



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

**February and March 2026
Volume 2 of 2**

Includes 9 through 27 March 2026

*(Sittings 29 - 34 of the 2025/26 Session)
(pages 2337-2850 and Index)*

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

Disclaimer: The electronic version of the *Official Hansard Report* is for informational purposes only. The printed version remains the official record.

**BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
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 co-ordinate 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 begins 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 substantiated;
- 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 (MARCA)—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 groundsman 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 1st, 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 1st, 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 3rd and 4th, 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 40th 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-1301].

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 Correia-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 re-placed. 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 adoptive, that's a matter for another conversation. But certainly, 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.]

**BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
11 MARCH 2026
10:03 AM**

Sitting Number 30 of the 2025/2026 Session

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

The Speaker: Good morning, Members.

The Deputy Clerk will lead us in prayer this morning once the Sergeant gets us resolved down at the end there. Thank you, Sarge.

Mrs. Beale.

PRAYERS

[Prayers read by Mrs. Beale, Deputy Clerk]

The Speaker: Thank you, Mrs. Beale.
Good morning, Members.

[Gavel]

The Speaker: The House is now in session.

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

The Speaker: Members, the Minutes of the 6th and 9th of March have both been deferred.

MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR

The Speaker: There are none.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER
OR MEMBER PRESIDING**

APOLOGIES

The Speaker: The following Member has informed us of his absence today: MP Famous will not be present.

MESSAGES FROM THE SENATE

The Speaker: There are none.

**PAPERS AND OTHER
COMMUNICATIONS TO THE HOUSE**

The Speaker: There are three Papers this morning. The first is in the name of the Premier and Minister of Finance . . . actually the first two.
Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

Bermuda House of Assembly

The Speaker: Good morning.

**GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES (FEES)
AMENDMENT ORDER 2026**

**SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATE (NO.2)
FOR FINANCIAL YEAR 2025/26**

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for the consideration of the Honourable House of Assembly the Government Authorities (Fees) Amendment Order 2026 proposed to be made by the Minister of Finance in exercise of the power conferred by section 4(1) of the Government [Authorities] (Fees) Act 1971.

Further, Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the powers conferred by section 96 of the [Bermuda] Constitution [Order 1968], I have the honour to attach and submit for the consideration of the Honourable House of Assembly the Supplementary Estimate (No. 2) for Financial Year 2025/26.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The third Paper this morning is in the name of the Minister of Home Affairs.

Minister Lightbourne.

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

The Speaker: Good morning.

**CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY
THE STORY OF US—GREEN PAPER ON
BERMUDA'S APPLICATION FOR FULL
MEMBERSHIP IN THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY**

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly, The Story of Us—Green paper on Bermuda's Application for Full Membership in the Caribbean Community.

The Speaker: Thank you.

PETITIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS AND JUNIOR MINISTERS

The Speaker: We have three Statements this morning. The first is in the name of the Minister of Housing and Municipalities.

Minister De Silva, you have the floor.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Good morning.

MORGAN'S POINT DEVELOPMENT COMPANY UPDATE—END OF FISCAL YEAR 2025/26 AND OUTLOOK 2026/27

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to provide Honourable Members with an update on the work of the [Morgan's Point Development Company](#), or MPDC, at the close of the 2025/26 fiscal year, and to outline the Company's priorities for the 2026/27 fiscal year.

Over the past year, the Board and management of MPDC have continued the steady and disciplined work of stabilising operations, strengthening governance, advancing site control, and preparing the foundation for a comprehensive master planning process. The approach remains deliberate and measured, with an unwavering focus on protecting the public interest and avoiding the errors that characterised earlier phases of this project.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to advise that the Board remains fully constituted and in full operation. During the reporting period, one private director tendered his resignation. Following a structured recruitment and vetting process, a new director has been successfully appointed and onboarded, ensuring continuity of oversight and expertise.

The Company remains fully compliant with the Companies Act 1981 and all applicable statutory requirements in Bermuda. Corporate filings are current, statutory registers are up to date, and Board governance practices continue to reflect best standards.

