



MINISTERIAL BRIEF

By

Minister of National Security,

The Honourable Michael Weeks, JP, MP

Tabling of the National Violence Reduction Strategy

November 15, 2024

Mr. Speaker, I stand before you today to introduce into the Legislature the National Violence Reduction Strategy. This strategy is the result of months of collaboration, reflection, and dialogue. Tabling the strategy today marks a significant step forward in this government's unwavering commitment to addressing the pressing issue of violence in our community.

Mr. Speaker, as a nation, we face a challenge that has deep and wide-reaching consequences. Violence, in all its forms—be it youth violence, gang-related activity, interpersonal conflicts, psychological abuse, or anti-social behavior—affects every part of our society. It undermines the very fabric of our island, placing at risk the safety, security, and well-being of our families and the future of our country. But Bermuda is resilient. Together, we can heal, restore peace, and rebuild our island on the principles of respect, empathy, and unity.

Mr. Speaker, The National Violence Reduction Strategy is not just another policy document; it is a testament to our collective will to put an end to violence in all its forms. It is the result of a two-day consultative workshop, where key stakeholders from across the public and private sectors—faith-based organizations, community groups, sports clubs, and government agencies—came together to identify solutions and forge a path forward. We are deeply grateful for their contributions and the robust dialogue that has shaped this plan. A special thanks must also go to the Ministry of National Security’s Gang Violence Reduction Team, whose tireless efforts have been instrumental in crafting this strategy.

Mr. Speaker, this strategy is a call to action. It calls on all of us—government, community leaders, faith groups, families, individuals, and young people—to unite in our collective efforts to reduce violence and heal our island. Through collective efforts, we will realize the strategy’s vision of “A safe, empowered community where violence is reduced to its minimum. Through collaboration and innovation, we aim for trust, opportunity, and justice for all. Together, we envision a future where understanding and connection replace violence, fostering a brighter, safer tomorrow.”

Mr. Speaker, The National Violence Reduction Strategy outlines a comprehensive, multifaceted approach to prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation. By recognizing the root causes of violence—whether they be economic hardship, lack of opportunity, social alienation, or

generational trauma—we aim to create lasting change. It emphasizes the need to empower our youth, to protect the most vulnerable among us, and to ensure that those who commit acts of violence are held accountable, while also being given pathways to rehabilitation and reintegration into society. This strategy is about hope, healing, and the restoration of our communities.

Mr. Speaker, A key component of this strategy is the focus on our youth—our future. We know that if we can change the mindset of our young people and offer them alternatives to violence, we can break the cycle and prevent future generations from facing the same challenges. We are committed to expanding programs that engage young people, promoting inclusion, mentorship, and positive role models. By doing so, we can create a generation that chooses peace, understanding, and respect.

Mr. Speaker, Additionally, as part of our commitment to youth empowerment, I am proud to highlight the reinstitution of the Bermuda Youth Counselling Services under the Department for National Drug Control. Originally launched in 2002, this service will now offer targeted counselling and case management for young people aged 10 to 18 who are at risk of substance misuse and violence. This program will help guide our youth through difficult challenges and provide them with the tools they need to build brighter, more hopeful futures.

Mr. Speaker, The National Violence Reduction Strategy also includes important community-driven initiatives. We are expanding the Gang Violence Reduction Team's outreach programme, which helps young people involved in or at risk of gang activity. This programme will offer educational and vocational support, including financial assistance for GED programs, access to Bermuda College for those who meet the entry requirements, and expanded opportunities for apprenticeships, certifications, and overseas training.

Mr. Speaker, the government also recognizes the profound emotional and psychological toll that violence takes on individuals and families. That is why we are expanding the Community Counselling Programme, which offers grief and trauma support to those impacted by violence. Whether it's a victim of a violent crime or a family affected by the loss of a loved one, this program provides a crucial service to help people heal.

Mr. Speaker, This strategy is a living document, one that will evolve as we continue to engage with our communities and assess the impact of our efforts. We are not just setting out a plan; we are building a movement, a shared vision for a safer Bermuda. The National Violence Reduction Strategy underscores our belief that through collaboration, education, and

accountability, we can reduce violence, heal broken relationships, and restore peace to our island.

Mr. Speaker, We stand at a critical moment in our history, and the decisions we make today will shape the future we leave for our children and grandchildren. The National Violence Reduction Strategy is our commitment to a brighter, safer Bermuda, where peace, respect, and understanding replace fear, division, and violence. I ask for the support of this Honourable House and the people of Bermuda as we embark on this journey together.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I am urging all Honourable Members and the people who call Bermuda home to familiarize themselves with the eight strategic goals for the strategy, and determine how they can join us in our mission to implement strategies that will reduce violence in Bermuda. . Together, we can create the Bermuda we know is possible—a Bermuda that is united, resilient, and dedicated to healing. By working together, we will reduce violence and build a future filled with hope and opportunity for all.

Thank you, **Mr. Speaker.**

