the question of who we are and where we belong has been answered by others. This process is different and this Green Paper gives Bermudians the facts, the analysis, and the framework. The next steps belong to them.

Mr. Speaker, this country has always known who it is. A Caribbean island. A mid-Atlantic bridge. A financial centre of global standing. A community built by generations who sailed between these worlds and made them one.

The structures that kept us at the margins of our own region's [decision-making] no longer reflect who we are or what we are capable of. Bermuda does not need permission to believe in its own value. It needs the standing to act on it.

The question that the Green Paper puts to the people of Bermuda is whether we will seize this opportunity, whether we participate in the trade relationships, climate partnerships, and regional conversations that our Caribbean neighbours are leading, whether we will claim the seat that is waiting for us.

At its heart, this is the story of us.

The answer should be guided by self-belief, self-assurance, and by an honest understanding of who we are and where we stand in this region. Every Bermudian has a place in this story, and they are invited to find their place in it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Thank you, Minister.

Members, that brings us to a close of the Statement period this morning.

We will now move on.

## REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

**The Speaker:** There are none.

## QUESTION PERIOD

**The Speaker:** Members, there are questions this morning on the Statements.

There are no written questions, so we will begin with the questions on the Statements that were given this morning.

And the first Statement this morning [was] by the Minister of National Security.

Minister, you have Members who wish to ask questions of you. And the first is MP Tucker.

MP Tucker, would you like to put your question?

**Ms. Robin Tucker:** Good morning, Mr. Speaker, thank you.

**The Speaker:** Good morning.

### QUESTION 1: MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY RECRUITMENT ACROSS THE UNIFORMED SERVICES AND DEPARTMENTS, UPDATE

**Ms. Robin Tucker:** So, my first question is, I would like to know if there are, if each of the Uniformed Services departments have proactive staffing plans for each area. It just seems as though they have large numbers of vacancies, and then we are looking for people.

**The Speaker:** Your question is—

**Ms. Robin Tucker:** Do they have proactive—

**The Speaker:** For the individual departments.

**Ms. Robin Tucker:** —staffing plans for each individual department? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Okay. Minister.

**Hon. Michael A. Weeks:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question.

The answer is actually, yes. Each department . . . the mandate is to remain fully operational, and services to the public have not been affected. It's been a lot of actual work and manoeuvring on the part of the department heads. But the answer to her question is yes.

**The Speaker:** Supplementary or new question?

**Ms. Robin Tucker:** Yes, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Supplementary.

**SUPPLEMENTARY**

**Ms. Robin Tucker:** Yes, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Supplementary.

**Ms. Robin Tucker:** Yes, supplementary.

I appreciate that there is no impact to the public, but if the Minister can talk a bit about the impact these vacancies are having on the staff, I'd appreciate it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Your question is?

**Ms. Robin Tucker:** The Minister mentioned that having the vacancies has not impacted the public, so now I'm just asking what impact are the vacancies having on the staff that have to cover those vacancies?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. Michael A. Weeks:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously, until we are able to get all of the numbers that are required throughout the departments there is a lot of overtime, and potential, you know . . . understanding, for staff burnout. So, as a result, we have a diligent recruitment process to try to bring our numbers up to par.

**The Speaker:** Supplementary or new question?

**QUESTION 2: MINISTRY OF NATIONAL  
SECURITY RECRUITMENT ACROSS THE  
UNIFORMED SERVICES AND DEPARTMENTS,  
UPDATE**

**Ms. Robin Tucker:** New question, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister mentioned, for example, the Regiment, and they have the next intake in July. So, I just wanted to know if there is rolling intake for any of the departments, or are there specific intake periods throughout the year per department?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. Michael A. Weeks:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

No, there are not rolling intakes. There are specific times when each department sets out a recruitment plan and then they advertise for bodies.

**The Speaker:** Supplementary or new question?

**Ms. Robin Tucker:** Yes, please, Mr. Speaker, supplementary.

**The Speaker:** Supplementary, okay.

**SUPPLEMENTARIES**

**Ms. Robin Tucker:** So, my supplementary question is, given the large number of vacancies and the ongoing large portion of vacancies, whether the Ministry would consider actually implementing rolling intake?

**The Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. Michael A. Weeks:** The answer really is no to that, because it's not financially feasible.

**The Speaker:** Supplementary or new question?

**Ms. Robin Tucker:** Supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

Can the Minister tell us what positions are vacant in those areas?

**The Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. Michael A. Weeks:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The positions are of new recruits. We have a natural attrition of people retiring [from] Bermuda services. Then you have others who are being promoted on the job. So, they move up. So, it leaves a lot of room and positions for new recruits at the intake level, the operational level.

**The Speaker:** Supplementary or . . . no that was your second supplemental. Third question?

**Ms. Robin Tucker:** I'll move to the third question because I do have a supplementary, but I'll speak to the Minister separately about that.

**The Speaker:** Okay, all right.

**QUESTION 3: MINISTRY OF NATIONAL  
SECURITY RECRUITMENT ACROSS THE  
UNIFORMED SERVICES AND DEPARTMENTS,  
UPDATE**

**Ms. Robin Tucker:** So, my third question is, given the difficulties of trying to attract quality candidates, has the Ministry been looking at the internal mechanisms of each department that make it difficult to attract such candidates? So, for instance, has the Minister looked at management? Has the Minister looked at the infrastructure, internal operational matters, those types of things to help improve so that more quality candidates may come forward?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. Michael A. Weeks:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to clarify that the attractiveness is not what the issue is. It's trying to hire qualified persons. And we are definitely in the process now of going

through a complete look at the recruitment process. But certainly, the attraction is there. But there is a rigorous process because it's important that those who qualify for any uniformed service are able to carry out their duty.

**The Speaker:** Supplementary?

### SUPPLEMENTARIES

**Ms. Robin Tucker:** Mr. Speaker, yes, thank you. A supplementary.

Can the Minister sort of clarify, because he said it's an entry-level position, and then he also mentioned attracting qualified candidates. So, if he can sort of clarify whether these are entry-level positions or is he looking for qualified candidates?

Just there is a . . . just trying to get some clarity around what that actually looks like, because I would also like to know how has he . . . how are they assessing whether the environment is such whereby the candidates are . . . whether the issue . . . can I start again?

*[Laughter]*

**The Speaker:** So, what you're asking for is, Is it more important for the "qualified" or is it more important just to take people in? That's what you're asking basically. Is he looking for intake or is he looking for qualified?

**Ms. Robin Tucker:** Yes, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** And "to qualify," for you, means?

**Ms. Robin Tucker:** Yes, so specific qualifications that they are looking for, are they looking for people that have specific qualifications to fill these roles, or are they looking for entry-level candidates who may not have specific qualifications?

**The Speaker:** Okay, Minister.

**Hon. Michael A. Weeks:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to start off by saying I invite the Member to at least read my Statement, because the Statement sets out clearly that when we advertise for jobs, not just in the uniformed services, but any job, we are looking for quality personnel. I'm sure ICS looks for quality personnel. I mean, what is it that I'm asked to explain?

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Michael A. Weeks:** What is it that I'm asked to explain?

**The Speaker:** I'm going to try and help this so we can go forward.

Any application that goes out, you got a whole list of applicants. Some applicants just don't meet the standard that you are looking for. So, when you say "qualify," you are basically looking for somebody who meets the standards. Am I correct?

**Hon. Michael A. Weeks:** Yes.

**The Speaker:** Okay. Does that help?

*[Inaudible response.]*

**The Speaker:** Okay.

**Ms. Robin Tucker:** It helps.

**The Speaker:** Thank you. All right.

**Ms. Robin Tucker:** Do I have a second supplementary, Mr. Speaker?

**The Speaker:** You have a second supplementary, yes.

**Ms. Robin Tucker:** Okay, thank you.

So, my second supplementary is, What is the stumbling block, then, to finding these suitable candidates? Can the Minister explain to us, break it down for us, so we understand what the difficulty is?

**The Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. Michael A. Weeks:** Mr. Speaker, I don't know how to answer that.

It's the same challenge that every other business has when they are trying to get suitable people for their departments or their business. There's a rigorous standard, and I outlined it not only in this Ministerial Statement, but in previous Ministerial Statements, that there's medical, there's psychological, there's drug testing, there's an academic component, there's a fitness component. Do you know what I mean? Like, you just don't walk in a door, especially of a service that the uniformed services provide, and just say, *Here I am. I applied, let me in.*

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

That was your second supplementary. Okay, thank you. Thank you, Members.

MP, or Minister, rather, there's further questions for you. MP King would like to put questions to you.

MP King?

### QUESTION 1: MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY RECRUITMENT ACROSS THE UNIFORMED SERVICES AND DEPARTMENT, UPDATE

**Mr. Robert King:** We'll play nice this morning. Good morning, Mr. Speaker, Members of this Honourable House and the listening public.

Regarding the recruitment of officers, what is the expectation in terms of manning or staffing the road traffic division and gang resistance, specialised task force, with the increased numbers that you have?

The reason why I ask the question is, we accept that the number of traffic accidents on the roads and the number of serious injuries are too many. And we also accept that the incidents of gun violence and knife violence and the injuries and deaths caused are too many, and obviously, staffing issues play a role in that. So, I'm asking, how will the officers be allocated to those particular areas of need?

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. Michael A. Weeks:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to start off by saying that I don't equate our staff levels with the road deaths and the murders. Right? We are in the process of hiring new police officers, and as they get through the process and become qualified, they will be placed where the Commissioner of Police deems that they need to be put.

**The Speaker:** Supplementary or new question?

#### SUPPLEMENTARY

**Mr. Robert King:** Supplemental.

Understanding that we recognise that driving behaviours on the Island's roads are causing unnecessary accidents, and it can be argued that it's due in part to a lack of police presence, is there a consideration to making sure that the road traffic division has a regular presence on the road with these new recruits?

**The Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. Michael A. Weeks:** Mr. Speaker, I'm certain that the Commissioner of Police will place his officers where he feels the need is necessary.

**The Speaker:** Second supplementary or new question?

**Mr. Robert King:** New question, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Yes.

#### QUESTION 2: MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY RECRUITMENT ACROSS THE UNIFORMED SERVICES AND DEPARTMENTS, UPDATE

**Mr. Robert King:** Understanding that two cohorts are going to be receiving training, how many vacancies are

anticipated at the conclusion of the two cohorts? Because not all of them are going to graduate. So, what's going to be the outstanding staffing number that's required?

**The Speaker:** Speculation at this point.

**Hon. Michael A. Weeks:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, at the—

**The Speaker:** I would deem that it's more speculation at this point because until we get the process done, you don't know how many spaces are going to be filled, whether they'll be able to get to full complement or not. So, it's really just sort of speculation to ask that question right now.

**Mr. Robert King:** For clarification, Mr. Speaker.

**Hon. Michael A. Weeks:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Robert King:** Ordinarily, they know that the failure rate is going to be about 15 per cent or 20 per cent, so I was asking it based on projections of that.

Thanks.

**Hon. Michael A. Weeks:** Mr. Speaker, the recruitment process is ongoing. It's a five-step process. You know, I have said it in this Ministerial Statement and previous ones. For me to be asked how many are going to fail, how many are going to pass, and then how many are going to be left, you know, I think that's a math question that I'm not able to figure out.

**The Speaker:** Is there another supplementary or third question?

**Mr. Robert King:** Third question.

**The Speaker:** Go ahead.

#### QUESTION 3: MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY RECRUITMENT ACROSS THE UNIFORMED SERVICES AND DEPARTMENTS, UPDATE

**Mr. Robert King:** Mr. Speaker, this concerns Customs. Understanding that there are 52 uniformed officer vacancies, but only 14 are funded, why do 38 positions remain unfunded?

**The Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. Michael A. Weeks:** Thank you for that question, Mr. Speaker.

As we get the required numbers to fill our posts, the funding is there, and we will fund the posts as necessary.

**The Speaker:** Supplementary?

## SUPPLEMENTARY

**Mr. Robert King:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. Understanding that there are 52 vacancies in the Customs Department, and Customs is responsible for protecting our borders, how has this impacted on service delivery and protecting of our shores?

**The Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. Michael A. Weeks:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My answer's very similar to the answer given to the previous MP. There's a lot of overtime that takes place. The operational effectiveness of the uniformed services in general is still being met and keeping Bermuda safe on our borders and on land and sea.

**The Speaker:** Supplementary?

No questions?

Okay. Minister, that's the end of questions for your Statement.

Minister of Economy and Labour, you have Members who wish to ask questions of yourself.

MP King, would you like to put your question?

### QUESTION 1: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2023—2027, STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION

**Mr. Robert King:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Would the Honourable Minister inform the House how many new international businesses [have been] established since the launch of the Economic Development Strategy in 2023?

**The Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Mr. Speaker, that's a matter of public record. The economic update in the Quarterly Bulletin of Statistics, tables that are presented to the public, highlight local and new businesses. And they also highlight international businesses.

And so, I would say that there has been tremendous growth in our international business community since the launch of the Economic Development Strategy. As it pertains to insurance and reinsurance companies, the BMA puts out those numbers on an annual basis as well. And so, I don't have the exact numbers, but it is a fact that there has been significant growth of new businesses registering in Bermuda.

**The Speaker:** Supplementary or new question?

## SUPPLEMENTARIES

**Mr. Robert King:** Supplementary. We welcome and we are thankful that international business is doing well in Bermuda. The question I have is, How many

Bermudians are employed in international business in management or senior management positions as a result of this initiative?

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** The Member included a phrase *as a result of this initiative* when he talked about the numbers. I'm not sure if there is a direct correlation. What we would say is we create a business environment which allows for businesses to grow and expand.

The principal aim of this strategy was business retention and expansion. We have seen retention of our local businesses, and we have seen expansion of our local businesses. When those businesses remain and when they expand, they add employment numbers. [With] those employment numbers we now see that over 5,000 employees are within the international business sector. Over 50 per cent of those individuals are Bermudians.

Bermudians continue to progress, but not at the pace in which we would fully appreciate. The annual employment numbers do put out the figures as it pertains to Bermudians in the industrial section and the positions which they possess.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

Supplementary or new question?

**Mr. Robert King:** Supplementary.

**The Speaker:** Okay.

**Mr. Robert King:** Would the Minister be able to speak to how many Bermudians are in senior positions as of 2024 in international business? Because what we understand is that definitely international business hires, but the majority of the jobs in international businesses are work permit holders.

**The Speaker:** Would your Statement have addressed that specific piece?

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** The Statement doesn't address the specifics regarding Bermudians in management. However, the Member is 100 per cent incorrect when he says the majority of persons employed in international business are work permit holders.

**The Speaker:** New question? That was your second supplementary.

**Mr. Robert King:** For clarification, in senior positions, that was . . . that's my final question.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** All right, good, that's good. So, you're putting that as a second question?

**Mr. Robert King:** I was just clarifying that I was speaking to Bermudians in senior positions in international business.

**The Speaker:** Do you have a second question?

Okay, all right.

Minister, MP Campbell would like to put questions to you as well.

MP Campbell.

**QUESTION 1: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2023—2027, STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION**

**Mr. Vance Campbell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Minister for his update.

Minister, if my calculation is correct, we are in year four of a five-year strategy. Can the Minister provide the number of residential units that have been developed to date under this strategy?

**The Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** The Statement makes it clear that we are making progress. There are two separate residential schemes. There is the approved Hamilton scheme, and there's the approved residential scheme.

The Uptown Development Authority has identified sites, and they are doing a lot of the prep work, and so a lot of legwork has gone into identifying potential investment sites and working directly with investors. We haven't received the uptick as it pertains to investment into the development of sites, but there is interest, and they continue to work with developers.

As it pertains to the approved Hamilton residential scheme, we do have one approved Hamilton residential scheme, which is passed. But this is all process work. And I would like to inform Members that that is a component of an overall strategy to increase housing in Bermuda. And so, the strategy speaks to not just the work that has been done in the approved schemes, but also the development that takes place outside of the approved schemes.

The overall aim is to ensure that we continue to support our retail sector with the expansion of houses. We certainly see the expansion of houses in Bermuda year over year. That is reported on in the Quarterly Bulletin of Statistics as well, where we see the addition to the residential stock on an annual basis.

**The Speaker:** Supplementary or new question?

**SUPPLEMENTARY**

**Mr. Vance Campbell:** Supplementary.

If I understood the Minister correctly, there is one development that's in progress. Can the Minister

advise how many units will result from that development when it's completed?

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Thank you. Minister.

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** I don't have those details at this moment. But I will endeavour to provide full transparency and clarity on those details to the Honourable Member.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

Second supplementary or second question?

**Mr. Vance Campbell:** No, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister.

**The Speaker:** Okay, thank you.

Minister, that's the end of questions for you and your Statement.

The last Statement [was] in the name of the Minister of Home Affairs.

[Minister], MP Fahy would like to put questions to you.

**QUESTION 1: CARICOM, BERMUDA'S NEXT STEPS**

**Hon. Michael Fahy:** Good morning, Mr. Speaker, and good morning listening audience.

My first question is, does the Minister have any form of draft agreement from CARICOM, given the previous stated position that full consultation would likely commence once a draft agreement was in the hands of the Government?

**The Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. Alexa Lightbourne:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My Statement went into the framework that Bermuda is seeking to negotiate with the Secretariat as part of the Green Paper, as well as what was included in the Statement this morning. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Supplementary or—

**Hon. Michael Fahy:** Mr. Speaker, there wasn't an answer to that question. It's a very specific question. Does the Government have any draft agreements? Because that was a previous stated position, and if it's not in the Statement, we'll have to assume, I suppose, that there is no draft agreement.

That's a very simple question to answer. It's not really a supplementary; we didn't get an answer.

**The Speaker:** The Member is restating the fact that there was a specific response that was sort of directed from that, and he was wondering if there was a . . . you could be more direct in the response.

**Hon. Alexa Lightbourne:** Sure, Mr. Speaker.

The current full members of CARICOM have agreed to the treaty provisions. So, the entire treaty provisions and the terms make up the agreement that they would accept or be part of CARICOM as a full member. Bermuda is unlike the other sovereign islands, and so therefore we have refined and also examined the areas of participation, which is included in the Green Paper.

A draft document is not compiled because we are still in the consultation phase. And so that consultation which the Green Paper pursues will be able to best define what the draft agreement entails.

**The Speaker:** Okay. Supplementary?

**Hon. Michael Fahy:** No supplementary. I think we have an answer, barely.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Second question.

### QUESTION 2: CARICOM, BERMUDA'S NEXT STEPS

**Hon. Michael Fahy:** Yes, Mr. Speaker.

So, the Minister has advised that the fees are 0.16 per cent of annual expenditure. So that appears to be approximately \$2 million on an annual basis, based on the budget expenditures.

Can the Minister expand on what additional costs may be to the taxpayer, given that there would likely be a CARICOM ambassador and other potential posts that come with CARICOM membership?

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. Alexa Lightbourne:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The current cost is important to clarify that the 0.6 [sic] is based on full participation, as I just—

**Hon. Michael Fahy:** Sorry, just a point of clarity, because I don't want the Minister to go down a different road. I think it was 0.16 [per cent], and she has just said 0.6 [per cent]. So, I just want to get clarity.

Her statement, I believe, said 0.16 [per cent], and she just stated 0.6 [per cent]. I think we should clarify that.

**Hon. Alexa Lightbourne:** The Shadow Minister is gracious—0.16 per cent is accurate in terms of what a full membership based on our GDP would entail. However, because of Bermuda's status and the terms of our current letter of entrustment and framework, it is not foreseen that we would have to pay the full cost of a full member, so someone that can accede to all of the provisions.

In terms of the foreseen costs, at present there are no foreseen costs. We are in the consultation phase. I do note the, I guess, position that was concluded in the Honourable Shadow Minister's question. But at present we are in the consultation phase to be able to deepen these ties with CARICOM.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Okay, thank you. Supplementary or third question?

### QUESTION 3: CARICOM, BERMUDA'S NEXT STEPS

**Hon. Michael Fahy:** Third question, Mr. Speaker.

I am a little surprised that the Green Paper has not been tabled in the House. We understand that it will be put to the public at around one o'clock today.

Will the Minister undertake to table the Green Paper in the House at a future date?

**The Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. Alexa Lightbourne:** Yes.

**Hon. Michael Fahy:** Great, thank you for that clarification.

**The Speaker:** Supplementary?

### SUPPLEMENTARIES

**Hon. Michael Fahy:** Yes, supplementary.

In respect of the overall timelines, can the Minister then share what the rest of the anticipated timeline looks like from the tabling of the Green Paper in the House to the eventual publication of a White Paper?

**The Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. Alexa Lightbourne:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Government is seeking to take a measured approach. We will be governed by the feedback that we receive from the public. And once we have completed consultation, we will publish a White Paper.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Second supplementary?

**Hon. Michael Fahy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, if the Minister could add some clarity, is there an anticipated timeline? We say we are taking our time; we are going to be careful. Can the Minister opine on does that look like it's going to be the end of the year? How long is the Green Paper consultation period going to be for? I think people have the right to know what they are facing in terms of these decisions.

**The Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. Alexa Lightbourne:** We are going to proceed with a three-month consultation. But we will be guided, as I shared in my previous response, by the public. If they need more information, we will provide the information as they seem to suggest that they need.

The Ministry of Human Affairs has done deep research and deep engagement with stakeholders to be able to present the document and the Green Paper as currently concluded and presented. However, as further information becomes known, as more information is also therefore known, we want to be able to amply communicate that to the public as well.

And so, we do not have a fixed timeline at present. But we are commencing our consultation, which will include town halls, which I will share with this Honourable House in a future Ministerial Statement.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Thank you, Minister.

Members, that brings us to a conclusion of the Question Period. I think all the supplementary questions have been used. There are no other Members who wish to put a question to you.

Members, we thank you for your participation. We will now move on.

## CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY SPEECHES

**The Speaker:** The next item on the Order Paper is the Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches.

Would any Member wish to speak to that?

MP Lister, I see you rose quickly that time. Would you like your three minutes?

**Mr. Dennis Lister III:** Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Good morning.

**Mr. Dennis Lister III:** Good morning to the listening audience and to this Honourable House.

Mr. Speaker, I stand today just to give recognition of this week. This week, as a member of Somerset Cricket Club, we celebrate our anniversary week, Mr. Speaker. Somerset Cricket Club has been in existence for 124 years, but in its present location at the grounds of Somerset Cricket Club for 78 years.

And Mr. Speaker, as we do every year, we have our anniversary week, which started yesterday with a church service at the Agape [Faith Kingdom] Ministries out in Dockyard by Bishop Landy. Anyone who was in attendance, they can say that it was a blessed service and a great way to start our week.

Mr. Speaker, I would just like to read off the schedule, what the week of events looks like to invite all the Members out. Tonight, there will be an Education Committee presentation by Ms. Chardonnaé Rawlins for young people. On Tuesday, tomorrow, we have our special bingo. So, we invite all those who love bingo to

come out. On Wednesday, Mr. Speaker, we have our seniors' tea at noon. So, I invite all the seniors out. And then later on that evening, there is a slate of youth football games. So, if you have young people, we invite them to come out to watch the youth football games.

Thursday night, we have our games night. And again, I invite the public to come out to take part in our games night. And then on Friday, there is an appreciation night for any volunteers over the past 20 years or so who have volunteered at Somerset Cricket Club, whether it be for football, for cricket, or any other sporting activity, we invite them out. And then on Saturday night, there's a football game between Rangers and the Somerset Cricket Club. And then on Saturday night, we have our president's dinner. So, I invite those to look out for tickets to attend the president's dinner. So, Mr. Speaker, I would like to just say again, congratulations to Somerset Creek Club on 124 years of existence, but 78 years in our present location.

And Mr. Speaker, I would like to take the last minute of my time. Last Friday, we had International Women's Day. And I would like, again, to just acknowledge all the women. But, Mr. Speaker, highlighting and recognising the Woman of the Year recipient, my cousin, Latisha Lister[-Burgess]. I do declare my interest, and she's also the daughter of former MP Terry Lister. But, Mr. Speaker, what was even more touching, I believe, was last year's recipient, again, my cousin, Lisa Lister[-Reed], daughter of former MP Walter Lister, had got to hand over the award this year to her cousin. So, I'd like to just, again, congratulate my cousin, Ms. Latisha Lister-Burgess, on receiving the award for Woman of the Year 2026.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Thank you, MP.

I noticed MP Ming was on her feet pretty quickly. So, we've gone from the west to the east.

Member, you have your three minutes.

**Mrs. Renee Ming:** Good morning, Mr. Speaker and listening audience.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, with a very sad heart, I know I was associated with these comments on Friday, but I wanted to bring mention of it myself. And that was on the passing of a staunch St. Georgian, a person who touched many, many hearts, even children outside of St. George's, and that would be Aunt Cynthia Lottimore. She was a teacher at St. George's Secondary for many, many years. And it's so funny over the weekend, I bumped into several people who were like, *she taught me; she taught me*. And being a teacher, you can imagine that she touched many minds and hearts. She will truly be missed.

I would definitely say she was a woman of integrity. Her word was her bond. And if she said it, she meant it. And if she was going to do it, it was going to get done. I would just like to let her only son, Donald,

his wife, Margaret, and the Lottimore and Basden families know that they are in our thoughts and prayers.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to extend congratulations to the International Women's Day Committee for organising a fine event every year, and also having panels that definitely are thought-provoking and allow us as women to think about our role, and also mindful of the fact that in terms of parity with our male counterparts, we still have a very, very, very long way to go. There were other International Women's Day events over this weekend, and I would just like to thank persons who take the time to organise and remember women at this time.

I would also like to give congratulations to Latisha Lister-Burgess, because her story was impeccable. She has done a lot of work in the space of mental health, and she shared her story, which was very sensitive with all of the women there. And that's not easy, and I recognise that, Mr. Speaker. And so, for that, I commend her. I would like to associate Minister Wilson with his comments as well.

And also, congratulations to Somerset Cricket Club on their anniversary week. I will try to make it there for one of the events, because in this space, whilst you know I am diehard St. George's, and I'm, you know, every—

**The Speaker:** We will have some red and blue for you that night.

**Mrs. Renee Ming:** I am a member of Somerset Cricket Club as well. I believe it's important to be a member of more than one club. And you see me bouncing around my various memberships.

**The Speaker:** You like being on a winning team, I understand.

**Mrs. Renee Ming:** Well . . . I will even be up there when St. George's wins, Mr. Speaker.

*[Laughter]*

**Mrs. Renee Ming:** But congratulations. Club life is not easy. And to the executive of Somerset Cricket Club, I wish them all the best, and the members as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Thank you, MP.

Does any other Member wish to make—Opposition Leader.

**Hon. Ben Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good morning.

**The Speaker:** Good morning.

**Hon. Ben Smith:** Last night, I had the opportunity to go to the Bermuda Spelling Bee. Really good event.

Thirteen finalists were participating yesterday, and I would like to highlight the final three. So, it was George Morris from Dellwood Middle School came in third. And then it was Eli Oduntan from Saltus Grammar [School], and the winner, Hunter Pewter from Somersfield Academy.

It was quite impressive watching these young people spell some very difficult words. The Governor gave some words of encouragement at the end, and he did mention to everybody there, he's not sure he would have made it to the finals. And I can agree with him there, because some of those words were extremely difficult. But it's amazing to see our young people putting in the work and it was really encouraging to see from different various schools, the high quality of the ability to spell difficult words and the coaching that went into it from the teachers. So, congratulations to all the finalists, and specifically to the winner.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

MP, I'm sorry, Minister Furbert.

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Yes, good morning, Mr. Speaker.

I do want to take the opportunity to give congratulatory remarks to a day that many of us in this House may participate in, and that is congratulatory to Nikita Robinson, who organises World Book Day every year. And you may think in this day and age, not many children are probably reading books, but we should still keep books at the forefront of the minds of our children and our youth as being very important to their literacy skills. And for those persons in our community who participate in that particular day, we want to recognise you and give a huge thanks for continuing to make reading relevant.

Mr. Speaker, I do want to also acknowledge the International Women's Day activities that occurred last week, and also recognise Dr. Latisha Lister-Burgess for being selected as Woman of the Year. I also want to take this time to think of all the women around the world globally who experience disadvantages with the war currently happening across our seas. It is important to recognise the rights that are violated, women's rights that are violated. And I just want to take the time to again congratulate everyone who is recognising International Women's Day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Thank you. Does any other Member—MP DeCouto.

**Dr. Douglas DeCouto:** Yes, good morning. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to congratulate the Casa dos Açores on their 11th anniversary. I had the pleasure of joining them for their celebration last night, and I want

to thank Lucia Botelho, her officers, the members for a fabulous time. They have a young dance troupe, a cultural dance troupe, and it's quite enjoyable watching them. I'm not clear all the youngsters enjoyed themselves as much as those watching did, but I know that as they get older, they will appreciate the opportunity to learn more about their culture and their families' cultures.

Ms. Botelho pointed out a couple of things in her remarks that I thought were really nice to hear. She talked about how they were open to the whole community and that they don't intend to operate as an isolated cultural organisation, but they wanted to be part of and invite the community in. And I think that's really important as Bermuda develops as a diverse and multi-cultural community. And I also want to thank the Casa for doing their part to celebrate and to continue to promulgate the role of the Azorean culture in Bermuda.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution? None . . .

Minister De Silva.

**Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva:** Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for giving me that second.

Mr. Speaker, I would like the House to send congratulations to Mrs. Nadine Brown-Evans Henry. She is the president-elect of the BPSU and I will associate Minister Weeks.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva:** Everybody on this side wishes to be associated, Mr. Speaker, and Lord willing, she will take office on Friday the 13th.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Any other?

None other?

Well, Members, that brings us to a close of the Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, so we will move on.

## MATTERS OF PRIVILEGE

**The Speaker:** There are none.

## PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

**The Speaker:** There are none.

## NOTICE OF MOTIONS FOR THE ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE

## ON MATTERS OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

**The Speaker:** There are none.

## INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**The Speaker:** There are none.

## NOTICE OF MOTIONS

**The Speaker:** There are none.

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

**The Speaker:** So that brings us, Members, to the point of, or the main purpose for today, which is the continuation of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27.

And this morning, again, for the listening audience, as we go into the Budget Debates each day, there are eight hours that are set aside for the annual debates each day. And today, the first four hours will cover the Ministry of Labour and Economy, and the second four will be the Ministry of Youth, Social Development, and Seniors. When we go to enable the debate of the individual departments, we have to go into Committee.

So, the House will be moved into Committee for the next eight hours, and the Speaker will be out of the Chair, and the House will be under the guidance of the panel of Chairs.

And the morning Chairman, who will start us off, will be MP Ming. After the House is moved into Committee, MP Ming will then take the Chair.

Junior Minister, will you lead us into Committee?

**Hon. Wayne L. Furbert:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now resume the Committee of Supply to consider the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2026/27.

**The Speaker:** Are there any objections to that?

There are none.

MP Ming.

*[Crosstalk]*

House in Committee at 11:27 am

*[Mrs. Renee Ming, Chairman]*

## COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

### ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2026/27

**The Chairman:** Honourable Members, we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27. The following heads will be debated under Youth, Social Development, and Seniors: Heads 86, 23, and 55. I call on the Minister in charge to proceed. Minister, you have the floor.

## MINISTRY OF YOUTH, SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, AND SENIORS

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, I move the following heads: [Head] 86, Ministry of Youth, Social Development, and Seniors Headquarters, [Head] 23, Child and Family Services, and [Head] 55, Financial Assistance, be now taken under consideration.

**The Chairman:** It has been moved that Heads 23 and 55 be approved. Is there any objection to that motion? No objection. Agreed to.

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chairman, I would just like to just say that the statements are very lengthy ones, and so I ask that my colleagues indulge. It is lots of information. I ask that we are listening attentively so that questions can be made accordingly. Madam Chairman, I am pleased—

**The Chairman:** Minister, before you start, I just want to be clear on something. The heads that I have listed are Heads 86, 23, and 55, but you moved 23 and 55.

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** I did 86 first.

**The Chairman:** No, you just said 23 and 55, so we just want to be sure that—

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Yes, so I move following heads, [Head] 86, Ministry of Youth, Social Development, and Seniors Headquarters, [Head] 23, Child and Family Services, and [Head] 55, Financial Assistance, be now taken under consideration.

**The Chairman:** So, we just said that for the sake of recordkeeping. I'm just going to say that it has been moved that Heads 86, 23, and 55 be approved. Is there any objection? No, agreed to. Thank you, Minister.

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. I am pleased to present the 2026/27 Budget estimates for the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors, which comprises of the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors Headquarters, inclusive of Ageing and Disability Services, the K. Margaret Carter Centre, the Office of Youth Affairs; the

Department of Child and Family Services and, the Department of Financial Assistance.

Madam Chairman, the 2026/27 budget allocations for the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors demonstrates there is a continued financial commitment to support Bermuda's population during their lifetime, which includes our most vulnerable population groups, that is our children, persons with disabilities, and our seniors. The Government is committed to ensuring the services and programmes offered by the Ministry will directly influence and enhance persons overall well-being and quality of life.

Madam Chairman, the Ministry focused on numerous initiatives during the last budget year, which are ongoing and will continue in the upcoming 2026/27 budget year. I will briefly highlight these as follows:

This budget, Madam Chairman, advances a clear, coordinated and evidence-based response to homelessness in Bermuda. A Homelessness Advisory Panel comprising of public, private and non-profit representatives, whose mission was to develop a comprehensive plan to end homelessness have completed a report, and a National Homelessness Action Plan has been devised.

In this fiscal year, the Plan's priority is to further strengthen urgent, life-saving efforts to end rough sleeping, while also developing a system that is data-driven, accountable, and sustainable. The budgeted amount for the upcoming fiscal year to address the Housing First for rough sleepers programme is \$70,000. These measures reflect a housing-first approach and ensures that public resources are targeted where they achieve the greatest impact, with transparent monitoring. The plan will be executed under the vigilant supervision of the Homelessness Advisory Panel, in collaboration with government Ministry partners and key stakeholders.

Looking ahead, Madam Chairman, the budget lays the foundation for continuing to strengthen supportive housing options that will assist with early identification and prevention of homelessness over the medium term. In 2026/27, a grant of \$150,000 has been budgeted to continue support for Astor House, a government supported housing facility that is a 9-bed boarding house, providing supportive housing and services through coordination and intensive support to enable inmates to sustainably return to life after incarceration.

This initiative in partnership with HOME, the Department of Corrections, Department of Court Services, is supported by the Bermuda Police Service. This initiative offers barrier-free housing for former inmates, along with rehabilitation and long-term planning to help lower recidivism.

Madam Chairman, in March 2025, the Ministry partnered with the charitable organisation HOME to support the Rental Support Services (Emergency Subsidy) Programme, to ensure people's safety while enabling access to adequate accommodation and services

for an agreed period, so they can live in a dignified space, with access to minimum services, water, electricity, and household items to cover basic needs. This programme also fills a gap in providing immediate rental support in the form of the first month’s rent or deposit needed to secure accommodation. A “hardship fund” was established with a multi-disciplinary team comprising representatives from various non-profit agencies who determine the eligibility of applicants. As of February 2026, the fund has disbursed a total of \$93,790. Madam Chairman, \$150,000 has been budgeted in 2026/27 to support the Hardship Fund.

Rental expenses remain the main reason for accessing the hardship fund. Rental expenses are reflected in requests made to the Department of Financial Assistance, as rental expenses continue to be the primary factor leading individuals to seek support from the hardship fund. This trend is evident in the numerous requests received by the Department of Financial Assistance, where a significant portion of applicants cite rental payments as the main reason for requiring aid. The ongoing demand for assistance with rental costs highlights the critical role the hardship fund plays in providing relief to those facing housing instability.

Madam Chairman, the Gender Affairs Council was established in 2023 to ensure that the Government could address legislation and policy; research and evaluation; and community engagement and education.

Madam Chairman, on Monday, 17th November 2025, the Council held their first town hall at the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation. This forum allowed the Council to highlight public concerns about gender-based violence, sexual harassment, reproductive rights and workplace inequality. The Council addressed the limitations on finding gender-specific data, which would assist them in making more informed recommendations to the Ministry.

The meeting provided an opportunity for attendees to raise the need of better engagement with different genders to discuss broader social issues, such as, homelessness among men, racial and income disparities and the influence of generational beliefs. The Council aims to hold conversations this year to continue to raise awareness on gender issues and strengthen partnerships with the public and community groups.

Madam Chairman, ensuring the best interests, protection and safeguarding of our children is imperative. In support of this, during the past year, the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors continued to strengthen the litigation guardian framework by setting up building blocks for a long-term, sustainable litigation guardian service.

Madam Chairman, in November 2025, the Ministry organised its fourth awareness campaign to recognise the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls and the launch of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence. The theme was, “Unite to End Digital

Violence against All Women and Girls,” which is an increasing relevant topic locally and internationally. This provided an opportunity for the Ministry to provide public awareness of digital safety, such as, cyberstalking, non-consensual sharing of intimate images or videos, and online harassment. Members of the public were reminded to report such content, promote respectful behaviour and use compassion with victims of harassment.

Madam Chairman, on the 8th February 2026, the [Ministry] launched the guidebook entitled, “Envision Your Retirement: 2026 Planning Guide to Retirement.” The guide was developed to provide tools that would assist persons on proactive retirement planning as Bermuda’s seniors’ population continues to increase. The aim of the guide is to provide pensioners and residents approaching retirement access to vital information that would assist in planning in advance for a secure and fulfilling retirement. The public will be informed of upcoming education sessions that would assist individuals to have a better understanding of the guide and the retirement process. The guide can be located on the Ministry’s website and hardcopies can be collected from the Ministry Headquarters located at Veritas Place, 6th Floor, 65 Court Street, Hamilton or Ageing and Disability Services, located at Continental Building, 25 Church Street, Hamilton.

Madam Chairman, during the past year, the Ministry continued promoting its services and programmes to educate the public on issues such as, homelessness, protections for seniors and persons with disability through radio talk shows, Let’s Get Social, The Golden Hour, in-person meetings with HOME; various senior clubs and churches; and guest speaking events.

Madam Chairman, I will now move on to the summary of the fiscal year 2026/27 current account budget estimate for the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors, which is found on page B-289 of the Approved Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the Year 2026/27. The Ministry’s total budget estimate for the fiscal year 2026/27 is (\$97,274,000).

Madam Chairman, this represents an increase of \$6,000,000, or 7 per cent compared to the original estimate of \$91,274,000 for fiscal year 2025/26.

Madam Chairman, the breakdown of the Ministry’s current account budget estimate for 2026/27 by Head as shown on page B-289 is as follows:

Head	Department	2026/27 Estimate (\$ Million)	% Increase (Decrease)
86	Ministry Headquarters	16.052	14
23	Child and Family Services	22.821	8
55	Financial Assistance	58.401	4
Overall	Ministry Total	97.274	7

Madam Chairman, this summary shows that the 2026/27 current expenditure allocations for all

Heads within the Ministry have increased. I will explain the details of these increases further in this budget [presentation].

## HEAD 86—MINISTRY HEADQUARTERS

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the current account expenditure for Head 86—Ministry Headquarters can be found on pages B-289 to B-292 of the Estimates Book.

The Ministry Headquarters is responsible for the budget of 10 Business Units

- 96000—Administration;
- 96040—Ageing and Disability Services;
- 96050—K. Margaret Carter Centre;
- 96060—Policy Development;
- 96070—Grants to the Third Sector;
- 96080—Youth Office;
- 96090—Youth Grants and Investments;
- 96100—Youth Community Centres;
- 96110—Before, After, and Out of School Programmes; and
- 96120—Youth Policy.

Madam Chairman, the mission of the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors Headquarters found on page B-290 is the *Protection of all individuals during their lifetime and facilitation of their well-being*. The five objectives of the Ministry Headquarters are also found on page B-290, which are:

1. Collaborate with Ministry Departments to ensure overall policy objective are met.
2. Create partnerships that allow for better-coordinated services that are synergistic with the Government's social initiatives.
3. Help facilitate or improve social supports for Bermuda's at-risk populations.
4. Ensure all stakeholders have safeguarding and child protection policy statements.
5. Advance Government's social policy initiatives with an emphasis on social cohesion.

Madam Chairman, the General Summary of the Ministry's budget on page B-290 shows that the total budget allocation for the Ministry Headquarters for fiscal year 2026/27 is \$16,052,000, distributed amongst the 10 business units, representing a net increase of \$1,941,000.