In accordance with its statutory obligations, the audit for year 2025 is currently underway. Once complete, the audited financial statements will be provided.

In addition, external accounting support has been formally engaged to monitor financial activity, strengthen internal controls, and ensure adherence to proper procurement and payment protocols. Further, as of this month, the Company has implemented monthly coordination meetings with Ernst & Young (EY) to support ongoing financial supervision and structured site management.

This arrangement provides independent oversight of financial transactions and reinforces prudent fiscal management as the Company transitions from

stabilisation into active planning. These measures underscore the Board's commitment to transparency, accountability, and disciplined stewardship of public assets.

Mr. Speaker, the Board continues to receive regular updates regarding all legal matters associated with the Company's ongoing works and the broader site. Legal counsel remains actively engaged to support land acquisition processes, contractual negotiations, compliance matters, and any residual legacy issues. This ongoing oversight ensures that decisions are taken with a clear understanding of risk exposure and statutory obligations.

Mr. Speaker, during the 2025/26 fiscal year, the Company has continued to monitor and manage the Morgan's Point site.

Ongoing site clearing activities have been undertaken in phases, with strict adherence to safety protocols and environmental standards. Security arrangements remain in place, and routine inspections are conducted to safeguard infrastructure and mitigate risk.

With respect to land control, the Company has continued to advance its site ownership strategy through various stages of acquisition discussions and financial closing processes. Subject to final verification of surveyed areas and completion of legal formalities, the intention remains to increase the acreage under Company control from 20.66 hectares (51.06 acres) to 29.70 hectares (73.39 acres), thereby significantly expanding the development footprint and enhancing long-term planning flexibility.

Mr. Speaker, I must emphasise that final acreage figures are currently undergoing professional verification to ensure absolute accuracy before formal consolidation is completed.

Looking ahead to 2026/27, the priority will be to finalise these acquisitions, regularise all titles under MPDC control, and establish a clear and consolidated landholding structure to support master planning and possible future development partnerships.

Mr. Speaker, A major milestone during this reporting period has been the advancement of the master planning process. Under the direction of its consultant, the Board oversaw the preparation and issuance of a request for proposals (RFP) for comprehensive master planning services. The RFP was circulated to qualified international and local firms with demonstrated expertise in large-scale, mixed-use waterfront redevelopment.

The RFP process is currently underway. Site visits are anticipated toward the end of February, with proposal submissions expected in late Q1 to early Q2 of this calendar year. Following evaluation, the Board intends to bring a recommendation for approval, enabling the appointment of a master planning team within the early part of the 2026/27 fiscal year.

The master plan will be required to

- establish a realistic and financially viable development framework,

- integrate marina assets and waterfront opportunities,
- consider residential, hospitality, commercial, community, and public realm components,
- incorporate climate resilience and environmental sustainability,
- provide phased implementation options aligned with market demand, and
- incorporate participation from qualified Bermudian firms to the greatest extent possible.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this work is not to rush construction, but to ensure that any development pathway is evidence-based, financially sound, and aligned with Bermuda's broader economic, and development objectives.

Mr. Speaker, throughout the fiscal year, MPDC has operated within its approved budget allocation. Expenditures have been focused on governance, professional services, site security, maintenance, and preparatory planning works.

Enhanced financial monitoring procedures have been implemented, including the dual signatory protocols, periodic reconciliations, independent accounting review, and structured monthly oversight meetings with EY. These controls are designed to ensure that as activity increases in 2026/27, robust safeguards remain firmly in place.

The Company will also continue to evaluate potential revenue strategies associated with interim uses of the site, where feasible and appropriate.

Mr. Speaker, as we move into the 2026/27 fiscal year, the Company's priorities are very clear:

1. Finalise and verify expanded land control.
2. Complete and award the master planning contract.
3. Advance structural and infrastructure assessments to inform phased development options.
4. Maintain rigorous governance, compliance, and financial controls.
5. Develop a clear strategic roadmap for Cabinet consideration, including potential partnership models and investment structures.

The objective for the coming year is to transition from stabilisation and preparation into structured planning with defined redevelopment pathways.

