



MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

BY

Minister of Public Safety

The Hon. Michael H. Dunkley, JP, MP

CRACKDOWN ON CELL PHONES IN PRISON

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Mr. Speaker, by definition a prison combines those elements in our society that present some of the greatest challenges. Incarceration is principally designed to remove an individual from the comforts of home and to severely restrict one's liberty and contact with the outside world. In this era of cell phones and the vast array of communicative features they contain, their presence in a prison has the potential to frustrate the ends of justice and to pose serious risks to the safety of the wider public.

Mr. Speaker, the Prisons Act 1979 already makes provision for offences of conveying prohibited articles into prison. While not specifically mentioned in the legislation, the practice is to include cell phones as prohibited articles also. Mr. Speaker, the Commissioner of Corrections has instituted a zero-tolerance policy on contraband generally and cell-phones in particular. However, the Government has determined that this policy must be supported with an appropriate legislative framework.

Therefore, **Mr. Speaker,** I am pleased to advise this Honourable House that Cabinet has approved amendments to the Prisons Act 1979 and the Prison Rules 1980 to increase the penalties for the offence of conveying prohibited articles into prison and to also provide a sentencing regime around specific prohibited articles including cell phones.

Mr. Speaker, it is intended that the amending legislation will set out a list of certain specific items which, if conveyed into a prison, will be punishable as an offence with periods of imprisonment and/or fines. Attempts at committing these offences will also be punished. Mr. Speaker, as legislators first and foremost it is our responsibility to support the men and women who we entrust with this important aspect of public safety. A cell phone in the hands of an inmate can be tool to continue the conduct for which they have been imprisoned in the first

place. This will not be tolerated and those who supply phones to prisoners can also expect to feel the full brunt of the law.

Mr. Speaker, these measures form part of an overall review of various aspects of security within the Department of Corrections. The Commissioner and the Prison Officers' Association (POA) have emphasized the importance of secure facilities. In addition to these legislative initiatives work is underway to modernize the system of internal radios within Corrections to ensure that officers have a working system in which they have confidence. Perimeter integrity, officer and inmate safety and high standards of training will all be addressed as priorities within the Department.

Mr. Speaker, keeping Bermuda safe is not solely the responsibility of the Police. The gang lifestyle which inevitably leads to imprisonment, injury or death, does not check itself at the prison gate. This Government will not tolerate any activity within the prison walls that further undermines the integrity of the work of so many within the criminal justice system.

Thank you, **Mr. Speaker.**