I will now share details of each of these Business Units, commencing with business unit 96000, Administration.

### Business Unit 96000—Administration

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the 2026/27 budget for the Administration business unit 96000 of \$1,493,000 compares to the \$1,625,000 originally budgeted in financial year 2025/26. This reflects a decrease of \$132,000, or an 8 per cent decrease, as shown on page B-290, which is primarily due to less funding needed for professional services. These

monies will be used within the Ministry to support programmes such as a new Disability Unit within Ageing and Disability Services and Grants to the Third Sector.

### Business Unit 96040—Ageing and Disability Services

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, I will now present the budget for business unit 96040, Ageing and Disability Services which can be found on page B-290.

Madam Chairman, the mission of Ageing and Disability Services (ADS) is *To support and protect seniors and persons with disabilities at risk of abuse or self-neglect via compliance, programme delivery, education and stakeholder collaboration*.

ADS has a budget allocation of \$2,37[0],000 for fiscal year 2026/27, representing \$468,000 more than the prior year. Included in this amount is the mid-year supplementary funding of \$181,000. Funding provides for a total of 11 full-time employees.

Madam Chairman, the primary focus of Ageing and Disability Services is adult protection, delivered principally through its case management programme. In addition, to this core function the Office plays a critical role in the development and delivery of public education and awareness initiatives. These efforts are aimed at strengthening community understanding of the services provided by ADS, as well as increasing awareness of key issues affecting seniors and people with disabilities.

As an ex-officio member of the Disability Advisory Council (DAC), Ageing and Disability Services remains committed to supporting disability initiatives. In this capacity, ADS works collaboratively with DAC members and community organisations to advocate for measures that enhance inclusion, protect rights, and improve the quality of life for persons with physical and intellectual disabilities.

Madam Chairman, a key area of collaboration for ADS is the provision of support to individuals with complex needs, particularly adults with intellectual disabilities and diminished capacity. These cases often involve challenges as it relates to informed consent, heightened safeguarding risks associated with complex behaviours, and limited or absent family support, requiring coordinated and specialised intervention.

Over the past few years, ADS has partnered with the Mid-Atlantic Wellness Institute to support a client currently placed overseas. This arrangement was necessitated by the absence of specialised services and infrastructure on Island and continues to represent the most appropriate and cost-effective option for meeting the client's assessed needs at this time.

ADS also pays for the court ordered litigation guardian services of another young adult with intellectual disabilities who is receiving assistance from Therapeutic Consulting Services which will total close to \$40,000 for 2025/26.

### Policy and Programme Development

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, in 2025/26, Policy and Programme Development within Ageing and Disability Services continues to support the planning, development, and coordination of policies and programmes for seniors and persons with physical and intellectual disabilities. Funding allocated to this area supports the sustained delivery of core policy functions while enabling measurable progress on key national initiatives.

Madam Chairman, Bermuda's National Disability Register application, which forms a key component of the Government's five-year National Plan for Adults with Intellectual Disabilities and their Families, successfully migrated to government-managed local servers in December 2025. While complete migration required additional time due to necessary system enhancements to ensure a secure and effective transfer of information, this milestone represents a significant achievement in strengthening local digital capacity and data stewardship.

During 2025/26, ADS continued to maintain and promote the Disability Register as a centralised repository for [accurate] and current data on persons with disabilities. This data supports evidence-based planning, policy development, and service delivery across sectors including health, education, employment, and social services. Key performance outcomes for the fiscal year include:

- Successful migration of all Disability Register data to local servers without loss or compromise of information.
- Continued registration of new participants on the platform, expanding the national dataset.

A maintenance contract is currently under development to support the next phase of the project. Only system functions that cannot yet be maintained locally will be embedded under this contract, ensuring that the majority of the application can be sustained and advanced on Island. This approach maximises local control, enhances system reliability, and lays the foundation for future application enhancements.

Madam Chairman, in the year ahead, ADS will focus on:

- expanding outreach and engagement to increase registration and participation in the Disability Register;
- generating more comprehensive analytical reports to inform policy making;
- continuing to develop local technical capacity to fully manage and enhance the application, reducing reliance on external contractors over time; and
- leveraging the Disability Register data to identify service gaps and guide targeted interventions under the National Plan for Adults with Intellectual Disabilities and their Families.

Madam Chairman, this work demonstrates the Government's commitment to robust data management, evidence-based policy development, and the

advancement of services for persons with disabilities, ensuring that the Disability Register remains a vital tool for planning, monitoring, and improving national outcomes.

Ageing and Disability Services is well positioned to lead this work, consistent with its core mandate and its ongoing development of new disability legislation, including the proposed Disability Act.

Madam Chairman, since last year, significant work has been undertaken to advance disability inclusion. This process began with a comparative review of disability rights legislation and governance frameworks across several jurisdictions, including The Bahamas, Jamaica, the United Kingdom, and the United States. This analysis highlighted that each jurisdiction has established stand-alone legislative frameworks and designated focal points, or Disability Units, in accordance with Article 33 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to strengthen and protect the rights of persons with disabilities.

Madam Chairman, building on this analysis, stakeholder engagement was initiated to gather insight into the current state of disability inclusion in Bermuda, identify gaps within existing systems, and understand lived experiences. Based on this engagement, a policy proposal was developed and presented to Ministry leadership, outlining two options to address the identified gaps, one, to amend existing legislation and two, to develop stand-alone disability legislation. Both options were underpinned by the recommendation to first establish a disability unit to ensure appropriate resources and governance to support reform.

A decision was taken to proceed with amendments to existing legislation, alongside the establishment of a disability unit. This unit aims to form the foundation of a strong and sustainable framework for disability inclusion in Bermuda, beginning with the onboarding of a project manager through allocated supplemental funding. The unit will be scaled over time as work advances and capacity requirements are further defined. Ongoing stakeholder engagement will remain a core component of implementation, ensuring that the framework is informed by, lived experiences and remains responsive to the needs and priorities of persons with disabilities.

Madam Chairman, under its broader policy and programme remit, Ageing and Disability Services is responsible for administering duty relief exemption requests for materials that support ageing at home, as well as for medical and adaptive equipment related to disability conditions.

In 2025/26, ADS received and approved 16 duty relief exemptions, an increase from eight approvals in 2024/25. Building on this progress, ADS will continue to work collaboratively with partners in the upcoming fiscal year to raise awareness and encourage uptake of this exemption; supporting greater independence; accessibility; and quality of life for seniors and persons with disabilities.

Madam Chairman, continuing with the theme of ageing, a significant achievement for the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors during the past year was the development of the National Seniors Strategy 2024–2030, fulfilling the Government's commitment set out in the 2020 Speech from the Throne. The Strategy provides a comprehensive, long-term framework to ensure that Bermuda's seniors, and future generations, are supported to age well, with dignity, independence, and security.

To advance implementation, a National Seniors Strategy project manager was onboarded in October 2025 to establish and operationalise the governance, coordination, and monitoring infrastructure required to oversee delivery of the Strategy. This role is also responsible for coordinating the development of long-term care actions that fall within the broader Strategy and the remit of the Ministry, ensuring alignment across policy, planning, and service delivery.

During 2025/26, the Ministry will continue to focus on strengthening implementation; advancing priority actions; and improving accountability and outcomes under the National Seniors Strategy, positioning Bermuda to respond effectively to demographic change and the evolving needs of its ageing population.

Madam Chairman, over the last fiscal year several national policies and programme initiatives have commenced. These include:

1. The establishment of a long-term care working group. The Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors is responsible for strategic development of this sector; however, this must be done in partnership with the Ministry of Health and other key stakeholders. Accordingly, a working group was established a year ago to facilitate identifying systemic barriers and consequently both short- and long-term solutions for long-term care with a focus on the current community and hospital bed crisis. The group comprises representatives and leadership across government health and social care and support sectors facilitating cross-ministry, department and quango issue and solution identification. Data collection is currently underway to help target pilot programme development to address barriers to hospital discharge and care in the community.

2. Amendments to the Senior Abuse Register Act 2008. ADS continued to engage and consult with the Attorney General's Chambers on the drafting instructions submitted to enhance the protections available under the Act in relation to financial exploitation. Furthermore, advocacy and cross ministerial engagement occurred on how to advance more substantive changes required under the Act in alignment with other initiatives such as the Office of the Public Guardian.

3. Publication of an Integrated Care Pathway for dementia (ICP). The Ministry contracted the Bermuda Health Council to conduct research and stakeholder engagement to identify current local practices; service availability and gaps; international best practices; and viable local solutions for quality dementia prevention,

diagnosis and care at a total cost of \$60,000. The ICP development engaged health professionals, professional caregivers, families and dementia related organisations. The Integrated Care Pathway was published in December 2025 and outlines seven key phases to ensure quality outcomes for persons living with dementia and their families including:

- awareness and risk reduction;
- initial detection;
- diagnostic work up;
- diagnosis disclosure;
- ongoing medical and social care;
- care in the community; and
- end of life support.

The next steps are to identify and prioritise key actions through stakeholder working groups to work towards developing and implementing the identified pathway. This is part of the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors commitment to addressing dementia in our community and a key focus of the National Seniors Strategy. The Dementia Integrated Care Pathway Report 2025 is available for review on the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors website; and members of the public and stakeholders are encouraged to read the report and engage with its recommendations as the report is implemented.

4. ADS continued collaboration with the Ministry of Justice in their creation of an Office of the Public Guardian to ensure our high-risk welfare cases are managed under the appropriate entity and to address the broader needs of the community in this area. This is a critical service for our community, and a pilot programme will help further define the scope and role of the Office of the Public Guardian.

5. The development of the Senior Day Care Facility. This initiative is intended to strengthen Bermuda's continuum of care for seniors by delivering a purpose-built Senior Day [Care] Facility. The facility will enhance quality of life and reduce social isolation among seniors, particularly those living with dementia or cognitive impairments; alleviate financial, physical, and emotional pressures on caregivers through structured daytime support; and provide opportunities for on-site, best-practice training in dementia-specific care for health [care] professionals.

Madam Chairman, during the last fiscal year, the Gilbert Institute was identified as the proposed location for the facility. The project design prioritises accessibility, robust safety measures, and the integration of sensory-friendly indoor and outdoor spaces to create a therapeutic environment that supports independence, dignity, and well-being.

Key milestones achieved to date include:

- The release of the Request for Proposals (RFP) in June 2025.
- A site visit was held on 13 June 2025, that was attended by all four shortlisted architectural firms, each of which expressed interest in the project.

- Closure of the RFP in July 2025, with the contract subsequently awarded to Botelho Wood Architects.

Moving forward, demolition and discovery works are scheduled to commence in the new fiscal year. Construction is anticipated to begin between September and October 2026, subject to planning approval and the issuance of a building control permit. The Department of Planning advertised the project on 27 January 2026, in accordance with the required 14-day public objection period, which closed on 10 February 2026.

Madam Chairman, Public Works is currently progressing the preparation of building control documents and will subsequently advance asbestos abatement, demolition, and construction packages. Once planning approval is secured, the building control permit is expected to follow shortly thereafter. Madam Chairman, \$1,800,000 has been budgeted in capital funding for 2026/27, as shown on page C-8.

Upon full operation, the facility is expected to require a staffing complement of 87 staff to support up to 50 clients with varying levels of care, ensuring appropriate care ratios and the delivery of high-quality, specialised services.

#### Education and Awareness

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, education and awareness is an important component to Ageing and Disability Services to ensure our [community] knows: how to protect itself from senior abuse, plan for their future, support inclusion and upholding disability rights, and identify and locate available services and supports to meet their needs.

Over 2024/25 ADS held 19 education and awareness events. During this fiscal year ADS aims to exceed this number. In 2025, events included the ADS third annual Seniors Tea. This successful event hosted over 100 seniors and focused on the importance of planning ahead through the guest speaker Perry Trott and included information booths for support services, such as, the Department of Financial Assistance, Social Insurance and Age Concern. The feedback from the participant survey and partner agencies was extremely positive. I would like to acknowledge and thank the generosity of those that made the event possible including the Bermuda Police Service who volunteered at the event and the Northlands Primary School choir for their uplifting performance.

ADS also commenced a training partnership with the Bermuda Peer Learning Network to provide abuse prevention and reporting training in all care homes on the Island, which commenced in the fall of 2025, and feedback to date has been very positive.

Madam Chairman, education and awareness continue to be a core pillar of Ageing and Disability Services, ensuring the community is informed and empowered to prevent senior abuse, plan for later life, uphold

the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities, and access the services and supports available to them.

#### Case Management

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, case management represents the primary programme under ADS, business unit 96040. Case management clients include seniors and persons over 18 years of age with long-standing [disabling] conditions and are divided into general case management and adult protection services. General case management services include needs and service identification, and system navigation and support coordination. Adult protection pertains to seniors, and persons with disabilities who are at risk of abuse, neglect or self-neglect.

The case management team continues to strive to provide quality services and support, despite challenges arising from service and system gaps. These challenges underscore the importance of the ongoing work of ADS together with other Ministries to address critical issues such as long-term care, public guardianship, and the prevention of domestic abuse.

Madam Chairman, in 2025/26, ADS had a total of 353 new cases. These do not include cases that remained open from the previous fiscal year. Of these cases:

- Two hundred were general case management [cases], eight [of] which were abuse allegations of persons with disabilities under 65 years of age.
- The remainder of the total cases were senior abuse referrals totalling 153 reports received. The reports, identified by primary presenting type of abuse, consisted of:
  - 33 per cent for physical abuse;
  - 29 per cent for financial exploitation;
  - 24 per cent for psychological abuse;
  - 12 per cent for neglect; and
  - 2 per cent for sexual abuse.

Of these reports received, to date:

- 29 per cent were unsubstantiated;
- 56 per cent were unsubstantiated;
- 15 per cent are pending, as they are still under investigation.

Madam Chairman, Ageing and Disability Services provided these case management services with a team of four social workers, one social work coordinator and a programme manager and during this fiscal year, the social worker assistant post was able to be filled by a temporary relief contract. In 2024, ADS filled the new social worker post, increasing the posts to a total of four social workers within the case management section.

As a result, the average social worker to client ratio was 1:38 for fiscal year 2025/26, a slight decrease from the previous year. However, best practice standard is one [worker] to 25 clients for low risk or low need clients and should be substantially less for high

complexity and risk cases, which many ADS cases are. Sustained high caseloads result in a required focus on risk reduction opposed to overall quality of life, less time available for lower risk cases and preventative support to clients, prolonged investigations, and limited monitoring. To illustrate the latter, for the last fiscal year, senior abuse cases still open after three months was 46 per cent, which is impacted by caseloads and current programme structure based on the current staffing complement.

Madam Chairman, over the course of the last year, the case management programme made key advancements internally and maintained key external partnerships to strengthen our responses to the needs of persons with disabilities and seniors from an adult protection and general case management perspective. I will now outline these initiatives.

ADS continues as a core member on key committees including:

- Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Committee (MARC)—manages high-risk domestic violence cases and also led the development of the Domestic Abuse Strategy, discussed further in this brief.
- The Sexual Assault Response Team (SART)—coordinates responses and supports for survivors of sexual assault.
- The Transition Team—established to help identify, and plan for service needs for persons with intellectual disabilities as they age. The transition team is co-chaired by Ageing and Disability Services and the Community Intellectual Disability Team from the Mid-Atlantic Wellness Institute. The team meets monthly and consists of representatives from multiple ministries and departments including: Education; Child and Family Services; Health; Bermuda Hospitals Board and ADS.
- The Domestic Abuse Steering Committee—a cross-ministry committee established to align and address policy and practice development around domestic abuse.

Madam Chairman, ADS contracts a registered nurse to conduct long-term care assessments when community nursing support from the Department of Health is unavailable and to assist with investigations alongside social workers responsible for senior abuse cases involving clinical care concerns. In 2024/25, the cost of this contracted service totalled \$7,000, decreasing to \$5,500 in 2025/26.

With the establishment of a new registered nurse role at the K. Margaret Carter Centre (KMCC) in February 2026, ADS case management staff now have dedicated, in-house clinical support for assessments and investigations. This new arrangement is expected to improve response times and service continuity, as contracted nurses previously had competing full-time commitments, and community health nurses have existing workloads that limited their availability.

Additionally, Madam Chairman, in 2025, Ageing and Disability Services implemented a Structured Decision-Making (SDM) Framework for intake and safety assessments.

The SDM is an evidence-based methodology that supports the identification and definition of populations served, prioritises response times according to risk, and guides safety planning. Implementation activities included the development of tools, integration and certification within the case management software, testing, and staff training at a total [cost] \$335,000.

Due to the time required for software certification and to ensure effective change management, the second phase focused on a Strengths and Needs Assessment, which was postponed and is now planned for the upcoming fiscal year. The implementation of the intake assessment is critical for obtaining data and reframing ADS case management services into adult protection services, and general case management. This reclassification is to work towards the intended future state where all vulnerable adults receive appropriate protection from abuse, neglect and self-neglect under the law.

Madam Chairman, professional development is critical to the practice of social work. In January 2026, ADS hosted an advanced certification training in forensic interviewing of older adults provided by Modell Consulting Group. This intensive 4-day training was developed initially for the Department of Justice Elder Abuse programme in the United States, by Modell Consulting Group, who were also then contracted to provide the training nationally. The training cost was \$28,000 and included 24 participants from Bermuda Police Service, the Department of Public Prosecutions and Ageing and Disability Services. The training not only provided critical skill enhancement for staff with experience in interviewing and/or working with older adults, but also enabled cross-agency engagement, learning, and collaboration. The course was a complete success with a 100 per cent pass rate for the practicum held on the final day.

Madam Chairman, in 2024, as part of the supplemental funding, a hardship fund of \$120,000 was allocated for case management. Funds are used for critical services or interventions required to ensure the safety or welfare of clients. To date this has included: grocery cards, cleaning services where the state of the home was preventing care services from entering, and temporary emergency funding support for welfare clients.

Welfare clients are people with diminished decision-making capacity, no responsible person and a high risk to their safety and welfare. Over 2024/25 and 2025/26 this has included ensuring basic needs are met for these clients as well as emergency medical procedures and care support. In the third quarter of 2025/26, an additional \$100,000 was awarded to this fund for two primary purposes:

1. The implementation of a hearing aid programme to ensure those who are uninsured or under-insured have access to hearing tests and devices. This programme identified late last fiscal year was paused due to the emergency funding needs required for a welfare client. The additional funding will now enable its implementation, which is expected to start prior to the end of this fiscal year.

2. Supplemental funding for a foster child with profound disabilities that has aged out from the Department of Child and Family Services and faced funding shortages in relation to their complex needs and available benefits.

With a total of \$220,000 allocated for hardship funding in 2026/27, Ageing and Disability Services is better positioned to assist clients, while ensuring that the distribution of these funds is targeted and risk-based to address priority needs and manage potential community demand.

#### Business Unit 96050—K. Margaret Carter Centre

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the K. Margaret Carter Centre (KMCC) provides essential support for adults with intellectual disabilities through comprehensive day programme services and case management, ensuring that adults with intellectual disabilities have consistent access to meaningful engagement, skill development, and social inclusion in a supportive environment.

As shown on [page] B-290, the K. Margaret Carter Centre will receive a budget allocation of \$2,556,000 in fiscal year 2026/27, \$213,000 or 9 per cent more than the prior year. This will fund 19 full-time staff and three service providers, thus enabling the delivery of services to 48 service users.

Throughout the year, KMCC continued to operate five days per week, serving seven distinct client groups. In recognition of the demands on families, KMCC also continued to provide early morning and late afternoon care outside of regular operational hours to support those requiring extended programming to accommodate the work schedules of families.

Madam Chairman, in 2025, the K. Margaret Carter Centre undertook a significant programme revision to strengthen service delivery and enhance client outcomes over the course of the year. The following key developments included:

- Clear entry and exit criteria to safeguard service users, and staff ensuring their wellbeing.
- A new behaviour support programme, the addition of a behaviour specialist, and strengthened crisis response for clients requiring behavioural support.
- Defined mandates and programme targets for each of the seven client groups, ensuring individuals are placed in activities that align with their abilities, interests, and functional needs.

- Digital transformation through electronic forms to streamline programme efficiency, data tracking, and improve recordkeeping.
- Monthly client engagement summaries to capture participation and track involvement across core programmes.
- Seeking out direct client feedback in line with the human rights-based principle of “Nothing About Us, Without Us,” which allows service users to influence programming changes that reflect their interests.
- Hosting case reviews with parents/guardians and care teams to foster collaboration and provide clear insight into client progress.

In addition to the programme revisions above, social and community engagement has also been a focus. Clients participated in a range of events designed to increase community awareness and provide enriching social experiences, including:

- The Ageing and Disability Services Seniors Tea, where clients practiced hospitality skills by assisting with providing tableside service.
- Attendance at a community boxing event, through charity collaboration, giving clients the opportunity to engage socially outside programme hours.
- Hosting His Excellency, the Governor of Bermuda, for a KMCC facility tour led by a client ambassador, showcasing the centre’s programmes and achievements.
- The KMCC Wedding Experience—a mock wedding hosted by the Hamilton Princess and Beach Club, providing clients with the opportunity to celebrate a traditional life milestone in a dignified and joyful way. In recognition of this achievement, KMCC staff were awarded the Public Service Excellence Award for September 2025.
- Participation in a community adaptive sports day, allowing clients to showcase their sportsmanship.
- Active involvement in multiple KBB [Keep Bermuda Beautiful] community clean-up events.
- Participation in a Carter House Charity (registered charity #1031) tag day.
- Hosting “Celebrations Around the World” that was a holiday showcase, highlighting the many talents of the clients at KMCC.

Madam Chairman, over the past year, the K. Margaret Carter Centre has revised performance measures to focus on engagement rather than improvement in skill areas. This recognises that success is not solely defined by skill advancement, as many clients may reach their personal peak in certain areas.

Instead, the emphasis is on participation in meaningful activities that enhance quality of life. As such, KMCC has three client groups that regularly engage in administrative, hospitality, and product-

labelling tasks. Two groups focused on sensory engagement and integration. One group to support ageing clients with slower paced programming. And one group focused on social skills development and recreation.

KMCC has expanded its network of community partners this year from 15 to 17, further increasing client exposure and inclusion in the community. While community-based work placements have become increasingly difficult due to many barriers within the current economy and job market, KMCC continues to provide in-house work skills opportunities through partnerships with government departments/agencies and local businesses enabling clients to make meaningful contributions while developing their vocational skills.

Overall, the programming at the K. Margaret Carter Centre continues to take a whole-person approach, addressing life skills, social skills, community connection, health, friendships, recreation, sensory exploration, and therapeutic support.

Madam Chairman, in addition to the changes mentioned, staff development was also a priority for the year, with five professional development sessions being delivered to enhance practice, strengthen knowledge, and ensure staff are equipped to deliver high quality support. In alignment with continuous improvement, [the] aged facilities at the K. Margaret Carter Centre have also received attention, in the following ways:

- Renovation of a large room to become a clinical and therapeutic hub to support collaboration with the community intellectual disabilities team, behaviour support, and nursing, ensuring clients have a dedicated space for therapy and clinical care.
- Conversion of a former storage area into a staff room, providing a designated, on-site space for staff breaks, which enhances staff wellbeing and capacity to support clients throughout the day.
- Ongoing upgrades to increase overall campus safety.

The K. Margaret Carter Centre is grateful to have received supplementary funding of \$22,500 to address gaps in allied health services due to staffing constraints with a community partner who is responsible for delivering physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy services to clients, and to also support the transportation services at KMCC ensuring continuity of bus operations during staff absences.

Madam Chairman, despite these improvements and areas of growth, the K. Margaret Carter Centre is operating at near full capacity. The transition of four clients from the Dame Marjorie Bean Hope Academy and two clients from CedarBridge Academy's Functional Skills programme this fiscal year alone, combined with a growing waitlist, has placed significant pressure on space at the facility.

Madam Chairman, the K. Margaret Carter Centre remains fully committed to continually enhancing its programmes. With appropriate resources, KMCC will continue to deliver engaging, inclusive, and high-quality programmes that promote skill development, community connection, and overall quality of life for adults with intellectual disabilities.

#### Business Unit 96060—Policy Development

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, I will move on to business unit 96060, Policy Development, page B-290. For fiscal year 2026/27 the budget remains the same at \$157,000 for policy development.

This policy resource supports the Ministry's policy commitments, which include Throne Speech and the Government's platform initiatives.

#### Business Unit 96070—Grants to the Third Sector

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, \$4,466,000 has been allocated for the fiscal year 2026/27 for business unit 96070, Grants to the Third Sector, as shown on page B-290.

This is an increase of \$771,000, or 21 per cent, reflecting the inclusion of 2025 supplementary grant funding of \$300,000 for nursing homes and residential care facilities, as well as additional funding to support the homelessness strategy. Specific allocations can be found on page C-21 of the Budget Book.

#### Youth Affairs

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, I will now present the fiscal year 2026/27 estimates of expenditure and revenue for The Office of Youth Affairs (TOYA), which comprises the Youth Development, Youth Outreach, Youth Services and Youth Policy programmes, found on pages B-290 and B-291 of the Budget Book.

Madam Chairman, the total 2026/27 budget allocation for all four programmes within The Office of Youth Affairs is calculated at \$5,010,000, an increase of \$621,000, or 14 per cent over the prior year.

#### Mission

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the mission of The Office of Youth Affairs is, *To form a unified approach to tackle issues faced by Bermuda's young people and provide them with the support to have positive and productive futures.*

Madam Chairman, the objectives for The Office of Youth Affairs for 2026/27 are as follows:

- provide funding/support for Youth Organisations and Groups (YOGs);
- manage and maintain government community centres;
- provide before, after and out of school programmes for school-age children;

- provide recreational programmes and activities to surrounding communities;
- prepare and manage the budget to ensure intended deadlines are met; and
- monitor and facilitate the goals of the National Youth Policy and action the National Youth Policy Working Group recommendations.

Madam Chairman, I will now discuss the individual programmes associated with this section of the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors.

#### Programme 8602—Youth Development

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the programme budget for fiscal year 2026/27 is \$863,000, reflecting a rise of \$172,000, or 25 per cent as shown on page B-290.

#### Business Unit 96080—Youth Office

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, of the programme budget, the Youth Office, business unit 96080, has now been allocated \$703,000 in fiscal year 2026/27. This funding supports salaries and wages for leadership and administrative staff; professional development including autism spectrum disorder and neurodivergent training; travel for conferences and exchanges; and the operational requirements needed to ensure efficiency and effective administration, which supports the other units in all operations. Such operations include registrations, programme payments, staff onboarding, and certification training. It also provides for the continued governance, administration, and oversight of the Youth Office, which is located at Veritas Place, 5th Floor, 65 Court Street, Hamilton.

#### Business Unit 96090—Youth Grants and Investments

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the programme budget is also apportioned for Youth Grants and Investments, business unit 96090. The allocation is \$160,000, reflected on page B-290, and is an increase of 19 per cent over fiscal year 2025/26.

This funding is integral to building sector-wide youth capacity by strengthening the structures, opportunities, and support systems that enable young people and youth-serving organisations to thrive. It supports youth event sponsorships that create accessible platforms for participation, leadership development, skills-building, and community engagement. It also provides direct investment in individual young people to help them access training, mentorship opportunities, educational programmes, and personal development initiatives that may otherwise be out of reach.

In addition, the funding provides essential grants to voluntary youth organisations, enabling them to enhance programme delivery, improve governance and operational effectiveness, and build long-term organisational sustainability. Through these investments,

organisations are better positioned to recruit and train youth leaders, expand outreach to underserved communities, strengthen safeguarding and inclusion practices, and deliver innovative, evidence-based programmes that respond to emerging youth needs.

Collectively, this funding framework strengthens leadership pipelines, improves the quality and reach of youth programmes, and fosters a resilient youth sector capable of delivering consistent, high-impact initiatives. All supported activities are aligned with the National Youth Policy and are intentionally focused on advancing youth development, mentorship, educational attainment, social inclusion, civic participation, and positive youth engagement. This ensures that young people are empowered as active contributors to their communities and to [national] development.

**The Chairman:** Minister, we have concluded one hour of your four-hour debate, and we will be breaking for lunch in one more minute. So, we are going to stop there and allow you to move us into lunch, into adjourn for the lunchtime. And we will be returning at two [o'clock].

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I would like to move that we adjourn for lunch with a return of 2:00 pm.

**The Chairman:** Thank you, Minister.

Any objection to that?

No.

See you at 2:00 pm. The House is adjourned.

### Proceedings in Committee suspended at 12:29 pm

### Proceedings in Committee resumed at 2:02 pm

*[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]*

## COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

### ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2026/27

## MINISTRY OF YOUTH, SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND SENIORS

### HEAD 86—MINISTRY HEADQUARTERS

*[Continuation of debate thereon]*

**The Chairman:** Good afternoon, Members.

We are resuming the Budget Debate on the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors, and are looking at the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27.

Members, you may take your seats. And I call on the Minister to continue.

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Good afternoon, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, the budget for the Youth Community Centre's business unit 96100 is \$2,032,000.

**The Chairman:** Minister, could you do me one big favour? Could you let me know which page you are on in particular?

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** [Page] B-290.

**The Chairman:** OK, B-2—

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** It is programme 8603.

**The Chairman:** Thank you.

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** You're welcome.

**The Chairman:** Thank you, Minister.

#### Programme 8603—Youth Outreach

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the budget for the Youth Community Centre's business unit 96100 is \$2,032,000, which funds the operations of three community centres for the fiscal year 2026/27. This represents an increase of \$319,000, or 19 per cent, over fiscal year 2025/26, shown on page B-290.

This allocation supports the full operations of the government's three community centres, the Eastern Zone Community Centre [EZCC], located at 18 Old Military Road in St. George's, the Sammy Wilson Central Zone Community Centre [SWCZCC], located at 3 Angle Street in Hamilton, and the Western Zone Community Centre, located at 15 Kitchener Road in Sandys. Funding covers staffing, facility operations, utilities, maintenance, and the delivery of essential programmes and services.

Beyond the operational figures, however, these centres represent a critical investment in the social infrastructure of our communities. They provide year-round enrichment programmes for seniors, adults, youth, and children which strengthen and support neighbourhood cohesion. These programmes ensure residents have access to safe, structured, and inclusive spaces for learning, recreation, and support. Through extended hours, intergenerational initiatives, and responsive programming, the centres meet community needs in a practical, accessible, and meaningful way.

Importantly, these centres also play a stabilising role in supporting and restoring family units within today's evolving social landscape. While many families now operate within non-traditional frameworks, including single-parent households, blended families, grandparent-led homes, and guardianship arrangements, the need for shared spaces that reinforce positive

relationships, mentorship, and collective responsibility remains unchanged.

Community centres help bridge these realities by providing structured after-school programmes, parenting supports, youth leadership opportunities, and family-focused events that reconnect caregivers and children through shared participation and guidance. By offering safe environments where young people can learn, socialise, and develop life skills under positive supervision, the centres reduce exposure to risk factors while strengthening protective networks around families.

At the same time, programmes for adults and seniors promote volunteerism, mentorship, and community stewardship. This provides opportunities for knowledge and cultural values to pass across generations. This intergenerational engagement helps rebuild the informal support systems that historically sustained positive family structures even as household compositions evolve.

#### Programme 8604, Youth Services

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, business unit 96110, Before/After/Out of School Programmes has a budget for fiscal year 2026/27 of \$1,848,000, representing an increase of 3 per cent, or \$46,000. As shown on page B-290, the budget will support 23 programmes providing child care and supervision services as follows:

Madam Chairman, Before School Programme is provided at four primary school locations; namely:

- West Pembroke;
- Elliot;
- Harrington Sound; and
- Francis Patton.

Madam Chairman, After School Programmes [ASP] and Clubs [ASC], 15

- Western Zone Community Centre—Boaz [ASP];
- Western Zone Community Centre Middle [ASP];
- West End [ASP];
- Dalton E. Tucker [ASP];
- Port Royal [ASP];
- Purvis [ASP];
- Paget [ASP];
- SWCZCC Middle [ASP];
- West Pembroke [ASP];
- Elliot [ASP];
- Harrington Sound [ASP];
- Francis Patton [ASP];
- St. David's Primary [ASP];
- Eastern Zone Community Centre [ASP];
- EZCC Middle School [ASC].

Madam Chairman, Out-of-School Programmes operate out of four locations:

- Eastern Zone Community Centre [EZCC];

- Sammy Wilson Central Zone Community Centre [SWCZCC Sites 1 and 2]
- Western Zone Community Centre [WZCC].

This programme is designed to provide safe, structured, and developmentally appropriate environments for children and youth during school closures, holidays, and other non-instructional hours. It ensures that families have access to reliable supervision while supporting participants' social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development through planned activities, recreation, and enrichment opportunities.

Funding allocations support the full delivery of programme operations. This includes the recruitment and retention of qualified staff, seasonal and relief employment, and ongoing professional development and training to maintain high levels of standards of care, safety, and inclusive practice. Resources are also directed towards programme communications and outreach to ensure families are informed about available services and the registration processes.

Additional investment covers recreational programming, educational materials, and essential supplies that enable engaging, age-appropriate activities. Operational supports such as nutritious food, safe transportation options, and the integration of appropriate technology, which enhances programme accessibility, participation, and learning opportunities.

A central priority of the programme is inclusive service delivery. Emphasis is placed on expanding support for neurodivergent children and youth with diverse learning, behavioural, or accessibility needs. This includes staff training in inclusive approaches, adaptive programming, sensory-friendly environments, and the provision of additional supports, all required to ensure that all participants can safely and meaningfully engage.

#### Programme 8605, Youth Development

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, for fiscal year 2026/27, the budget for Youth Policy, business unit [96120] will increase by \$84,000, or 46 per cent, or \$267,000, as shown on page B-290.

This increased funding supports the coordination, development, advancement, and monitoring of the National Youth Policy, including staffing; administration and technical support; stakeholder engagement; training; communications; and participation in regional and international youth policy forums. Importantly, it also strengthens the Youth Office's capacity for structured research, data collection, and policy analysis. This ensures that youth programmes and interventions are informed by data, reliable evidence, measurable outcomes, and emerging trends affecting young people. The allocation further supports national engagement initiatives designed to strengthen youth voice, leadership, and cultural connection while generating meaningful, qualitative, and quantitative data to guide programme improvement and national planning.

Madam Chairman, in the upcoming fiscal year, this programme will also support several key National Youth development priorities. These include establishing the National Youth Council, facilitating the National Youth Entrepreneurship Expo, and continuing the provision of structured youth engagement platforms, such as the Zone In and Zone Out consultation sessions. The Youth Office will also support the inception of a youth-focused podcast designed to expand outreach, share information, and amplify youth perspective on issues affecting them, while also contributing to public awareness, research, and digital engagement metrics.

Madam Chairman, in 2026/27, further priority will go into research, consultation, and drafting of the National Youth Policy 2027–2029, ensuring continued progress towards achieving the remaining goals of the current policy, while preparing the strategic framework for the next phase of the National Youth development planning. This process will include national surveys, stakeholder consultations, programme evaluations, and the collection and analysis of youth development data to ensure that the next policy framework is grounded in measurable data, demographic insights, and clearly identified national priorities.

Madam Chairman, these initiatives collectively strengthen the government's commitment to ensuring that Bermuda's young people are heard, supported, and equipped with the leadership opportunities, engagement platforms, and policy structures necessary to contribute meaningfully to the social and economic future of Bermuda. The government remains committed to creating a modern research-driven youth development system that uses data and feedback to improve outcomes for all young people in Bermuda.

#### Performance Measures

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the performance measures for the Youth Development Administration; Youth Grants and Investments; Youth Community Centre; Programmes: Before and After and Out of School; and Youth Policy can be found on pages B-294 and B-295.

Madam Chairman, throughout business unit 96090, Youth Grants and Investments, the Office of Youth Affairs provided 16 youth grants, 24 youth investments, and seven youth event sponsorships to youth organisations, community groups, and individual young people during fiscal year 2025/26. These organisations and partners continue to invest countless hours into programmes and initiatives that support the positive development, engagement, and well-being of Bermuda's young people.

In addition, several of these investments and sponsorships were delivered to achieve National Youth Policy Goal 5.3, which supports the provision of short-term sponsorship to provide opportunities for young people seeking to pursue their recreational passions in

areas such as the culinary arts, science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics.

### Youth Sponsorship

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** [Following are Youth Sponsorships:]

1. **Kameron Young** is currently focused on developing representative robotics and technology solutions which aims to increase diversity and inclusion within the technology sector. Ms. Young would like to provide opportunities for young girls and boys of colour to work in STEM-related fields.

Investment funding would support Ms. Young in advancing the development of her robotics product and strengthening the research, design, and production capacity. In addition to product development, Ms. Young has indicated her commitment to facilitating summer sessions focused on robotics, technology, concepts, and research for young people. These sessions will provide early exposure to STEM learning, creativity, and emerging technology pathways.

By promoting inclusive access to STEM learning opportunities and supporting young people's preparedness for future education and careers in technology, the initiative aligns with the National Youth Policy Goals 2 and 4.

2. **DanceSations School of Dance** has submitted an umbrella application on behalf of multiple students seeking support to participate in overseas dance workshops and a performance showcase. These opportunities will provide young dancers with access to advanced technical instruction, structured training, and international performance experience designed to strengthen their artistic development, discipline, teamwork, and confidence.

Through coordinated group participation, the school ensures that students receive supervised travel, organised programming, and exposure to professional dance environments which broaden their cultural awareness and support their continued engagement in the performing arts.

By supporting young people in pursuing structured artistic development opportunities in the performing arts through short-term sponsorship, the initiative aligns with the National Youth Policy Goal 5.3.

3. **Youth Leadership Academy** is a structured four- to five-year initiative serving young people aged 13 to 19 who may be at risk of repeating negative behaviours or not reaching their full potential. The programme is designed to help participants recognise themselves as leaders while developing strong leadership, social, and life skills.

The Youth Leadership Academy operates within a safe and supportive environment where young people can build competencies, strengthen their peer relationships, and [improve] their academic readiness. The programme also creates opportunities for participants to exercise their voice by contributing to

community discussions, including sharing perspectives on government policies, programmes, and the broader youth-related initiatives.

A partnership with the Family Centre will provide opportunities for collaboration in programme design, staff, and youth training.

By providing a safe development environment, strengthening leadership and post-secondary readiness, mentoring at-risk youth, and providing a platform for youth to advocate for the programme this aligns with National Youth Policy Goals 1, 2, 3, 7, and 8.

4. **Alpha Kappa Alpha—Tara Roberts Student Event** hosted historian and storyteller Tara Roberts, whose work documents the journey of Black scuba divers as they recover and preserve the histories of sunken slave ships. Ms. Roberts will share her newly published memoir as a student-focused event for public and private secondary schools, and Bermuda College.

This forum will provide an opportunity for a question-and-answer session with Ms. Roberts so that they can learn about historical research and storytelling, as well as educational and career pathways connected to culture, history, and the humanities. This exposure aligns with National Youth Policy Goals 2 and 5.

5. **Southampton Rangers Youth and Families Programming** held an overnight youth and family recreation event that brought together club leaders, parents, and youth for a series of games and team-based activities. The event focused on leadership development, cooperation, and good sportsmanship.

This initiative provided an opportunity to engage both youth and their guardians in shared physical and recreational activities, helping foster stronger family involvement in young people's sporting experiences and personal development.

By delivering extracurricular recreational programming that responds to the interests of young people while actively involving parents and guardians, this aligns with the National Youth Policy Goals 5.4 and 5.5.

6. **Tomorrow's Voices** developed its summer 2025 programme to provide educational and recreational opportunities for young persons with autism spectrum disorder. This initiative was created in a direct response to feedback from parents who identified a lack of suitable summer programming for students with ASD.

The programme is designed to support participants [through] continued development through structured activities that promote learning, social engagement, and well-being during the school break.

By supporting the development needs of young people with ASD while promoting opportunities for active participation, well-being, and continued learning, the programme aligns with the National Youth Policy Goals 2 and 6.

7. **The Open Your Heart Foundation** delivered a holiday support initiative designed to assist families experiencing financial hardship. The initiative provided

toys, recreational materials, and seasonal supplies for their children.