Mr. Speaker, At the end of the 2025/26 fiscal year, the Morgan's Point Development Company stands on significantly firmer footing than at any time since its establishment. Governance structures are stable, compliance is current, financial oversight has been strengthened, and the groundwork for a comprehensive master planning exercise is underway.

This Government remains committed to ensuring that Morgan's Point is redeveloped in a manner that delivers sustainable economic value, protects the public purse, and reflects the long-term interests of the people of Bermuda.

I look forward to returning to this Honourable House during the 2026/27 fiscal year with further

updates as the master planning process advances and strategic options are refined.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, the next Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister of Youth, Social Development and Seniors.

Minister.

Hon. Tinee. Furbert: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

DEMENTIA NAVIGATION AND SUPPORT PROGRAM FUNDING

Hon. Tinee. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I rise today, before this Honourable House to provide an update on the [Dementia Navigation and Support Program Funding](#), highlighting the importance of ensuring accessible dementia care support services and account for Ministry spending in this area.

I cannot share enough, Mr. Speaker, that dementia is one of the most significant and growing public health challenges facing countries around the world, and Bermuda is no exception. While dementia is often associated with ageing, it is not a normal part of ageing.

Research shows that up to 45 per cent of dementia risk factors may be reduced through prevention and early intervention. However, at present there is no cure, and the majority of services required relate to the long-term care and support needs as the disease progresses.

Mr. Speaker, this reality places significant responsibility on families and carers. Supporting these caregivers is therefore critical, not only to maintain the wellbeing of those living with the disease, but also to sustain the broader system of long-term care services upon which our community depends.

Mr. Speaker, recognising these challenges, a dementia pilot program was first launched in October 2023 by the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors together with Dementia Bermuda. The funding focused on dementia navigation and support services, supplementing Dementia Bermuda's in-home occupational therapy (OT) services program. Based on its success and the clear need within the community, as previously shared with the Members of the House, this initiative later transitioned to the issuance of a grant in the sum of \$150,000 in July 2025. This amount totals approximately one third of the total program costs.

The importance of this service, Mr. Speaker, was reinforced through the Health Council's Dementia Health Needs Assessment and the Ministry's Dementia Integrated Care Pathway. The needs assessment identified potentially around 3,000 people living with dementia in Bermuda, recognising better data collection is required, as well as current service availability and gaps. Whereas the integrated care pathway, or ICP, identified the clinical and support pathway required

from prevention to end of life for persons with dementia and their carers.

A key strength of the existing system, highlighted in both reports, were the in-home OT program services provided by Dementia Bermuda and [expanded] through the Ministry's funding. More specifically, this program helps individuals and families understand the disease, access appropriate support, identify care plans and needed interventions that are strength and evidenced based, and plan for the disease progression.

Mr. Speaker, a requirement of our grant funding is to receive statistics on the program, and I would like to highlight some of those with you now. The program has a current active caseload of 199 clients. Over quarters two and three of this fiscal year:

- Sixty-four new clients were served.
- The majority of these clients were female (53 per cent), Black Bermudian (55 per cent), and between the ages of 75 and 84 years (39 per cent).
- Forty-five per cent were FutureCare recipients.
- Only 40 per cent had a confirmed dementia diagnosis at the time they accessed the program. This reflects the overall trend and importance of early engagement and intervention to help ensure a diagnosis is obtained.
- The data also confirms that caregiving in Bermuda remains largely family-based and predominantly provided by women, often shared amongst multiple relatives.
- Notably, 77 per cent of clients reported financial need, reinforcing the importance of maintaining accessible, community-based dementia services.
- Finally, and most importantly, Dementia Bermuda reports decreased caregiver stress, enhanced safety and improved quality of life for people living with dementia as a result of these interventions.

These findings, Mr. Speaker, underscore the importance of accessible dementia navigation and support programming to help sustain much needed family support, recognise the financial burden associated with such care, and to help facilitate the well-being of those living with dementia.

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report to this Honourable House, on 18 December 2025, the Dementia Care Services Pilot Programme was recognised by *The Bermudian Magazine* for the Product and Service Award in the category of Government Service.

