



**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
To the Senate**

by

**Senator the Hon. Kathy Lynn Simmons, JP
Attorney-General and Minister of Legal Affairs**

Serving Our Homeless Population

Wednesday, 22nd July, 2020

Madam President, the Government's Emergency Measures Organization (EMO) engaged the Temporary Shelter In Place Accommodation at Berkeley Institute's gym on 29 March 2020 to provide emergency shelter to the unsheltered residents of Bermuda during curfew throughout this difficult period of Covid-19.

From March 29 through 20 July, safe shelter and support was available to this population, first at The Berkeley Institute gym with a move to the CedarBridge Academy on 8 April. The move was necessary as the CedarBridge Academy facility was better suited as a longer-term accommodation. The Shelter operated 24 hours per day during the Shelter In Place period and during inclement weather and up to 12 hours per day when there was a night curfew.

Madam President, pre-Covid-19, the EMO only engaged shelters for Hurricanes. The Hurricane Shelter model was quickly adapted for a pandemic. The Department of Environmental Health assessed and approved the layout of the accommodation at both shelter sites, ensuring that social distancing and air circulation requirements were met. Measures were also taken to rearrange the areas within the building that would allow for any necessary quarantine and safe screening of individuals entering the building.

During the sixteen weeks that the Shelter operated, the numbers of registered persons fluctuated. The highest number of

registrants was 50 (45 males and 5 females) during the first three weeks. During the last seven weeks there were 19 (17 males and 2 females). Most of the occupants were vulnerable and challenges were identified for this target population. While at the shelter most of the challenges were met with the provision of wrap around/supportive services. Their need for shelter, food, social and emotional and medical wellbeing were met.

Madam President, recognizing that meeting these needs will once again be a challenge for this population upon the Shelter closure, each occupant was surveyed to ascertain where they would go upon leaving the shelter and what specific need they may have. 95% indicated that they had no place to go and they once again will be unsheltered. Most of the individuals are considered to be chronically homeless – living on the streets for years. To this end all occupants were provided with the admission criteria and expectations to obtain a bed at The Salvation Army Male Night Shelter. It should be noted that upon closure of the Shelter there were only five (5) beds available and residents must be under the age of 65 with the ability of paying \$50 per week.

Four of the occupants required assistance with their mental health and have been connected/reconnected with the services at the Mid-Atlantic Wellness Institute.

Those occupants identified as having complex medical needs were assisted in obtaining indigent status so that they can continue to be seen by the medical doctor that they were connected with while at the Shelter. This will ensure that they are able to continue to obtain the medication prescribed as well as have continued access to health care and monitoring. All residents left the Shelter with information of feeding programs across the island and the feeding schedule of the Salvation Army.

Madam President, I take this opportunity to thank all the individual donors, companies, organisations and agencies that came forward and offered support which contributed to the success of the Shelter during such a precarious period.

Madam President, I also extend a heart-felt appreciation of the dedicated team that supported the management of the Shelter – the support team includes the Department of Child and Family Services, Director, Alfred Maybury, Kennette Robinson, Renee Brown, Maureen Trew and Darren Francis, St. John Ambulance,

Mid-Atlantic Wellness Institute Community Mental Health Nurses, 2 volunteer medical professionals, Reverend Thompson of Christ Church Warwick providing laundry services, the Third Sector, the CedarBridge Academy custodial and maintenance team, The Berkeley Institute custodial and maintenance team (at the previous location), security services from GET Security and Universal Security Alliance and Kara's Kitchen providing breakfast, lunch and dinner daily, Fairmont Southampton who treated the shelter to a meal once a week, St. Theresa's Catholic Church who also provided meals and the numerous anonymous donors who provided various items when needed.

Madam President, you would be aware that people who find themselves homeless include some of the most vulnerable in our society and the Government remains committed to ensuring they receive the help they need through programmes at the Nelson Bascome Substance Abuse Treatment Centre and the Turning Point Substance Abuse Programme under the Bermuda Hospitals Board.

The Government also recognizes that local helping organizations and charities face challenges, with more people seeking help and often with complex reasons behind their homelessness. The Ministry of Legal Affairs provided grant funding to the Salvation Army, Pathways Bermuda, and FOCUS Counselling Services and will continue to work with the Third Sector in their efforts to support this sector of our community.

Thank you, **Madam President.**