The foundation coordinated a structured community donation campaign involving local businesses, volunteers, and charitable partners to collect, organise, and distribute to eligible families. The initiative reflected a responsive community-based approach to addressing identified needs while strengthening support networks for young people. This initiative aligns with National Youth Policy Goals 2 and 8.

**8. The Women's Resource Centre—Youth Assistance** organised a fundraising initiative to strengthen its capacity to support individuals and families impacted by domestic abuse. This initiative contributes to sustaining counselling, advocacy, and support services that help young people and their caregivers.

The Women's Resource Centre provides community visibility, helping to raise awareness of the challenges faced by families experiencing domestic abuse while encouraging community engagement and support for vulnerable people. Funds raised will help the organisation maintain programmes and services that reduce harm, strengthen family resilience, and provide safe support networks for affected youth. This supports policy by initiatives aligned with the National Youth Policy Goals 2, 3, and 8.

**9. Uni Power Skills Student Development Event** hosted a skills and knowledge development event for secondary school and university students, focused on preparing participants for the transition to tertiary education and early career opportunities. Guidance was provided on applying for scholarships and internships, developing essential academic and professional skills, and maintaining mental and physical well-being while studying at a tertiary level.

By equipping students with the academic, personal, and well-being skills needed for a successful transition to tertiary education, the event aligns with National Youth Policy Goal 2.

Madam Chairman, in fiscal year 2025/26, the Office of Youth Affairs remains committed to strengthening Bermuda's youth development ecosystem by intentionally supporting organisations and community. TOYO [The Office of Youth Affairs] seeks to align its efforts with initiatives that advance education, leadership development, social engagement, and opportunities for young people.

Madam Chairman, the performance measures for the Office of Youth Affairs, as outlined on pages B-294 and B-295, reflect a year of progress achieved through the delivery of programmes, strategic services, and community-based initiatives. These results demonstrate the Youth Office's ongoing commitment to ensuring that young persons are supported, engaged, and given the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Madam Chairman, on April 4, 2025, TOYO hosted Sports Days, bringing together students from schools across Bermuda to participate in sports and recreational activities. The event promoted healthy

lifestyles while encouraging teamwork and good sportsmanship.

Madam Chairman, from April 21 through 25, 2025, the team recognised staff during the After-School Programme Professional Week through activities that allow clients and the public to express appreciation for the dedication of programme professionals serving Bermuda's children and families.

Madam Chairman, the Office of Youth Affairs hosted the 2nd Annual National 18-plus Youth Conference from June 30 through July 6, 2025. The conference focused on mental health and antisocial behaviour to benefit Bermudians aged 16 to 29 and the wider community.

An information fair was also held, providing organisations working with and on behalf of youth an opportunity to showcase their services, share resources, and increase awareness of the supports available.

Madam Chairman, each community centre also facilitated signature community events to strengthen family engagement and neighbourhood connections. The Eastern Zone Community Centre hosted a community fair on July 12, 2025, providing family-friendly activities and community participation.

The Sammy Wilson Central Zone Community Centre hosted a long-table event designed to revive the tradition of shared family meals, encouraging parents and children to sit together, enjoy conversation, and participate in interactive games.

The Western Zone Community Centre continued its popular drive-in movie night held on November 28, 2025. The community also supported the free, No Competition Majorette and Dance Show organised by the Eastern Zone Community Centre team. Dance and majorette groups showcased their skill in a spirit of unity.

Madam Chairman, International Youth Day was recognised with a National Youth Entrepreneur Expo held on Sunday, the 13th of 2025, at Pier 6, Lower Level. The expo showcased Bermuda's young entrepreneurs and business owners, providing them with a dedicated space to present their products and services.

Madam Chairman, the Office of Youth Affairs also delivered the Youth Voices Needed campaign, encouraging young people aged 18 and older to apply to serve on Bermuda Government boards and committees. This campaign directly supported National Youth Policy Goal Number 7, enable participation in civic engagement.

Madam Chairman, Youth Services also began drafting TOYO's Compass Points Curriculum, a holistic developmental framework designed to support the personal, emotional, and social growth of children from preschool through middle school. This curriculum, which is amazing, seeks to empower students and is intended to be taught during out-of-school and after-school programmes.

Anti-Bullying Week 2025 was observed from November 10 through 14. Under the theme "Power for

Good,” activities throughout the week reinforced the message that every young person could use their voice and positively encourage kindness, responsibility, and safe communities, while addressing the antisocial behaviours associated with bullying.

Madam Chairman, the Western Zone Community Centre Court was refurbished and upgraded to accommodate multiple regulated sporting activities within a single facility, enhancing recreational opportunities for young people and the wider community.

The National Mini Youth Conference, Big Up Yaself, Protecting Your Peace: Online Digital Safety and Digital Wellness was held on January 29 and 30, 2026. This two-day event brought students together for workshops, discussions, and guided activities focused on digital responsibility, online safety, and maintaining positive mental wellness in digital spaces.

Madam Chairman, youth outreach through the community centres facilitated over 90 community enrichment programmes, spanning a wide range of activities, including life skills development, boys’ and girls’ clubs, STEM and robotics, cooking, dance, art, homework clubs, to name a few.

Madam Chairman, following a successful year of pilot implementation and assessment with the Elliot Primary School and Francis Patton Primary School, the Youth Services Before Schools Programme has been expanded to West Pembroke Primary School and Harrington Sound Primary School. The programme provides supervised early-morning care and structured support for primary students whose parents and guardians require care before the start of school. Youth services will continue to monitor the demand.

Madam Chairman, the employees at the Office of Youth Affairs, now established as Team TOYO, are to be congratulated on the establishment of their new office. This dedicated team remains fully committed to serving Bermuda’s young people and ensuring they have a voice on matters affecting them.

Madam Chairman, this concludes the presentation of fiscal year 2026/27 budgetary allocations for Head 86 section, the Office of Youth Affairs.

I will now present the combined subjective analysis of the current accounts estimate for the Ministry’s Headquarters as found on page B-291 of the Budget Book.

## ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

### HOUSE VISITOR

**The Chairman:** I just want to recognise that we have the Senator Lindsay Simmons-Wilson sitting in the gallery.

Senator, welcome. Thank you.

*[Committee of Supply, continuing]*

**The Chairman:** And I will allow the listening public to hear again that we are in Committee of Supply on the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27. We are listening to the Budget Debate for the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors.

And I believe the Minister is going to continue with Head 86 . . . not 86. Yes, Head 86. She will continue with Head 86.

Thank you, Minister, whenever you are ready.

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Thank you, Madam Chairman.

### Salaries

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the budget allocated for salaries is \$5,137,000. An increase in the fiscal year 2026/27, an increase of \$257,000, or 5 per cent.

The salary allocation covers the Ministry’s 90 full-time equivalents found on page B-292. The salary allocation covers the Ministry’s 90 full-time equivalents (found on page B-292). The salary uplift reflects additional funding needed to support negotiated salary uplifts, as well as one new temporary additional post for the administration section.

### Wages

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the increase in the budget for wages of \$222,000 supports the hiring of two assistant community workers and provides extra funding needed to cover wage uplifts for unionised industrial employees.

### Training

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, \$137,000 has been allocated to facilitate professional training for employees during fiscal year 2026/27, representing an increase of \$81,000. This increase is key to supporting officers selected to attend both local and overseas conferences. Also, the Office of Youth Affairs has strategically planned, neurodiverse recreational training for its supervisors that will allow for more inclusivity of neurodivergent young people when delivering community programmes. Lastly, programme workers will attend professional development training to maintain accreditation standards within the Office of Youth Affairs.

### Transport

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the increase of \$1,000 is due to the marginal amounts added to the budget to cover cost of parking fees and mileage reimbursement for employees who use their personal vehicles for site visits.

### Travel

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, \$91,000 has been budgeted for fiscal year 2026/27 for travel, representing a \$26,000, or 40 per cent increase. This growth in travel expenses is to fund the cost to send representatives to meetings of the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force, to cover overseas training planned by the Office of Youth Affairs and to finance the cost of youth ambassadors, and youth council representation, at overseas conferences hosted by CARICOM, the Commonwealth and United Nations.

#### Communications

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, communications, inclusive of phones, courier and postal cost, is budgeted at \$126,000 for the new year, indicating a decline of \$2,000. This decrease reflects minor adjustments across various sections within the Ministry Headquarters, and telephone equipment rental and local telephone call budgets.

#### Advertising and Promotion

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, advertising and promotion costs increased by \$29,000. Ageing and Disability Services will engage in targeted promotion of its Disability Register to increase enrolment numbers and will also create education and awareness campaigns around the new Disability Unit, to be coordinated in the new year. In terms of community building and social responsibility, the Ministry's Headquarters will support sponsorship opportunities that are aligned with its mission, *To provide more reach and exposure of the Ministry and the services offered.*

#### Professional Services

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, professional services of \$1,831,000 fiscal year 2026/27, increased by \$173,000, or 10 per cent. This increased level of funding reflects the allocation of monies for the establishment of a dedicated Disability Unit within Ageing and Disability Services. Recreational services for neurodivergent young people enrolled in programmes offered by the Office of Youth Affairs, and funding for case management coverage support needed by Ageing and Disability Services and the K. Margaret Carter Centre.

#### Rentals

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, \$393,000 was budgeted for rentals, an increase of \$158,000, or 67 per cent. This rise in budget is directly attributable to rental increases by the landlord for offices rented by the Ministry Headquarters and the Office of Youth Affairs. In addition, money was budgeted in anticipation of Ageing and Disability Services moving from shared space at

the Ministry of Health to a new location, more fitting for their clients they serve, and expected growth in staff.

#### Repair and Maintenance

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, in fiscal year 2026/27, the repair and maintenance budget is \$241,000, or \$32,000 more than the prior year. This increase in funding covers the cost of a variety of repair and maintenance expenses anticipated by the Community Centres, including but not limited to,

- industrial cleaning of floors
- minor interior building repairs
- pest control
- equipment maintenance.

Also increased funds have been allocated to maintain an ageing vehicle operated by Ageing and Disability Services, and maintenance of security systems and equipment at the K. Margaret Carter Centre.

#### Insurance

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, only \$2,000 is budgeted for insurance costs for fiscal year 2026/27. Costs have been reduced by \$70,000, or 97 per cent, during the current fiscal year. All clients qualify for assistance with HIP coverage through the Department of Financial Assistance. Thus, the K. Margaret Carter Centre no longer must bear these costs.

#### Energy

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, energy costs increased by \$24,000, or 13 per cent, to \$205,000. Additional funds for electricity were budgeted in anticipation of Ageing and Disability Services moving from one shared space at the Ministry of Health, to a new location more fitting for their clients, and for expected growth in staff.

#### Clothing, Uniform and Laundry

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman. Cost for clothing, uniform and laundry accounted for \$16,000. The marginal increase of \$4,000 will cover the cost to replenish uniform shirts, jackets and protective wear for the caretaker groundsmen who work within our Community Centres, as well as for uniforms for Programme Workers within the Before, After & Out of School programme.

#### Materials and Supplies

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, \$473,000 has been allocated for materials and supplies for the new year, in addition to marginal increases in office supplies and food supply budgets across the sections. This increase of \$56,000 also reflects the added cost of software licences for the administration section, and ADS,

to respectively access charity data and additional reporting tools. The Office of Youth Affairs plans to purchase more affiliate subscriptions, as well as recreational and audio/visual supplies for community events and Youth Expos, and for promotional items to endorse a planned anti-bullying message. Finally, this section will purchase supplies to provide more activities geared towards their neurodivergent clients.

#### Equipment

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, equipment expenses have an allocation of \$64,000, an increase of \$38,000, for fiscal year 2026/27. Both the K. Margaret Carter Centre, and the Office of Youth Affairs, will be replacing old worn furniture throughout the various sections of their programmes.

#### Other Expenses

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the total budget for other expenses has increased by \$121,000 above the fiscal year 2025/26 budget. This increase will expand new social sector programmes, such as Ageing and Disability Services' Seniors Hardship Fund, which will provide for costs of hearing aids for qualifying clients. The budget will also fund a foster care client with profound disabilities who has aged out of care of the Department of Child and Family Services.

#### Grants and Contributions

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the allocation for grants and contributions for fiscal year 2026/27 is \$4,616,000, an increase of \$791,000, or 21 per cent. This increased budget supports additional funding of \$20,000 to youth organisations offered by the Office of Youth Affairs. Madam Chairman, \$771,000 comprises of support for nursing homes, who are experiencing an increased intake of residents with more complex health conditions, requiring more specialised care and attention, and homelessness initiatives to support community-based housing and intensive support services. Also, supplemental money is included to cover certification and accreditation for the Office of Youth Affairs and the Department of Child and Family Services during 2026/27.

#### Revenue Summary (page B-291)

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the majority of the \$908,000 in revenue earnings reflect afterschool vouchers purchased, and online payments by parents and guardians to have their children participate in the Before, After & Out of School programmes offered by the Office of Youth Affairs.

The growth in revenue of \$265,000 is reflective of a rate increase of \$5 for the cost of a child to enrol in

the After School programme, effective September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025, and a rate increase of \$10 for the cost of a child to enrol in any of the Out of School programmes offered during term breaks, effective October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025. This is coupled with the addition of more sites for the Before School programmes, and more spots made available within Francis Patton School and the Purvis Primary Schools After School programmes.

#### Employee Numbers (Full-Time Equivalents) (page B-292)

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, on page B-292, you will note that there are 90 full-time equivalent positions for the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors Headquarters for fiscal year 2026/27. The increase of three full-time equivalents is due to the planned recruitment of one temporary additional Seniors accounts officer within the Administration section, and two assistant community workers within the Office of Youth Affairs.

#### Performance Measures

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman. Performance measures for sections in the Ministry Headquarters are outlined on pages B-293 to B-295.

Madam Chairman, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Ministry Headquarters team for their diligence, and for remaining committed to delivering the requisite services for our community. Madam Chairman, that concludes my budget presentation for Head 86.

**The Chairman:** Thank you, Minister.

We are in Committee of Supply for the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27. We are approximately one hour and 45 minutes into the debate, which is, in total, a four-hour debate, due to end at 5:02 pm this afternoon.

Minister, whenever you are ready, you may continue.

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I now wish to present Fiscal Year 2026/27 Estimates of Expenditure for Head 23, the Department of Child and Family Services, which are found on pages B-296 to B-303 . . . sorry, 302, and C-8, C-15 and C-21 of the Estimates Book.

#### HEAD 23—DEPARTMENT OF CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, as set out on page B-296, the Department of Child and Family Services' mission is, *Protecting Children by Strengthening Families*.

The department carries out its objectives to

- minimise and eliminate those social, psychological or other conditions known to cause, or contribute to, physical and emotional illness, and sometimes socioeconomic problems;
- promote growth and directional change in people and their social situation;
- assist in facilitating, or improving, social supports for those in our population who are at risk;
- provide treatment or curative services to address dysfunction, and thereby assist people to function better in society; and
- restore individuals to a health condition or useful capacity.

These objectives are obtained by DCFS, providing

- investigative services
- day care services
- care and protection services for children
- residential and home-based services for families
- assessment
- intervention, and counselling services for children, adolescents, and families.

Madam Chairman, the current accounts estimate for Head 23 begin on page B-297 of the Budget Book. A total of \$22,821,000 has been allocated for Head 23 for fiscal year 2026/27. This represents an increase of \$1,688,000, or 8 per cent. Madam Chairman, DCFS is responsible for promoting and protecting the best interests and social well-being of children, adolescents and their families. The department meets these responsibilities via the operations of five programmes shown on page B-297:

- Programme 2301—Services to Children/Young Persons
- Programme 2302—Services to Individuals and Families
- Programme 2303—Residential Treatment
- Programme 2304—Administration
- Programme 2305—the Mirrors Programme.

Madam Chairman, the Nonprofit Alliance of Bermuda, in partnership with the Council on Accreditation, administers a rigorous accreditation and certification process for local nonprofits and government social services. This process evaluates governance, operational standards and financial controls against international best practices. I am pleased to report that the sections within DCFS are all accredited.

Madam Chairman, service improvements have been achieved through implementing a strategy that begins with the enhancement of a structured decision-making tool designed specifically for Bermuda taking into consideration our cultural identity and social norms. Madam Chairman, since its introduction in 2013, the Structured Decision-Making Assessment Tool has enabled DCFS staff to objectively assess child safety and risk, ensuring appropriate referrals and services. The tool assists in reducing duplication,

addresses service gaps, improves efficiency, shortens response times and prioritises high-risk cases to achieve better outcomes for children and families.

During fiscal year 2026/27, DCFS will be partnering with Evident Change developers of the Structured Decision-Making Model to update the department's manuals and tools, integrating new research findings and advancements in child protection screening, safety planning and assessment methodologies to strengthen the department's child safeguarding evaluations and practice.

Madam Chairman, I will now address each programme and business unit for the department, as set out on page B-297.

#### Programme 2301, Services to Children and Young Persons

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the Happy Valley Child Care Centre comes under business unit 33010, and has an estimate for fiscal year 2026/27 of \$1,243,000; a 4 per cent, or \$43,000, increase over fiscal year 2025/26. The performance measures for the Happy Valley Child Care Centre are found on page B-300 of the Budget Book.

Madam Chairman, the Happy Valley Child Care Centre is Bermuda's only government-operated child care facility, providing high-quality care for up to 44 children, aged three months to four years. Priority is given to referrals from DCFS, the Department of Financial Assistance, the Department of Health, the Child Development Programme and Teen Services to assist families facing challenges, which comprises 60 per cent of enrolment.

Madam Chairman, each year there is an increased demand for child care placement at Happy Valley Child Care Centre. For the school year 2025/26, 90 applications were received for 13 available spaces, which is broken down as follows:

- Infant spaces, six (30 applications)
- Toddler spaces, two (34 applications)
- Toddler spaces, zero (these are children born in 2024) zero applications
- Preschool spaces, five (26 applications).

The 2025/26 application process was held on April 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025, to ensure Happy Valley Child Care Centre is compliant with PIPA. All applicants were required to acknowledge a PIPA compliancy privacy statement prior to submission of their application. The statement outlined the collection, use, security and disposal of an applicant's information. For the second consecutive year, a standardised rubric and lottery system was used to ensure a fair, transparent and objective selection process for the limited spaces available at the Happy Valley Child Care Centre.

Madam Chairman, the Happy Valley Child Care Centre monthly fee is \$400 for each child enrolled. However, if a child is in the care of the Director of the Department of Child and Family Services, they do not

qualify for child day care allowance provided by the Department of Financial Assistance, and as such, their costs are absorbed by DCFS.

Madam Chairman, the estimated revenue for 2025/26 school year is \$192,000, as shown on page B-298. It is important to note that the actual cost per child exceeds \$400 per month. A subsidy is built into the fees, which are considerably less than private child care centre fees. Despite the low cost to parents, Happy Valley Child Care Centre is a first-class programme that is specifically designed to meet the comprehensive needs of young children.

Happy Valley Child Care Centre delivers an extensive high-quality academic curriculum, led by trained educators who are committed to ongoing professional development. In addition, enrichment programmes are offered to support child development and encourage meaningful family and community involvement. Madam Chairman, Happy Valley Child Care Centre provides a comprehensive programme supporting children's overall development, including,

- music and movement
- creative arts
- literacy
- STEM activities
- field trips
- sports
- enrichment experiences.

Happy Valley Child Care Centre provides daily snacks and lunch for children through its nutrition programme approved by the Department of Health, approved nutrition programme. Also, an intervention programme, that includes mandatory parenting classes where required, is available.

Madam Chairman, Happy Valley Child Care Centre consistently utilises child assessment outcomes for classroom planning and individual intervention activities. The High Scope Curriculum and Assessment tool reflected outstanding results that validated Happy Valley Child Care Centre's commitment to an inclusive learning model. The results for infants, toddlers and preschoolers mapped steady improvement in all areas of development growth term over term.

Madam Chairman, this year's Happy Valley Child Care Centre launched OWNA, a digital complete child care management system. OWNA streamlines day care operations and enhances real-time communication between educators and parents about children's daily activities. Madam Chairman, in July 2025, 13 children graduated from the programme and were all prepared to attend preschool. Their accomplishments were celebrated with a school-leaving ceremony at the Bermuda Underwater Exploration Institute.

Madam Chairman, in fiscal year 2026/27, Happy Valley Child Care Centre will continue partnerships with the Department of Health, the Child Development Programme and Fire and Life Safety Associates. Happy Valley Child Care Centre will remain a community service, and workforce development site,

for high school and university students, and practicum placements for Bermuda College PACE students and CedarBridge Academy child care students.

Madam Chairman, Happy Valley Child Care Centre remains committed to maintaining a first-class facility while ensuring a safe, healthy and nurturing environment for the children in its care. The works and engineering team has been instrumental in supporting this objective, notably, following a significant flooding incident at Happy Valley Child Care Centre, which required the replacement of flooring and cabinetry to restore the facility to full operational standards with minimum disruption.

Madam Chairman, I wish to acknowledge and commend the staff of the Department of Public Lands and Buildings, within the Ministry of Public Works, for their continued dedication to the upkeep and maintenance of the Happy Valley Child Care Centre physical structure throughout the year.

Madam Chairman, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff at the Happy Valley Child Care Centre, the Centre's active Parent Teacher Association, volunteers and community partners for their continued dedication to Bermuda's most vulnerable treasures: our children, our future.

**The Chairman:** Members, we continue in Committee of Supply for the year 2026/27, considering the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure.

The Minister is currently providing her budget brief on Head 23, which is Child and Family Services. Once she is ready to continue, she will take to her feet and continue to give you all of the information that I know the public definitely needs to know, in order to ensure what services are available to them. Thank you.

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Thank you, Madam Chairman.

**The Chairman:** Minister.

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Programme 2302, Services to Individuals & Families

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the activities covered in Programme 2302, also on page B-297, are,

- Business Unit 33020—Investigating and Screening (formerly known as Family Services);
- Business Unit 33030—Foster Care
- Business Unit 33200—Counselling and Life Skills (formerly known as Bermuda Youth Counselling Services)
- Business Unit 33250—Child Safeguarding.

Madam Chairman, the total estimate for the Programme 2302 for fiscal year 2026/27 is \$6,227,000. This represents a minor increase of \$29,000 over fiscal year 2025/26.

## Investigating and Screening, Business Unit 33020

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, Business Unit 33020, the Intake, Investigations and Assessment section, within the Department of Child and Family Services, is responsible for providing comprehensive investigations and assessments for children who are referred for services. The budget estimate for the new year 2026/27 is \$2,365,000. This represents a 5 per cent, or a \$12[0],000, increase.

Madam Chairman, the staff at DCFS are the first responders who provide services and support for children and families referred [who] have experienced, or are experiencing, abuse or neglect. The department is committed to partnering with stakeholders to promote the safety and wellbeing of families while protecting children from abuse and neglect. Madam Chairman, all referrals that are made to the department are screened to determine if they meet the threshold for abuse and/or neglect, utilising the Structured Decision-Making Assessment Tool. The performance measures for intake and assessment can be found on page B-300 of the Budget Book.

Madam Chairman, DCFS operates 24/7, providing crisis services to police, hospitals and the community after hours on weekends and holidays. In 2025, the department handled 22 on-call referrals. Madam Chairman, the investigation team received 1,186 new referrals in 2025. This is a decrease of 24, or 2 per cent, from 2024, when 1,210 new referrals were reported to the department, mandated reporters referred 1,077, and 109 were referred by other sources in the community.

Madam Chairman, the investigation team utilises the Structured Decision-Making Screening Assessments to determine the required response times. Madam Chairman, 362 cases were screened out, as they did not meet the threshold for child abuse investigations, or were duplicate referrals from another source. Seven hundred and ninety-four were screened in for investigations, and 30 were screened directly to the Counselling and Life Skills section for substance education. DCFS ensured that the child, or children, and their families, were referred to another supportive service within the community where necessary if they were screened out for an investigation.

Referrals were received for the following types of abuse:

- Neglect—373: One hundred and sixty-six, or 45 per cent, of the neglect referrals were children exposed to family violence, which is a 10 per cent decrease from 224. Fifty-eight were for inadequate food, shelter, hygiene, and 62 for lack of supervision.
- Sexual Abuse—166: One hundred and five, or 63 per cent, sexual abuse referrals were for child-on-child inappropriate sexual interactions, or child only matters, which is a 1 per cent decrease from 2024.

- Physical Abuse—128, a decrease of 70 from 2024.
- Behavioural Problems—37, a decrease of 11 from 2024.
- Emotional Abuse—71, a decrease of 13 from 2024.
- Service Requests—38, which included 14 welfare check/home studies—17 were local, seven overseas—an increase of nine from 2024.
- Suicide Ideation/Attempts—5.
- Family in Need of Assistance—42 (this may be the case of a child beyond parental control who AWOL, or attempts suicide, or suicidal ideations).

Madam Chairman, of the 1,168 new referrals in 2025, the total number screened in for investigations were 794. Madam Chairman, the referral numbers by age and sex are as follows:

- 0 to 4 years—166
- 5 to 9 years—203
- 10 to 14 years—211
- 15 to 18 years—144

**The Chairman:** Minister, could I have you pause for two seconds? There is going to be a change of Chairman.

I am calling the Member from Constituency 31 to come and assume the Chair and she will take you to the end of this debate, which ends, again, at 5:02 p.m.

Thank you, Minister.

[Pause]

[Ms. Linda Smith, Chairman]

**The Chairman:** Good afternoon, Honourable Members and the radio listening audience. We are resuming debate in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimate of Revenues and Expenditures for the year 2026/27, for the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors. We will resume Head 23, which is Child and Family Services.

Minister.

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, 370 males, 354 females, equalling a total of 724 children, representing 579 families. This is a decrease of 33 children from 2024. The number of children referred to DCFS for the first time was 221.

Madam Chairman, the department has screening criteria that stipulates response times within 24 hours, five days or 10 days, depending on the nature of the referral, and the designated timeframes. The department received, 243 referrals that required a 24-hour response; 521 referrals that required a five-day response; and 30 referrals that required a 10-day response. Of the 794 cases that were screened in for

investigation, 85 per cent of them met the stipulated response times.

Madam Chairman, the investigation social worker is required to complete an assessment to determine the immediate services of the child and their family. This involves assessing the child's safety and risk of future risk of neglect and/or abuse within the home and determining the family's need for intervention, counselling or support services. DCFS collaborates with the Bermuda Police Service on referrals received for physical, sexual abuse, severe neglect and behavioural problems. The MASH team (which is the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, that was established between the department and the Bermuda Police Service) continues to review all referrals received every week. During meetings, the team determines the investigation approach that is required for each case. For 2025, there were 853 cases discussed in the MASH meetings, and 154 were jointly investigated by DCFS and the Bermuda Police Service.

Madam Chairman, DCFS is also required to investigate mandated professionals. That can include, doctors, day care providers, teachers, coaches, religious officials, and youth leaders, if an investigation identifies them as the alleged perpetrator.

A total of 48 investigations were conducted requiring the investigation social workers to conduct interviews with the children, their parent or guardian, the mandated professional and all relevant witnesses. These investigations may also involve Bermuda Police Service if a criminal offence has occurred. In 2024, 60 investigations of professionals were conducted, which was reduced in 2025 by 28.8 per cent.

After each investigation, an outcome report is provided to the organisation or employers of the investigated professional. The outcome report includes recommendations that are a result of the investigation findings. Outcomes:

- 26 were unsubstantiated
- 10 were substantiated
- two inconclusive
- one suspected and pending, and
- seven remain open with the Bermuda Police Service.

Madam Chairman, during an investigation, once initial contact has been achieved, DCFS is required to complete a safety assessment to determine imminent risk in all in-home abuse cases. If a safety threat has been identified, the objective of both the safety assessment and the plan is for the department and the family to work all together to reduce risk without seeking a court order. Madam Chairman, the investigation social workers completed 486 safety assessments. This engagement with parents allows DCFS to ensure that children are safe, while working to preserve the integrity of the family.

Risk assessments are always completed after conducting a home visit, and prior to a case being transferred or closed. The team completed 291 risk

assessments. Investigations that are referred for abuse outside of home do not require the Structured Decision-Making Tool, as the household is deemed safe. At the completion of investigations there were 64 cases in need of case management and referred to the family preservation team. Thirty-nine were referred to counselling and life skills, nine referred to the assessment teams, and two to residential treatment.

On December 31, 2025, of the 794 cases screened in for investigation, 637 were completed with outcomes, 122 remain open to Bermuda Police Service, 35 were pending, 9 are domestic violence matters awaiting court, indicating an increasing trend.

Madam Chairman, the investigation team delivered 14 mandatory reporting presentations to schools, the After School programme, Bermuda College students and new employees. These sessions explained the Children's Act of 1998, mandatory reporting responsibilities and child abuse reporting procedures. Madam Chairman, the investigation team participates in multi-agency team meetings such as the Sexual Abuse Response Team (SART), the Child Protection Team (CPT), the MARAC team and the subcommittee for National Safeguarding Board.

Notable trends for 2025, inappropriate intimate photos, videos being shared on social media by youth, and use of vaping devices and edibles, with 25 cases referred in 2025. There is an increase in cases being put before the courts for domestic violence, and currently nine cases are awaiting trial.

Madam Chairman, the assessment team is responsible for conducting comprehensive assessments on children and families experiencing various issues including, cognitive challenges, domestic violence, substance abuse, behavioural problems, trauma symptoms, and mental health concerns. The goal of the assessment process is to create a detailed report that provides recommendations for the referred to help empower the family and improve family functioning. Families or individuals are given an overview of the assessment process and informed that participation is voluntary unless mandated by the court.

Madam Chairman, the assessment timeframe ranges between a minimum of 45 days to a maximum of 90 days. A feedback session is held after the assessment process with parents, the child at a lesson as appropriate and, if consensus given, with the case management workers from other departmental teams and schools.

Madam Chairman, additionally, the assessment team conducts individual assessments for all new clients entering for secure residential treatment. This is done to obtain baseline data for children or adolescents who have not had prior involvement with DCFS.

Madam Chairman, the assessment team primarily receives referrals internally, from within the DCFS, and externally from the Family Court and Supreme Court. Service provisions cover four main areas:

1. individual assessments, child and/or adult;

2. family assessments;
3. consultations;
4. case conceptualisations, child and/or adult.

Madam Chairman, in 2025, the assessment team received 40 referrals. There were 39 accepted for services, and one declined. Based on further consultation of the needs of clients, 34 received an assessment, and five were recommended for external services such as parenting capacities, educational evaluation reports and neuropsychological reports. Additionally, there were 26 clients' cases audited and closed in 2025. These closed cases comprised 14 males and 12 females. The total of participants that were served in 2025 were 22 males and 17 females. Therefore, 13 clients were carried over from 2025.

Madam Chairman, the sources of referrals within DCFS included, investigations team, 10 cases, family preservation, eight cases.

Madam Chairman, there is a continuing increase in

- domestic violence, mental health concerns and behavioural issues;
- using a clinical conceptualisation for case planning rather than a full assessment for specific referrals;
- trauma assessments for younger children who have witnessed domestic violence within their home environment;
- clients requiring concurrent assessments and counselling services;
- requests for neuropsychological assessments for parents, children and adolescents.

Foster Care, Business Unit 33030

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, business unit 33030, Foster Care, within the Department of Child and Family Services, is responsible for providing alternate living arrangements for children under the age of 18 who need out of home placement.

The budget estimate for fiscal year 2026/27 is \$2,630,000. This represents a decrease of \$42,000, or 2 per cent. Performance measures for this programme can be found on page B-300.

Madam Chairman, during the 2025 calendar, a total of 68 children occupied foster care beds at some point during the year. This represents an increase of seven children from the prior year. The team was also responsible for case management duties for the children's birth families and foster families, as indicated last year. The team continues to express concern regarding the increasing complexity of cases, particularly related to mental health, behavioural challenges and academic difficulties.

During the last budget year, the foster care programme serviced a total of four therapeutic foster children. The children in this category have a variety of physical, cognitive, emotional and behavioural challenges. Therapeutic foster parents are compensated at

a higher rate than traditional foster parents. They sign contracts that outline the levels of care expected, based on the child's need. Out of the four children, one was referred to an overseas facility for a comprehensive assessment and was recommended for further overseas placement. One aged out of the Department of Child and Family Services system and was transferred to Ageing and Disability Services, while two remain in foster care.

By the end of 2025, a total of 12 children had left the foster care programme. Four were reunified with a parent. Three were transferred to residential treatment. One was referred to an overseas facility. Two were adopted, and two aged out of the foster care system.

Madam Chairman, foster parent recruitment was conducted through multiple channels, including social media campaigns supported by the Department of Communication and Information, community outreach at the Spring Fair in Paget, and media features in *The Royal Gazette* and on Bermuda Broadcasting. The year concluded with a targeted recruitment campaign via DCFS, new Instagram and Facebook platforms managed by Lovell Technologies.

The foster care coordinator interviewed 16 interested persons for foster care recruitment. This was a decrease of six from the year before. Out of the 16 interested people, 10 were approved and became foster parents. Despite the constant addition to the pool of available foster parents, the department remains hard pressed to recruit enough foster parents to be open, available and suitable for emergencies, and for hard-to-care-for children. Madam Chairman, presently DCFS has 15 sibling sets residing in foster care. And from that amount, six sibling sets are residing together in the same foster home.

In May 2025, the observance of Foster Care Month, the team hosted its Annual Appreciation Tea featuring keynote speaker Antonio Grate, author of *The Power of One*, who also conducted professional development for DCFS staff, and engaged youth in the Independent Living Programme. Feedback was positive, and foster parents received copies of his book. The programme concluded the year with a Christmas celebration and gifts for all foster children supported by public donations and corporate partners with coordination by the Foster Parent Association. Foster parents also received gift cards through community contributions.

The department extends sincere thanks to Bermuda's foster parents and our unsung heroes who provide stable nurturing homes for children impacted by abuse and neglect. Madam Chairman, appreciation is also extended to the Foster Parent Association (registered charity #620) that partners with DCFS' Foster Care Team, to provide additional support, including funding for educational trips, specialised programmes, laptops for senior students and post-secondary scholarships for foster youth. The Foster Care Team is to be commended, as well as, for working through some very

serious, complex and challenging cases throughout 2025.

#### Counselling and Life Skills, Business Unit 33200

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the purpose of the Counselling and Life Skills section [CLS], business unit 33200, within the Department of Child and Family Services, is to advance and promote the emotional wellbeing of youth up to 18 years of age and their families. The budget estimates for fiscal year 2026/27 is \$1,132,000. This represents a decrease of \$49,000, or 4 per cent.

Madam Chairman, this team delivers strength-based, solution focused, client-centred services that empower individuals and families to make healthy life choices. As first responders, they also provide debriefing support to colleagues following personal and professional trauma. In 2025, they addressed ongoing mental health challenges, including domestic violence, family conflict, grief, trauma, depression, anxiety, and adolescent substance abuse.

Madam Chairman, CLS provides individual family and group counselling, using in-person and virtual platforms such as Webex, WhatsApp and phone. Remote assessments and testing allow clients to complete tools online, supporting flexible service planning and care delivery.

Madam Chairman, in 2025, CLS received 105 referrals, a slight decrease compared to the previous year. Of these, 95 received services, 10 did not due to clients declining, being denied or they were already involved in external services. The referrals included 56 females and 49 males. The counselling modalities provided included cognitive behavioural therapy, dialectical behavioural therapy, motivational interviewing, dance and movement therapy. Counsellors address therapy issues such as, ADHD interventions, suicidality, substance abandonment, attachment, depression, anxiety, trauma, complex PTSD, grief, and parent-child relationships.

Notably, the highest age group for both genders have traditionally been between the ages of 10 and 14 years old, and 15 and 18 years old. This trend continued during 2025.

Madam Chairman, in 2025, referral resources for the CLS team included:

- DCFS teams (Investigations, Foster Care, Family Preservation and RTS—73 cases;
- Adoptions—1 case;
- Court Social Worker—1 case;
- Schools—22 cases;
- Other, which includes police, KEMH, CAS (Child and Adolescent Services), ILP (Independent Living Programme)—8 cases.

Madam Chairman, the teams observed that in 2025, adolescents using vapes and smoking marijuana was a continuing trend. There was a shift in 2024, whereas the number of females reported use was

higher than their male counterparts. The average age for 2025, based on the data, was 13 years old. However, it should be noted that there were children as young as 12 that were referred in 2025, for either experimenting, or for having a vape pen in their possession. The referrals in 2025 were received from children as young as primary school age, to middle and high school youth.

Madam Chairman, it should be noted that 90 per cent of substance referrals are received from our schools. The other 10 per cent of referrals are sent in by the Bermuda Police Service or KEMH. Vaping and marijuana use remains prevalent among adolescents. Data from 2025 indicates that young people still appear to believe that substances are a healthy way to cope with life stressors, depression, anxiety, trauma and grief. Unfortunately, there are parents who engage in substance use, which makes it hard to expect our young people to believe that there are negative consequences from using substances. The complexity of family systems also underscores the need for co-parenting support and coping strategies for parents to help families effectively address mental health issues.

Madam Chairman, CLS received a total of 30 substance referrals in 2024, and out of these referrals, 23 referrals received services. There were seven referrals that were not serviced based on the following: two young people relocated overseas, three people went to an external agency, and two denied services offered.

The number of substance clients who received services for 2025 were 19 males and 11 females. The other 75 referrals were serviced for either trauma, domestic violence, behavioural grief, mental health or parent-child relationships. It is not uncommon for clients in CLS to receive therapy for multiple issues that could be affecting their well-being.

The CLS team conducted one substance group for the year in 2025. Madam Chairman, 23 clients underwent a substance screening after consenting to services via a biopsychosocial assessment. This screening also identifies trauma, grief and mental health issues affecting individuals or their families. If further substance evaluation is needed, a standardised tool like the SASSI (Substance Abuse Subtle Screening Inventory) will be used to assess intensity and frequency, and determine if higher care is required as CLS does not provide inpatient services. SASSI identifies individual with a high probability of a disorder, even when they are unwilling, or unable, to openly acknowledge their issues.

Madam Chairman, several trends were identified in 2025:

- Substance referrals for vaping and marijuana continue to be the highest substance referral for young people.
- There was an increase in clients as young as 12 years old being referred in 2025 for marijuana and the use of vapes.

- There is a growing need for understanding how to work with neurodivergent children and parents.
- Younger children being referred with complex neurodiversity and behavioural issues, which require collaborative and multidisciplinary team approaches to address their needs.
- Parents requiring therapy support, whom themselves have experienced childhood trauma that is impacting them in adulthood.
- Younger children require therapy beyond talk therapy, such as play therapy; interventions to assist with self-regulation of emotions, such as somatic therapy, which focusses on the body and how emotions appear within the body and then nervous system.
- A need for parenting skills and resources that help parents with understanding different developmental stages, and what is appropriate behaviour during those stages.

These trends highlight the growing need for counselling resources to support parents, children and adolescents that are affordable, evidence-based and relatable.

#### Child Safeguarding, Business Unit 33250

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, business unit 33250, Child Safeguarding, is the final section within programme 2302. For the new financial year, \$100,000 has been allocated, indicating no change in funding level.

Madam Chairman, in 2024, DCFS commenced engagement with a forensic psychologist with specialised expertise in conducting assessments on juvenile sexual abuse victims and offenders, juvenile antisocial behaviours, and parenting capacity assessments.

Madam Chairman, cases involving child victims of sexual abuse, and youth who display harmful sexual behaviours, present complex clinical, developmental and legal considerations for the Department. These cases often inform trauma-related symptoms, high-risk family dynamics and behaviours that require specialised interpretation. Standard assessments are not sufficient to fully evaluate risk, or treatment needs, for this population.

Madam Chairman, the forensic psychologist provides,

- expert insight through trauma-informed assessment of child victims;
- risk assessment for juvenile sex offenders, distinguishing developmentally typical behaviours from problematic or harmful sexual behaviours;
- guidance in complex cases;
- evidence-based recommendations for therapeutic interventions;
- supervision levels and safety planning for both victims and young offenders.

Madam Chairman, DCFS also engaged the forensic psychologist to conduct time-sensitive parenting capacity assessments, most often for court-ordered assessments. Parenting capacity assessments are a critical tool in determining whether a caregiver can provide safe, stable and developmentally appropriate care for a child in high-risk or legal contested cases. The assessment must be comprehensive and evidence-based. Situations involving mental health concerns, significant trauma histories, cognitive limitations, substance misuse or allegations of severe abuse, child abuse, require specialised expertise.