Mr. Speaker, this Government remains committed to strengthening Bermuda's dementia care system by supporting programs that provide practical assistance, guidance, and emotional support to those navigating this complex and long-term process. The Ministry is committed to coordinating, advocating and advancing the recommendations from the Dementia

Integrated Care Pathway including how to expand the accessibility of this type of program.

Through continued partnership with our stakeholders, we will continue to build a system that ensures those living with dementia, and those who care for them, are supported, respected, and able to maintain dignity and quality of life through to the end of life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, the next Statement is also in the name of Minister Furbert.

Minister, would you like to continue?

Hon. Tinee. Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

BIG UP YASELF NATIONAL MINI-YOUTH CONFERENCE 2026

Hon. Tinee. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to inform Honourable Members and the public about The Office of Youth Affairs (TOYA) [Big Up Yaself National Mini-Youth Conference](#) that took place on January 29 and 30, 2026. This event has proven annually to be an important opportunity for TOYA to connect with Bermuda's youth on issues that are important to their lives and development.

Mr. Speaker, one of the potential dangers we see young people encounter, especially during their pre-adolescent and adolescent years, is their access to the Internet, especially social media. As we are aware young people of all ages are drawn to screentime, whether it is watching television, using a tablet, computer or mobile phone, the Internet and the devices that provide access to it have become the preferred option of entertainment.

Mr. Speaker, the Internet can be a very valuable tool for young people providing access to vital resources for students, but it also allows young people to socialise and entertain themselves while exploring their world. For all the positives however, the Internet can be a dangerous place for young people. Although they may be fluent in their use of the Internet, young people can be unaware of the real threats that exist online. There are predators, people who harm young people, and bullies who attack young people because of their own personal shortcomings.

There are people who share misinformation to create chaos and influence other's thinking and behaviour. Even the sites and applications that young people visit can be a threat to them by stealing their time and attention away from activities that are required or are of more benefit [to them]. As adults, we must protect our young people from the risks posed. More importantly, we must support our young people in making the right decisions so that they are not susceptible to these menaces that most certainly exist online. TOYA was able to share this information at the third annual Big Up Yaself National Mini-Youth Conference as the theme focused

on online spaces and its impact on youth mental health. Also, I commend the Minister of Education for taking the bold, but necessary step of banning phones during the school day.

Mr. Speaker, Big Up Yaself conference focused on the development of Bermuda's young people and ensuring their awareness of the eight National Youth Policy Goals. The goals are the areas in which young people, youth organisations and the government agreed are critical for young people to have to positively support them in their transition to adulthood. Centred on Goal 1—*Keeping young people safe and protected from harm*, the theme for this year's event, "Protect your Peace" encouraged students to be mindful of their online behaviours and its impact on their mental health. This included attention to the Internet sites they visited, the time they spent online and how they interacted with others while online.

Mr. Speaker, the first day of the conference was for our senior school students and the second day was for primary and middle school students. Over 200 students were reached on a topic of grave importance to all Bermuda's youth.

Mr. Speaker, the voices of our youth are critical to the understanding and resolution to issues our youth experience. TOYA believes that it is imperative that their thoughts, insights and perspectives be captured at any event TOYA hosts. The Big Up Yaself Conference is one of the ideal events to capture this information. All students were asked about their online habits to gather data. However, while this is not a scientific statistical sample of the Island, it provides insight into TOYA's Youth Development Team.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to share a few results from that day because the online habits of our youth are important. Also, parents and guardians must be aware. TOYA asked all attendees of the National Mini-Youth Conference how much time they spent on a screen.

At the senior school level 65 per cent of students spent more than five hours a day on a screen—and I encourage my colleagues to listen to these stats. At the senior school level 65 per cent of students spent more than five hours a day on a screen with 78 per cent of that time on social media. Of these same students, 70 per cent reported that their parents or guardians did not monitor their screen time.

At the middle school level there was more of a balance with 37 per cent of students spending zero to two hours on a screen with 32 per cent spending more than five hours. However, 42 per cent of students stated their parents or guardians did not monitor their screen time.

