



MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

by:

The Hon. Tinee S. Furbert, JP, MP

Minister of Youth, Social Development and Seniors

2023 – 2024 Annual Report of the Department of Financial Assistance

Friday, 6 December 2024

Mr. Speaker,

I rise today to lay the 2023 - 2024 Annual Report of the Department of Financial Assistance before this Honourable House as prescribed by the Financial Assistance Act 2001.

Mr. Speaker,

The Annual Report highlights some meaningful results achieved during this reporting period, which include:

1. a 5% decrease in the number of persons receiving Financial Assistance;
2. an increase in the number of child day care recipients because of Financial Assistance Reform measures put in place in October 2023;
3. a reduction in the number of appeals to the DFA Review Board;

4. enhanced monitoring and control of expenditure;
5. improved governance and management of client case files;
6. continued activities to advance Financial Assistance Reform initiatives; and,
7. an increase in the outstanding debt due to overpayments because of a rigorous investigation regime; currently there are 39 active cases of which 31 have been referred to the Attorney Generals Chambers and 8 cases are under review with our investigators.

Mr. Speaker,

The Report illustrates a one (1) year performance trend for the Department of Financial Assistance. It remains the case that the categories from the highest participants in financial assistance to lowest participants are: pensioners, disabled persons, those with low earnings, and abled-bodied unemployed persons, year on year. For the fiscal year 2023/24 the average number of recipients of Financial Assistance (FA) services was 1,991, a decrease from the average of 2,095 recorded in the year prior. The recipient categories are: 1031 pensioners and seniors; 737 persons with disabilities; 122 persons with low earnings; and 101 abled-bodied but unemployed persons.

The monthly average number of children that comprised the Child Day Care Allowance programme in 2023/24 was 264, compared to 118 from the prior reporting period. This increase was attributable to the Financial Assistance Reform measures put in place in October 2023.

Mr. Speaker,

Actual program expenditure for grants directly to support FA recipients totalled \$49.26 million. The highest expenditures are rent, nursing homes, food, and health insurance (HIP and Future Care).

Spending remained consistent with the prior fiscal year, whilst the numbers of persons on assistance decreased.

Mr. Speaker,

Work continues in earnest to improve good governance by sustaining monthly compliance activities, with specific focus on the use of data analytics to aid in compliance with Financial Instructions, the Financial Assistance Act and Regulations, and the Child Day Allowance Act and Regulations. This enables the department to effectively demonstrate proficiency in consistently providing services that meet customer and regulatory requirements, while demonstrating continuous improvement and minimizing risk.

Mr. Speaker,

During the period 2023/2024, transaction monitoring was performed on 75,444-line transactions. The Department of Financial Assistance team continues to make strides on transforming service delivery, to ensure the customer experiences professional and high quality assistance. During this reporting period the team participated in the Government of Bermuda's 'Service Standards' training to further improve their skills in this discipline. This training is bearing fruit as there is a continued decrease in the number of complaints lodged with the Ombudsman's Office and a reduced the number of appeals referred to the Financial Assistance Advisory Board.

Mr. Speaker,

The report provides information that demonstrates ongoing work being performed to maintain fiscal responsibility by enhancing the monitoring of expenditures and reducing the risk of fraud.

Stringent procedures are constantly being reviewed to ensure that the Investigative Officers utilize compliance guidelines in addition to the services of the Attorney-General's Chambers to standardize 'Payment Agreements' to reduce receivables.

Mr. Speaker,

Phase One of Financial Assistance Reform began in 2022/23, and the Department of Financial Assistance continues to move forward with amendments being made to our legislation in accordance with the legislative process. Key amendments were made to the Financial Assistance Act 2001, the Financial Assistance Regulations 2004, the Child Day Care Allowance Act 2008, and the Child Day Care Allowance Regulations 2008. These amendments have supported our continued Financial Assistance Reform.

Mr. Speaker,

The Ministry would like to take this opportunity to thank the Department of Financial Assistance team together with all other partners who collaborated to support the work that is being carried out. These efforts will ensure that Bermudians gain access to services that will assist them in maintaining a respectable standard of living.

It is the goal of this Ministry to go a step further to position Bermudians to achieve gainful and respectful employment opportunities. Initiatives will continue in earnest by utilizing services provided by the Department of Workforce Development to enable recipients to be better positioned for employment opportunities in the local workforce. This benefits the participants as well as the Bermuda community.

The Financial Assistance Annual Report is online at gov.bm now and hard copies will be available next week. Thank you, **Mr. Speaker.**