Madam Chairman, the parenting capacity assessment provides a specialised assessment of caregiver functioning, evidence-based risk and safety analysis, assessment of capacity for change, and evidence-based recommendations for therapeutic interventions to enhance the quality of child protection decision-making. During 2025, the contracted psychologists completed four juvenile psychosexual risk evaluations, and 15 parenting capacity assessments.

Madam Chairman, I will now speak to Programme 2303, Residential Treatment as shown on page B-297.

#### Programme 2303, Residential Treatment Services

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Services under this programme include,

- Business Unit 33060—Family Preservation;
- Business Unit 33070—Brangman Home;
- Business Unit 33080—Youth Development Centre;
- Business Unit 33090—Observatory Cottage;
- Business Unit 33100—Psycho-Ed Programme (also referred as Overseas Therapeutic Programme);
- Business Unit 33110—Youth Residential Treatment; and
- Business Unit 33240—Independent Living.

**The Chairman:** Minister, this might be a good time just to remind everyone that we are in debate in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27, for the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors. We are on Head 23, which is Child and Family Services. This is a four-hour debate and we are now at approximately two and a half hours.

So, Minister, if you would like to continue.

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Thank you, Madam Chairman.

For financial year 2026, this programme has a total budget allocation of \$11,563,000, representing an increase of \$1,175,000, or 11 per cent.

#### Family Preservation, Business Unit 33060

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the budget estimate for Business Unit 33060, Family Preservation for fiscal year 2026/27 is \$4,096,000. The estimate is \$260,000, or 7 per cent higher, than fiscal year 2025/26.

The performance measures for this section can be found on page B-300.

Madam Chairman, DCFS Family Preservation Team uses a comprehensive case management model to assess family and child needs, develop service plans with stakeholders and provide ongoing interventions. Their work ensures child safety, improves family functioning, enhances child well-being, reduces out-of-home placements and supports safe reunification for children in foster care, residential or psycho-educational services.

Madam Chairman, the goal is to reduce or eliminate the circumstances in the family that have been or are causing abuse or risk of abuse (emotional or physical) to the child, and to maintain the child in the home environment. The Family Preservation Team receives referrals from the DCFS Intake Team, and from DCFS Out of Home Services, which includes Foster Care, Psycho-Educational Programme or Residential Treatment services.

Madam Chairman, Family Preservation Services is provided to clients of the DCFS, either via consent of the parents, or under the authority of a family court order. If a child's safety is an assessed concern, as per the Children Act 1998 and its revisions, Family Preservation Services will be mandated if deemed so via the courts.

Madam Chairman, to achieve its goal, Family Preservation Services requires social workers and social work assistants to manage cases, in compliance with the Council on Accreditation Family Preservation Standards, in accordance with the policy and procedures of DCFS and the Structured Decision-Making Tool. The social worker's frequency of contact with a family is determined by the family's assessed risk level. The higher assessed risk for future abuse or neglect, the higher the level of intervention and engagement is required monthly. A household assessed as "high risk" requires a minimum of four face-to-face visits per month with parent, caregiver and children, in addition to collateral contacts: for example, school, doctors, and mentors. Moderate risk requires a minimum of two face-to-face visits per month with parent, caregivers and children, in addition to collateral contacts. Low risk requires a minimum of one face-to-face visit per month with parents, caregivers and children in addition to collateral contacts.

The Family Preservation Team consists of two coordinators, eight social workers, eight social work assistants and one administrative assistant.

I will now provide an overview of the statistical outputs and outcomes for the Family Preservation Team from January to December 2025. This team has served a combined total of 142 families, 258 children,

which is a 3 per cent decrease in families, and 4 per cent decrease in children, over the prior year. Case-loads, complexities and risk levels remain very high throughout 2025, thus requiring a higher number of face-to-face contacts, multiple court appearances, family conferences and consultations with community and government stakeholders.

Madam Chairman, all families involved with Family Preservation received Family Strengths and Needs Assessments and are reassessed every three months. These assessments help to identify the area of need or development required within a family, as well as strengths within the family unit. It also serves as a guide for service planning.

Madam Chairman, needs assessments completed on parenting during 2025 have identified the following top three areas of need affecting our parents/caregivers, which require interventions to improve outcomes in these areas.

#### Mental Health/Coping Skills/Cognitive Functioning

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Parents/caregivers having difficulty coping with stresses in their life that create situations placing the child/children in their care at risk. This may be demonstrated by periodic, or at times severe, mental health symptoms, including, but not limited to, depression, apathy or consistent use of negative coping mechanisms that exacerbates the problem.

#### Parenting Skills

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Improvement of basic parenting skills is needed by the parent/caregiver to ensure safety and appropriate discipline of the child. In addition, improvement is needed to meet the emotional and development needs of the child.

#### Household Relationship/Family Violence

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Households are experiencing increased disruption of positive interactions, coupled with lack of cooperation and/or emotional or verbal abuse, that are impacting children in the household. This may be evidenced by the following:

- Custody and visitation issues are characterised by frequent conflicts also resulting in police involvement.
- The caregiver's pattern of adult relationships creates significant stress for the child, and/or puts the child at risk for maltreatment or severe emotional distress.
- Adult relationships are characterised by physically assaultive behaviours towards household members.
- Controlling behaviour resulting in isolation or restriction of activities.

#### Resource Management

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Resources are insufficient or not well managed, and/or including debilitating debt, food and/or clothing or housing do not meet the child's basic needs. The caregiver has insufficient resources, does not adequately manage available resources or does not adhere to the Department of Financial Assistance requirements, resulting in difficulty providing for basic needs related to health and safety.

Madam Chairman, needs assessments completed on children during 2025 have identified the following as the top three areas of need affecting our children. Interventions must be targeted to improve outcomes in these areas.

#### Emotional/Behavioural Challenges

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Emotional/behavioural challenges, defined as limited emotional adjustment. These include

- episodic difficulty coping with stress or crises;
- periodic mental health symptoms (for example, depression, running away, hostility, apathy);
- occasional extreme acting out, such as not accepting limits, fire setting or violent behaviour.

These issues severely impair one or more areas of functioning and may restrict the activities of the child and family or family.

#### Educational Concerns/Needs

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** “Academic difficulty” refers to a child's performing below grade level in at least one, but not more than half, of their subjects, or struggling with a current education plan which may require change.

“Severe academic difficulty” means a child is below grade level in most subjects, or unable to meet educational plan goals, necessitating modification of the plan.

#### Family Relationship Challenges

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Strained relationships create stress or discord in the family, affecting the child's sense of safety and security. The family struggles to resolve conflicts or get needed help. And ongoing stress, conflict or violence further harms the child's well-being. Without outside help, the family cannot address these issues alone.

During 2025, Madam Chairman, 35 new families were referred to Family Preservation. The reason for the referrals were: neglect, child exposure to domestic violence, emotional abuse, physical abuse and children beyond parental control. Throughout the year, a total of 47 families had their cases closed. All closed cases were void of child safety or child protection issues at closure, which included:

- twenty-three achieved service plan goals/no child protection issues at closure;

- thirteen declined services—assessments indicated family would benefit from services; however, there was no child protection concern at closure;
- two aged out of services;
- eight transferred to foster care; and
- one transferred to Residential Treatment Services.

Madam Chairman, Family Preservation workers attended 89 Family or Supreme Court hearings during 2025, a 21 [per cent] increase from 2024. Hearings included

- care orders;
- supervision orders and protective intervention orders;
- applications, reviews or discharges;
- Juvenile Court matters; and
- custody/access issues.

Madam Chairman, the 2025 Preservation Team outcomes were:

- 61 per cent of households completed family risk assessments during consistent or improved behaviours on service plan goals.
- 79 per cent of households saw a decrease, or stable risk, of abuse/neglect.
- 61 per cent of families had cases closed after achieving service goals, a 17 [per cent] increase from last year.

Madam Chairman, in 2025, DCFS remained dedicated to enhancing the skills of its Family Preservation workers to better serve its clients. Staff completed training in mental health, first aid for adolescents, therapeutic crisis interventions for families and domestic abuse awareness. Additionally, four staff attended the 40<sup>th</sup> Annual International Conference on Child and Family Maltreatment, which provided continuing education, networking and updates on evidence-based practices. The conference aimed to encourage collaboration and multidisciplinary development in preventing, recognising and addressing child and family maltreatment. The Family Preservation team continues to strive in providing effective service to children and families.

Performance improvement is an ongoing endeavour, thus enhancing the opportunity for improved client outcomes. The data gleaned from 2025 has been utilised to establish annual plan goals and objectives for 2026, driving towards increased positive client outcomes. The Department of Child and Family Services commends the Family Preservation Team, and its coordinators, for their commitment to families through 2025.

Brangman Home, Business Unit 33070

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the financial year 2026/27 budget allocation for business unit 3037 . . . sorry, [33070], Brangman Home is \$1,578,000.

This is a \$383,000, or 32 [per cent], increase over the prior year's budget.

#### Youth Development Centre, Business Unit 33080

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, business unit 33080, Youth Development Centre, has been allocated a new budget of \$317,000. This is \$11,000, or 4 per cent, more in comparison to the budget provided during fiscal year 2025/26.

#### Observatory Cottage, Business Unit 33090

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, Observatory Cottage, which comes under business unit 33090, has a new budget of \$1,132,000, which is a \$40,000, or 3 per cent, decrease in monies compared to the prior year.

Madam Chairman, Residential Treatment Services [RTS], comprised of the three sections above, provides group living intervention services to children between the ages of 12 and 18 years. These are adolescents who are deemed to be at risk in the community and requiring care and protection in a safe and structured residential environment. All children placed in this service have had their situation and circumstance considered by the Family Court, where it has been deemed appropriate for them to be placed on a care order, and as such become the responsibility of the Director of Child and Family Services.

Madam Chairman, the RTS programme provides 24-hour services. The young ladies are located at Brangman Home, while the young men receive services at Oleander Observatory Cottage. The Youth Development Centre is utilised to provide one-to-one, and special management of residents based on their needs, as indicated by ongoing evaluation, and if they are placed in the care of the Director because of criminal behaviours.

Madam Chairman, the RTS programme offers comprehensive services to all youth in its care. Residential locations are utilised to accommodate young people, based on their individual needs, with specialised settings available for those requiring one-to-one support or specific management, as determined by ongoing assessments. Placement decisions are made in accordance with best interests of each young person, including circumstances where care is required due to involvement with the justice system.

Madam Chairman, the inclusion of family is paramount to the healing process of children receiving our services. The goal is to engage families of all levels of care, strengthening relationships through reintegration plans or community-based support. When families cannot meet the child's needs, the RTS programme fosters collaboration with families and the community, using a trauma-informed approach to honour the child's cultural experience.

It should be noted that an increasing number of children in RTS lack viable family support, resulting in longer stays, sometimes until the age of 18, which strains resources and can expose children to other traumas. Many adolescents experience complex trauma from repeated interpersonal events, affecting the goal of 12-month transitions.

Madam Chairman, during budget year 2025/26, RTS provided comprehensive case management and transition support, collaborating with multi-agency teams to ensure seamless trauma-responsive care, with families often requesting continuing engagement beyond the three-month aftercare phase.

Madam Chairman, in the last fiscal year client service included crisis intervention, and referrals to both internal and external services to respond to critical incidents. Both genders demonstrated externalising and internalising problem behaviours at RTS. Strong case management of children was essential, through crisis management meetings, ongoing individual assessment and service plans.

Client profiles in 2025 indicated that 96 per cent of children had come from single-parent households, an increase of 4 per cent. Additionally, both male and female profiles continue to reflect 100 [per cent] of the children experienced trauma that included abandonment and abuse, which is unchanged from the previous year. The types include physical, emotional and sexual abuse, as well as neglect.

Over the year, DCFS saw an increase in residents that were involved in substance abuse, from 42 per cent to 50 per cent. Of the young people in care engaged in substance use, including marijuana and tobacco (more specifically vapes), this data demonstrates the wide range of challenges faced by our children, and why the Services has had to employ specialist services to effectively support both our children and their families. RTS remained committed to striving for the success of our children in the education system and responded to the learning challenges.

Madam Chairman, security became a key focus in 2025/26, due to the clients residing at group homes operated by DCFS having more complex needs, and presenting with more significant risk profiles, raising significant concerns by staff. The upgrades to these facilities have included the installation of mobile panic buttons, an integrated fire and security door system, and upgraded cameras across both campuses. Other safety precautions in place have been risk assessments and referrals to child adolescent services. Over the year, there was an increase in children with complex mental health, self-injurious behaviours and diagnosed conduct and oppositional defiance disorders. The increased security measures better equip staff to manage some of these cases, while ensuring a higher level of safety for themselves and residents.

RTS met the performance targets with

- 90 per cent of residents having independent treatment plans;

- 85 per cent having severe service plans; and
- 90 per cent of residents having individual crisis management plans.

As they work towards meeting the complex needs of residents, they continue to partner with key community stakeholders, such as

- Department of Court Services;
- Department of Education;
- the Mirrors Programme;
- Child and Adolescent Services;
- Gang Violence Reduction Team;
- Bermuda Police Service;
- WindReach; and
- Amber's Wings.

Madam Chairman, another key area of development has been training for frontline staff to enhance service provision. A large part of that has been training and recertifying RTS staff in therapeutic crisis intervention. This was intentional due to the rise in perceived and challenging behaviour, and young people going into crisis while being cared for with the service. Staff have also been engaged on the Relias online learning platform, with a more focused and targeted curriculum, informed by trends seen in the children DCFS serves.

Madam Chairman, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff at the Residential Treatment Services and the community stakeholders for their commitment in providing trauma responsive services to the residents of group living, which aims to restore hope and build resiliency in children's lives.

Madam Chairman, for over 20 years, the Department of Child and Family Services has operated the Psycho-Educational (or Psycho-Ed) programme.

#### Overseas Therapeutic Programme, Business Unit 33100

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** The term "Psycho-Ed," while historically rooted in psychoeducational practice, may unintentionally carry negative connotations or stigma. In contemporary usage, shortened references to "psycho" can be misunderstood, support outdated stereotypes or create apprehension amongst our young people supported by the programme and their families. Such perceptions may present unnecessary barriers to engagement.

To reduce stigma and promote inclusive language, the Psycho-Ed Programme will be renamed the "Overseas Therapeutic Programme," to better reflect the programme's evolving service model, ultimately improving stakeholder perceptions, including our young people, parents, referring professionals and community partners. This enhancement represents a proactive step towards reinforcing the programme's mission and removing barriers to engagement. Madam Chairman, business unit 33100 (currently showing as the Psycho-Ed educational programme on page B-297) which has been renamed, and to be referred, as the Overseas Therapeutic Programme (OTP).

OTP was developed to clinically address children who could not be effectively treated in Bermuda, or those who had exhausted all available local therapeutic treatment services. The budget estimate for business unit 33100 for fiscal year 2026/27 is \$2,545,000, representing \$426,000, or 20 per cent more in the operating budget. Performance measures for this programme can be found on page [B-]301.

Madam Chairman, our local psychologists, psychiatrists and educational therapists have demonstrated an improved ability to diagnose various psychological behavioural and education programmes. However, more Bermudian children are being identified with various psychological, social, emotional and psychiatric conditions, that go beyond the service provided by our local providers. The Overseas Therapeutic Programme allows DCFS to have an external input concerning clinical, therapeutic interventions and aftercare services.

Madam Chairman, Overseas Therapeutic Services facilities utilised by the programme are selected based on specific areas of expertise, and specialised services, for each facility is licenced to provide. After reviewing a child's local clinical reports, the OTP committee decides on an overseas therapeutic placement that provides best suitability for the child. For several years, DCFS has sought additional accredited therapeutic programmes on the east coast of the United States to meet our children's needs. Unfortunately, only a limited number of overseas therapeutic facilities have been found to meet the clinical therapeutic needs of Bermuda's children. Also, after research, it has been identified that providing our children with specialised clinical assessments and therapeutic interventions on Island, like those provided in overseas therapeutic facilities, is cost prohibitive.

Madam Chairman, the OTP provides children with protection, care and nurturance by licenced and accredited therapeutic overseas facilities. The programme provides a safe, supportive and therapeutic environment for each child, while working collaboratively towards either family reunification, or alternate permanent option. The Overseas Therapeutic Programme committee is comprised of representatives from

- the Child and Adolescent Services;
- the Ministry of Education;
- the Ministry of Health; and
- DCFS.

The committee meets monthly to review the status and makes decisions on children referred for overseas placement or clinical assessment.

Madam Chairman, during 2025, the OTP had a total of 17 clients who [received] services in overseas therapeutic programmes, for a complexity of issues identified across the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders criteria. The purpose of the DSM-5 is to provide clear descriptions of diagnostic categories to enable clinicians to diagnose and treat various mental health disorders. Each child received an

assessment from local service providers that determine an individual treatment plan, and intensive interventions, according to the diagnostic categories defined by the DSM-5 . . . Was I saying four?

Madam Chairman, in the best interest of our children, the OTP Committee utilises overseas service providers, such as Huntsman Mental Health Institute and Harbour Point Behavioural Health Centre, that specialise primarily in providing clinical neuropsychological assessment. Implementing the neuropsychological assessments have assisted DCFS in obtaining a clear and comprehensive understanding of specific needs of clients referred for an assessment. Most of our . . . Bermuda's children who were referred for a neuropsychological assessment were current OTP clients who did not have an identified diagnosis, or who had complex needs that they could not be met by our local service providers.

Madam Chairman, 17 children participated in the Overseas Therapeutic Programme in 2026. Six children participated in an overseas neurological assessment. Three children were assessed at HMHI, and three children at Harbour Point Behavioural Health. Two children completed their neurological assessments at HMHI, resulting in referrals in long-term overseas therapeutic placements, and one child remains at HMHI, and has not completed the assessment process. Two children completed their assessment at Harbour Point Behavioural Health and returned to the local jurisdiction, to await referrals for long-term overseas placement. One child remains at Harbour Point Behavioural Health as the assessment has not been completed.

Out of the remaining 11 OTP clients, nine children were already enrolled in a long-term overseas placement, and two children, who were referred to OTP, were admitted directly into an overseas therapeutic facility for long-term placement of 9 to 18 months.

Madam Chairman, the Overseas Therapeutic Programme continues to use specialist, accredited facilities in the United States of America to support young people with the most complex needs. The US provides a culturally comparable environment to Bermuda, and enables timely emergency response, due to its relative proximity, reducing clinical and operational risks. In 2025, a specialist facility in the United Kingdom was assessed for a particular high-risk young person. This option was not advanced due to higher costs, increased distance between both jurisdictions and insufficient security to safely manage the identified risk. Facilities in Canada were also considered; however, immigration requirements present potential barriers, and further analysis is required to determine feasibility and associated risk. Madam Chairman, in accordance with the Overseas Therapeutic Programme policies and procedures, the vetting of new facilities was completed prior to any placement. Additionally, all other facilities have undergone the vetting process during 2025.

Madam Chairman, DCFS continues to face significant pressure due to these limited resources and lack of adequate support. Although DCFS has representation on the High-Risk Intervention Committee to strategise how to manage complex cases, the department remains under-resourced, and ill-equipped to meet the growing volume and complexity of referrals from the Ministry of Education and Child and Adolescent Services. This persistent difficulty in addressing non-acute mental health and psychiatric needs is of particular concern. This gap in service delivery highlights the urgent need for a coordinated response to meet the clinical needs of children across agencies involved.

Madam Chairman, during 2025, the OTP experienced increasing challenges in securing overseas placements for approved and referred children. As the complexity of children's needs has increased, so have the associated risk and liabilities for overseas providers. This has resulted in greater caution amongst approved placement partners, fewer suitable placement options and more extensive assessment and approval processes. Consequently, the time between acceptance into programme and placement has lengthened, leading to extended waiting periods for children and families.

Youth Residential Treatment, Business Unit 33110

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, business unit 33110, Youth Residential Treatment, budget allocation for fiscal year 2025/26 is \$1,127,000. This is a 4 per cent, or \$40,000, more than fiscal year 2025/26.

Madam Chairman, Youth Residential Treatment [YRT] serves as the administrative and professional services arm that delivers comprehensive support, including accounting, management, counselling and clinical services to all residential homes and programmes. This business unit is responsible for identifying staff training needs, assessing the clinical needs of all children within the programme and managing facility maintenance and repair issues, which are reported to the Director for appropriate action. Additionally, the unit oversees all Performance and Quality Improvements efforts (or PQIs), ensuring that every programme within YRT consistently meets and maintains industry standards.

Madam Chairman, YRT currently operates with two staff per home, per shift, 24-7. Increasing complexity and risk among admitted young people has led to significant overtime, due to the need for one-to-one supervision of high-risk clients, in addition to maintaining the general house environment.

Increasing staff to three residential care officers per shift would better support high-risk cases, allow staff to take allocated breaks, reduce overtime, and improve child-to-staff ratios from 1:6 to 1:4 in line with international best practices.

Madam Chairman, this budget for DCFS [Department of Child and Family Services] will undertake a comprehensive review that aims to assist in addressing the growing needs within Bermuda for care of children with foster needs at a younger age, adolescents demonstrating more challenging behaviour, and ageing infrastructure of children care facilities. This initiative will assist in determining if existing infrastructure can support modern residential care options, childcare operations, and deciding the most appropriate strategy moving forward, whether renovation, or a complete redevelopment is required to meet future operational demands, international standards, and human rights obligations.

#### Business Unit 33240, Independent Living

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, business unit 33240, Independent Living, is the final section within programme 2303. The budget for fiscal year 2026/27 is \$768,000. This reflects a \$95,000, or 14 per cent increase over fiscal year 2025/26. It is worth noting that the Independent Living Programme [ILP] has developed performance measures for the first time, which is included in the Budget Book on page B-302.

Madam Chairman, the Independent Living Programme remains a key initiative aimed at supporting young adults as they transition from the care of the Director of DCFS. The programme provides structured support, guidance, and access to resources to assist participants in developing the skills necessary for successful adulthood and long-term self-sufficiency.

**The Chairman:** Minister, this might be a good time to say that we have hit the three-hour mark. So, we have one hour left in this debate. And for the listening audience, we are in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27 for the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors. And we are currently hearing about Head 23, which is Child and Family Services.

Minister.

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Independent Living Programme is housed at Garrison View in St. George's and has the capacity to accommodate up to 10 participants, comprising six females and four males.

Madam Chairman, the Independent Living Programme has been developed in accordance with the Council on Accreditation's Youth Independent Living Services Standards.

Eligibility for participation in the programme is limited to young people who were clients of DCFS that aged out of the care of the director without a reunification plan and have been formally referred by a DCFS social worker.

Madam Chairman, over a three-year period, the Independent Living Programme has provided

person-centred, holistic [care] and support to residents between 17.5 and 24 years of age.

The Independent Living Programme had a total of 10 residents in 2025. The year started with nine residents, seven females and two males. At the end of the year there were five residents, four females and one male. One female resident was terminated in January due to non-compliance.

I am proud to report three residents completed the programme. The first resident who completed the programme moved into Bermuda Housing Corporation [BHC] housing in May 2025. In September and October 2025, two others moved into shared accommodations. In December 2025, one resident achieved their goal and exited the programme earlier than their completion date to reside in shared accommodations.

Madam Chairman, each resident had some form of employment full-time, part-time, summer employment, and/or apprenticeship. By the end of 2025, one individual celebrated a year of continuous employment with their employer. One resident completed the Hospitality Programme through the Department of Workforce Development [DWD] and secured a position. One obtained a full-time post in the fall of 2025 after graduating from high school. One individual is employed permanently on a part-time basis while attending Bermuda College.

One graduated from high school, participated in the Summer Employment Programme and Bridge to Work Programme through the Department of Workforce Development, while another resident secured two three-month contracts between January and July 2025.

In addition, the programme has actively engaged community partners to deliver monthly workshops, which aims to contribute valuable expertise and perspectives aimed at enhancing the residents' life skills and fostering greater community connection. I would like to thank those community partners for their support.

Madam Chairman, renovations to the Independent Living Programme staff offices and boardroom commenced in November 2024 with the project anticipated to be completed by May 31, 2025. However, renovations were not completed until end of July 2025. Staff have now relocated to the lower level of the building. Capital funding of \$39,000, shown on page C-15 was spent during 2025 to purchase new furniture.

As a result, programme groups are now able to be held in the newly renovated boardroom, and staff have a more suitable workspace. These upgrades were undertaken to enhance the functionality of staff areas and to better support ongoing programme delivery.

Madam Chairman, in addition, a new wheelchair-accessible studio apartment has been completed, increasing Independent Living Programme's residential capacity to a total of 11 rooms. The unit was thoughtfully designed to accommodate residents with disabilities, reinforcing the government's commitment to accessibility and inclusivity. When not required for

accessibility needs, the studio will be utilised as a transitional living space for residents who have demonstrated readiness for greater independence, providing an opportunity to build autonomy in the final stages of their ILP journey.

Building security upgrades were completed in November 2025, further strengthening safety for residents, staff, and visitors.

Madam Chairman, as the programme enters its third year, an increasing number of ILP residents have neurodivergent diagnoses, prompting the programme to adapt to more complex, [individualised] needs. The ILP Structured Decision-Making Risk Assessment, implemented by the social worker, provides an evidence-based framework to identify risks and guide targeted supports.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the ILP staff and stakeholders for their dedication in helping young adults gain skills, confidence, independence which assists them in fostering their development into self-sufficient and contributing to members of society.

#### Programme 2304, Administration

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, I will now speak to programme 2304 Administration, referenced on page B-297, which comprises:

- Business unit 33120, Administration; and
- Business unit 33130, Grant Funding.

The total programme estimate for fiscal year 2026/27 is \$2,658,000, which is \$180,000, or 7 per cent more than fiscal year 2025—

**The Chairman:** Minister, I think we got the number wrong there. It is \$2,563,000. I believe you said \$2,653,000. So, anyhow, just to clarify that.

*[Pause]*

*[Inaudible interjections]*

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** It's correct.

**The Chairman:** It's correct in the Budget Book. I think you switched around two numbers, that's all, when you said it. That was what I was suggesting.

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** The total programme estimate for fiscal year 2026/27 is \$2,658,000.

*[Inaudible interjections]*

**The Chairman:** Okay. Yes. Thank you.

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** The Budget Book is correct.

**The Chairman:** Yes.

*[Inaudible interjections]*

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, can I continue because I want to try—

**The Chairman:** Yes, please continue.

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the Administration section of DCFS is responsible for the general supervision of the sections within the department, and oversight of the Overseas Therapeutic Programme, the Mirrors Programme, child safeguarding, and court social work. The budget estimate for administration is \$2,563,000, representing an 8 per cent increase over fiscal year 2025/26.

Madam Chairman, DCFS is required to conduct Social Inquiry Reports for both the Family Court and Supreme Court. This section has one substantive social worker and due to the increased requests for reports one social worker continues to be reassigned to assist in reducing the backlog from the courts.

Madam Chairman, in 2025—sorry. The court social worker's main focus during this process is to thoroughly assess and recommend what is in the best interest of the children. The court social worker has also been assigned the responsibility of guardian ad litem for adoption matters.

Madam Chairman, in 2025, there were 66 court matters. Thirty were carried over from 2024 and the total number of new cases for 2025 was 36. The court social workers submitted 31 Social Inquiry Reports (SIRs) and 35 updates, or addendum reports, to the courts. The court social workers during 2025, appeared 144 times in court and 122 times in 2024. This was an 18 per cent increase from 2024. In Family Court, court social workers appeared 113 times and 31 times in the Supreme Court. With the growing caseloads and requests for expedited Social Inquiry Reports, additional court social workers are required. The reassignment of a social worker is a temporary solution that does not address the long-term demands.

Madam Chairman, an increasing number of Supreme Court matters now proceed to trial and require court social workers to provide oral evidence regarding their reports. This practice has resulted in social workers spending extended periods in court, which has a significant impact on their capacity to meet prescribed timeframes for the completion of other Social Inquiry Reports.

Emerging trends include increases in allegations of domestic violence, false reports of child abuse, and cases of parental alienation. These trends require coordinated involvement from DCFS Investigation Section, the Bermuda Police Service, and external agencies such as the Centre Against Abuse [CAA]. This also highlights the need for the development of targeted interventions to better support affected parents and families.

Madam Chairman, the Sexual Assault Response Team [SART] is a partnership between the Department of Health, Bermuda Police Service [BPS],

DCFS, Bermuda Hospitals Board [BHB], and the Centre Against Abuse [CAA]. This team aims to reduce the impact of sexual violence through a coordinated, compassionate response. SART ensures that victims receive immediate medical care, support, and follow-up services. In 2025, 18 forensic examinations were conducted, which was a 29 [per cent] increase from 14 in 2024.

Currently, forensic examinations take place at King Edward [VII] Memorial Hospital; however, assessments have shown the need for a more private, client-centred environment. As shown on page C-8, I am pleased to say that capital funding of \$303,000 has been allocated in 2026/27 for the construction of a dedicated SART facility. This new space will provide a confidential setting and integrated wrap around services for victims and their support persons, which aims to strengthen the overall quality and dignity of care.

Madam Chairman, the budget estimate for Grant Funding for fiscal year 2026/27 is \$95,000, as shown on page B-297 representing no change from the 2025/26 budget allocation. Madam Chairman, \$75,000 will support the Cross-Ministry Initiative (CMIT) and assist families in crisis through the development of coordinated, inter-agency responses that address urgent and multifaceted needs. This investment underscores a continued commitment to collaborative, holistic [support] strategies that create lasting impact where it is needed most. Madam Chairman, \$20,000 is allocated to the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference [MARAC] to facilitate education, promotion and awareness about domestic violence.

Madam Chairman, from its inception (the MARAC team was established on April 28, 2023), until December 31, 2025, MARAC has reviewed a total of 187 cases. These cases include couples, families with children, and seniors/vulnerable persons experiencing family abuse. The breakdown of the statistics for the calendar year 2025 is as follows:

- Forty-two new cases. Of the forty-two new cases:
  - Two involved vulnerable adults (seniors/disabled persons).
  - Twelve involved couples without children.
  - Twenty-eight involved families with children or a child exposed to domestic abuse, which accounted for a total of fifty children exposed to domestic abuse.

Madam Chairman, I will now speak to the final programme for DCFS.

#### Programme 2305, The Mirrors Programme

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** As shown on page B-297, for fiscal year 2026/27, \$1,130,000 has been budgeted, representing an additional \$261,000, or 30 per cent more than the prior year.

Performance measures for the Mirrors Programme can be found on pages B-301 and B-302.

Outcomes included improved self-management, stronger communication skills, and greater readiness for learning and life beyond school.

In 2025/26, 194 middle and senior school students took part in five programmes, with 98 per cent reporting positive feedback on the Mirrors training content and 96 [per cent] reporting a positive response to the Mirrors training experience, which is shown at the top of page B-302.

Madam Chairman, Mirrors has trained five Bermudians in the Quantum Learning curriculum under Dr. Cheyenne Correira-Foster of IPMI [In Power-Meant Institute], building local expertise and sustainable leadership. The 2026[27] budget emphasises entry-level training, creating a pipeline from learning to programme delivery while ensuring quality. With full staffing, Mirrors is expanding local capacity; supporting workforce development; Bermudianisation and a sustainable, locally led prevention services workforce.

Madam Chairman, in the 2026/27 fiscal year, Mirrors anticipates enrolling a senior leadership group [Cohort 21] comprising of 20 students aged 14 to 16, along with five junior team leaders, who will participate in the Super Camp Senior Forum leadership experience, building on the demonstrated success of Cohort 20. The programme is being expanded into a Community Programme Leadership Academy, with a focus on developing emerging leaders. In addition, Mirrors is expanding its capacity by enrolling 40 life coaches to support a greater number of students, including those accessing services through drop-in support who may require ongoing intervention.

During 2025, Madam Chairman, 36 middle school students participated in the All In! 8 Keys of Excellence prefect training across three middle schools. Madam Chairman, 40 youth attended the five-day Super Camp Junior Forum workshop; 19 youth were supported through the out-of-school suspension and drop-in service programme; and 80 senior school S4 students participated in a full day of team building around the 8 Keys of Excellence. Post-training surveys continue to reflect 90 per cent to 100 [per cent] positive ratings from students, demonstrating strong engagement and impact.

Madam Chairman, in 2025, PeerForward Bermuda travelled overseas with a delegation comprising 16 peer leaders, 4 advisors, 1 college coach.

Madam Chairman, in 2026, Mirrors; and the Mirrors Alumni and Friends Association will transition the PeerForward programme to a newly established structure, with a direct focus on college and career readiness. Mirrors will remain a key partner, enabling them to expand efforts in developing social and emotional competencies across all school levels.

Madam Chairman, Mirrors continues to engage parents in programming to build skills for positive youth development. In 2025, Madam Chairman, 479 parents participated in training. [A full] 62 per cent were parents of clients served. Efforts continue to focus to

meet the 80 per cent parent engagement target of clients served. In 2026/27, Mirrors has allocated funding for six staff members (four Mirrors staff and two DCFS staff) to begin parent coaching training, building internal capacity to support parents more effectively. Mirrors served 877 adults in 2025.

Madam Chairman, [in] the Mirrors Field of Learning Garden, 30 adults and 48 youth, contributed 328 service hours, learning sustainable gardening and transferring knowledge to home gardens, with produce donated to seniors and families. In 2026/27, partnerships with Food Forest and the Department of Parks will expand, enhancing skills in horticulture, garden-to-table culinary arts, and sustainable food production.

Madam Chairman, I take this opportunity to thank corporate Bermuda, the Mirrors Alumni Board members, and the Mirrors team for their ongoing commitment to the development of Bermuda's youth. Mirrors and its partners continue to develop the work in the social emotional development and life coaching areas within our community. Join me in congratulating Mirrors for this accomplishment.

#### Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, I will now present the subjective analysis of current account [estimates] for the Department of Child and Family Services as found on page B-298 of the Estimates Book.

#### Salaries

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the budget allocated for salaries is \$12,689,000 for fiscal year 2026/27, an increase of \$763,000, or 6 per cent.

The salary growth largely reflects increases in manpower (full-time equivalents) to ensure that the Brangman Home has sufficient residential care officers to ensure best practice standards are met, and that there is a provision for managing complex clients who need one-to-one supervision. Also, there has been a proven need to fund a second social worker domestic liaison post within the Family Preservation programme. Finally, additional funds were budgeted to cover the costs of negotiated salary uplifts for public officers.

#### Wages

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the estimate for wages is one \$190,000 for fiscal year 2026/27, representing a minor increase of \$3,000, or 2 per cent. Within the Counselling and Life Skills budget, \$5,000 has been removed from wages and transferred to other operational expenses as this section has no weekly paid staff. However, this reduction was offset by additional funding needed to cover the costs of negotiated pay uplifts for industrial employees.

#### Other Personnel Costs

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the budget expenditure allocated for other personnel costs is \$149,000, an increase of \$20,000, or 16 per cent more than the prior fiscal year. The Administration section has added funding to cover the costs of venues for business and staff functions for the year.

#### Training

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the increase of \$67,000, or 36 per cent in training expenses for fiscal year 2026/27 is reflective of Mirrors' shift in programming to support the international Super Camp residential experience for senior school students.

#### Transport

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, expenditure for transport has been budgeted at \$102,000 for fiscal year 2026/27, indicative of a \$32,000, or 46 per cent increase over the prior year. The Foster Care programme provides transportation services for children to and from school and some after-school activities.

#### Travel

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, total travel expenses have increased by \$49,000 to \$301,000 for fiscal year 2026/27, an increase of 19 per cent. There is a growing intake of children entering the care of the Director of the Department of Child and Family Services demonstrating complex behaviours. The Overseas Therapeutic Programme anticipates more travel costs associated with children needing overseas clinical neuropsychological assessments. In addition, planned overseas training by the Counselling and Life Skills programme and the Foster Care programme also contribute to the increase.

#### Communications

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, communications, inclusive of phones, courier and postal costs, are budgeted at \$228,000 for fiscal year 2026/27, which represents a minor increase of \$3,000. With planned recruitment, there is anticipation that telephone and cellular phone costs will also rise marginally.

#### Advertising and Promotion

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the budget of \$27,000 for advertising and promotion expenditures is \$9,000, or 50 per cent more than fiscal year 2025/26. This is to support a planned campaign by the Mirrors Programme to increase its volunteer enrolment numbers during the year, to be able to service clients and deliver key aspects of its programming.

#### Professional Services

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, professional services budgeted at \$4,636,000 for fiscal year 2026/27, represents an increase of \$707,000, or 18 per cent. The Overseas Therapeutic Programme will receive just over 55 per cent of the additional funds to support the increased costs of children under the care of the Director who are receiving services in accredited therapeutic facilities overseas. The Foster Care and Observatory Cottage programmes anticipate additional counselling costs associated respectively, with more foster care adoptions, and an increase in clients demonstrating complex behaviours at the residential facility.

Contractor and consultant costs will also increase since the Administration section will hire a security guard for their main offices located at 131 Front Street to mitigate the risk of attack on staff members. Also, the investigations section will hire a part-time service provider to assist with their vetting process, and the Mirrors Programme plan to provide year-round parenting skill workshops and training for clients.

Finally, moderate increases in medical service costs within the Foster Care programme also account for the increase.

#### Rentals

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the estimate for rentals for budget year 2026/27 is \$1,663,000, which is a decrease of \$19,000 less than the prior budget year. This decrease is representative of the shift in the Mirrors [Programme] to support the international Super Camp residential experience for senior school students. There will be a reduced need to rent local residential facilities.

#### Repair and Maintenance

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, for fiscal year 2026/27 the costs of repairs and maintenance is \$620,000, a marginal increase of \$9,000. Various programmes have introduced slight increases to maintain ageing office equipment, laundry equipment and kitchen equipment, as well as pest control costs.

#### Energy

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the energy budget has been allocated \$382,000, representing a \$64,000, or 20 per cent increase over fiscal year 2025/26. Approximately 86 per cent of the increase is for the Administration section, who have considered prior years of underfunding and have adjusted their budgets to better align with historical spending. Several other programmes have made minor adjustments—in total, accounting for the remaining \$9,000, or 14 per cent increase.

#### Clothing, Uniforms and Laundry

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** For fiscal year 2026/27, Madam Chairman, \$177[,000], or \$1,000 increase in this budget is allocated. This increase is attributed to the Independent Living Programme that has included a new budget line for clothing, in the emergency that a resident needs clothing, but has no means to pay for them.

#### Materials and Supplies

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the estimate for materials and supplies for fiscal year 2026/27 is \$567,000, representing a \$55,000, or 11 per cent increase over the prior year budget. Almost 60 per cent of this increase is due to increased food supplies budgets. The Happy Valley Child Care Centre, as well as Brangman Home, Observatory Cottage and Independent Living residential programmes have all cited increases in food expenditure and have adjusted their budgets accordingly.

#### Equipment (Minor Capital)

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, \$37,000 has been allocated for minor equipment expenses for fiscal year 2026/27, a decline of \$74,000, or 67 per cent. Unlike last year, the annual costs for contracted security services at the Independent Living Programme are now funded under the contractor budget, instead of major/minor equipment security budget.

#### Other Expenses

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the budget of \$108,000 for other expenses decreased by \$1,000 for fiscal year 2026/27. Within the Foster Care programme, the General Respite Care budget was reduced \$1,000 and was transferred to Transportation Cost.

#### Grants and Contributions

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, there have been no changes to this budget for fiscal year 2026/27.

#### Revenue Summary

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, for fiscal year 2026/27, revenue for nursery fees earned by the Happy Valley Child Care Centre and residential fees collected by the Independent Living Programme are estimated to be on par with the 2026/27 estimate.

#### Employee Numbers (Full-Time Equivalents)

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, on page B-299 you will note that there are 123 full-time equivalent positions for the Department of Child and Family Services. This is an increase of six full-time equivalents

compared to fiscal year 2025/26. This increase is a result of an additional four funded temporary additional residential care officers budgeted within the Brangman Home facility; one temporary additional social worker within the Domestic Liaison . . . Domestic Abuse Liaison within the Family Preservation programme; and one prevention services/Mirrors co-ordinator within the Mirrors Programme.