At the primary level 61 per cent of students—at the primary level—said they spent more than five hours a day on a screen, and 78 per cent of students said their parents did not monitor their screen time.

Mr. Speaker, this information is real data from our young people. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry recommend no more than two

hours per day of screen time use for children ages 6 and 15. Researchers from the University of California, San Francisco in a recent study said young people's addiction to social media and video games is tied to a higher risk of developing mental health issues including suicidal behaviours. Young people's sleep, ability to pay attention, as well as their physical and social emotional well-being can also be impacted by spending too much time on a screen. This says nothing of the actual content that our young people are viewing or who may be trying to access them. I urge parents and guardians to be vigilant.

I cannot stress this enough, monitor [not] only your children's screen time, but also the content they are viewing. We must protect our children.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Youth Development Team at TOYA for hosting the Big Up Yaself National Mini-Youth Conference. They are providing a service to the country that is both timely and impactful. Also, I extend my appreciation to the facilitators of the conference namely the Family Centre, Solstice, Sloane Johnson, Carlos Santana, Dion the Creative, Teacher Telle, Litt-Really Fun [Entertainment], Mr. Fotogenik and Miss Aalai Wolffe who performed her hit single "Dum Da Da" for engaging our youth, and making this year's Big Up Yaself Conference a success.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, that's the end of the Statements this morning. We will now move on.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The Speaker: There are none.

QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: There are no written questions this morning, so the questions will come from the Statements that were given today. And Members, we have two Statements that have questions this morning.

The first is for the Minister of Housing. You have Members who wish to put questions to you.

And the first question is from MP Fay-hee.

Hon. Michael Fahy: [It's pronounced] Fay.

The Speaker: Fahy. MP Fahy.

QUESTION 1: MORGAN'S POINT DEVELOPMENT COMPANY UPDATE—END OF FISCAL YEAR 2025/26 AND OUTLOOK 2026/27

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you, and to thank the Minister for his Statement on Morgan's point.

The Minister has advised that an RFP has been circulated to local and international developers who have experience in waterfront development, et

cetera. Can the Minister advise if that RFP is specific to any of the following, and that is, direct development by MPDC? Does it include private-public partnerships? Or does it include disposal of assets through sale or lease?

And, Mr. Speaker, I've asked those questions because those were options that had been put by the Minister in a September Statement that he brought to this House. I want to see if the two are linked.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: All options are on the table, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Hon. Michael Fahy: No, that's helpful. Thank you.

The Speaker: Second question?

Hon. Michael Fahy: Second question.

**QUESTION 2: MORGAN'S POINT DEVELOPMENT
COMPANY UPDATE—END OF FISCAL YEAR
2025/26 AND OUTLOOK 2026/27**

Hon. Michael Fahy: As the Board continues its work to ensure that it is complying with good governance, and I'm pleased to hear that it is, can the Minister advise if the Board has now acquired D&O insurance?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, they have.

The Speaker: Okay.
Supplementary?

Hon. Michael Fahy: No supplementary on that.

The Speaker: Third question?

Hon. Michael Fahy: Third question, thank you.

**QUESTION 3: MORGAN'S POINT DEVELOPMENT
COMPANY UPDATE—END OF FISCAL YEAR
2025/26 AND OUTLOOK 2026/27**

Hon. Michael Fahy: The Minister said in his Statement that the Board would consider interim uses as the RFP process continues. Is the Minister able to advise if there are any current interim uses being considered?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Hon. Michael Fahy: If the Minister would please opine on what those interim uses are.

The Speaker: Okay.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: One, for example, is SailGP.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Hon. Michael Fahy: Does that include (the interim measures) any medical tourism facilities?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: No, they don't.

The Speaker: Okay. All right. That's all your questions allocated.

Minister, you also have questions from MP King.

MP King.

**QUESTION 1: MORGAN'S POINT DEVELOPMENT
COMPANY UPDATE—END OF FISCAL YEAR
2025/26 AND OUTLOOK 2026/27**

Mr. Robert King: Good morning, Mr. Speaker, Members of this Honourable House, and the listening public.