Madam Chairman, this concludes our presentation for Head 23, the Department of Child and Family Services. At this time, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to its dedicated staff for their unwavering service to the children and families of Bermuda. These employees increasingly serve as the country's first responders, often standing on the front-line assessing risk, safeguarding children, and responding to families in moments of crisis and profound vulnerability.

Much of this work takes place quietly and without recognition, yet its impact is life changing. The compassion, strength, and professionalism demonstrated by these employees each day leaves a lasting imprint on the lives of children and families and helps shape a safer, more hopeful future.

To every member of staff: Thank you. Your commitment, resilience, and care does not go unseen. Your work matters deeply, and it is profoundly valued and sincerely appreciated.

**The Chairman:** Thank you, Minister.

Just a reminder that we have approximately 30 minutes left in this debate.

## HEAD 55—DEPARTMENT OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I will now present the estimates of expenditure and revenue for Head 55, the Department of Financial Assistance which can be found on pages B-303 through B-306, C-16 and C-21 of the Budget Book.

### Mission

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the Department of Financial Assistance [DFA] is mandated *to ensure that individuals and families with limited financial means can access the essential services required to achieve, sustain or regain a minimum standard of living.*

DFA promotes personal dignity, self-worth, and the development of skills and resources that support long-term economic and personal independence. The department's legislative authority provided for the following legislation, the Financial Assistance Act 2001, Financial Assistance Regulations 2004, Child Day Care Allowance Act 2008, Child Day Care Allowance Regulations 2008, and the Financial Assistance (Short-Term Relief) Benefit [Act] 2024.

### Department Objectives

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the Department of Financial Assistance objectives can be found on page B-303, [which is] to improve operational, financial, and legal compliance functions aimed at enhancing efficiencies and detecting financial assistance fraud. It is the intent of the department that a robust and consistent approach to monitoring risk and enabling compliance supports a sustainable compliance and regulatory framework. This objective is critical to DFA given the legislative guides, the core operational and financial activities of the department.

Madam Chairman, the Department of Financial Assistance must ensure that all actions and transactions performed by all officers comply with the department's legislative framework and any other legislation that impacts the nature of the services provided.

Madam Chairman, DFA also prioritises ongoing training for officers to strengthen organisation and capability and support effective risk mitigation. Current training initiatives focus on behavioural indicators and red flags associated with fraudulent activities, informed by the department's recently completed [typologies document] and related learning materials.

### Performance Measures

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, performance measures for DFA can be found on page B-306, and these demonstrate to the public and stakeholders the achievement of the public value to vulnerable population groups. These performance measures are deliberately concise and precise as they focus on measuring outcomes from the department's objectives and other business improvements to better articulate the ability of DFA in achieving effectiveness and service delivery. The department's performance measures [are] as follows.

#### Reduce Recoverable Debt from Prior Year

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** This allows the Department of Financial Assistance to eliminate waste and control budget amounts by effectively dealing with financial assistance fraud, reducing abuse of the system and overpayment of funds. The original forecast for fiscal year 2025/26 was to reduce recoverable debt by 15 per cent from prior year, and the revised forecast for the period is 24 per cent.

In February 2026, DFA had reduced recoverable debt by 21 per cent from prior year. The investigative offices remain committed to continuing their collaboration with the Attorney General's Chambers in the pursuit of legal recourse. A target outcome for 2025/26 is 25 per cent.

#### Reduce Number of "Able-Bodied" and/or "Earnings-Low" Clients from Prior Year

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the department provides a structure for financial assistance awardees allowing able-bodied, unemployed, and earnings-low clients to become unemployed or employable without losing all financial assistance benefits. This has led to clients becoming employed, financially independent, and not depending on financial assistance awards.

Collaboration with the Department of Workforce Development has proven to be successful, whereby the use of personal employment plans encouraged clients' participation in employment opportunities that led to avenues for recipients becoming financially independent.

Madam Chairman, the original forecast for 2025/26 was based on the expectation that through continued strategic review and targeted interventions, 20 per cent of clients classified as able-bodied, [unemployed], or earnings low would transition off financial assistance and into sustainable employment with independent living conditions. In February 2026, the actual outcome achieved was 11 per cent, falling short of the original forecast.

The shortfall is primarily due to the number of new applicants seeking financial assistance exceeding the number of individuals who transition off financial assistance under the two categories. Through ongoing collaboration with the Department of Workforce Development, the Department of Financial Assistance will continue to pursue options towards achieving the 20 per cent target for the financial year 2026/27.

Madam Chairman, to reduce the number of legitimate client complaints from prior year, this is aimed at improving service quality. The department addresses legitimate complaints via direct conversations with clients or in writing, and in many instances, issues are raised either at the department level or referred to the Permanent Secretary or the Ministry. Responses are provided in an efficient, fact-based, and timely manner without compromising professionalism. The original forecast for fiscal year 2025/26 targeted a 75 per cent reduction in legitimate client complaints.

However, in February 2026, both the revised forecast and the actual outcome stood at 50 per cent. This variance is partially attributed to the increased number of individuals receiving financial assistance during current fiscal year compared with the previous year. The Department of Financial Assistance will target a 75 per cent benchmark for fiscal year 2026/27 as it continues to reinforce a culture of customer centricity and deliver consistent professional service standards.

#### Expenditure Overview Capital Expenditure

#### **Hon. Tinee Furbert:**

Madam Chairman, there is no capital expenditure estimated for fiscal year 2026/27 as shown on page C-16.

The capital budget for [\$]4,000, that was appropriated for prior financial year 2025/26. And the intended purpose was procurement of laptops for the department to be utilised by DFA officers.

#### Subjective Analysis of Current Account Expenditure

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, total current expenditure for fiscal year 2026/27 is estimated to be \$58,401,000 as shown on page B-304. This budget estimate comprises of two business units as shown on page B-304. These business units are 65050 Grants Administration and 65080 General Administration.

#### 65050, Grants Administration

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the budget for business unit 65050 Grants Administration is estimated at \$53,389,000 as shown on pages B-304 and C-21. This is an increase of \$2,100,000, or 4 per cent from the prior year. Specifically, the funds allocated under business unit 65050 are earmarked for the following financial assistance programmes as shown on [page] C-21:

1. A total of \$15,639,000 will be used to maintain the financial assistance programme and the short-term relief benefits. This is an increase of 4 per cent, or \$1,850,000 from the prior year. This additional funding will support DFA in executing changes made to the Financial Assistance Act 2001 and the Financial Assistance Regulations 2004, specifically to increase the excluded income threshold for financial assistance clients under the pensioners category, as well as increases in the number of mental health outpatient treatment sessions, all of which affect client payouts.

2. A total of \$2,750,000 will be used to maintain the Child Day Care Allowance Programme. This is an increase of 10 per cent or \$250,000 from the prior year. This increase is necessary to accommodate the growing number of children that receive Child Day Care Allowance monthly due to prior year's legislative amendments and new amendments to legislation currently under discussion. These new amendments are intended to provide additional financial support to client families with multiple children under the age of four.

#### 65080, General Administration

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, the total estimate for business unit 65080 General Administration for 2026/27 is \$5,012,000, as shown on page B-304. This is an increase of \$271,000, or 6 per cent, from the prior year. This increase is explained as follows:

1. An increase in salaries of \$217,000, or 5 per cent compared to the prior fiscal year.
2. An increase in training costs by \$3,000, or 25 per cent, from the prior fiscal year.
3. An increase of communication costs of \$4,000, or 27 per cent, over the prior year with planned

recruitment and filing of posts during 2026/27. There is anticipation that the phone costs specifically will also increase.

4. An increase of professional services of \$25,000, or 8 per cent, compared to the prior fiscal year. Additional funding will accommodate the engagement of a consultant to assist with the implementation of online applications across all Department of Financial Assistance programmes.
5. An increase in repair and maintenance costs by \$12,000, or 23 per cent, from the prior year. This level of funding is necessary to cover the cost of maintaining aged photocopiers.
6. An increase in materials and supplies of \$10,000, or 7 per cent, from the prior fiscal year. To service expected growth in financial assistance and child day care allowance applications and payments, as well as a rise in employment due to recruitment operating expenditures such as printing costs, office supplies and office cleaners.

#### Employee Numbers

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, for fiscal year 2026/27, the total employee full-time equivalent count as shown on page B-305 remains the same at 41 funded substantial posts.

Madam Chairman, one of the essential roles of this Government is to ensure the well-being of its citizens, especially those who face financial hardship due to various reasons that are outside of their control. Providing financial support can help them overcome difficulties, maintain their living conditions and continue to contribute to society.

#### Plans for the Upcoming Year

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** The Department of Financial Assistance will continue to collaborate with the Department of Workforce Development to encourage participation in employment opportunities as a means to create avenues for recipients to become financially independent. This will be achieved with the use of personal employment plans for able-bodied unemployed financial assistance clients.

The DFA will continue to improve and re-engineer existing systems that will facilitate operational performance enhancements when conducting investigations, compliance transaction monitoring and evaluations. DFA consulted with the government team responsible for advising other government departments on compliance with the Personal Information Protection Act to advance compliance with PIPA. The department further identified key deliverables for financial year 2026/27. These deliverables include conducting a privacy analysis to identify risks within the DFA process and data maps conducting a readiness assessment for

each business function and developing a privacy notice.

The department completed updates to policies to ensure alignment with legislative amendments enacted over the past two years because of financial assistance reform. As such, refresher training will be conducted to ensure employees perform their duties in compliance with the updated legislation policies and procedures.

DFA has established fraud risk recognition, tracking and monitoring environment as a means to mitigate internal and external fraud. Madam Chairman, employees at the Department of Financial Assistance continue to demonstrate professionalism and commitment to support disadvantaged and vulnerable Bermudians. For this, I continue to recognise and applaud the hard work and dedication demonstrated by this department.

Madam Chairman, that ends my presentation on Head 55, the Department of Financial Assistance.

**The Chairman:** Thank you, Minister.

And that concludes the presentation of the estimates for the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors.

Would any Member like to speak to that?  
Member Tucker, MP Tucker.

**Ms. Robin Tucker:** Yes, thank you, Madam Chairman.

**The Chairman:** Just to note that we have approximately 15 minutes left in this debate, so just keep that in mind. Thank you.

**Ms. Robin Tucker:** Thank you

So, I have a lot of questions, but in the interest of time I will just ask the most pertinent ones that I would like answers to at this time.

So, on Head 86, Ministry of Social Development and Seniors HQ, looking at page C-28, under Rentals, I note that the Ministry's current rental budget is \$656,971. When you add the rent for the Office of Youth Affairs, which is \$165,031, that gives a total annual rent for those two entities of \$822,000 annually. So, I would like to know, has the Government checked to see if there is more affordable rental accommodations available? And if they have also checked to see if there are any unused government buildings available? And I would also like to know if the Minister can justify that spend. That is a lot of money annually.

My next question comes from page B-290, the General Summary, Policy Development, business unit 96060. So, when asked in a recent interview, the Minister indicated that there was a lot of work yet to be done for Bermuda's advancement toward obligations in relation to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. So, I would like to know if the Minister can confirm what portion of the budget is specifically earmarked for convention compliance,

including monitoring, reporting, accessibility audits, and implementation of recommendations.

The next question from pages B-289 and B-290, Current Expenditure and Youth Outreach, business unit 8604, I would like to know how many neurodiverse youth have been identified in Bermuda? In the presentation, there were a number of references to providing assistance for persons with neurodiversity. So, I would like to know how many have been identified. And I will declare my interest. I have a grandchild who has been diagnosed as neurodiverse.

Can the Minister also, in the same reference, tell us how much of the Ministry's budget, which is \$97.2 million, is actually allocated to the dedication of neurodivergent youth, and the line item or items where it can be found?

Next question from page B-293. Ageing and Disability Services, business unit [96040]. So, the third from the top, the entry was, Number of senior abuse reports submitted to ADS by types of abuse. The actual outcome being a total for 2024/25 was a total of 153. Actual reports for 2024/25 include physical abuse, which tops the list [at] 51 reports, and financial abuse against seniors is second with 44 reports. The original estimate for 2025/26 was 130 cases, and we see the target outcome for 2026/27 is 200 cases. Can the Minister explain why this sizable increase in reports is anticipated?

And also, can she provide an update on the Office of the Public Guardian initiatives? [Those are] the questions I have for Head 86.

**The Chairman:** Do you have any additional questions you want to ask now? We have approximately nine minutes left, so.

**Ms. Robin Tucker:** No, I would like to move to Head 23, please.

**The Chairman:** Okay.

**Ms. Robin Tucker:** So, page C . . . this is in reference to . . . Child and Family Services, Head 23, page C-27, Government Department Accommodations Rentals.

The Budget Book shows a rent for DCFS Space in Customs House, 131 Front Street, rising from \$795,638 to \$919,181, an increase of about 15 . . . about 16 per cent. It was publicly reported in the *RG* in 2021 that DCFS signed a five-year contract with F&E Holdings, a company in which Minister De Silva is a director and shareholder. This is also mentioned in his [Register of] Interest form. So, I lay that foundation because my questions are, can the Minister tell us what specifically accounts for this \$124,180 increase in rent for Child and Family Services offices in Customs House?

Next question, will the Minister commit to tabling the lease agreement or rent increase justification so that Parliament can properly scrutinise that

expenditure? Can the Minister confirm if the renewal contract, which on my assumption (and I would ask that she tell me if my assumption is incorrect) is an additional five-year contract extension that went along with that increase in rent, and if not, what the length of the new renewal is? And also, has the Ministry conducted market comparison to ensure that the Government is not overpaying on office space in Hamilton?

My next question is from page B-297, the General Summary, business unit 33100, the Overseas Therapeutic Programme. Minister, thank you, I do like that name a whole lot better than Psycho-Ed. Will the Minister . . . the line item rises to \$2,500,000. Will the Minister please confirm when an independent review or audit of the Psycho-Education or Overseas Therapeutic Programme was last conducted or will be conducted, and if she will commit to tabling the findings in the House? These areas are where we have our most vulnerable. And so, I believe that we need to be as transparent as we can be about the service offerings for vulnerable populations.

**The Chairman:** Thank you.

We are now at the eight-minute mark, so if you would like the Minister to answer, I would suggest that we move forward with that.

**Ms. Robin Tucker:** Thank you.

**The Chairman:** Minister.

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Thank you, Madam Chairman.

[I will] try to answer them as best as I can and they might be out of order. I just want to speak to the rental, which comes up every year. And we continue to tell . . . we continue to share that the rental is managed under the Ministry of Public Works. And so, I encourage that Member or the team who is debating the Public Works Ministry that they ask those questions then. However, I would just like to report that the rental amount that is currently in the Budget Book is in error. It is not correct as it relates to the Ministry's Headquarters. And the TOYA's rent is also incorrect. The current Ministry Headquarters is \$111,885 and TOYA is \$112,062.

There was a question in regard to the rental increase for DCFS. Again, Public Works deals with rental spacing. DCFS has added a new programme and therefore there has been additional space that has been rented. You would have heard me speak in the media in regard to the extension of the Family Preservation programme. And so, there has been more space that has been acquired in that building to accommodate that new programme and its staff.

There was a question about an update for public guardianship while the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors and Ageing Disability Services does add to providing consultation for public guardianship. Again, if there are any updates that are needed in

regard to the Office of the Public Guardian, that comes under the Ministry of Justice. It does not come under the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors.

There was a . . . I'm sorry. I am just going jump back to the lease for DCFS. It is a two-year lease.

There was a question in regard to the senior abuse stats. In addition to yearly increases due to awareness and ageing population, the increase in reports of senior abuse cases is based on how data is being collected in relation to reports received or reports now received that the alleged abuse or neglect are screened in regardless if the allegation may not appear to fully fall under the Act, especially as it relates to neglect.

It would be difficult for me to fully pull out all the costs as it relates to the neurodiverse persons who we provide for under the Office of Youth Affairs because that would be the staff associated with the services that we provide in the before out-of-school programming and after-school programming that we hire to support this population. We also embark upon further training as it relates, making sure that our staff are trained when they are having to work with children with neurodivergent conditions. And so, it would be the staff salaries and it would be the training in regard to making sure that our staff are trained when working with this population.

**Ms. Robin Tucker:** Madam Chairman, may I just . . . I actually asked . . . I also asked how many children . . . how many clients had been identified with neurodiversity.

**The Chairman:** Okay, thank you.

We are two minutes out of the time allotment for this. So, at the moment, Minister, I would like to ask you to move your heads so that we can complete on time.

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Sorry.

**The Chairman:** The cutoff time is 5:02.

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** Madam Chairman, I move that Heads 86, 23, and 55 be approved as printed. No, this is not right.

[Crosstalk]

**Hon. Tinee Furbert:** I move that Heads 86, 23, and 55 be approved.

**The Chairman:** The Minister has moved that Heads 86, 23, and 55 be approved.

Are there any objections?

If not, it's approved. Thank you.

[Motion carried: The Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors, Heads 86, 23 and 55 were approved

*and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27.]*

**The Chairman:** We are now going to move on to the next item on the agenda, which is the debate on the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/[27] for the Ministry of Economy and Labour. And that will be led by the Honourable Jason Hayward.

And we are also going to change Chairman at this time. So, I would like to call on the Honourable MP Foggo to please take the Chair. Thank you.

[Pause]

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

**The Chairman:** Good afternoon, Members.

Whenever the Minister is ready, he may go full speed ahead.

## MINISTRY OF ECONOMY AND LABOUR

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, I move that the following Heads 44, Ministry of Economy and Labour Headquarters; 14, Department of Statistics; 27, Immigration; 29, Registry General, 60, Workforce Development, 94, Economic Development, and 99, Department of Labour be now taken under consideration.

**The Chairman:** It has been moved that Heads 44, 14, 27, 29, 60, 94, and 99 be considered at this time.

Are there any objections?

There are none.

Minister, you have the floor.

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, I am pleased to present today the budget for the Ministry of Economy and Labour for the upcoming fiscal year, 2026/27.

### Mission

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, the overarching mission of the Ministry is, *To drive economic growth and job creation*. The Ministry seeks to achieve this mission through its six departments, which are the Department of Statistics, Immigration, Workforce Development, Economic Development, Labour, and Registry General.

The departments are led by Ministry Headquarters, Head 44, whose mission is to *establish effective policy that helps foster the expansion of jobs and economic growth*. Overall, a total of \$29,800,000 has been allocated to the Ministry for the upcoming fiscal year, which represents an increase of \$1,499,750 from the previous year. The increase is due largely to incremental increases across most departments for programme expansion and salary adjustments, as well as the 2026 Census of Population and Housing.

## HEAD 44—HEADQUARTERS

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** I will begin today's budget presentation with the Ministry Headquarters, Head 44 found on pages B-171 to B-174 of the Budget Book.

### Expenditure Overview

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, a total of \$1,099,000 has been allocated to Head 44 for the fiscal period 2026/27, which represents an increase of \$23,760, or 2 per cent compared with the previous year. The Headquarters' budget is 4 per cent of the overall Ministry budget.

Madam Chairman, Head 44 is comprised of two business units, 54060 Administration and 54210 Immigration Appeals Tribunal.

### Business Unit 54060, Administration

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** The bulk of the Headquarters work is funded under Administration [business unit 54060], which drives policy and legislative developments, and oversees the Ministry's six departments.

Specifically, Headquarters' objectives are to provide oversight of

- the Department of Workforce Development for the implementation of the Youth Employment Strategy and Workforce Development Strategy;
- the Department of Labour to promote harmonious labour relations;
- the Department of Statistics for the timely distribution of data and other relevant statistics;
- the Economic Development Department to implement economic growth initiatives and drive the Economic Development Strategy;
- the Registry General in the accurate recording of vital records and the protection of intellectual property, and
- the Department of Immigration to continue to implement immigration reform by providing oversight of process improvements, policy and legislative changes, and information technology system upgrades and enhancements.

In addition, the Ministry Headquarters manages the Office of the Minister, provides strategic leadership to departments, and appoints and oversees 10 boards and committees.

Madam Chairman, the Administration business unit is allocated \$1,079,000 in the upcoming fiscal year. This represents an increase in the business unit's budget of \$23,760. This reflects necessary funding for a local consultancy.

### Manpower

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, the Ministry Headquarters has a staff of five: a Comptroller, an Office Manager, a Policy Analyst and two Special

Advisors to the Minister. The team is led by the Permanent Secretary (who is accounted for in the Cabinet Office budget). Due to the nature of Headquarters' work in supporting the Minister and researching and developing policy, the bulk of this Head's budget is dedicated to salaries. Overall, salaries account for \$586,000. Other significant items of expenditure are professional services at \$269,000, travel at \$123,000, and advertising and promotion at \$40,000.

### Business Performance

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, over the past year, the Ministry's Headquarters made significant progress with respect to its performance objectives and delivered on numerous policy and legislative initiatives, all to improve the lives of Bermudans and set the Island up for greater economic development.

Madam Chairman, individual departments will report in more detail, but the Ministry as a whole advanced and completed the following 2025/26 Throne Speech initiatives

- development of a National Entrepreneurship Strategy;
- amendment of the Employment Act 2000 to allow parental leave for a legal guardian or adoptive parent;
- completion of legislative amendments in support of the family office framework;
- expansion of programmes to equip Bermudans with training and skills necessary to take advantage of opportunities in today's job market; and
- development of policy framework for cooperative legislation and development of policy framework for amendments to the Employment Act to provide greater protections for workers in the enhancement of employment and labour relations tribunal awards. And both legislative proposals will become Bills that are tabled in this House in the coming months.

Additionally, many initiatives coming out of the Economic Development Strategy 2023–2027 will seek to drive sustainable economic growth for Bermuda have been implemented. The achievements span the four strategic priorities

- local and international business retention and expansion;
- business attraction and investment promotion;
- entrepreneurship and small business development; and
- investing in people.

A comprehensive update of the Economic Development Strategy action items will be provided to this House in this session.

Business Unit 54210, Immigration Appeals Tribunal

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, in addition to the administration business unit, Head 44, also has business unit 54210 Immigration Appeals Tribunal. This is a small unit with a budget of \$20,000, which is unchanged from the current fiscal year. The budget allocation for this unit is to provide for appeals under the Immigration and Protection Act 1956.

During this fiscal year, three appeals were received, heard and closed, and three new appeals have very recently been received. Unfortunately, two older appeals continue to remain open due to the applicants being non-responsive. The Ministry will bring to this Honourable House amendments to the Bermuda Immigration and Protection (Appeal) Rules 2013 to address this issue.

#### Plans for the Upcoming Year

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, in the upcoming fiscal year 2026/27, the Ministry is prioritising the development of the Digital Economy Strategy, inclusive of plans for a National Digital Identity, implementation of a National Entrepreneurship Strategy and implementation of cooperative legislation in support of BEDC's cooperative policy.

Further, Madam Chairman, the Ministry is committed to driving continued improvements in all departments. Immigration's digital transformation remains a priority as is the Department of Statistics work to ensure a successful 2026 Census of Population and Housing.

Madam Chairman, I want to end my presentation by thanking the staff of the Ministry Headquarters who were all instrumental in delivery of the Ministry's priorities and initiatives. The Ministry of Economy and Labour has a small but excellent team of professionals and our achievements in this past year are testament to their hard work.

Madam Chairman, that ends my presentation on Head 44, Ministry Headquarters.

**The Chairman:** Members, we are in Committee of Supply for the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27. And the Minister has just completed Head 44, and I believe he is going to move on to Head 14.

So, I please invite the Minister to continue.

### HEAD 14—DEPARTMENT OF STATISTICS

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget [for] Head 14, the Department of Statistics found on [pages] B-175 to B-177 and C-12 of the Budget Book.

#### Mission

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, the mission of the Department of Statistics is, *To produce and*

*provide statistical information for data-driven decision-making for Bermuda.*

The department will seek to fulfil its mandate by delivering quality data that aligns with international standards and best practices to facilitate a culture of evidence-based decision-making for policy and programmes.

#### Department Objectives

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** This accords with the department's objectives, *To raise the Department of Statistics profile to*

- improve accessibility to statistical data and information utilising innovative digital tools by March 2027;
- ensure the collection, compilation, and production of statistical outputs are based on the most current international statistical methodologies, standards, and best practices by using data quality frameworks by March 2027;
- operate a transparent and citizen-centred department by improving the understanding and use of statistical data and information by March 2027; and
- engage in targeted external and internal training and development to build a statistical capacity required to sustain a high-performing department by March 2027.

#### Expenditure Overview

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, a total of \$4,613,000 has been allocated to the Department of Statistics for 2026/27, which represents an increase of \$1,255,000 from the previous year and constitutes 16 per cent of the budget allocation for the Ministry as a whole. This change is due primarily to budgetary allocation for conducting the 2026 Population and Housing Census.

Madam Chairman, the Department of Statistics comprises of six business units as listed on page B-175:

- 24010, Censuses and Special Surveys
- 24015, Administration
- 24020, Core Statistics and Publications
- 24025, Core Annual Surveys
- 24055, Census and Survey Research
- 24065, Household Expenditure Survey

#### Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, the subjective analysis of current account estimates of the Department of Statistics is found on page B-176. Please allow me to highlight the material object code increases and decreases.

- Salaries increased by \$229,000, or 10 per cent because of the negotiated salary uplifts.
- Wages increased by \$307,000 due to hiring four temporary in-office staff to assist with the Household Income and Expenditure Survey and the 2026 Population and Housing Census.
- Advertising and Promotion increased by \$160,000 to fund advertising via newspaper, radio, online and other promotions for the 2026 Population and Housing Census.
- Professional Services increased by \$479,000 to hire interviewers for the 2026 Census and a consultant to assist with processing the 2024 Household Income and Expenditure Survey.
- Materials and Supplies increased by \$59,000, or 88 per cent due to an increase in office supply and printing costs associated with preparing for the 2026 Census.

#### Performance Measures by Business Unit

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, I am pleased to report that most of the revised forecast performance measures for 2025/26 were achieved and details will be provided as each business unit is discussed. Madam Chairman, I will now present my analysis on both expenditure and performance by business unit.

#### Business Unit 24010, Censuses and Special Surveys

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** This business unit is responsible for conducting the 2026 Population and Housing Census. The census is the department's largest statistical data collection project. Census day is the reference day for most questions in the census questionnaire.

The 2026 reference day is May 20, 2026, and the census slogan is "Fill the Gap." The 2026 Census of Population and Housing collects information about the population in Bermuda such as their age, race, marital status, migration, employment, and housing characteristics in accordance with the Statistics Act 2002. The information collected enables the department to track housing and population trends in Bermuda.

A total of \$1,570,000 has been allocated to business unit Census and Special Surveys which represents an increase of \$1,418,000 from the previous year. Within this business unit, the greatest absolute increase from the previous year was for object code 5260, Consultant Services Local. This funding is required to pay interviewers.

#### Business Unit 24015, Administration

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** This business unit is responsible for management and administration functions of the Department of Statistics. A total of \$800,000 has been allocated to business unit Administration which

represents a decrease of \$39,000, or 5 per cent from the previous year due to budgetary adjustments. Within this business unit, the greatest absolute increase from the previous year was object code 4110, Salaries.

Regarding progress on performance measures, indicator raised the profile of the Department of Statistics with improved accessibility to statistical data through innovative digital tools,

Revised targets for 2025/26:

- one monthly social media post
- one monthly messaging app
- one quarterly online news ad
- one annual newsletter

The outcomes were:

- twelve monthly social media posts
- twelve monthly messaging apps
- one online news ad per quarter
- one newsletter per year called "By the Numbers"

#### Business Unit 24020, Core Statistics and Publications

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** This business unit is responsible for providing economic statistics relating to the growth of Bermuda's economy, retail sales and the production of goods and service via monthly, quarterly and annual surveys.

A total of \$948,000 has been allocated to business unit Core Statistics and Publications which represents an increase of \$38,000, or 4 per cent from the previous year.

Within this business unit, the greatest absolute increase from the previous year was object code 4110, Salaries. Regarding progress on the performance measures, indicator: [The indicator was] *100 per cent of all outputs will undergo a formal review to ensure that the collection, compilation and production are based on the most current international statistical methodologies.* The revised target for 2025/26 was 100 [per cent] and the outcome was 100 [per cent].

#### Business Unit 24025, Core Annual Surveys

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** This business unit is responsible for providing employment statistics, labour force statistics and inflation rates via monthly, semi-annual and annual surveys.

A total of \$585,000 has been allocated to business unit Core Annual Surveys which represents an increase of \$1,000 from the previous year. Within this business unit, the largest absolute increase from the previous year was object code 4110, Salaries.

When we look at the progress of the following performance measures associated with that unit, the indicator: *Target response rates for major statistical surveys.* In 2025/26, we set targets for:

- the Labour Force Survey, 80 per cent
- the Economic Activity Survey, 80 per cent

- the balance of payments, 80 per cent
- the Household Income and Expenditure survey, 70 per cent

Our outcomes for our Labour Force Survey for spring and fall of 86 per cent exceeds the targets. The Economic Activity Survey, annual, [of] 72 per cent, is lower than the target. And I must stress that in order for us to meet our targets, that means that the business community have to participate and fill out their surveys.

The balance of payments quarterly, the target set was 80.0 [per cent] and we achieved a 93.0 per cent response rate. For the Household Income and Expenditure Survey, we achieved a response rate of 62.3 per cent. And again, our response rate is low because of the reluctance of households to adequately participate in the survey. Hopefully, the attitude changes when we move into the Population and Housing Census so that we can get a better response rate.

Understanding that all of these surveys, both the Economic Activity Survey and the Household Income and Expenditure Survey, are mandated by law, it is a legal requirement to ensure that you comply with the Department of Statistics.

#### Business Unit 24055, Census and Survey [Research] Unit

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** This business unit is responsible for maintaining a core level of research capability for the department.

It also provides data from Population and Housing Censuses, trade statistics, environmental statistics, vital statistics which include births, deaths, marriages and divorces and population projections. In addition, this business unit conducts ad hoc surveys and produces reports on the survey's results.

A total of \$610,000 has been allocated to business unit Census and Survey Research Unit. This represents an increase of \$59,000, or 11 per cent from the previous year. Within this business unit, the greatest absolute increase from the previous year was object code 4110, again, salaries.

Regarding the progress in this particular area, the indicator was: *Progress international trade statistics on a monthly basis for use in the production of key economic indicators such as the gross domestic product and balance of payments.*

We had a target of data [processed] monthly. Our outcome [was]: *[processed] 12 months of data by the end of the fiscal year.*

#### Business Unit 24065, Household Expenditure Survey

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** This business unit is responsible for conducting the Household Income and Expenditure Survey and the team has completed data collection for the 2024 Household Income and Expenditure Survey.

A total of \$100,000 has been allocated to the business unit Household Expenditure Survey which represents a decrease of \$222,000, or 69 per cent, from the previous year. Within this business unit, object code 5265 Consultancy Services Overseas, accounts for the \$100,000.

#### Achievements

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, throughout the year, the Department of Statistics continued to produce its standard publications. Additionally, the department completed the data collection for the 2024 Household Income and Expenditure Survey.

Madam Chairman, if we look at the capital acquisition for the Department of Statistics on page C-12, we will see an amount of \$123,000 which has been apportioned in this year's budget. These monies will be used to support the online 2026 Population and Housing Census to replace devices.

#### Manpower

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, as seen on page B-176, Employee Numbers, there are a total of 31 full-time equivalents in the department for the upcoming fiscal year 2026/27 which is an increase of seven from the 24 full-time equivalents in the current year. This enhances the department's capacity to perform effectively. The full-time equivalents reflect recruitment plus four additional full-time equivalents being temporary staff who are required to assist with the 2026 Population and Housing Census.

#### Plans for the Upcoming Year

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** The department will process and analyse the 2024 Household Income and Expenditure data and begin data collection and processing for the 2026 Population and Housing Census.

The department will conduct the necessary census and surveys and collect administrative data to produce the following core publications in the upcoming fiscal year 2026/27:

- Monthly: Retail Sales Index and the Consumer Price Index;
- Quarterly: Balance of Payments and International Investment Position; and Gross Domestic Product by Expenditure;
- Annually: Labour Force Survey Report; Bermuda Digestive Statistics; Bermuda Job Market Employment Briefs; Employment Survey Tabulation Set; Annual Gross Domestic Product; Information, Communication and Technology Profile; Environmental Statistics Compendium and Tourism Satellite Account Report.

Madam Chairman, the department conducts ad hoc surveys, provides survey samples, and undertakes in-depth research and analysis of data. In

addition, the department provides statistical advice and professional consultancy in the collection, processing, and analysis of data for government departments. Furthermore, the department fulfils statistical gaps requests from local and international organisations.

Madam Chairman, let me take this opportunity to thank the dedicated staff of the Department of Statistics under the leadership of Director Melinda Williams for their continued commitment to the department's objectives.

Madam Chairman, that ends my presentation for Head 14, Department of Statistics.

**The Chairman:** Thank you, Minister.

We are continuing in Committee of Supply for the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27 for the Ministry of Economy and Labour. And we have just completed Head 14, and the Minister will lead us to Head 27, which is Immigration.

Minister, whenever you are ready.

## HEAD 27—IMMIGRATION

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, it also gives me great pleasure to present the budget Head 27, the Department of Immigration, found on pages B-178 through B-183 and C-12 of the Budget Book.

### Mission

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, the mission of the Department of Immigration is, *To facilitate economic growth and to protect the future of Bermuda for the benefit of Bermudians, residents and visitors while protecting our borders.*

### Expenditure Overview

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, the total projected expenditure for 2026/27 is estimated at \$7,061,000, reflecting an increase of \$194,000, or approximately 3 per cent compared to the 2025/26 budget.

This increase is primarily attributed to the uplift in the BPSU salary scales, which became effective in April 2025. Additionally, there were new membership fees associated with the International Civil Aviation Organization as well as an increased cost associated with on-site file storage. Immigration's allocation constitutes 16 per cent of the total Ministry budget.

### Subjective Analysis of the Current Accounts Estimates

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, the material changes of the subjective analysis of the current accounts estimates as compared with the 2025/26 [fiscal year] can be found on page B-179 and are as follows:

- Salaries increased by \$140,000, or 3 per cent due to salary upgrades and a reduction of

temporary additional staff not required during the 2026/27 fiscal year.

- Professional Services increased by \$20,000, or 8 per cent, due to a new membership fee with the ICAO. The membership is required to enable the printing of passports with BMD [*sic*] coding.
- Rentals increased by \$20,000, or 29 per cent, due to increased costs required to store files with an off-site storage company.

**The Chairman:** Minister, the coding, is it BMD or BMU?

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** BMD.

**The Chairman:** Okay, thank you.

[*Inaudible interjection*]

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Apologies, BMU.

**The Chairman:** Yes, that's what I thought. We always want to make sure the record is accurate.

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Yes, thank you.

**The Chairman:** Yes. You're welcome, okay.

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, thank you for your intervention.

### Revenue Overview

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** And the total revenue for 2026 fiscal year is projected at \$20,756,000, which represents an increase of 11 per cent, or \$2,129,000. The most notable revenue changes compared to the original 2025/26 estimates are detailed on page B-179. They are as follows:

- 8281 Work Permits—Full-Time and Part-Time: Based on actual revenue collections from the past two fiscal years, the revenue projection has been revised upwards to \$1.25 million to provide a more accurate and realistic forecast.
- 8283 Work Permits—Temporary: This projected revenue from temporary application types has been aligned with actual revenue collected in the past two fiscal years with an increase of \$226,000, anticipated.
- 8301 Status and Naturalisation: The anticipated revenue has increased by \$619,000, 67 per cent, for the next fiscal year.

### Capital Expenditure

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, funds allocated for capital acquisitions for 2026/27 are \$1 million, as detailed on page C-12. This amount will support the

implementation of a digitised system to automate the application process for all submissions.

#### Manpower

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** As it relates to manpower, the Department of Immigration Resources will be used to effectively and efficiently deliver day-to-day operations required for the business's key policy priorities.

The department has a team of 49 staff carrying out three major areas of work, as follows:

- application processing, 23;
- compliance, 17;
- finance and administration, 9;
- for a total of 49 staff members.

As a result of organisational structure review update, the former Corporate Services Section and Personnel Services Section have been combined and renamed Application Processing Section.

#### Business Unit Performance

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, the department's performance against the performance measures in the Budget Book are listed on [pages] B-181 to B-183. However, I will outline key performance outcomes now.

#### 37010 Corporate Services

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** This business unit is responsible for processing a wide range of work permit applications. The corporate services manager, industry relationship officer, and customer service representative liaise directly with employers to review and make recommendations for each application.

The business unit experienced the last backlog during the course of 2025/26 as recruitment took effect. With the implementation of the new Work Permit Policy on November 1, 2025, there has been greater diligence and team effort to consistently process all applications within published timelines.

#### 37020 Personnel Services

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** This business unit is responsible for liaising directly with individual customers. The customer service representatives in our reception area are available to answer all individual inquiries. The personal services manager, client service officers, and client service representatives are responsible for the following areas:

- travel documents;
- the acquisition of Bermuda status;
- naturalisation of a Bermuda Overseas Territory citizen;
- permanent resident certificate applications;
- issuance of related certificates;

- permission to reside and seek employment and attend school; and
- letters for spouses of Bermudians.

The volume of passport applications continues to be high, with peak periods resulting in larger volumes. For the first eight months of the fiscal year, applications were processed between 11 and 20 weeks, and then the processing time significantly reduced to four to six weeks for renewals and six to eight weeks for first-time lost or stolen applications.

Please note that for 2026/27, the performance targets for Corporate Services and Personnel Services will be combined into a series of measures and renamed Application Processing. As such, performance measures for Corporate Services and Personnel Services are being discontinued.

#### 37030 Compliance

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** The work of Compliance Section continues to be integral in investigating breaches against immigration law, regulations, and policy. The team of 10 senior immigration officers is led by the compliance manager and two principal compliance officers. During the past fiscal year, the following cases are on record:

- General Investigations. There were 41, of which 22 have been completed.
- Civil Penalties. There were 51. There were 45 that had been started, one has been completed, and five await a decision for civil penalties.
- Enforcement Site Visits. [There were] 52, [which] includes all enforcement actions, refusals, overstays, made to leave, and site visits. During the fiscal period, we had five deportations, permanent resident certificate holders, absent assessments, 257.

#### 37040 Finance and Administration

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** This business unit is responsible for the department's accounts, budget, financial records, reporting, annual budget preparation, administrative support services, and personnel administrative functions. This unit is overseen by the finance and administration manager. During the past fiscal year, 15 vacant positions were filled in the department.

#### Major Policy Changes

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** The following policy changes were made during fiscal year 2025/26:

#### Prohibition of Entry Order

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, the prohibition of entry order which seeks to ensure that tourists, visitors, and residents of Bermuda have ready access

to the US, UK, and Canada through commercial air service was updated twice. This was due to amendments to the UK's visa list.

Madam Chairman, as already stated, the Work Permit Policy was updated with effect on 1 November 2025. Also, a few months prior, in September 2025, the Partner Residence and Permission to Reside in Bermuda policies were enhanced to provide clarity to residents and families and to protect and strengthen the integrity of the immigration framework.

#### Plans for the Upcoming Year

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, during fiscal year 2026/27, the Department of Immigration will continue its work on digitisation of the application process for all immigration applications.

#### Digitisation System

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Last year, I reported that the department expected a formal proposal from the selected vendor by May 2025. Due to the need to undertake necessary due diligence towards good governance, the formal proposal was not received until June 2025.

Following that, meetings were held with the IT Governance Committee of the Office of Procurement and Project Management, OPMP. As a result of those meetings, a second vendor presented a proposal in January 2026. The department's main thrust will be to select a vendor within the first quarter of the new fiscal year and shortly thereafter proceed with the funding phase subject to guidance from OPMP. I am happy to report that a project manager, a business manager, has been recruited to work with the team.

Madam Chairman, in conclusion, I would like to thank the dedicated team members and staff at the Department of Immigration. I would like to thank the Immigration team under the leadership of Dr. Danette Ming, Chief Immigration Officer; and Ms. Marita Grimes, Assistant Chief Immigration Officer, together with Ms. Tionea Effs; Ms. Kelly Perinchief Burgess, and Ms. Jonee King and Kennisha Minks, newly appointed Immigration Managers, and their respective teams.

I also would like to extend thanks to Ms. Lauren Sadler-Best of the Attorney General's Chambers; the IDT Department led by Acting Director, Ms. Gina Benjamin; and Chairman of the Board of Immigration, Mr. Scott Simmons; the Immigration Appeals Tribunal, headed by Ms. Charlene Scott; and the Collector of Customs, Ms. Lucinda Pearman, and her team.

That ends my presentation for Head 27, the Department of Immigration.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

**The Chairman:** Thank you, Minister.

We are continuing in Committee of Supply for the Estimates [of Revenue] and Expenditure for the

year 2026/27 under the Ministry of Economy and Labour, and we are going to continue with Head 29, Registry General.

And when the Minister's ready, he will resume.

#### HEAD 29—REGISTRY GENERAL

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, it gives me *continued* pleasure—

[Laughter]

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** —to present the budget for Head 29, the Department of Registry General found on pages B-184 through B-187 and C-12 of the Budget Book.

#### Mission

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** The mission of the Department of Registry General is: *Preservation of vital and general records and the projection [sic] of intellectual property rights.* (I'm sure that is the *protection* [not projection] of international property rights.)

The Registry General achieves this via maintenance of a reliable system for the storage of public records, access to those records, and the provision of an efficient registry service which supports the registration of every birth, death, adoption, domestic partnership, and marriage in Bermuda.

The Registry General also facilitates the registration of

- chattel mortgages;
- the registration of trade unions;
- professional and charitable organisations;
- the granting of intellectual property rights such as trade and service marks, patents, and designs;
- advising on copyright and related rights; and
- assumes all administrative responsibilities with respect to the registration of country code top-level domain names for Bermuda (.bm).

To meet these objectives, the department has four business units as shown on page B-184 as follows:

- Business Unit 39000—Administration
- Business Unit 39010—Intellectual Property Registration
- Business Unit 39020—Property Professional and Organisation Registration
- Business Unit 39030—Births, Marriages, and Deaths.

#### Expenditure Overview

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, the current account estimates for Head 29 Registry General can be found on page B-184. The Registry General has been allocated a total of \$2,210,000. This represents a net increase of \$266,000 from the amount allocated in the

original budget for fiscal year 2025/26. It constitutes 8 per cent of the Ministry's total budget.

#### Business Unit Administration

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, the budget allocation for the Registry General will allow the Registry to provide the core services mandated by law. The allocation of \$856,000 to the Administration business unit will ensure that the infrastructure and proper resources are made available to facilitate the efficient and timely registration of all professional bodies, intellectual property, organisations, vital and general events occurring in Bermuda during the fiscal period.

#### Business Unit Intellectual Property

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** The \$757,000 allocated to [the] Intellectual Property business unit will allow the section to register or renew the registration of domain names, trade marks, patents, and designs, and maintain the existing registration system for intellectual property and .bm domain names.

#### Business Unit Property, Professional, and Organisation

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** The department will continue to meet its output measures as it registers documents relating to charities, professional bodies, chattel mortgages, and other legal transactions with \$228,000 allocated to Property, Professional, and Organisation Business unit.

#### Business Unit Births, Marriages and Deaths

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** The \$369,000 allocated to the Births, Marriages, and Deaths Business unit will ensure that all these vital events occurring in Bermuda will be accurately recorded and registered.

Madam Chairman, the most significant variants in the estimated budget are further explained on page B-185 as follows:

- An increase of \$219,000, or 13 per cent, in salaries.
- An increase of \$21,000 in travel represents an increase in the amount of money allocated for business travel for anticipated Caribbean Financial Action Task Force preliminary meetings in preparation for the next mutual evaluation in 2027; and to attend the training sessions arranged for IP staff at the UK IP Office and Trinidad IP Office.
- An increase of \$19,000, or 15 per cent, for repairs and maintenance. This is largely due to an increased cost for quarterly cleaning of the search room to remove mould and dust due to modified levels of cleaning required.

#### Revenue

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, on the revenue side, page B-186, the Registry General expects to realise \$2,402,000 during 2026/27, which is an increase of \$200,000.

The most significant amounts are explained as follows:

- \$70,000 is expected from registration fees;
- \$221,000 is expected from trade mark applications;
- \$395,000 is expected from trade mark registrations—(I'm sorry, the \$221,000 is expected from trade mark applications, and the \$395,000 is expected from trade mark registrations.) This is an increase of \$122,000.
- \$70,000 is expected from IP certificates;
- \$77,000 is expected from trade marks;
- \$369,000 is expected from trade mark renewals;
- \$216,000 is expected from .bm domain name registrations;
- \$260,000 is expected from applications for birth certificates;
- \$120,000 is expected from marriage licences; \$170,000 is expected from maritime marriage licences;
- \$90,000 is expected from marriage certificates; and
- \$70,000 is expected from death certificates.

#### Manpower

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** As it pertains to manpower, which is found on page B-186, the Registry General has a total staff of 22 full-time posts. Five of those posts are currently vacant. It is anticipated that the customer service representative and the charities administrator's post, as well as two vacant trademark administrator posts, will be filled by the beginning of the upcoming fiscal year.

The Registry General's staff is as follows:

- Administration, seven staff;
- Intellectual Property, seven staff;
- Property, Professional and Organisation Registration, three staff; and
- Births, Marriages and Deaths, five staff.

#### Performance Measures

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, the department's performance measures are outlined on page B-187. The department is operating with four posts currently vacant, and these posts are filled by temporary relief staff. The members of the Registry General's team continue to work hard and are dedicated to achieving their goals. The department is responsible for discharging duties conferred under a total of 36 Acts and Regulations, which govern the operations of the Registry General.

The main function of the department is to ensure the efficient and timely registration of all intellectual property rights, vital and general events occurring in Bermuda. All sections of the department met performance targets set in 2025/26.

#### Capital Expenditure

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** As it relates to capital expenditure, the capital acquisition for Head 29 Registry General can be found on page C-12.

The Registry General has [been] allocated a total of \$164,000. This represents a net decrease of \$172,000 from the amount allocated in the original budget for fiscal year 2025/26. Madam Chairman, \$164,000 has been allocated to complete the final phase of the acquisition and installation of a new technology-based registration system for the IP Section.

#### Major Policy Changes

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, the policy initiatives to be drafted and implemented, which have been carried forward from the 2025/26 fiscal year are outlined. Now, the Registry General has oversight of the local non-profit organisation sector, which is subject to [the] Mutual Evaluation Assessment by the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force.

The next assessment will be conducted in 2027. One recommendation highlighted in the 2018 draft report from CFATF assessors is the need for countering terrorism, terrorist financing training, and policy development with respect to non-profit organisations and charges.

[Specifically], the oversight and monitoring services that the Registry General provides to the non-profit organisation sector can be greatly improved if staff are more aware of global risk trends and risk indicators that could possibly point to an entity being misused for terrorist financing.

To enhance . . . the enhancement of both policies and procedures for terrorist financing detection and prevention, specifically for non-profit sector, is an ongoing initiative for the Registry General as global risk trends can change annually.

Also, Madam Chairman, following the 2020 update to the Bermuda National Assessment of terrorist financing risk in the local NPO sector, a gap in the oversight of the privately funded charities was identified, and the necessary amendments to the Charities Act 2014 to address this gap were passed this fiscal year. However, during a mock interview exercised in May 2025, another gap in our regime for non-profit organisations was identified, which will lead to further legislative amendments to the Act either this fiscal year or early 2026/27 fiscal year.

Legislative and policy oversight of [the] Charity Unit is part of the portfolio of the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors, and the legislative

amendment initiatives have progressed this fiscal year under the Minister's remit.

#### Plans for the Upcoming Year

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, in the upcoming year, the Registry General will execute the following initiatives:

- We will bring into effect new patent legislation and new design legislation by amending the current Patent and Designs Act [1930] to introduce two standalone Acts.
- Introduce a Trade Secrets Act and amend the Copyright and Designs Act 2004 to implement a voluntary registration scheme for copyright works.
- Continue with application to the UK Government for the provision of key intellectual property international treaties to be extended to Bermuda. And I speak of the Paris Convention, Madrid Protocol for trademarks, Patent Cooperation Treaty, and the Hague Agreement for designs.
- Complete the final phase of the modernisation of IP Section's technology-based registration systems to operationalise the new IP framework.
- Digitisation of the Registry General's form, records and general registration business and certificate order processes by transitioning onto the Google platform will improve efficiency and accessibility for customer and safety and safely promote online business transactions on any device and from anywhere in the world.

One sentence, Madam Chairman.

*[Laughter]*

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, in the upcoming fiscal year, the Registry General will be advancing several policy initiatives for consideration subject to Cabinet approval and legislative process.

These policy initiatives under consideration include:

1. Advancing amendments to the Registry General recording of Documents Act 1955 and related legislation, including the Registration (Births and Deaths) Act 1949 supported by the acquisition and implementation of a modern digital platform. This initiative will facilitate the establishment of a voluntary register and enable the efficient processing of applications for registration of vital events occurring outside Bermuda, including births, deaths, and marriages of Bermudian citizens.

2. Considering amendments to the Registration (Births and Deaths) Act 1949 to provide an administrative mechanism for adults to apply to alter their name with their birth register. This would establish a clear

statutory pathway as an alternate to the existing court-based [deposition] process, improving accessibility while maintaining appropriate safeguards and the integrity of the register.

3. The Registry General's Department remains committed to delivering the various projects with plans to have the new system operational during the upcoming fiscal year.

Madam Chairman, I would like to express my gratitude to the team and dedicated staff members of the Registry General Department led by Mr. Aubrey Pennyman and Dr. Freddie Evans, who is currently acting as they continue to take a proactive approach to ensuring Bermuda remains relevant and comparable with its global partners.

This ends my presentation on Head 29, the Department of Registry General.

**The Chairman:** Thank you, Minister.

We continue in Committee of Supply on the Estimates for Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27. And we are dealing with the Ministry of Economy and Labour. And we are moving on to Head 60, which is Workforce Development.

And while the Minister gets a brief drink of water for his throat, because reading a lot can dry your throat out, while he takes a quick sip of water, we will wait for him. And he can continue when he is ready.

## HEAD 60—WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget Head 60, the Department of Workforce Development found on pages B-188 through B-193 and [pages] C-13 and C-19 of the Budget Book.

### Mission

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, the mission of the Department of Workforce Development is, *To develop a resilient workforce to provide a sustainable and stable community.*

### Expenditure Overview

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, a total of 400 . . . sorry, a total of \$4,729,934 [sic] has been allocated to this head, which represents an increase of \$204,934 from the previous year and constitutes 16 per cent of the budget allocation for the Ministry as a whole.

This increase came as a result of salary increases and the department's plan to reallocate to the Bermuda College campus in April 2026. Additionally, the department has been granted a capital expenditure of \$18,800 for upgrades to outdated computers for staff. Madam Chairman, the Department of Workforce Development comprises three programmes, as noted on page B-189.

- 6001, General Administration
- 6003, Career Development
- 6004, Training

**The Chairman:** Excuse me, Minister.

Can I just ask you a brief question because I think I misread something. What did you say the total budget was for this head?

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** [It is] \$4,723,934.

**The Chairman:** Okay, so it's "23" and not "32" because in the Budget Book, it's recorded as \$4,732[,934]. I looked to see if there was an erratum, but there isn't, so I don't know which is correct.

[Inaudible interjection]

**The Chairman:** You think the Budget Book is incorrect?

[Inaudible interjections]

**The Chairman:** It would be correct. Okay.

Okay, so I think all you need to do is mention that the figure is \$4,732—

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** To clarify, the figure in the Budget Book, I have been told is the correct figure. That is \$4,732,934.

**The Chairman:** Thank you, Minister.

### Capital Expenditure

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Additionally, the department has been granted a capital expenditure of \$18,800 for upgrades to outdated computers for the staff.

### Programme 6001 General Administration

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, programme 6001, General Administration, is responsible for the overall management and administration of the Department of Workforce Development.

The department is fully staffed with 21 full-time positions across administration, career development, and training.

Madam Chairman, the Department of Workforce Development achieved several impactful outcomes during the 2025/26 fiscal year, driven by a motivated team and a clear strategic direction. Over the past year, the department has advanced digital transformation to advance and enhance its services to the public.

A key achievement has been developing a modernised Bermuda Job Board. The new Bermuda Job Connect platform represents a significant advancement in how the Department of Workforce

Development gathers, analyses, and utilises labour market data to inform decision-making and improve employment outcomes. With enhanced reporting capabilities, the platform will provide real-time insight into job seeker activity, employer demand, and programme effectiveness, allowing the department to respond more strategically to workforce trends. Importantly, the new Job Connect introduces the ability to capture detailed information on students, including their field of study and projected graduation dates.

This enables proactive engagement and better alignment between education pipelines and labour market needs. By serving as a centralised, user-friendly hub for both job seekers and employers, Bermuda Job Connect will streamline access to opportunities, strengthen employer connections, and support more targeted workforce planning. Ultimately, this upgrade will continue a more responsive and future-ready labour market in Bermuda.

#### Programme 6003 Career Development

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, programme 6003 Career Development is comprised of the Career Development Administration 70300.

This programme is responsible for developing professional employment plans and case management resulting from client assessments, core soft skills training, and employment readiness training. The Career Development Team delivered measurable expansion and structural transformation during the 2025/26 fiscal year.

From April 2025 through January 2026, the section strengthened youth employment pathways and increased employability participation beyond annual targets. It also elevated professional service standards by ensuring all officers on the team attained their Global Career Development Facilitator [GCDF] certification.

New initiatives such as a modernised employer referral system through structured programmes created sustainable transitional employment models that move beyond traditional referral systems and into coached, monitored workforce integration.

By March 31, 2026, the Career Development Section is projected to significantly exceed its performance targets with over 400 new client registrations (the target was 350) and more than 700 participants engaged in employability skills training (the target was 400) while maintaining two business day intake turnarounds.

This section also strengthened youth engagement in alignment with the Youth Employment Strategy supported by a strategic shift from volume-based service delivery to a structured assessment-driven case model focused on employment outcomes and employer partnerships.

Key initiatives included the successful launch of the Bridge to Work programme, which placed 14 youth into structured roles and achieved eight

confirmed full-time jobs, demonstrating strong employer engagement and workforce integration models that can be replicated.

The Graduate Apprenticeship programme facilitated five placements with embedded professional development, while On-the-Job Training Programme supported financial assistance clients through structured placements and coaching, positioning participants for sustained employment.

Collectively, these programmes reflect a more targeted, outcome-driven approach that strengthens workforce readiness and supports sustainable employment pathways in Bermuda.

#### Programme 6004 Training

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Programme 6004 Training provides administrative support to and oversight of the National Certification and Apprenticeship Board activities, such as the apprenticeship programmes, professional designation training programmes, and the national certification and designated trades. The Training Section supported Bermuda's workforce readiness and regulated training pathways by facilitating apprenticeships, strengthening national certification activity, and advancing enforcement compliance action under national occupation certification requirements.

Professional performance shows sustained apprenticeship activity with key employers and continued investment in work readiness, completion, and follow-up outcomes. Under the governance of the National Certification and Apprenticeship Board, the training and certification programme has had much success in implementing training programmes in high-demand, industry-driven occupations and in advancing national certification. The Board's primary objective is to oversee and ensure the quality, relevance, and efficiency of training and apprenticeship programmes in Bermuda.

The department recorded 50 local apprenticeships year-to-date, reflecting continued progress in expanding workforce training opportunities. These apprenticeships were supported through strong governance and oversight, including alignment with legislative requirements, regular monitoring of apprentice logs and duties, and ongoing stakeholder onboarding. Employer engagement was a key focus. Monthly meetings were held with employer training leads. There was active troubleshooting of progression issues, such as ensuring appropriate assessments and proctor engagement. Also, deliberate efforts were made to expand apprenticeship opportunities into new and emerging sectors.

Key industry partners, including BELCO, Air-Care, the Bermuda Hospitals Board, and the BAC Group of companies, played a significant role in hosting apprentices, demonstrating strong collaboration to develop skilled talent and strengthen Bermuda's workforce pipeline.

The National Center for Construction, Education, and Research core programme played an important role in advancing the department's work readiness and training mandate by equipping participants with essential foundational skills aligned with broader workforce development programmes. Delivered through a structured series of 12 modules at Bermuda College, the programme provided participants with practical, industry-relevant knowledge to support entry into trades and other technical career pathways. All 12 participants successfully earned their core certification, strengthening their employability and positioning them for progression into apprenticeship on-the-job training and other departmental initiatives.

Madam Chairman, Solar Photovoltaic Certification Programme. In alignment with the government's endeavours to promote the emerging blue and green environment sector, which is a vital component of the economy, the Training Department of the Department of Workforce Development has once again trained 10 nationally certified electricians to obtain certifications from the recognised industry professionals.

The Electronic Technicians Associations. The six-week programme included a mix of theory and practical components, specialising in upscaling knowledge and practical experience in solar and electronic systems. As an added incentive and value for money, individuals identified for participation in this landmark programme had previously obtained national certification as electricians.

National Occupational Certification. Referrals for national certification reached 107 year to date, reflecting steady progress in advancing workforce standards and qualifications. Standards and enforcement efforts focused on strengthening compliance with national occupational certification requirements across government departments, maintaining assessment readiness, and expanding certification capacity through industry partnerships.

Participation was recorded across key trades, including electrical, welding, landscaping, and motor mechanics. During this period, the department also progressed efforts to secure accredited assessment capacity, coordinated closely with industry stakeholders, and advanced compliance timelines for departments, such as Works and Engineering. This reinforced a more structured and standards-driven approach to workforce development.

Madam Chairman, at this time, I would like to commend our training officers and standards and enforcement officers on successfully achieving the City & Guild's advanced diploma in Teaching, Training, and Assessing Learning. This accomplishment not only reflects the professional dedication and expertise but also strengthens the department's capacity to deliver high-quality training and assessment, ultimately benefiting the wider community.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, as we look forward to the upcoming fiscal year and beyond, the Department of Workforce Development objectives for the fiscal period 2026/27 can be found on page B-188 and read as follows:

- Expand apprenticeship opportunities and placements available to Bermudians with a focus on engaging young people in skills-building experiences.
- Strengthen hospitality workforce through training and development.
- Advance digital skills and innovation.
- Empower and engage Bermuda's youth.
- Continue to modernise departmental operations.

Co-location at Bermuda College

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** In the upcoming 2026/27 fiscal period, the Department of Workforce Development will

- implement a Digital Literacy Programme;
- strengthen certification by stabilising assessment capacity;
- continue national occupational certification compliance engagement across sectors;
- expand the Bridge to Work and graduate apprenticeship programmes;
- partner with the tourism and hospitality industry on training initiatives to ensure Bermudians have the skills needed for the opportunities in the industry;
- launch a robust information campaign to ensure Bermudians know how to get information on opportunities available and the skills needed; and
- enhance training offerings through collaboration with the Bermuda College.

Madam Chairman, that ends my presentation on Head 60, the Department of Workforce Development. At this time, I would like to thank the team at the Department of Workforce Development led by Director Malika Cartwright for their commitment to supporting Bermudians as they navigate the career pathways.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

**The Chairman:** Thank you, Minister, in continuing in the Committee of Supply under the Ministry of Economy and Labour looking at the Estimates for Revenue and Expenditure, the Minister will now lead us into Head 94, which is Economic Development.

Minister, whenever you are ready, you have the floor.

## HEAD 94—ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget Head 94, the

Economic Development Department [EDD], found on pages B-194 to B-197, and C-19 of the Budget Book.

#### Mandate

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, the mandate of EDD is, *To advance the sustainable growth development and diversification of Bermuda's economy*. It does so by

- facilitating, creating, and implementing policies to support the Bermuda Economic Development Strategy 2023–2027;
- in collaboration with industry stakeholders, position Bermuda as an ideal test market for innovative products and industry development;
- identify the jurisdiction's market fit, clearly communicating its messaging, and driving opportunities that lead to economic activity;
- processing various land licences and incentives for Job Maker applications in a timely, efficient, and professional manner;
- facilitating opportunities for technology, education, mentoring, and training, and support for entrepreneurship; and
- helping create a more attractive regulatory environment for business and enhance communications between government and the private sector.

#### Expenditure Overview

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, the subjective analysis of the current account estimates of the Economic Development Department is found on page B-195 of the Budget Book.

A total of \$7,933,000 has been allocated for this year, which represents a decrease of \$690,000 from the previous year, and constitutes 27 per cent of the budget allocated for the Ministry as a whole.

The budgetary allocation includes the total current expenditure for the Economic Development Department, which is estimated to be \$1,374,000 for 2026/27, as well as two operating grants, one allocated for the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation, and the other to the Bermuda Business Development Agency. The decrease in funding reflects the fact that EDD is undergoing a review, and activities are funded accordingly pending the outcome of the review and the implementation of changes to its programmes.

In addition, recruitment is ongoing, and salaries are prorated. Also, it is important to note that the BEDC and the BDA grant allocations have been moved to their own business units for 2026/27. In previous years, those grant allocations were listed together under EDD's Administrative business unit.

The grants [comprise] an allocation for BEDC in the amount of \$2,239,000, and one for BDA in the amount of \$4,320,000. I will present the budget briefs

for each of those grantees separately after I present the budget for the Economic Development Department.

Madam Chairman, the total revenue for the 2026/27 fiscal year is projected at \$6,518,000, which represents an increase of 14 per cent, or \$818,000 compared with original estimates for 2025/26.

It is anticipated that the incentives for Job Makers programme will generate \$300,000 in revenue, and the Alien Land Licence Programme will generate \$6,218,000 combining land licence application fees and landholding charges.

#### Manpower

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** As it pertains to manpower, for all of its achievements, the Economic Development Department is a relatively small department with a staffing complement of nine full-time posts as follows: the director, an administrative assistant, a senior manager, a senior development analyst, two analysts, a senior regulatory analyst, regulatory analyst, and a concierge. Of these posts, four are filled, three are under recruitment, and two are vacant.

*[Inaudible interjections]*

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** I can proceed, Madam Chairman?

**The Chairman:** Yes, you may. Was it correct, the figure was seven full-time employees, or was it nine?

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** There were nine full-time posts, however, four were filled, and three are under recruitment, and two were vacant.

**The Chairman:** Thank you.

#### Performance Measures by Business Unit

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** The programme of EDD are funded through business unit 104000 Administration. They are comprised of:

- 9403, Analysis and Policy;
- 9404, Research and Legislative Support,
- 9405, Concierge and Engagement.

The performance measures can be found on page B-197 of the Budget Book.

#### Programme 9403, Analysis and Policy Business Services

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, over the past fiscal year, the EDD has primarily focused on engaging with the community and employers, investors, partners, educators, and learners, primarily in various fields of emerging tech, and I will speak to some of the performance results now.

### Completing Stakeholder Engagement Initiatives

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** The EDD supports innovation and workforce development through strategic collaborations that extend to digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and emerging technologies. With these initiatives it provides the local workforce with upscaling and rescaling opportunities and positions Bermuda as a global hub for technology and innovation.

In 2025/26, these initiatives included video game design challenge, CyberSmarts pilot, and the annual business awards in the technology category.

### Initiatives Offered in the Community

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** The EDD continued to meet its annual target, focusing on skill building and talent development through collaborative training and education. Efforts were aligned with promoting digital and financial innovation and preparing a trained workforce for a tech-driven economy and included [the] FinTech training programme. The fiscal year 2025/26, was the fourth year of the FinTech training programme, which was run in partnership with internationally recognised learning platforms and the Department of Workforce Development. It saw a total of 35 graduates from two cohorts over the summer 2025 and winter 2025 programmes.

### Monthly FinTech Webinar Series

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** This series was launched in January 2025, and over the year provided monthly educational sessions covering Bermuda's FinTech landscape, AI, blockchain, and data science. The EDD hosted nine webinars covering such topics as AI and FinTech, data science, Bermuda's FinTech legal framework, AI and privacy, cybersecurity, and AI agents, and included various stakeholders from Bermuda's FinTech and digital finance ecosystems.

### Bermuda Coders Initiative

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** This is a three-year programme that offers free digital skills for all Bermuda residents. It was launched in 2024 in collaboration with the UAE [United Arab Emirates] and will go on to 2027, free of charge for anyone who registers. From this programme, participants can earn certifications, enhance tech readiness and Bermuda's workforce development.

In fiscal year 2025/26, the EDD saw over 500 participants in this initiative, building on the programme's demonstrated success in enhancing local skills. The Bermuda Coders Initiative has now been transitioned to the Department of Workforce Development.

### Incentives for Job Makers

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Pursuant to the Economic Development Act 1968, the Incentives for Job Makers programme allowed companies to apply for and obtain the concessions to have their senior executives exempt from needing a work permit. These are persons responsible for continued presence of jobs for Bermudians in Bermuda. When successful applicants are exempt from needing a work permit, the dependent family members are granted permission to reside with them.

In 2025/26, the Incentives for Job Makers programme processed 18 successful exemption applications. This represented a slight decrease in successful applications from the previous year. The target is to progress 100 per cent of applications in no more than eight weeks. However, with staff shortages, 65 per cent were completed within that timeframe.

### Alien Land Licensing

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** The Alien Land Licensing Programme, as detailed in Part [VI] of the Bermuda Immigration and Protection Act 1956, aims to protect land in Bermuda for ownership of persons who possess Bermuda status by requiring restricted persons to have licences to hold and acquire land in Bermuda and preventing them from appropriating it, requiring trustees to have licences to hold or acquire land in Bermuda for the benefit of restricted persons and preventing them from appropriating it, and preventing corporations from acquiring or holding land in Bermuda unless they do so in accordance with the legislation. In 2025/26, Madam Chairman, 119 land licence applications were received and 75 per cent were processed in no more than 30 business days.

Programme 9404, Research and Legislative Support Division

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** During the year, in collaboration with the Ministry of Economy and Labour Headquarters, the EDD made significant strides to enhance Bermuda's appeal as a leading investment jurisdiction. A core component of this effort was the introduction of the Benefits Entities Act 2025 and the Trustees Amendment Act 2025.

**Mr. Vance Campbell:** Excuse me, Madam Chairman. Did the Minister say 94—

**The Chairman:** [Are] you rising on a point of clarification?

**Mr. Vance Campbell:** Clarification, clarification.

**The Chairman:** Okay, Minister, do you yield?

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Yes.

**The Chairman:** Okay, continue.

**POINT OF CLARIFICATION**

**Mr. Vance Campbell:** Did the Minister say 9404?

**The Chairman:** Research and Legislative Support?

**An Hon. Member:** Correct.

**The Chairman:** Yes.

**Mr. Vance Campbell:** Which page is that on, Minister?

**The Chairman:** [Page] B-197. That's under the performance measures.

**Mr. Vance Campbell:** Okay, thank you.

**The Chairman:** He's talking about that.

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** [Repeating] During the year, in collaboration with the Ministry of Economy and Labour Headquarters, the EDD made significant strides to enhance Bermuda's appeal as a leading investment jurisdiction. A core component of this effort was the introduction of the Benefits Entities Act 2025 and the Trustees Amendment Act 2025. The Benefits Entities Act 2025 introduced a new legal framework for companies, LLCs, and limited partnerships looking to manage businesses, operating in a way that is more beneficial to society and the environment.

Unlike traditional models aimed solely at maximising profits, these public benefit entities operate under a framework that prioritises both profits and additional stakeholders. Concurrently, the Trustees Amendment Act 2025 was enhanced to modernise provisions in the Trustees Act 1975. This change empowers trustees to factor environmental, social, and governance criteria into their investment decisions without fear of violating their fiduciary duties.

These efforts underscore Bermuda's commitment to providing a stable, compliant, and competitive environment for family offices and international investors. It also highlights the Island's efforts to offer a flexible legal framework that allows socially conscious companies to balance financial returns with positive social and environmental impacts.

Programme 9405, Concierge and Engagement

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Through Concierge—

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** [Line item] 9405.

Through Concierge and Engagement, the EDD is assisting companies that are relocating to the Island to navigate the registration process by offering pre-screening of their applications to the Department of Immigration, the Department of Social Insurance, and the

Office of the Tax Commissioner. The intention is to have applications processed as a matter of priority and ensure these companies are in good standing with the government. Although the EDD does not make direct applications to the registry of companies on the behalf of the clients, it provides advice to them on the process.

The EDD also acts as the coordinator internal to the government, making introductions and facilitating meetings where appropriate to ease the company's entry into the local economy and assist them with their initial steps to business setup.

#### Plans for the Upcoming Year

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Entering the 2026/27 fiscal year, the EDD is dedicated to advancing Bermuda's economy through targeted business service initiatives. By strategically developing and promoting the talent, skill sets, experience, and professional networks of the local workforce, it ensures that incoming investors recognise it as a premier competitive advantage.

In 2026/27, EDD will review the Incentives for Job Makers programme for the purpose of streamlining the evaluation cycle, ensuring that qualified businesses can access benefits with no administrative delay, complete its current recruitment cycles so as to ensure it is well positioned to promptly process all applications and work with the Ministry Headquarters to develop Bermuda's Digital Economy Strategy.

Madam Chairman, the EDD's consistent work stands as a testament to Bermuda's proactive approach to global business.

I wish to commend the EDD team under the leadership of Director Ray Jones and Acting Director Maryem Biadillah for their unwavering dedication in supporting Bermuda's reputation as a premier international business hub.

#### Bermuda Economic Development Corporation

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation (BEDC).

[The BEDC] is a quango under the Ministry of Economy and Labour. The grant to the Economic Development Department can be found on page C-19 of the Budget Book.

#### Mandate

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, the mandate of the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation is to oversee the operations of the Economic Empowerment Zones, to provide financial support and technical advice to small and medium-sized businesses, to manage the operations of outside vendor markets, and to manage vendors and issue vending licences.

The organisation's key objectives remain to assist the government in encouraging economic growth

for Bermuda's local small and medium-sized businesses.

#### Expenditure

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, \$2,238,000 has been allocated as a grant for this quango for 2026/27, which is unchanged from the previous two fiscal years.

The total current expenditure for BEDC, based on the allocated grant, is estimated to be \$5,344,000 for 2026/27, which is also unchanged compared to the previous fiscal year to 2025/26.

*[Mr. W. Lawrence Scott, Chairman]*

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Mr. Chairman, as we have had a change in seat, [the] BEDC has carried over \$2 million into the 2026/27 for major capital investment projects and initiatives aligned with the government and economic development goals.

#### Manpower

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** For all it achieves, the BEDC is a relatively small organisation. In 2025/26, BEDC did not add any new posts and had a staffing complement of 18 full-time posts.

There are currently three vacant posts actively being recruited. BEDC also anticipates increasing its full-time staffing numbers in 2026/27 to execute on a strategic plan and the Bermuda National Entrepreneurship Strategy.

#### Accomplishments for 2025/26

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Mr. Chairman, BEDC champions economic growth and entrepreneurial spirit in Bermuda. In 2025/26, BEDC's strategic initiatives enhanced business development, empowered entrepreneurs, and strengthened the Island's economy. BEDC supported Bermuda's entrepreneurs with targeted programmes, training, and resources to build sustainable businesses.

Key initiatives include BEDC's strategic plan. BEDC completed its new strategic . . . its new innovation . . . innovative five-year strategic plan 2025–2030, which is board approved from June 2025. An implementation roadmap has been developed and focuses on delivering on the yearly goals and objectives mapped out in the plan.

#### BEDC's Cooperative Policy

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** The BEDC launched Bermuda's first standalone cooperative business policy in October 2025 while celebrating the United Nations International Year of Cooperatives. The landmark policy provides a strategic framework to guide the

establishment and growth of cooperatives in Bermuda, empowering local entrepreneurs and communities to collaborate for mutual economic and social benefit.

#### Business Advisory and Engagement Services

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** BEDC conducted over 577 client meetings in 2025, providing confidential business advice tailored to entrepreneurs' needs. The services received a 92 per cent satisfaction rating from exit surveys. In addition, 385 business visits were conducted in weekly walkabouts within EEZs, enhancing support for local enterprises and promoting connectivity.

Six businesses opened in EEZs, bringing 24 jobs to the market.

#### Financial Support

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** BEDC provided 17 micro-loans and loan guarantees in 2025/26, providing \$441,000 and financing to local micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, thereby enabling businesses to secure essential funding for startup and expansion.

BEDC also supported clients in maintaining financial stability while managing its loan portfolio. In 2025/26, BEDC received 493 payments on micro-loans and interest totalling \$324,000, which included 16 business owners paying off their loans fully.

#### Online Platform

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** BEDC increased the membership on its business register by 251 entrepreneurs, or 10.1 per cent, in 2025/26, and currently has 2,737 registrants. Mr. Chairman, 75.0 per cent of the new members identified as sole proprietors and 9.0 per cent as vendors, with 69.0 per cent registered as starting a new business. In addition, BEDC's online virtual market by Bermuda supported 82 businesses in 2025/26, with 125 customers purchasing products and services through the site.

This generated approximately \$60,000 in online sales and enhanced digital commerce adoption among small businesses and their clients.

#### Economic Empowerment Zones and New Developments

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** BEDC facilitated progress on potential residential and mixed-use developments in four EEZs.

The Urban Development Authority has received formal applications today for two development projects under the approved residential scheme and is working with those developments to recommend approval and bring those developments to reality. Concurrently, the UDI is working with landowners and developers on four additional sites which show high development promise.

### Community Markets

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** BEDC supported the organising of four Court Street vendor markets in 2025/26, averaging 14 vendors and 1,000 attendees per event. In addition, BEDC's "Eat, Shop, Play" incentive programme garnered participants from 1,456 people, which helped to generate significant holiday spending in the four EEZ zones. Over the Christmas period, 90 businesses participated across all EEZs, generating approximately \$164,000 in revenues from consumers.

Enterprise Bermuda Incubator, the flagship programme supported 10 entrepreneurs in 2025, delivering intense one-on-one mentorship training and resources. Successful CEOs will be graduating the six-month programme in March.

### Youth Outreach Programmes

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** BEDC inspired future business leaders by engaging over 1,500 students in 2025 due to career affairs and entrepreneurial activities. Notable events included The Berkeley [Institute's] [Annual Signature] Career Fair with over 800 attendees and the Wave of Opportunity Youth Pitch finals with over 240 attendees.

### Sports Club Incubator

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Business planning resources supported sports clubs in 2025/26 with an incubator and a business plan pitch competition aimed at strengthening their business operations and sustainability. In partnership with the Department of Sports and Recreation, BEDC received a \$100,000 grant to assist the incubator clubs. Four clubs: Western Stars Sports Club, St. David's Cricket Club, Bayley's Bay Cricket Club, and Warwick Workmen's Club graduated in November 2025. Three of those clubs were awarded grant funding as part of the rigorous business plan competition.

### Entrepreneurship Celebrations

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Global Entrepreneurship Week 2025 was a success. Over 20,000 entrepreneurs and stakeholders participated in a combination of in-person virtual multimedia activities, including workshops, pitch competitions, networking events, radio, television interviews, and impactful targeting summits.

### Priorities

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** The priorities for 2026/27 will be the National Entrepreneurship Strategy for Bermuda.

Entrepreneurship is one of the most important drivers of job creation and economic growth and is crucial for the development of a vibrant, formal small and medium-sized business sector. The proactive role of

any government in supporting entrepreneurship requires a systemic approach. One of five strategic priorities forming the bedrock of Bermuda's economic development strategy is entrepreneurship and small business development.

To support this area, BEDC has made significant progress on developing Bermuda's first National Entrepreneurship Strategy.

### Streamline Registration Process for Entrepreneurs

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Starting a business in Bermuda can be a very arduous, complex, and an expensive process. BEDC is working to improve its business register. Three existing software platforms have been shortlisted and are being reviewed to determine the best for the corporation's needs. BEDC will also continue to engage with partner Bermuda government departments to streamline the business registration process as it transitions to a one-stop shop for the Island's entrepreneurs.

### Cooperative Ecosystem

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** The BEDC will continue to ramp up its focus on cooperatives in 2026/27 as a viable but overlooked business model for success in many industries such as food, agriculture and fisheries, housing, health care, and financing. Focused on the objectives contained in the new cooperative policy and supported by impending cooperative legislation, BEDC has laid out an annual schedule of cooperative workshops and will be hosting its second cooperative incubator in 2026.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, BEDC's initiatives empower entrepreneurs, revitalise communities, and contribute significantly to Bermuda's economic resilience throughout 2025/26. With its unwavering commitment to innovation, inclusiveness, and growth, the BEDC is poised to drive even greater impact in 2026/27.

I extend my sincere thanks to Erica Smith and the BEDC team for their continued efforts in supporting Bermuda small and medium-sized entrepreneurs.

**The Chairman:** And for the listening public, we are in the Committee of Supply of the whole House discussing the [Ministry of] Economy and Labour, Heads 44, 14, 27, 29, 60, 94, and 99. And this is a four-hour debate which will be ending at 9:02 [pm].

And the Minister has the floor and is going to continue to present.

Minister.

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, \$4,320,000 of the Ministry's budget has been allocated to the Business Development Agency as shown on page C-19 of the Budget Book. Last year, I advised the Honourable House that

the BDA would complete its transition into a more focused, results-driven investment agency.

I am pleased to report that this commitment has been delivered. The agency has been recognised, staff have been trained, a new website has been launched, internal systems have been upgraded, the foundation is now in place, and the work is moving forward with greater discipline and accountability.

Mr. Chairman, economic development does not happen overnight. It often takes between two to five years for a company to move from an initial conversation to actual establishing operations and hiring. At mid-year of 2025/26, Mr. Chairman, 47 potential investment projects were actively being processed, with nine now in the final stages of decision-making and close to confirming their move to Bermuda. In addition, the agency continues to receive a steady flow of new inquiries from investors who are at an early stage of considering Bermuda.

Importantly, the BDA now also examines projects that do not move forward. Understanding why Bermuda was not selected helps us identify where we need to improve, whether in legislation, regulation, or infrastructure. To support this, the BDA has put in place a formal system to record and track industry recommendations for legislative or policy improvements, ensuring that Bermuda remains competitive and responsive.

#### Measuring Real Economic Impact

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** In 2025, the BDA strengthened its ability to measure real economic outcomes. Working with Grant Thornton, the agency now uses a tool that tracks jobs created and supported, capital invested, the wider economic benefits that flow into the community and government revenue implications.

From projects that have already been successfully converted, the confirmed and projected economic impacts include \$5.4 million in capital investment over the next three years, \$5.9 million in operating expenditure in the next one year alone, and 20 new jobs over the next three years, including 13 in the next year. These are not projections from early discussions. They are results of confirmed investment decisions.

When measured against the public funding allocated to the agency, these outcomes represent a clear and measurable return on public investment. The progress is also reflected in the Economic Investment Residential Certificate Programme, where cumulative direct investment has increased from \$500 million to over \$600 million. That growth demonstrates continued confidence in Bermuda and highlights the importance of maintaining strong relationships with individuals and businesses already here.

#### Market Engagement and Visibility

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** The BDA continued active engagement in key markets, including the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and selected Middle East countries in 2025/26. The agency hosted and participated in strategic industry forums and investment events, including Bermuda Wealth Forum London, Industry Engagement at Risk World and Consensus, Bermuda Captive Conference, STEP Bermuda, Transcontinental Trusts Conference, AIMA Digital Asset Conference, Infrastructure Investors Engagements, Submarine Networks World, ITC Vegas, and in addition, the BDA strengthened Bermuda's international visibility through a coordinated media strategy. This work resulted in 37 international media mentions and published articles, coverage with an estimated global audience of 242 million, 10 featured placements in respective publications, approximately 725,000 readers and viewers reached directly, 16 interviews and high-depth media engagements, and seven new relationships with international journals and industry publications.

Coverage included respected outlets, such as Reuters, The Insurer, Forbes, Global Reinsurance, Telecom Review Group, supporting businesses already here. Global experience shows that many new investments come from companies that are already operating within a jurisdiction. Recognising this, the BDA created a dedicated role focusing on maintaining close contact within existing international businesses.

This ensures ongoing communication, early identification of expansion opportunities, retention of capital and talent, and resolution of operational concerns before they become barriers. Looking ahead, investment promotion requires patience, consistency, and long-term focus. The structure is in place; the pipeline of potential projects remains active. The strategy is clear. The Bermuda Business Development Agency remains committed to delivering manageable economic value and strengthening Bermuda's position as a competitive and respected international business jurisdiction. And I would like to thank Kendaree Burgess and her team for undertaking the hard work necessary to successfully position Bermuda on the global stage.

This concludes my presentation for Head 94, the Economic Development Department.

**The Chairman:** The Minister has just concluded his brief for Head 94. This is a four-hour debate. We are in the Committee of Supply, and we will be discussing the heads under Economy and Labour of Heads 44, 14, 27, 29, 60, 94, which the Minister just finished, and Head 99. This debate ends at 9:02 [pm].

Minister, you have the floor.

#### HEAD 99—DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Mr. Chairman, my last portion of pleasure is extended to Budget Head 99, the Department of Labour, found on pages B-198 through B-200 of the Budget Book.

## Mandate

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Mr. Chairman, the mandate of the Department of Labour is, *To provide services to support and foster positive employment relations and harmonious industrial relations within Bermuda in alignment with international best practice.*

## Expenditure Overview

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Mr. Chairman, as we look at an expenditure overview, a total of \$1,436,789 has been allocated for this head, which represents an increase of \$237,531 from the previous year and constitutes 5 per cent of the budget allocated for the Ministry as a whole. This change is primarily due to an increase of \$164,000, or 373 per cent, in accommodation rental for the department, which is now [located] on the third floor of Sophia House, 48 Church Street, Hamilton. Additionally, salaries have increased by \$64,000 to account for negotiated increases.

Mr. Chairman, the budget allocation for the Department of Labour provides for operational oversight and guidance of the labour relations officers and the labour inspectors to ensure that existing policies and procedures are adhered to and that the department's operations are aligned with the current legal framework as well as international best practices.

The department oversees the certification and decertification of unions in the workplace, investigates and conciliates employment and wage-related complaints in both the public and private sectors and refers unsettled matters to the Employment and Labour Relations Tribunal for determination. The department promotes fair dispute resolution, supports dispute prevention, enforces the statutory minimum hourly wage rate and offers free and unbiased training and workshop opportunities.

Mr. Chairman, the department is continuously reviewing the legislation that it administers to ensure that protections are in place for employees, and that employers are equally supported. During the 2025/26 budget year, the department, as ex-officio and secretariat for the Wage Commission, assisted with the progression and enhancement of the increased minimum hourly wage rate and passed the Department of Labour Act 2025 regarding the continuation of the Department of Labour and establishment of the Director of Labour as a public officer.

Mr. Chairman, \$131,000 is allocated to professional services which encompasses the operations of the Employment and Labour Relations Tribunal. The tribunal is responsible for hearing and adjudicating of unresolved employment- and labour-related disputes. These funds are also allocated for the use of the tribunal to defend against any judicial review proceedings that may arise.

Mr. Chairman, the department has allocated \$21,000 for the continued training of current staff and

training of new staff in dispute resolution and labour inspection which will consist of overseas virtual training as well as local vendor training. Through appropriate training, the department will be able to more effectively resolve matters through conciliation and reduce the number of complaints received and refer to the Employment and Labour Relations Tribunal for adjudication.

The department has \$31,000 to its travel budget which will ensure that adequate technical support is provided to the Minister during the ILO Labour Ministers meetings and as well as to enable a tripartite delegation to attend the 114th International Labour Conference.

## Manpower

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** The department currently has an established 10 full-time equivalents which consist of the director of labour, the labour relations manager, office manager, three labour relations officers, three labour inspectors and a tribunal coordinator with only three positions filled on a substantive basis in the 2025 budget year.

The department worked diligently with DEOD [Department of Employee and Organizational Development] to recruit for the following positions, a labour relations manager, two labour relations officers and three labour inspectors and one tribunal coordinator. I am pleased to announce that two labour relations officers have been hired, and we are seeking approval from the Public Service Commission for the hiring of the labour relations manager.

It is anticipated that the recruitment for the remaining posts will be completed by May of 2026.

## Performance Measures by Business Unit

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** While the department continues to receive complaints related to termination, constructive dismissal, layoffs, maternity leave, vacation pay redundancy overtime, union certification and collective bargaining agreement procedures and non-payment of the minimal hourly wage rate, the department has resolved 55 per cent of the complaints received this budget year through mediation and conciliation measures used by the labour relations officers.

With additional training and recruitment of additional staff, it is anticipated that the employment complaints and labour disputes resolved through mediation will increase to 65 per cent. The department has been able to refer 95 per cent of unresolved matters to the Employment and Labour Relations Tribunal within five working days, which has allowed for timely adjudication and resolution of matters. Additionally, the department had a 75 per cent user satisfaction rate which we anticipate will increase in the 2026/27 budget year.

## Plans for the Upcoming Budget Year

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** The department will continue to offer seminars, workshops and presentations to employers and workers groups and individuals to broaden their understanding, reduce employment and wage-related complaints and ensure they feel supported. To achieve this, the department will continue its collaboration with partner stakeholders and government departments.

The department will also continue to evaluate the facts that legislative change has had on the working population and keep abreast of international best practice to ensure that our national legislation is up to date, and the protection of employee rights remain at the forefront. The department is currently submitting a legislative proposal to strengthen the enforcement authority of the Employment and Labour Relations Tribunal, as well as tabling it in the House as a Bill—Sorry. The department is currently submitting a legislative proposal to strengthen the enforcement authority of the Employment and Labour Relations Tribunal, as well as tabling in the House a Bill regarding parental leave, which will be debated this afternoon.

The department will also continue to provide support to the Labour Advisory Council, as it makes recommendations to improve the rights of employers and employees and the Wage Commission in its pursuit to recommend a living wage for Bermuda.

The department will continue to liaise with the UK office and keep abreast of the happenings within the International Labour Organization to ensure compliance with the various conventions and recommendations critical to advancement of labour rights within Bermuda.

The department will also continue its close relationship with other Departments of Labour within the Caribbean region through the exchange of ideas, information, and experiences to promote innovation, accelerate problem solving, and boost productivity.

The Department of Labour will collaborate with other relevant departments and stakeholders to advance equal pay for equal work legislation and prioritise policies related to raising the retirement age.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff of the Department of Labour, as well as the members of the Employment and Labour Relations Tribunal for their hard work. As the Department of Labour continues to provide excellent service to the people of Bermuda and deliver in accordance with their mandate, their dedication to maintaining balance within the world of work is noteworthy. Their commitment and effectiveness necessitate recognition.

Mr. Chairman, that ends my presentation on Head 99, the Department of Labour. And with that, I conclude my presentation on the 2026/27 budget of Ministry of Economy and Labour.

Mr. Chairman, while that concludes my formal presentation, I just want to take the liberty to speak to the work of the Ministry of Economy and Labour and the departments that fall underneath that Ministry.

You would know year over year, we take great pride in putting out an annual report for the Ministry of Economy and Labour, which highlights all of our initiatives that we effectively executed on over that period of time. If you look at the number of initiatives that we have been able to execute on, but then also look at the leanness of the departments and the staffing levels, and even the size of our budget being just over \$23 million, you really get bang for your buck under the Ministry of Economy and Labour.

This is a Ministry that punches well above its weight class, and the Ministry and the team places heavy demand on its Minister to be out in the public and ensuring that we promote Bermuda as a business environment, that we promote workplace rights, that we ensure that we have our immigration framework in place that balances both the needs of Bermudians while inviting our guests to our shores. This Ministry has a very important and vital role, and we take it, very importantly, the execution of our duties. And I hope that the public and Members of this House can see that the Ministry of Economy and Labour is one where we focus on the execution of our objectives year over year.

Thank you.

**The Chairman:** And we are in Committee of Supply of the whole [House] for Economy and Labour [considering] Heads 44, 14, 27, 29, 60, 94, and 99. The Minister has just wrapped up his brief. This is a four-hour debate, and we have just about two hours left.

Is there anybody that would like to speak to the above Heads?

The [Chair] recognises the Honourable [Member] Vance Campbell. You have the floor.

**Mr. Vance Campbell:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank the Minister for his informative presentation. And before I forget, by leaving it to the end, I want to thank the members of staff of the Ministry as well, especially the three that are here today and enduring this process.

So, I would like to begin with Head 44, the Ministry of Economy and Labour headquarters. And I will state that I may ask some questions that were answered in the brief. And I do ask for the Minister's leeway in that because at times you are trying to listen and write at the same time, and you sometimes miss something. So, my first question was on salaries, and I believe the Minister answered that saying that that was (we are on page B-173) due to uplift. So, if the Minister can confirm that, that would be great.

I do have a question here on Training. There is an increase of \$21,000. And again, is that reflective of the work that the headquarters is doing in preparation for the upcoming census in May?

Still on page B-173, Travel, that is actually \$2,000 more than the original 2025/26 [estimate] but \$20,000 less than the revised 2025/26 [estimate]. And my question is, Did something . . . Was there a

conference or event that took place in 2025 for the number to be \$143,000 that will not happen this year, hence the drop to \$123,000? Or was there some anticipation of something happening in 2025/26 that did not? What is the cause for that difference between the revised and the current year estimate for Travel?

[On] B-173, the allotment for Advertising and Promotion is \$40,000, which is \$20,000 less than the original 2025/26, but \$10,000 more than revised for 2025/26. I would just like an explanation as to why that is the case.

And under Professional Services, there is an increase of \$9,000 there. I believe that the Minister mentioned something about there being some costs in there for a local consultant that was partially offset by some part-time workers that were no longer needed this year. I just want [to get] confirmation of that, if I can.

If I can move on to page B-174 on the performance measures. I am looking at business unit 54210, Immigration Appeals Tribunal. So, based on the two performance measures, when you look at that there are two immigration tribunals under 2025/26. That are a number still outstanding. Is it correct to assume that these two, because the amount is zero, are the two older appeals that the Minister spoke of in his brief?

I would like to move on to Head 14, Department of Statistics, and looking at B-175. Is there . . . Just a quick, a general question . . . Clearly, the money for this year's census, or the bulk of it, is located in business unit 24010. But that is under the heading of monthly to annual surveys, as opposed to 14029 non-annual surveys. One would think that the 10-year census would be under 14029 non-annual surveys. [That is] just an observation. You know, it does, or can, cause confusion in future years when you look back. [That is] just a comment.

So, still on page B-175, and I am looking at business unit . . . [I am] just asking if there has been a redistribution of resources between business unit 24015, Administration, and business units 24020, Core Statistics and Publications, and 24025, Core Annual Surveys. The amount of the decrease in the Administration 24015 equates to the increase in the other two that I mentioned. Is this just coincidental, or is there a redistribution of resources between those three business units?

The increase of \$59,000 in business unit 24055 Census & Survey in 14029 Annual Surveys—is that also due to the 2026 census?

Right below that on B-175, in business unit 24065, Household Expenditure Survey, there is a decrease in the budget from the previous year of \$222,000. I believe I heard the Minister say that the \$100,000 budgeted is for an overseas consultant. The decrease . . . Is this household expenditure not being done this year, and was done last year, hence the decrease?

We move on to page B-176, salaries. There is an increase of \$229,000. And wages . . . there is an

increase of \$307,000. Is that related to the increase in full-time equivalents that are shown at the bottom of the page? And I would assume that also part of that would be related to uplift, if the Minister can confirm that.

I had a question on Advertising and Promotion. I believe the Minister answered that when he said that would be primarily targeting the census.

So, under professional services, there is an increase of \$479,000. And which consultant . . . I believe the Minister said this was a cost allocated for a consultant. Can the Minister provide the details behind what that consultancy is for? I may have missed it in his presentation.

If we look at materials and supplies, there is a \$59,000 increase, and I believe the Minister said these were for office supplies and printing costs due to the census, so he answered my question that I had there.

If I can move to page B-177, looking at the performance measures. Under business unit 24010, Census and Special [Surveys], it says *conduct 2026 population and housing census*, and it is a minimum 95 per cent coverage of households. Just . . . Minister, I would like to know—I am not a statistician—is the 95 per cent the minimum that would allow you then to extrapolate the results out to a greater population? Or is it just 95 per cent was just chosen as the target for coverage?

Again, on B-177, business unit 24025, Core Annual Surveys. I noted that the response rates are 80 per cent for three of these: labour force surveys, economic activity survey, [and] balance of payment survey. Why [is it] not 95 per cent or even 100 per cent? Are there penalties for not responding as well?

And for the final one, household income and expenditure, you say it is not applicable. Is that because of my earlier question where I asked that there will not be a household expenditure done this year?

And my last question, just a question on . . . Which performance measure drives the timely publication of statistical data?

The Minister . . . If I move to capital acquisitions on page C-12, the Minister answered my question on the 76664 in that they were referring to replacing old computers for the \$23,000 that is allocated there.

Under 76738, there is \$100,000 capital cost there for Online Census. Is this the total cost of that particular item? Or was there something paid in the previous year? So, what is the total cost for that online census expenditure (\$100,000)? Or was that the balance from a previous year, i.e., what is the total cost?

I would like to now move to Head 27, Immigration. So, from the numbers on page B-178, it appears that for this year the Corporate Services and Personal Services, business units 37010 and 37020, have been merged into a new business unit 37140 Application Processing section. Is that correct? And was application processing the sole function of the corporate and personal services business units? I am asking that just to ensure that there are no gaps in services as a result of this change.

On [page] B-178, there is an increase in Compliance. The budget for this year of \$79,000 over the original for 2025/26 . . . [I] just would like to know what the reason for that increase is.

The salaries increase on [page] B-179. I believe the Minister said these were in part [due] to the salary uplift and some part-time staffing costs that were no longer . . . well, part-time staffing costs. [I] just want confirmation of that.

[I am] trying to read my writing on this next one.

[Laughter]

**Mr. Vance Campbell:** It is to do with professional services, and I have here there is a new something fee. [I] cannot read my writing.

[Laughter]

**Mr. Vance Campbell:** So, that is what happens when you are writing fast, I guess.

I had a question on rentals, and the Minister answered that in his brief, it is an increase in the cost of storage of \$20,000.

This next one is to do with clothing, uniforms, and laundry. [I am] just curious as to under what circumstances Immigration would have to incur laundry expenses. I think I know the answer, but I do not want to guess.

If we can go down to revenues, Resident Fees have gone from \$61,000 in the 2025/26 budget to \$0. So, my question is, Has this revenue item been reclassified, or is it now the responsibility of another ministry or department? And the same might apply also for, well . . . So, we are talking about 8293 Residence Fees.

Still on [page] B-179, Status and Naturalisation-Other, there is an increase of \$619,000 in the budget. That seems to be a very large, anticipated increase. So, if the Minister can explain why . . . And that is status and Naturalisation-Other.

On page B-180, looking at the full-time equivalents. When you look at just business unit 37030, it has one less full-time equivalent, but if we look over on page B-178, Compliance cost has gone up by \$79,000. So, if I can get an explanation for that . . . and again, looking at full-time equivalents for business unit 37040, Finance and Administration. This shows one additional full-time equivalent, but the cost has only gone up . . . if you look back to page B-178, the cost has only gone up \$24,000. Is that because that additional full-time equivalent will not be onboarded until partway through the year, so it only records part of the annual costs?

If we can look and move to the performance measures on page B-182 . . . If we can look at business unit 37030, Compliance. The second item there, *Percentage of all senior immigration inspectors trained in safety measures that will assist them in carrying out the duties of their role effectively and efficiently*. There is an 85 per cent outcome. Why is that not 100 per cent?

One would think they would want all of the senior immigration inspectors similarly trained.

Again, business unit 37030, average processing time investigating illegal worker . . . why has this gone up to 6–12 months from 3–6 months? And especially when you see that Compliance . . . Full-time equivalents is expected to go down by one. Is that the reason? And why would we not be looking to increase the number of staff in Compliance to bring that average processing time for illegal workers down?

Page B-182, business unit 37040, Finance and Administration. I thought I heard the Minister say 15 vacant positions were filled last year during the past year. Is that number correct? It does not seem to be correct because that would mean 15 out of 17 were filled. [I am] not sure; perhaps I heard incorrectly.

Lastly on [page] B-182, the last performance measure, *Number of key positions identified that require a succession plan, hard to fill positions requiring the preparation of a development plan for each position, and the succession plan for oversight and monitoring*. Does this mean . . . When I look at the number [that] is five, does this mean that more than half, five out of the nine, FTEs fall into this category?

On page B-183, what was the impetus, the primary impetus, behind the creation of the (I am just getting the correct name) application processing section? When we look at the performance measures on page B-183, most have remained the same. I believe two have improved and two have actually changed—potentially, one could argue, are worse. So, just rather than go into the individual performance measures, what was the impetus behind the combining of those two into one? And if it was efficiency, why are we not really seeing that efficiency in the change in targeted outcomes?

If we can switch to [page] C-12, looking at capital acquisitions, for Immigration, there is \$1,000,000 allocated for digitisation projects. Can the Minister provide the details of the main projects that make up most of that \$1,000,000?

I would like to move on to the Registry General now. So, there are . . . We are on page B-184. If the Minister can provide the reasons for the increases for business unit 39000, Administration, of \$21,000 . . . [I am] not sure if it ties in with the salaries increase, but Intellectual Property Registration 39010, the increase of \$105,000 . . . [For] 39020, Property, Professional and Organisational Registration, it is an increase of [\$]80[,000]. And finally, 39030, there is an increase of 60 . . . That is Births, Marriages, and Deaths. [There is] an increase of \$60,000 there.

On page B-185, salaries, there is an increase of \$219,000. Is that related to the two additional full-time equivalents for Intellectual Property, business unit 39010, and 39020, Property, Professional and Organisational Registration? Or is some of that also uplift? That is it. That is all that I have on page B-185 because the Minister answered my other questions in his brief.

If we can move to page B-186, Revenue, I do not have a question on this one, but I do want to note that under 8325, Trade Mark Registration, there is an increase in the estimated revenue of \$122,000. And I think it is good to mention that when we pass legislation, it is good to see that the intended purpose to increase revenue for a particular department or ministry is actually being realised.

[For] 8353, Certified Copies (we are on [page] B-186) there is an increase of \$26,000 over the original 2025/26 [estimate]. If the Minister can explain why that such a large increase . . . If I can go back, I do have a question on both Trade Mark Applications, 8323 and 8325. We are on [page] B-186. The revenue that is listed there . . . is that for new and new only registrations and applications?

Lastly, if we go down to 8364, Maritime Marriage Licence Fees, there is a projected or anticipated \$50,000 increase. We are feeling a lot more loving these days. That seems to be a large increase. The obvious answer is the anticipation of processing more marriage licences. And if that is the answer, that is the answer.

**The Chairman:** You mean the maritime marriage licences?

**Mr. Vance Campbell:** The maritime marriage licences, yes.

**The Chairman:** Thank you.

**Mr. Vance Campbell:** I just want to confirm. If the Minister can confirm what I recorded, when we look at the bottom of page B-186 as it relates to full-time equivalents, of the 22 positions for the 2026/27 budget, five are currently vacant, and three were filled during the current year. Those are my notes, so if the Minister can confirm that I recorded that correctly . . .

If we can move to [page] B-187—we are still under Head 29 Registry General, business unit 39010, Intellectual Property Registration—and we go to the second performance measure, *To ensure that 100 per cent of all correspondence with respect to applications, post-registrations, and the issue of certificates for all patents, trademarks, and designs are processed and actioned within one month of the date of receipt.* Again, Minister, this one month seems long, but perhaps it is the industry standard. So, if I can get clarification on . . . Because of my lack of knowledge of the industry, is that one month the norm, or a reasonable time, or is it actually somewhat excessive?

So, if we go to [page] C-12, there is \$164,000 for capital acquisitions for trade marks. My question there [is], Is the \$164,000 the full amount? I believe the Minister said this is the final phase registration system for IT, for the IT section. And the \$164,000, is that the total cost? Or is this the balance and there was a

previous amount paid in the prior year? So, what is the total cost of that?

I would like to move to Head 60, Workforce Development. [On] page B-189, under 6001 General Administration business unit, 70000 Administration, there is an increase of \$103,000 in the budget. If I can get an explanation for that . . .

Under 6003, Career Development, under 70300, Career Development Admin, there is an increase of \$101,000. If I can get an explanation for that as well . . .

Salaries, there is an increase of . . . On page B-190, salaries. There is an increase of \$133,000. I have a note here that the Minister said this was uplift. So, I believe I have my answer for that.

There is an increase of \$13,000 in the travel budget. [I] just want to know, Is this for apprentices to travel overseas for training?

There is a \$54,000 increase. We are still on [page] B-90 [sic] on professional services. Can the Minister advise what that increase relates to?

Pardon?

[Inaudible interjection]

**Mr. Vance Campbell:** [Page] B-190. Sorry.

Again, on B-190, Rentals. Has increased by \$31,000 from \$4,000 to \$35,000. The Minister can explain that increase.

Energy is actually going down by \$40,000. That is a good thing. But is there a particular reason why the energy went down that much? Perhaps I can get the answer. And if it is something I can use at home I can reduce my energy costs at home.

Still on [page] B-190, there is a \$15,000 reduction in Grants and Contributions that relates to national certification training. If I can get an explanation for that.

And also, if we look at the Grants and Contributions while we are on page C-19, can the Minister advise? We have \$400,000 on the Scholarships. Can the Minister advise how many scholarships this equates to, and what the average sum of each scholarship is? That is under 6866 on [page] C-19.

[Under] 7095, Apprenticeship Scheme, this amount . . . Is it payment for apprentices, the wages of apprentices, that have been taken on by businesses?

Under 7096, Sponsorship/Trainees, \$110,000, is this for trainees who cannot afford the cost of training courses, or is it for payment of wages where they are placed in an employment situation as trainees?

And under the summer student programme, 7098, is this for payment of wages for summer students? And on average, how many summer students participate in the summer student programme? And is it by application? Is this an application by businesses to take on a summer student, or is it the individuals?

[Inaudible interjection]

**Mr. Vance Campbell:** Pardon?

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Mr. Vance Campbell:** Yes, please, Minister.

At this stage, I would like to move to the performance measures under Workforce Development, page B-192. There are a bunch of performance measures that have been discontinued under business unit 70000, also business unit 70014, and business unit 70015 Certification. If I can get an explanation as to why those performance measures were discontinued.

If we can go to business unit 70014, Training Administration, the second performance measure, *To ensure arrangements of monthly Board and Committee meetings*, has 10. Is that 10 meetings per year? It is not . . . Just for clarity. And if we drop down to the middle of the diagram, *Increase number of apprentices year over year*, there is 75 per cent there. Just for clarity and explanation of what that 75 per cent means, because the measure is, *increase number of apprentice[s] year over year*, is that saying we are looking to increase the previous year's number by 75 per cent? So, [I am] seeking clarity on that.

If we go down to business unit 70015, Certification, it says *Percentage of Certifications Awarded*. So, just for clarity, does that mean only 35 per cent of those taking the certification successfully pass?

If we can move to [page] B-193, again, under business unit 70016, all of the performance measures have been discontinued. Just an explanation as to why.

So, if we look at percentage under business unit 70400, Career Development, it says percentage of clients with completed Personal Employment Plans [PEPs]. It is at 75 per cent. Why not 100 per cent? Are some clients not ready for PEPs or just do not complete the process?

And if we go to the very bottom under 70400, Career Development, it says percentage of participants reporting improved skills after training, and that is at 85 per cent. So, what are some of the reasons the 15 per cent felt that they could not report improved skills after training? Did they not complete the course, or was there some other reason why they would report that?

Madam Chairman, I would like to move on to Head 94, Economic Development. So, I may have missed this. I did have to step out briefly just as the Minister was starting his brief on this particular head. So, my first question on page B-195 is 9403, Analysis and Policy. Under Administration, 104000 Administration, there is the decrease of \$7,249,000 in this area. However, we now have under 9406, Grants, the Bermuda Business Development Agency [BDA] and the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation [BEDC] showing up. Has there been or is this part of that transition that Bermuda Business Development Agency went through, that they have absorbed some of the responsibilities that were previously under the Economic

Development Department [EDD]? And likewise, have both the Bermuda Business Development Agency and the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation, saying for that . . . Has the BEDC absorbed some of these responsibilities, and have they been brought somewhat under the remit of the Economic Development Department under this new set, or what appears to be new, 9406 Grants programme that is reported differently this year, I believe?

If we can go down to the bottom of page B-195 and look at the subjective analysis. We have decreases in salaries, training, travel, advertising and promotion, professional services, and repair and maintenance. So again, this would seem to indicate to me that there has been some sort of absorption of some of these responsibilities into either the BDA or the BEDC.

If we can go to [page] B-196, I did have a question on 8288 Work Permit Exemption Fee, which increased by \$100,000. My question was, Why is this revenue for Economic Development and not Immigration? I believe the Minister answered that.

Also, on [page] B-196, when you look at revenue item 8291, Land Acquisition Fees, there is a massive increase of \$718,000. Can the Minister provide a reason what . . . the reason that is driving this? Is this resales or new development?

I have a note here when you look at full-time equivalents on page B-196. The Minister in his brief said there were nine full-time posts, two vacant I believe. Yes. Four were filled, and three are under recruitment. Is there any intention to fill the two vacant posts at some point in time in the not-so-distant future?

**The Chairman:** Do you have a point of clarification, Minister?

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** The Member has to clarify whether it is talking about in this fiscal period or the next fiscal period, but “not-so-distant future” is somewhat vague for me to provide a response to.

**The Chairman:** Thank you.

Can we use more precise language so that when they answer, they can be actually answering the question? Or, sorry, you will get the answer to your question because they know what you mean by that.

**Mr. Vance Campbell:** Okay, it is clearly not in this year because it is not reflected. So, I would say next year.

**The Chairman:** Okay.

**Mr. Vance Campbell:** Next fiscal year, yeah.

**The Chairman:** Okay, thank you for the clarification.

**Mr. Vance Campbell:** If we look at move to page B-197, performance measures, under business partner compliance, are there currently no business partners

because that number is zero? That is under programme 9403, Analysis and Policy.

If you look at programme 9404—

**The Chairman:** One second, Member. So, what was your question for there? You said looking at a zero.

**Mr. Vance Campbell:** I said zero. Are there no business partners currently?

**The Chairman:** Oh, okay.

**Mr. Vance Campbell:** That was my question.

**The Chairman:** Okay, thank you.

**Mr. Vance Campbell:** So, if I go back to page B-195, I did not notice a 9404 Research and Legislative Support on that page. Is that an oversight, or because we are talking about it in the programme, or is it the zero there because that has been eliminated and that is why it was not on page B-195?

And when you look at programme 9405, Concierge and Engagement, have these services been discontinued or moved elsewhere because the performance targets are all zeros?

I am just looking at my notes here.

**The Chairman:** Member, so while you are looking at your notes, I would remind the listening public and the House that we are in Committee of Supply on Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27. And we are currently looking at the Ministry of Economy and Labour. And in particular, I think you have focused some of your questions now on Head 94. And whenever you are ready to continue, you may, Member.

**Mr. Vance Campbell:** I will. And I will now move to Head 99, Labour.

**The Chairman:** Okay.

**Mr. Vance Campbell:** So, I did have a question on Salaries. There is an increase of \$64,000. The Minister did indicate in his brief that that was uplift. So that question was answered. I had questions on Training that the Minister answered as well. That was to do with dispute resolution. Also on travel, my question was answered. That was to provide adequate technical support and also attendance at the 114th International Labour Conference. So, my questions on Salaries, Training, and Travel were answered by the Minister.

So, on Rentals, the Minister advised that there was a move to the third floor of Sophia House. So, my first question on that would be, When did that move take place? And is the \$208,000 the total rent, total annual rent, for that new facility? And if not, what is the total rent for that facility?

So, the Minister . . . When we look at full-time equivalents, the Minister, according to my notes, said that only three positions were filled on a substantive basis in 2025. Does that mean there were some part-time staff that were hired to help with the workload? And if so, how many?

The Minister also said two labour relations officers and, I believe, a labour relations manager would be hired, or [were] in the process of being hired, and that the remaining two employees will be hired by May 2026. So, if my notes are correct my question would be, Will they (this department, the Head 99 Labour) be up to full strength as of the target of May 2026 when it comes to full-time equivalents?

I would now like to move on to the performance measures. Under business unit 54200, Labour Relations section, [it] will be 200. This percentage of tribunal case files prepared within five working days. The target is 100 per cent. So, my question would be, How many tribunal cases are anticipated this year?

The next performance measure says number of outreach presentations for the year, and it is 100 per cent. Can the Minister provide some examples of what that outreach looks like?

**The Chairman:** Point of clarification, Minister?

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Yes, I do not see 100 per cent for that item.

**The Chairman:** No, it is not.

The Minister is correct.

**Mr. Vance Campbell:** The number of . . . Sorry. [It] is five.

**The Chairman:** Yes.

**Mr. Vance Campbell:** Five, sorry.

Thank you for that correction, Minister. It is five.

So again, the question still remains: What do these outreach presentations look like?

And the last performance measure, percentage of users satisfied with the Labour Department services, is 85 percent. Similar to a previous question I asked, why [is it] not 100 per cent? What are some of the reasons for client dissatisfaction or users' dissatisfaction? I think I know some of the answers, but I would like to hear it from the Minister himself.

**The Chairman:** Member, we have just gone past the third hour mark, so we have just under an hour remaining in this debate.

**Mr. Vance Campbell:** I have no more questions, and I believe one of my colleagues has some questions. So, I think there should be—

**The Chairman:** I will put it to the floor. Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak on Heads 44, 14, 27, 29, 16, 94 and 99?

I recognise the Member from constituency 10. Member, you have the floor.

**Mr. Robert King:** Thank you, Madam Chairman, Members of the House, and the listening public.

[Honourable Member] Vance already went through quite a few of these, so I have got to get the ones that [were] not.

Looking at [page] B-174 performance measures, business unit 54060, Administration—

**The Chairman:** On which page, Member?

**Mr. Robert King:** [Page] B-174.

So, regarding Administration, what accounted for the 20 per cent reduction? Staff and budget seemed to be okay. What were the specific initiatives? As we are looking for the Throne Speech initiatives, it went down from 100 [per cent] to 80 per cent, so I am wondering what accounted for that.

**The Chairman:** Okay.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**The Chairman:** Do you accept the point of clarification? Yes.

Minister?

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** On [page] B-174 under business unit 54064, Administration percentage of Throne Speech initiatives during the fiscal year and the targeted outcome for 2026/27 is 100 [per cent].

**The Chairman:** Yes.

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** I do not see a decrease.

**The Chairman:** No, it is actually an increase. They are looking to target 100 per cent, and maybe that is the question you meant to ask.

**Mr. Robert King:** Regarding 54201, Immigration Appeals Tribunals, what were the majority of them for, and what were the two outstanding tribunals in relation to?

[On page] B-176, current account estimates, regarding Training, what accounts for the increase and low budget QPS *[sic]*?

Regarding professional services, what is preventing the training of staff to do those jobs?

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam—

**The Chairman:** I recognise the Minister. Minister, you have the floor.

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** I do not. I am not familiar with the term QPS.

**The Chairman:** Yes.

Member, would you like to explain what you mean by that just so that your question can be answered?

**Mr. Robert King:** Just in the interest of time, I am going to go to Career Development, and that is on [page] B-192.

**The Chairman:** [Page]192?

**Mr. Robert King:** Performance measures.

**The Chairman:** Okay.

**Mr. Robert King:** And it is under Head 60.

**The Chairman:** Under Head 60?

**Mr. Robert King:** Yes.

**The Chairman:** And which business unit?

**Mr. Robert King:** That is under Workforce Development.

**The Chairman:** Yes. Which business unit, 70014?

**Mr. Robert King:** Well, I have got 7000 *[sic]* Administration.

**The Chairman:** Okay.

**Mr. Robert King:** Client feedback surveys. How many were conducted? What was the satisfaction rating, and what was the primary complaint?

[For] 70014 you have already answered that. Questions . . . How many Bermudians were successfully placed into jobs through the workforce development programmes in the period from 2025 to 2026? And how many remained employed 12 months or more? And what percentage of programme participants remain employed 12 months after placement?

Those are my questions. Thank you.

**The Chairman:** Okay, Member.

Are there any other persons who wish to speak to the Heads 44, 14, 27, 29, 60, 94, and 99?

I recognise the Member from constituency 30. Member, you have the floor.

**Mr. Dwayne Robinson:** Thank you so much, Madam Chairman. I will be very quick in the interest of time. I just wanted to go to [page] B-172 on the department objectives.

Number two mentions the Youth Employment Strategy and the Workforce Development Strategy. I just wanted to know how much funding in this fiscal year has been allocated to those two strategies? What line item can we view that under in this Budget Book? And also, why there are not any KPIs available for these two specific line items listed for these specific line items?

Thank you.

**The Chairman:** He was looking at the objectives on page B-172, and he was wondering under what line items when you are talking about . . .

You got it, Minister? Were you clear on what he was asking? Okay.

Go ahead. You have the floor.

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** I will start with that question first. I believe the Member is looking under the Ministry while the funding will be placed on the Department of Workforce Development, and we can actually point him to where that funding will be associated with the line item underneath Department of Workforce Development rather than the Ministry of Economy and Labour.

But I will now begin to answer the litany of questions that were actually asked by the Shadow [Minister]. A lot of the questions that were actually asked were in the budget brief, and we went into great detail, especially when we talked about fluctuation of salaries. For each head I explained, and I outlined why there were fluctuations of salaries. And for each head he asked: Why were there fluctuation in salaries?

I will repeat that. I do not know if it is worth me rereading my entire brief. It is a general premise that there was an increase in the wages and salaries of public service employees through their negotiations, and as a result there is a general increase. Where there are additional increases is where we plan to fill vacancies within the department, and I had indicated for each one of those departments where we were in the recruitment process and where we seek to fill vacancies.

Where the increase is much larger than the percentage increase, most times we prorated it because we understand that those positions would not be filled at the beginning of that particular period. So that covers most of the salary questions across the board. But then I will answer specific ones that have a little bit of a nuance, such as whether or not a department has a full complement of staff, which was actually asked.

There was a question under Ministry Headquarters regarding the increase in the Training budget. Those funds were to build capacity in the Ministry as a whole. And those funds will reflect on training for senior manager training.

When we look at the cuts in Travel that were actually asked, those cuts in Travel were so that we can have cost savings in other areas. And so, what you find is that not all of the justifications or fluctuations in the budget are solely because we intend to reduce services

or increase services. Some of it is because we were faced with a budget ceiling. We needed additional funds to fund [the] census and other things, and we had to find that capacity within our Ministry. And so, we did streamline by looking at how we can cut.

So not every time there is an adequate justification as pertains to . . . We have identified less travel, or we have identified more travel. And then you see the increases and decreases. Some of it balances out because we had to find additional funding to support our actual priorities, and that is a reflection of that. When you see these little, small, little cuts sometimes, especially if you see Advertising and Promotion, there is probably a shave and cut because you wanted to increase funds in an area that needed the actual funds, and you recognise that you had a bit of capacity.

When it comes to Advertising and Promotion, though, we did recognise that we did have a surplus as it pertains to the amount of money that we actually spent. And so that gave us an opportunity to revise that down when we looked at the initiatives that we would have executed on. But the Ministry has advertising and promotion, and then each department has a small bit of advertising and promotion. And we recognised that a lot of the advertising and promotion we were receiving was coming through the Department of Communication and Information [DCI], and they have a budget for that as well. And so, that was an area in which we can actually shave.

When you look at the Registry General department, there was a question regarding the local consultants or the professional service increase by \$9,000 for local consultants, and that was kind of a offset for the increase in personal services [and] reflects estimated costs of legislative work to be done by the Registry General where existing Acts will be repealed and replaced, and this [is a] major exercise.

So, if you ask for the specific work, we talked a lot about ensuring that we improve our IP [Intellectual Property registration]. We have a lot of IP [registration] that will be coming down the pipeline, and as a result, those increases will reflect the cost associated with getting a professional to do that particular work. Because those are robust, we do not fully rely on Chambers to do the work as it pertains to those, and we do not have the in-house capacity for those.

[Regarding] the question regarding B-1572 [sic], the performance of the Immigration Appeals Tribunal, the existing legislation does not allow us to close out matters where there has been a non-respondent from persons who have submitted an appeal. So, we will be bringing a legislative amendment to allow us to close out these matters, and you will no longer see those two appeals remain on the performance indicator. Over the years you will see that there are constantly two matters. We have zero set now for the next fiscal year because we want to sort that out via legislation.

There was a question as it pertains to the Immigration Appeals Tribunal: What were the appeals?

And what were the outstanding appeals? And what were they related to? All of them pertain to residency.

There was a general question regarding the census. Why was it not under . . . There are two line items: one for monthly and annual, and then one for non-annual surveys. The Member indicated that he would have thought that the bulk of the census funding should have been under the second line item. The funding is split between those two line items, but just for consistency, that is where the 2026 census funding was placed, under that top line item. And so, as a result of that, that is where the bulk of the money was replaced. There is no real justification as to why it did not fall underneath the second line item rather than the first.

[On page] B-175, when we talked about the business unit, Has there been a redistribution between admin and surveys? There has been no redistribution of that business unit. There is a filling of previously vacant posts with substantive employees. So, temporary additionals are being moved into the census cost centres, and they were previously in the household income and expenditure survey. So that is just a shift in resources from the household income and expenditure survey to work on the census. So, there is no real distribution, but it is a reflection of where we are now putting the resources to execute on the surveys.

A question was asked [about] whether or not the \$59,000 in 24055, Census and Surveys, is due to the 2026 census. This mainly includes the filling of a previously vacant post.

Regarding [page] B-1275 [sic] expenditure, there was a decrease of overseas consultant for the household expenditure survey not being done this year. So let me just explain the process we are in. Right now, with the household income and expenditure survey, we have completed the field work. And as a result, the only thing that is required is data entry and analysis. And the funds now have been shifted to the consultant who will be doing work on the analysis. We did not need the consultant during the data collection phase, and so that is why you see the shift in that particular budget item. And that is \$100,000 to cover the fees of the consultancy work that is actually required to analyse the household income and expenditure data.

Again, there was a question regarding [page] B-176, both salary increases. There were two factors. Number one was an increase in full-time equivalents as the Department of Statistics had been recruiting, and [there was] the wage uplift. So, the combination of that increases their salary line item.

Professional service increased \$479,000. Can you provide details on the consultancy? What is that for? And so, all of the consultancy work related to the census is the management of the census field work, which is required for conducting census interviews. And so, you can bring in a number of temporary staff and interviewers. And those individuals need to be managed, and the entire census need to be coordinated by professionals.

The material and supplies increase of \$59,000. That is also related to the preparation of the census. I know the Member did ask even as [it] pertains to the capital whether or not that was the total cost featured under capital or whether there is a combination of costs that have already been spent, and I will say that most definitely we had budgeted funds in [the] last fiscal period to begin the census prep work. And then we will continue with this budgetary period as well.

There was a question regarding [page] B-177 when we looked at the performance measures under 24019—95 per cent coverage of households. Then it says, especially for population and housing census coverage, 95 per cent is kind of the practical standard. You know that you are not going to get every single household, and for various reasons you are going to have five per cent of the households you are just not going to be able to reach. And so, we have a realistic target of 95 per cent.

When we look at page B-177 under business unit 24025 Core Annual Surveys, there was a question regarding the performance measures there. And it was a question regarding the response rate for these publications. Especially when we look at response rates, we look at what is the best practice regarding adequate sample sizes and adequate sample responses from a Department of Statistics standpoint. We recognise we do not get 100 per cent response rates, but we are looking to improve our response rates as best as we possibly can.

And where we had benchmarks that were set a little bit too high, we readjusted it based off of the practicability of receiving the responses. The vast majority of this requires external persons to submit surveys back to the Department of Statistics. And where persons fail to do so, that means that we are unable to receive 100 per cent response rates. And we know that, for whatever various reasons, people are not providing responses to all of the surveys that the Department of Statistics actually sends out.

It is a requirement by law. But we have not on a wholesale level fully moved into penalising companies or providing any sort of legal penalty to companies. I think that that is something we want to take a less punitive approach [to]. We want to ensure that we get buy-in from the business community and they focus on providing us with accurate and reliable data rather than us having this adversarial relationship. But where there are companies that we find to be flagrant or persons have large companies that have a huge economic impact and they are reluctant to provide the data, then certainly we will move forward with enforcement measures where appropriate.

Which performance measures drive publishing of statistical data? There is no explicit measure around the publishing of outputs, but all published outputs are constrained by the department's objectives, our publication calendar, and external best practices for the timing of releases. And so generally across the board we

are able to make a proper assessment and gauge as it pertains to the publishing of data. We want to ensure that we have data out in a timely manner.

There are methodological best practices that are in our data collection manuals. For example, like the system on national accounts, you would have international best practices in terms of the timeliness of those particular data, and so we do follow this. But we try to at the beginning of every year put out a statistical calendar and adhere to it.

When we look at the capital, the \$100,000 for the Census, we initially had developed a 2016 system for the census, and so those additional funds will be to upgrade that existing platform. And so, there was no need for us to go out and get a new platform. The platform that we had just needed to be upgraded, and that is why you see the \$100,000. The \$100,000 is not the total spend on the platform. It is a combination of the old platform plus the upgrades that are required to make it ready for the 2026 census.

When the individual talked about the merger of the two sections within the Department of Immigration, that is correct. There are no gaps in service. What we want to do is ensure that [in] the Professional Services and Corporate Services we have more cross training that happens within the teams. If you keep them in separate line items, then there is kind of these silo approaches to the way in which we do work, but if they are both responsible for processing applications, then if you merge them, then you do not create these team silos [where] somebody says: *I work in Corporate* or, *I work in Professional*. You can then have more cross-trained staff.

The \$79,000 in the increase of the Compliance budget is mainly due to increment increases of senior immigration inspectors. And so those persons would see increment increases on top of the salary increases that they receive. So, it is kind of like a double increase that will multiply the uplift.

You asked, Is the salary increase on [page] B-179 due to salary uplifts and some part-time staffing costs? And the answer is yes; that is correct.

I just want to make it clear. While the line item is clothing, uniforms, and laundry, under no circumstance does the Department of Immigration engage laundry services.

In terms of Rentals, you asked for the increase in storage costs of \$20,000. Yes, that is for an increase in the storage of older files.

There were resident revenues for Residence Fees in 8293 of \$61,000. That is going to zero. You asked: Has the revenue been reclassified or is it the responsibility of another department? That revenue was associated with the one-year Work from Bermuda applications that was applied to that code, and that particular programme ceased in February 2025.

Under [page] B-179, the increase in budget [for] Status and Naturalisation. Why the increase? The increase is anticipated based on collection of revenue

received in the previous fiscal year, which was \$1.5 million, and the collection at the time the budget was prepared. And so, we just on an estimate in terms of . . . We looked at the trend as to how it was trending and so on. For no specific reason do we believe it will increase except for that is just the general trend as it pertains to how we observed the revenue in that area over the previous few years.

I believe I explained the question as it pertains to the anomaly regarding the one full-time compliance equivalent, the reduction but the additional salaries. The existing salaries is staff will receive more salaries even though there is a reduction of one.

You did ask several questions about part-time staff. And just to be clear, there are no part-time staff hired in the Department of Immigration. There are temporary additional staff, which you may refer to, but part-time staff would be staff that work less than 15 hours a week according to the Employment Act 2000.

**The Chairman:** I just want to inform the House that we have approximately 30 minutes remaining for this debate.

You may continue, Minister.

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** You asked the question regarding the business unit 37030, Illegal Work Investigations: Why is it going from three to six months? [We] should be looking for full-time equivalents and compliance to bring down the processing times. And so, coordinated interviews for statements have proven to take longer. Sometimes people are not available on the dates that the investigating officer proposes, so rather than over promise and under deliver, the change from three to six months was more realistic.

You asked the question regarding business unit 37040 Finance and Administration on page B-182. You asked whether or not 15 vacant posts were filled last year. Is that accurate? And we were able to successfully fill 18 vacant posts.

You asked the question regarding performance measures on how to fill positions development plan monitoring. Does this mean that more than half of the five out of nine falls into this category? The chief immigration officer recently met with the talent manager partner team and identified six posts that are critical and hard to fill and that will require succession and development plans as it pertains to that particular question.

You asked, What was the impetus behind the creation of the application process section? I believe I explained that, but what we want to see is increased training of staff. And we want to see a reduction in the backlog of applications. And if we have more persons that can process different application types, that will assist us with the efficient processing of applications.

You asked regarding capital, the acquisition the \$1,000,000. The \$1,000,000 only includes

digitisation. It does not include multiple projects, and so that is solely for the digitisation project.

Regarding the Registry General under [page] B-184, provide the reason for the increase under the business unit 39000 of \$21,000. Is this a salary increase? The increase in 39000 is for salaries and training for charities in terrorist financing risk.

You asked the question regarding the \$80,000 increase under business unit 30920 on page B-184. The \$80,000 uplift is in salaries. Again, that will follow the general line and length for salaries, but then in Births, Marriages, and Deaths [there was an] increase of \$60,000. And why? And that is the increased cost of speciality paper for printing. You asked what was included in the \$60,000 increase for 39030, and that is salaries, printing, courier services, [and] credit card commission fees, which continue to rise.

You asked about the increase in salaries [of] \$89,000 in the full-time equivalents property registration, and that is due to uplift in salaries as well.

You asked regarding, on page B-186, the revenue line item 8325, the Trade Marks, that increased by \$122,000. You just generally made a comment that you were pleased to see where we have passed legislation, and you can see revenue associated with that pass. Understood.

Okay. Here is a genuine question [on page] B-186. Certified Copies increased \$26,000 over the original 2025/26. Why the large increase? There has just been an increase in demand of requested certified copies of passport deeds for various other reasons, whether it be passport deeds and other overseas documents. And so, we have actually witnessed an increased demand that has allowed us to increase that item.

You asked about the increase in maritime marriages. Yes, they do continue to arise as we have an expansion of cruise calls as well. You would see that there are certain marriages associated with certain cruise calls. But then, Bermuda is a destination where persons still come and have a beautiful wedding on the Gem of the Atlantic.

You asked me to confirm on page B-186 the full-time equivalents of 22 positions for 2026/27. Five are currently vacant, and three were filled in the current year. You asked me whether or not to confirm that, and the answer to your question is yes.

You asked the question on page B-187 with the unit 39010 regarding Intellectual Property [IP] registration. You asked about the one month from the date of receipt. You said it seems to be a long time in terms of whether or not that is industry standard as it pertains to the length of time that it is actually taking. I am being informed that, yes, from the Registry General department, that is the industry standard. The industry standard differs when you talk about technical industries. And so, the Registry General is viewed as a technical industry, and there is a great deal of scrutinisation so that we can ensure that there is accuracy in our

correspondence, especially when it comes to IP rights and other protected areas. And so, there is investigation and scrutinisation required, and it is not just a blanket answer you can provide at times.

You asked on [page] C-12 the \$164,000, the capital acquisition for Trade Marks and that is for a new IPAS system that we are in the process of acquiring. And that . . . Yes. That is the full amount of money that will be . . . Correct.

There were questions asked under Workforce Development, which is here at 60. And we start to talk about business on page B-189 business unit 6001 General Administration, 70000, the increase of \$103,000 in the budget. The increase was due to salaries, rent, and digital literacy training.

I just want to generally say you asked a number of questions regarding the rent and the electricity so DWD is moving out of government building, and they will be moving into the Bermuda College facility which is administered by the Bermuda College. And as a result, rent would have to be paid for that particular facility. They no longer have an independent electricity bill because they will be on the Bermuda College campus. As a result, [there] is a reduction in the electricity costs associated with the move.

You asked a question regarding the 6003 Career Development increase of \$101[,000]. Can we have an explanation? We had vacant posts which are being filled as well as increase in salary.

You asked on page B-190 as it pertains the increase of \$193,000. Is it due to salary uplifts? And DWD has confirmed that your answer is indeed correct.

The increase of \$13,000 in Travel budget. Is this for apprentices to travel overseas? No. This is for staff to travel overseas to workforce offices located on college campuses. So, it is this unique thing happening now as it pertains to the opportunities that arise of having a workforce development centre on a college campus. They are featured on college campuses in some areas in other territories. And so, it would be good for the staff to go away and see how the integration of a workforce development centre and a community college actually works so that we can maximise the advantage we can provide to the job seekers of Bermuda.

You asked about professional services and the increase on [page] B-190. You asked, What does that relate to? And that relates to the increase of hiring professionals to conduct staff training.

You actually got in the \$15,000 reduction in Grants and Contribution that relates to National Certification Training. What was the explanation? We just re-allocated those funds to other programmes, but there has not been a reduction in the overall funding of programmes.

You asked for a breakdown on [page] C-19 regarding the \$400,000 in grants under Scholarships. How many scholarships does this equate to? What is the average amount for the scholarships? The average scholarship for overseas is \$10,000, and we give out

35 scholarships. And for local, it is up to \$5,000, and it varies based off of the programme.

You asked a question regarding 7095 Apprenticeship Scheme, Is the amount for payment of wages for apprenticeships that have been taken on by businesses? It is both for wages and education. It does not mean that the department pays 100 per cent for wages and education of our apprentices. That is worked out with an employer. But at times we pay partial wages, and at times we pay to fund education.

You asked a number of questions regarding why these numbers are discontinued. I did just have general conversations as to how we can modernise our performance framework, and so this is us modernising our performance framework. So, we discontinued some items and then initiated with some new items that we believe were more practical to operational effectiveness.

So, if you look at the new measures, they focus on broader outcomes, such as training participation, certification success, and workforce readiness. I know [MP] King asked for a number of items rather than when we do place individuals or if we have tracked them over a 12-month period of time. That is something we are working on doing, and we are going to get better at the long-term tracking of persons that we actually train and connect with industry. And so that is something we will endeavour to get better at. But we are not there yet where we can say we trained 500 individuals, and as a result 40 per cent of those individuals got jobs, and then 12 months later those persons are still employed. That is a matrix that we will want to track at a later date, and we are simply not there yet.

You asked a question regarding business unit 70015 Certification, percentages of certifications awarded. Does that mean that 35 per cent of those taking the certification successfully passed? And the answer is no. The measure refers to the percentages of individuals who ultimately receive certification through a particular programme rather than a simple pass or fail. Certification is competency based, meaning candidates have to demonstrate that they meet industry standards before certification. Certification is not just to pass candidates but to ensure persons meet professional and safety standards required.

You asked the question on page B-193 regarding business unit 70016. All of the performance measures [are] discontinued. Explain why. I talked about the evolution of our performance measures.

As it pertains to career development on percentages of clients with complete PEPs, [why is it] 75 per cent? The 75 per cent is a realistic measure based on client engagement due to either not competing or disengaging with the programmes. And so, the department continues to support follow-up with clients to ensure they complete their PEPs. And just for understanding, those will be able-bodied persons on financial assistance. We put the personal employment plans in place and so there could be some other wrap-around

services that are required as well for even sustained training and development of those individuals.

You asked about why the 15 per cent could not report improved skills after training. There are a number of reasons why persons may not feel that they have improved. They might have not fully grasped the information the first time and may need some additional training to improve their skills. Also, if you go into a programme and you believe that you are at a certain competency and the programme, you feel, is beneath you, when you [are asked], *Have you improved my skills?* You say, *No; I already knew that.*

Moving on to Department of Economic Development. The EDD has split out the grants specifically for BDA and BEDC out of Workforce Development, and you see that reflected. I think that is better reporting. It is more transparent. It was lumped into Administration in the past, and those are for quangos and the BDA. And they have their own initiatives. They have their own performance measures. They have their own annual reports.

There were a number of questions pertaining to EDD as it pertains to the fluctuation in the numbers and the reduction of numbers regarding EDD. I did indicate that EDD is currently going under a full review, and as a result of that, that has kind of further progressed as it pertains to hiring staff and vacancies until that review is actually done, which means that also it is a reduction of overall programming until the review is actually done as well. And so, that is why you see across the board decreases. Because we knew that EDD is somewhat in a transitional pause period, we were able to utilise the funds out of EDD and reallocate them back into the Ministry.

You asked for the work permit exemption increase. That is to do with the [Incentives for] Job Makers Act, and so no work permit fees are underneath the EDD. Those are to do with the specific items in the Economic Development Act related to job makers applications. I mean maybe the appropriate title should reflect job makers, but it equates to work permit exemption.

You asked, on page B-196, about revenue, the \$790,000 increase and what was driving it. We do see increased sales and resales of tourism accommodations. That is what is largely driving that, and so those are an increasing of sales regarding high value property as well as tourist accommodations.

You asked a question regarding the full-time equivalents regarding EDD and the vacancies. Four were filled. Three are under recruitment. And the intention [is] to fill the vacant post in the next fiscal year. The EDD is currently recruiting to fill vacant posts progressively. At this point in time, you were correct when you said there is no business partner. As a result, that is why that measure is now zero. And that is actually correct. There is no business partner.

It is the same with [the] target under the Concierge. The Concierge Services that we were providing in EDD are no longer existing in EDD. We are kind of

utilising the BDA to assist with the concierge function at this point in time. And that will be re-evaluated after we do the department review.

We [were] asked a question regarding the Labour Department and when the move took place. The move took place on the 9th of February 2026, and so that is a fresh move. The \$208,000 rent is a combination of the \$116,900 per year in rent and the \$19,000 per year in service charge. But what is important about the Department of Labour moving into its own space [is] if you now have to have a tribunal, we have much better facilities for conducting tribunal hearings. We have many more rooms for mediation to take place. We have breakout rooms for when parties within a tribunal need to caucus as well. The department, if you look at it, is split into two, and it has two signs up. The Employment and Labour Relations Tribunal has its section, and the employment . . . the Administrator of the Tribunal actually is in that section. And in the other section you will find the Department of Labour in earnest. And there are a number of boardrooms and things of that nature. And so, it is a better space, and we will be able to conduct multiple tribunals at one point in time, ensure that we have the efficient running of tribunals, and not have to share rooms with other departments, and things of that nature.

Again, I answered the question. You asked a question regarding part-time staff. No. There is no part-time staff. What we did use is . . . we were able to utilise temporary release from other departments who were seconded into the department until we were able to fill those vacancies.

You asked the question: Will it be anticipated that the Labour Department will be up to full staff in May 2026? We have our fingers crossed that yes, we are actively recruiting, and that is a target we have set.

[Regarding] the presentations you asked about, the department offers seminars, workshops, and presentations to employers and workers' groups as well as individuals to educate, reduce employment and wage related complaints, and ensure workers and employers feel supported. We also work in conjunction with other government departments such as [the] Department of Workforce Development as it pertains to employee rights seminars [and] the Learn Through Experience Hospitality Programme. And so, we will partner [to] ensure that people know their rights according to law and that we can clarify areas within law for both employers and employees.

You asked about the 85 per cent satisfaction. Why not 100 per cent? We believe 85 per cent is a realistic measure and is an increase from the 75 per cent that we said.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Misaligned expectations . . . And so, you may walk in thinking that the department is going to provide one service for you, for example. Or

the department is going to provide a compliance function for you, when the department is there to mediate between parties.

Sometimes you want an advocate to take your side. And so, imagine being wrongfully terminated or feeling as though you have been wrongfully terminated. You walk into the Department of Labour, and then they investigate whether or not you are wrongfully terminated. You would leave with some level of satisfaction. You want an advocate that is going to get you your job back, and that is not always their function. Their function is to look at the matter objectively, determine what rights you have under the law, determine whether or not there was a breach, and then if there is a breach then refer you, if they cannot sort it out through mediation and conciliation, to our tribunal.

If you just want somebody to go in there and get you back employed, then sometimes there is a misalignment of expectation.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Miscellaneous. You asked about the Throne Speech initiatives completed, and again we clarified that we complete our Throne Speech initiatives in the Ministry of Economy and Labour. Yes, and we put out an annual report highlighting the valuable work that we provide to the public.

**The Chairman:** Minister there are three minutes remaining before this debate ends.

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, I think I have covered 98 per cent of the questions asked, and I think the other two per cent was a statement.

**The Chairman:** Yes. I think you have. Because there is some time and it will take just under a minute for the Minister to move his Heads.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak on this budget debate for the Ministry of Economy and Labour?

There being none, Minister, you may proceed to move your Heads.

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chair I move Heads 44, 14, 27, 29, 60, 94 and 99 be approved as printed.

**The Chairman:** It has been moved that Heads 44, 14, 27, 29, 60, 94 and 99 be approved.

Are there any objections to that?

There are none. So approved.

*[Motion carried: The Ministry of Economy and Labour, Heads 44, 14, 27, 29, 60, 94 and 99 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2026/27.]*

**The Chairman:** Minister, can you close us out?

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, I move that the committee rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again.

**The Chairman:** It has been moved that the committee rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again.

Are there any objections to that?

There are none. So, moved.

[Gavel]

[Motion carried: The Committee of Supply rose and reported progress and sought leave to sit again.]

[Pause]

**House resumed at 9:00 pm**

[Hon. Dennis P. Lister, Jr., Speaker, in the Chair]

## REPORT OF COMMITTEE

### COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

#### ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2026/27

**The Speaker:** Members, are there any objections to the Committee of the Supply rising and reporting back to the House?

There are none. Good.

Members, that concludes the major debate for today. We will now move on to the next item that is down for debate this evening, and it is [Order] No. 3, the second reading of the Employment Amendment Act 2026, in the name of the Minister of Economy and Labour, who just completed his debate this afternoon.

Minister.

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill entitled the Employment Amendment Act 2026 be now read a second time.

**The Speaker:** [Are there] any objections?

There are none.

Continue, Minister.

## BILL

### SECOND READING

#### EMPLOYMENT AMENDMENT ACT 2026

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce in the Honourable House today a Bill entitled the Employment Amendment Act 2026 which provides for the introduction of parental leave entitlement for employees upon the expected placement or placement of

a child under the age of 24 months within the household through adoption or legal guardianship.

Mr. Speaker, adoptive parents and legal guardians assume the same caregiving responsibilities as biological parents and require adequate leave to care for and bond with an infant upon placement within the household. Early bonding between a child and their caregiver is essential in fostering healthy emotional, psychological, and social development, and leave entitlements play a crucial supporting role in helping this connection.

Mr. Speaker, the Employment Act 2000, the principal Act, provides for the grant of maternity and paternity leave to birth parents, but does not include a statutory entitlement that grants leave for adoptive parents or a legal guardian who assumes the same responsibilities for an infant.

Therefore, the Government of Bermuda undertook to ensure that the amendments to the principal Act afforded the same benefits and protections to persons who become parents through adoption or legal guardianship.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill is grounded in the principle of fairness, child welfare, and international best practice while supporting families and enhancing employee well-being.

Mr. Speaker, to ensure the equitable treatment of adoptive parents and legal guardians in relation to leave entitlements, this Bill mirrors the current provisions for maternity and paternity leave in the principal Act.

Women who are eligible for parental leave will be entitled to 13 weeks of paid leave if they have been employed for one year at the time of the placement of the infant, and unpaid [leave] otherwise. Men will be entitled to five consecutive days' [paid] leave if they have been employed for over one year at the time of the placement of the infant, and unpaid [leave] otherwise.

Mr. Speaker, parental leave is not simply a workplace entitlement; it is a vital investment in the well-being of our workforce and in the long-term health and stability of our society. And this Bill seeks to give meaningful effect to the principal Act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Thank you, Minister.

Does any other Member wish to make a comment this evening?

MP Campbell, you have the floor.

**Mr. Vance Campbell:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Minister for bringing this Bill, and we on this side, the One Bermuda Alliance, do agree with this Bill in general. Although we do have some issues with some of the clauses, which we will raise in Committee.

Mr. Speaker, being someone who has adopted a young child, I have seen first-hand what stability means. You can see an immediate change in the

attitude and the countenance of a young child when they know they are in a stable situation, especially one who has moved from foster family to foster family. So, I cannot stress [enough] the importance of having the time to spend with the child that you have adopted.

So, it has my support. And as I said, we do have some questions around . . . there is support in general around the leave, but we do have some questions on some of the clauses which we will raise in Committee.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Thank you, Honourable Member.  
Does any other . . . MP Pearman.

**Mr. Scott Pearman:** Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

As the substantive Shadow Minister has pointed out, the Opposition is supportive of the intention of this Bill.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Mr. Scott Pearman:** Well, I hear the Premier saying, “but.” But, actually, there are some technical problems with it.

And whilst we are very happy to raise those in Committee, I do want to just flag a few in General Debate. Because I think if these technical mistakes were fixed, then the Bill would probably pass with our support. And it may well be that the Minister, having heard the points made, may wish to rise and report on it.

There are five points to be made. The biggest one, however, is that the Bill, as provided for at the moment, is discriminatory. And the reason why it is discriminatory is that the Bill envisages adoption by a two-parent family. But if the adoption is not by a two-parent family, if it is solely by a single parent, the situation, as currently created by this Bill, is that a single mother who is adopting would have 13 weeks of leave. Whereas a single father who is adopting would only have five days.

I am sure that is not what the Government intends here. And that has been corrected in other jurisdictions, not by dealing with it in gender terms, but by dealing with it through the concepts of primary care and secondary care.

And so, if the Government wished to rise and report on that and just amend that, I think it would eliminate the discrimination. Because at the moment, it is not right that a male single father gets five days and a female single mother gets 13 weeks. And I am sure that is not what the Government intended to do.

Whilst we are looking at some technical points, there are a couple more that I respectfully suggest the Government may wish to think again on.

The next one is at clause 3, [new section 16B](3).

**An Hon. Member:** And this is the general debate—

**Mr. Scott Pearman:** And this is for general debate, and so—

**An Hon. Member:** —but you can’t refer to the clauses.

**Mr. Scott Pearman:** I am trying to give the Minister the benefit of this opportunity before we get to Committee. And—

**The Speaker:** You can talk in general, but you cannot address the individual clause.

**Mr. Scott Pearman:** No problem, I am happy to do that.

At the moment, as it currently stands, there is an inconsistency internally within the Bill about the period of time with which it is triggered from the date of the order for adoption. One [clause] of the Bill deals with 14 weeks. Another [clause] of the Bill deals with 12 months. And those two periods seem inconsistent. If the order, for example, was on the 1st of January, 14 weeks would be by the 9th of April. Whereas, obviously, if the order was on the 1st of January and it is 12 months, that is by the 31st of December.

Again, I will not refer to the [clause] numbers. And I am grateful to my colleague, Michael Fahy, for pointing out this one. But what happens if you get the adoption order and you are adopting from abroad? And the adoption order is again on the 1st of January, but that child does not actually arrive on Island until a later date. The period is already running, and the child may not even be on Island at that point.

The fourth of five is a similar point, again by my colleague MP Fahy. This deals with children who are [under] the age of 24 months. And so, what would the situation be if the order took effect before the child, the infant, was 24 months? The current Bill uses the word “placement.” Of course, the placement could be after the 24 months. So again, that is another point that might just require a little bit of modification or tweaking.

And finally, and this is a point I can see why the Government could take a decision it did. But it is curious why we have taken 24 months. It does seem a little incongruous that if you adopt a two-year-old, you get a period of leave, which we fully support. But if it is a three-year-old, you are not eligible for that same leave.

And so, with those just general points, we would like to support this Bill. And it may well be that those tweaks could be modified here before the Bill proceeds to the Senate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

[Does] any other Member wish to make a contribution?

MP Lister.

**Mr. Dennis Lister III:** Good evening, Mr. Speaker, or good night, I should say, Mr. Speaker, and good night to the listening audience.

Mr. Speaker, I stand tonight to give support to this amendment being brought by the Minister.

I will declare my interest, Mr. Speaker. My wife is near to being due, so this does impact—

**The Speaker:** Near due?

**Mr. Dennis Lister III:** Yes, this does impact me, Mr. Speaker.

*[Desk thumping and inaudible interjections]*

**Mr. Dennis Lister III:** So, Mr. Speaker, I just want to lend support to this Bill. I think it is a commonsense Bill to have this amendment extend the period for other maternity or paternity leave. Also noting what MP Pearman said, it could be primary or secondary, but I trust that the Minister will be guided in his judgment on how he amends or makes any amendments to this wording. But again, this is commonsense for a soon-to-be (expecting) new father, those—

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Mr. Dennis Lister III:**—those first days of a child's life, it is very important for a parent, whether it be a male parent or a female parent, to build those foundations and bonds with their child. Yes, the period might be longer for a mother. But I think that it is commonsense. As it is, she is a primary caregiver, so her having 16 weeks is understandable . . . 13 weeks, is understandable compared to the man. But I think it is commonsense to extend this period for new expecting parents or people adopting, so they have time to bond with their child, build that relationship, and strengthen it before they have to go back to work.

So, Mr. Speaker, as I said, I just declare my interest as a new soon-to-be (expecting) father, and for any soon-to-be (expecting) parent, father, or mother, or again, a parent who is adopting, they can look forward to having that time.

So, Mr. Speaker, just shortly, I want to just give my support to this.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Mr. Dennis Lister III:** Just wanted to give my support to this Bill from the Minister and show support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution

None other?

Minister.

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Mr. Speaker, to categorise this Bill as discriminatory is unfortunate. We currently have maternity and paternity leave in law. We are simply

mirroring the provisions that are currently in law. If there is an argument that fathers should get the same time as mothers, whether they be biological or adop-tive, that's a matter for another conversation. But cer-tainly, to mirror the provisions in law and extend them to persons who legally adopt [individuals]. What you would end up doing is creating an inequity between biological parents and parents who are actually legal guardians to a child. I do not think we want to go down that road. But to classify this as discriminatory is really unfortunate.

I think the Opposition can clearly see that what we are doing is mirroring provisions that actually currently exist. And because we are mirroring, we are honouring the fact that the father of a child gets five days off and the mother of a child gets the 13 weeks off, we are extending that to adoption and legal guardianship. This is something that is positive; it is a progression and a step forward.

I do not think that we are there from a policy standpoint. I did have a Member of the Opposition write to me and ask me regarding that particular matter, and I said that that will be subject to future policy work, whether or not we progress the rights of fathers to equate to the rights of mothers. We know that in some other societies they do it. And in a lot of societies there is still a difference between the rights that are given to a mother and a father, and that is something that we can certainly consider at a later date.

But this Bill simply mirrors the existing provisions, and if we were not to mirror the existing provisions, we would actually give more rights to adoptive parents than to biological parents.

There were questions regarding timing and nuances and things of that nature. There are going to be many what-ifs and a ton of scenarios that could be placed in front of us, which we would have to consider. But I do not believe that the law, as currently drafted, is flawed. We would have to work through those provisions. But during the 24-month period, we liaised with the Health Department, and they determined that the 24-month period was reasonable to extend leave for a child. And also, when we did the research, it was considered that the 14 weeks was considered an adequate period as well.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** No, there is the 14 weeks regarding the triggering of the process.

*[Inaudible interjections]*

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** I believe that we can deal with the other matters once we get into Committee, Mr. Speaker. So, I now move that the Bill be committed.

**The Speaker:** Deputy Speaker.

## House in Committee at 9:15 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

### COMMITTEE ON BILL

#### EMPLOYMENT AMENDMENT ACT 2026

**The Chairman:** Good night, Members.

We are in committee of the whole [House] for the Bill entitled the [Employment Amendment Act 2026](#). I call on the Minister in charge.

Minister, you have the floor.

[Pause]

**The Chairman:** We are just having a bit of technical difficulty, and the Minister will take to his feet once that matter has been resolved. Thank you.

[Pause]

**The Chairman:** Okay. I recognise the Minister of Economy and Labour.

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, I move clauses 1 through 7.

**The Chairman:** It has been moved that we consider clauses 1 through 7.

Are there any objections to that?

There are none.

Continue, Minister.

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, the Bill seeks to amend the Employment Act 2000 to provide for the introduction of parental leave entitlement to employees upon the expected placement or placement of a child under the age of 24 months within the household.

Clause 1 is self-explanatory.

Clause 2 amends section 5 (Meaning of “continuous employment”) to provide to ensure that employment is considered continuous during a period of parental leave.

Clause 3 inserts a new section 16B (parental leave) to provide for parental leave entitlement to employees upon the expected placement or placement of a child under the age of 24 months within the employee's household by way of adoption or legal guardianship. Leave entitlement may be paid or unpaid depending on the length of continuous employment.

Clause 4 amends section 20 (Notice periods) to provide that a notice period of termination cannot be given to an employee during a period of parental leave.

Clause 5 provides for a consequential amendment to the Payroll Tax Act 1995.

Clause 6 provides for a consequential amendment to the Tax Credits Act 2025.

Clause 7 provides that the Bill comes into operation on such day as the Minister appointed by notice published in the Gazette.

**The Chairman:** Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to clauses 1 through 7?

I recognise the Member from constituency 22. Member, you have the floor.

**Mr. Scott Pearman:** Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I raised some points in the general debate, but now we are in Committee, so I will be more specific. This is in relation to clause 3 [new section 16B](2)(a) and [new section 16B](2)(b). And there we use the expressions “mother” and “father” for leave in relation to adoption or legal guardianship. “Mother” appears at [clause 3, new section 16B](2)(a) at the top of page 2 of the Bill. “Father” appears at [clause 3, new section 16B](2)(b) in about the middle of page 2 of the Bill.

And the point that I am making is that whilst adoption in an ideal world or legal guardianship might be a two-parent family, a husband and a wife, or a father and a mother who may not be married, that is not always the case. Sometimes it is a single mother, and sometimes it is a single father who might be brave enough to embark upon adoption, or take the responsibility, which we recognise as important, of being a legal guardian. And in that context, it does not seem correct, and, indeed, as I have suggested, I believe it is discriminatory.

If there is a single mother who adopts, that single mother gets a period of 13 weeks. And yet, if there is a single father who adopts, that single father gets only a period of five days. And it is hard to see what is different between them other than their gender. And on that basis, that is direct discrimination on the basis of sex. And I, for one, cannot pass a Bill in this House or vote to support a Bill in this House where we are discriminating between a mother, a single mother, and a single father.

I appreciate the point the Minister makes that we are mirroring periods of leave. That is different. This is about the adoption of a child. And if you are a single father and you choose to adopt a child, you should have the same rights as an adoptive parent as an adoptive mother. And we should not discriminate against single fathers in this way.

And I would like to point out; it is a very easy fix. Do not use the words “mother” and “father” in the Bill. Use the words that are used in certain other jurisdictions, namely “primary care” and “secondary care.” And if we have that, the problem falls away. And so again, it is not a political trick, it is just a very simple thing. I invite the Government to rise and report and to make those changes so that we are not passing discriminatory legislation.

While I am on my feet, Madam Chairman, there were other points. They are far more minor than the point I have just made, but I'll make them very quickly for the benefit of the Minister with reference to the [clauses].

That is clause 3 [new section 16B](3) at page 2 of the Bill, which makes reference to a period of "fourteen weeks" from the date of the court order. Whereas down below at [clause] 3 [new section 16B](5), it refers to a period of 12 months from the date of the court order. And at the moment I do not understand why those two periods are different. Again, if the court order is made on the 1st of January, "fourteen weeks" would mean that you have until the 9th of April to take the parental leave under [clause] 3 [new section 16B](3).

In contrast, if the court order clause 3 [new section 16B](5) is made on the 1st of January, you have a "12-month period" to take parental leave. And I just don't understand why those two periods are different. There may well be a reason that I have not grasped.

Likewise, whilst it is perfectly proper for the Government to decide that it is a 24-month-old infant and below, it would be great to have an explanation from the Government as to why that is.

And I have raised two points in the general debate about the date of the order, if the child is being adopted from abroad. What would be the situation in relation to a child where the adoption occurs before 24 months, but the arrival of the child occurs after? Again, that is specifically due to the word "placement" that appears in the preamble to the Bill, which suggests that the placement is the trigger date.

And finally, before I take my seat, Madam Chairman, the other point in relation to the adoption is, What if the child is below 24 months on the date of the adoption but above 24 months when they arrive? Would the leave still exist in those circumstances?

I believe that the first point I have made is of sufficient importance that we should not pass this Bill and we should rise and report.

And I believe the other points identified could be easily fixed and corrected if we did rise and report. And again, I want to be very clear, the Opposition would like to support this Bill if it were corrected.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

**The Chairman:** Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to clauses 1 through 7?

There are none that I see at this time.

I call on the Minister.

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, I believe that on this particular matter, the Government and the Opposition have a difference of opinion.

And the simple response is that the Government seeks to mirror the leave entitlement and provisions that already exist within the law. And so, there is a distinction between the amount of time that a father

gets versus the amount of time that a mother gets, as it pertains to whether you are a biological parent of a child or an adoptive parent of a child.

If you are the biological father of a child, you get five days. I believe that it would be whole-heartedly unfair to give an adoptive father more than the amount of time you would give a father who is the legal guardian of that particular child. That is subject to another policy decision. And so, as a result of that, the Ministry will certainly endeavour to look into that matter further to see how we can increase provisions for fathers underneath the current Employment Act. But at this point in time, this seeks to achieve the aim of providing leave for individuals.

While one would say it is discriminatory, you know, under the law now, legal guardians are not afforded the right of leave. And this is a big step forward, rather than somebody viewing it as a tremendous step backwards. This is a big step forward as it pertains to the rights that we are providing adoptive and legal guardians. And so, I think it should be recognised that we are progressing employment rights and we are progressing a better environment for children, understanding that there is more work that needs to be done.

I clearly explained in the submission that we liaised with the Department of Health regarding the views on the child's age of 24 months. And we decided, or the Health Department advised that that would be the appropriate age.

And it is called . . . they looked at the critical *First 100 [sic] Days* of a child report and the critical period of the brain's development and forming attachments in their first 1,000 days. I am sorry, I said 100 days, but it is the first 1,000-day report. And they recognised that within their first two years of that 1,000 days it is a critical period. And as a result of that, that is why the days [numbering] 24 were chosen.

As it pertains to, Is there enough time for adoptive leave from overseas? The period of 14 weeks was considered adequate, even for adoptions overseas.

And so that is the response I had to the questions that were asked, Madam Chairman.

**The Chairman:** Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to clauses 1 through 7?

I recognise the Member from constituency 22 Member, you have the floor.

**Mr. Scott Pearman:** Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I am still at clause 3. The point that is being made is that this is not discriminatory because our current law allows for working fathers to have five days off for their own children. That is not the point. Those working fathers have a wife (or have the mother) who's had a child. This is about adoption by a single father. It is easily correctable simply by changing the language to primary care.

And on that basis, Madam Chairman, in accordance with Standing Order 32(15), I formally move that this House rise and report progress and invite a vote on the motion.

**The Chairman:** It has been moved that the House rise and report our progress.

Are there any objections to that motion?

Are there objections?

**Some Hon. Members:** Yes. Yes.

**The Chairman:** There are objections—

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** There is, definitely.

**The Chairman:** Okay.

Do we need to take a vote count?

**The Clerk:** Yes

**The Chairman:** We need to have three people rise to their feet if you wish a vote count or—

**Mr. Scott Pearman:** Names.

**The Chairman:** Okay, all right.

So, we will take a vote count.

*[Crosstalk]*

**The Chairman:** Members, we will have two minutes after the bell has been rung and the Clerk is looking at the two-minute time frame.

*[Pause for the ringing of the bell]*

**The Chairman:** I need all Members who are in Chambers in their respective seats before we do the vote count.

Thank you, and the door has been locked by the Sergeant-at-Arms and his assistant.

*[Crosstalk]*

**The Chairman:** So, the Clerk will begin the vote count.

**The Clerk:** Okay, Members, we are voting on the motion by the Honourable Member, Mr. Pearman, that the Committee rise and report progress on the amendment . . . or, I should say, the Employment Amendment [Act 2026].

So, those in favour will vote aye, and those opposed will vote nay.

#### DIVISION

*[Motion for Committee to rise and report progress on the Employment Amendment Act 2026]*

#### **Ayes: 8**

Mr. V. Campbell  
Hon. L. C. Cannonier  
Hon. M. Fahy  
Mr. R. King  
Mr. S. Pearman  
Mr. D. Robinson  
Hon. B. Smith  
Ms. R. Tucker

#### **Nays: 13**

Hon. J. Adams  
Hon. E. D. Burt  
Hon. O. Darrell  
Hon. Z. J. S. De Silva  
Hon. T. Furbert  
Hon. W. L. Furbert  
Hon. J. Hayward  
Mr. D. Lister III  
Hon. D. V. S. Rabain  
Mr. J. S. Simmons  
Mr. H. K. E. Swan  
Mr. N. S. Tyrrell  
Hon. M. A. Weeks

#### **Absent: 10**

Pastor L. Bean  
Dr. D. DeCouto  
Mr. C. L. Dickinson  
Mr. C. Famous  
Hon. A. Lightbourne  
Mr. J. Richardson  
Mr. W. L. Scott  
Mr. S. Simmons  
Ms. L. Smith  
Hon. K. N. Wilson

#### **Abstain: 3**

Rev. Dr. E. A. Dill  
Mrs. R. Ming  
Mr. P. Wilmot

**The Chairman:** The Nays have it. This vote is 13 Nays, 8 Ayes, and 3 abstentions [and 10 absent].

*[Motion defeated by majority on division. The motion for the Committee of the whole House to rise and report progress on the Employment Amendment Act 2026 failed.]*

**The Chairman:** Yes, Minister.

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, I move clauses 1 through 7 be approved.

**The Chairman:** It has been moved that clauses 1 through 7 be approved.

Are there any objections?

There are none.

*[Motion carried: Clauses 1 through 7 passed.]*

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, I move that the preamble be approved.

**The Chairman:** It has been moved that the preamble be approved.

[Are there] any objections to that? There are none.

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Madam Chairman, I move that the Bill be reported to the House as printed.

**The Chairman:** It has been moved that the Bill be reported to the House as printed.

Are there any objections to that?

**Some Hon. Members:** Yes.

**The Chairman:** There are objections.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**The Chairman:** Okay.

Yes, I do have to do that.

Those who agree with the objections?

None.

Those who say nay to his objection?

*[Laughter]*

**The Chairman:** Yes, I do know. But the objection is noted, but it does not—

**An Hon. Member:** It doesn't carry.

**The Chairman:** Yes, it doesn't carry.

Okay. We will call on the Speaker to resume his seat.

*[Motion carried: The Employment Amendment Act 2026 was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed without amendment.]*

**House resumed at 9:38 pm**

*[Hon. Dennis P. Lister, Jr., Speaker, in the Chair]*

## REPORT OF COMMITTEE

### EMPLOYMENT AMENDMENT ACT 2026

**The Speaker:** Thank you, Deputy [Speaker].

Members, are there any objections to the Bill entitled the Employment Amendment Act 2026 being reported to the House as printed?

**Some Hon. Members:** Objections.

**The Speaker:** There are objections.

**An Hon. Member:** Yes.

**The Speaker:** You are not seeking to have those objections noted tonight, are you?

**An Hon. Member:** We have their names already.

**The Speaker:** You have the names already? Fine, thank you.

There were objections. That has been noted. No names taken.

That brings us to a close of the business for today. And Minister, would you like to do your third reading?

### SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 21

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** Mr. Speaker, I move that Standing Order 21 be suspended to enable me to move the Bill entitled the Employment Amendment Act [2026] be now read the third time by its title only.

**The Speaker:** Are there any objections?

**An Hon. Member:** No.

**Another Hon. Member:** Objections.

**The Speaker:** There are some objections. Not enough have them named.

Minister, continue.

## BILL

### THIRD READING

#### EMPLOYMENT AMENDMENT ACT 2026

**Hon. Jason Hayward:** I move that the Bill be now read the third time by its title only and passed.

**The Speaker:** The Bill is read the third time by title only and is now passed.

Thank you.

*[Motion carried: The Employment Amendment Act 2026 was given a third reading and passed.]*

### SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 14

**Hon. Wayne L. Furbert:** Mr. Speaker, I move that Standing Order 14 be suspended to enable me to introduce a Bill to the House.

**The Speaker:** I seek the indulgence of the House so that we can suspend [Standing Order] 14 for the introduction of this Bill.

Any objections? There are none. Continue, Junior Minister.

*[Motion carried: Standing Order 14 suspended.]*

## BILL

## FIRST READING

### CUSTOMS TARIFF AMENDMENT ACT 2026

**Hon. Wayne L. Furbert:** Mr. Speaker, I am introducing the following Bill for its first reading so that it may be placed on the Order Paper for the next day of meeting, the Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2026.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.  
Premier.

## ADJOURNMENT

**Hon. E. David Burt:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that this Honourable House do now adjourn until Wednesday, March 11 at 10:00 am.

**The Speaker:** Does any Member wish to speak to that?  
None.

Thank you, Members, for your participation today. I ask that you get refreshed and rested tomorrow and come back again on Wednesday morning at 10:00 am.

The House now stands adjourned.  
Good evening, Members.

*[Gavel]*

*[At 9:40 pm, the House stood adjourned until 10:00 am, Wednesday, 11 March 2026.]*