Can the Minister of Housing and Municipalities speak to the progress regarding the MOU, regarding the medical facility, that's proposed for Morgan's Point, and what stage of development that is?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Not in my Statement, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I don't know if that was included in the coverage of the Statement.

**QUESTION 2: MORGAN'S POINT DEVELOPMENT
COMPANY UPDATE—END OF FISCAL YEAR
2025/26 AND OUTLOOK 2026/27**

Mr. Robert King: That's true, Mr. Speaker. However, as part of the development for Morgan's Point, that was one of the initiatives that was talked about previously.

Regarding Morgan's Point development, how many board meetings have been held, and what were the recommendations that came out of those board meetings?

The Speaker: There was only . . . his question was about the board meetings.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Board meetings are held every month at a minimum.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Robert King: How much did the board meetings cost this government, cost the people of Bermuda, the directors on them?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: A lot less than the \$220 million debt we were left in by the OBA. But I'm only kidding, Mr. Speaker.

[Laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I will be happy to get that number for the Honourable Member.

The Speaker: The Minister has indicated he will get the exact number for you.

Second supplementary or third question?

Mr. Robert King: Third question.

The Speaker: Okay.

QUESTION 3: MORGAN'S POINT DEVELOPMENT COMPANY UPDATE—END OF FISCAL YEAR 2025/26 AND OUTLOOK 2026/27

Mr. Robert King: Regarding the land verification process ongoing, what prevented the land verification process from happening at the start to make sure that any developments would be able to be executed smoothly, as opposed to after the fact?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Well, Mr. Speaker, you'll be aware that we were left quite a mess and a \$220 million debt. We have been in the process of acquiring the property from the default that was left to the taxpayers of this country.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Robert King: When does the Minister anticipate that there will be developments starting at Morgan's Point? That's my final question. Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Speaker, like I said, once we finish clearing up the mess that was left behind, we'll proceed.

The Speaker: Thank you. No further questions for that Statement. We will now move on.

The next Statement is in reference to the dementia navigation. And MP Pearman would like to put a question to you, Minister.

QUESTION 1: DEMENTIA NAVIGATION AND SUPPORT PROGRAM FUNDING

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I thank the Honourable Minister for her important Statement to the House today on dementia navigation and support programme funding.

Mr. Speaker, with your leave, as the Minister has noted, quote, *dementia is one of the most significant and growing public health challenges facing countries around the world, and Bermuda is no exception.* And that is clearly a statement of great accuracy.

The Minister stated to this House this morning that research shows that up to 45 per cent of dementia risk factors may be reduced through prevention and early intervention. And my question is, Is the Minister able to share with us the factors for prevention and early intervention? And if she does not have those factors at her fingertip, as she may not, would she be willing to give a Statement to this House so the public can realise how best to combat this awful disease?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Tinee. Furbert: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the risk factors are presented in the Dementia Integrated Care Pathway that has been publicly published in the public domain. So, they are available. Those risk factors are available in that particular document.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Supplementary or new question?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Scott Pearman: Supplementary. To the extent that those risk factors are identified, and I'm grateful [for] the answer [from] the Honourable Minister, what efforts are envisaged as being intended to better inform the public as to how they might go through their lives and reduce the risk of dementia? Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Tinee. Furbert: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question.

Part of the Dementia Integrated Care Pathway has a segment on public awareness and how persons in our community can get information as it relates to lifestyle changes that can help to prevent the progression of dementia. So, we will, as part of that plan,

continue to go about providing public awareness as it relates to dementia.

The Speaker: Second supplementary or new question?

Mr. Scott Pearman: Second supplementary . . . well, I just, I thank the Minister for that commitment, and I look forward to seeing it being deployed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Oh, no question. Okay.

Members, there's also a question for the next Statement by the Minister and that's from the Opposition Leader.

Opposition Leader, would you like to put your question?

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

The Speaker: Good morning.

QUESTION 1: BIG UP YASELF NATIONAL MINI-YOUTH CONFERENCE 2026

Hon. Ben Smith: I would like to thank the Honourable Minister for bringing this forward.

I do believe that that data that was provided is quite sobering for people to hear, and I take the point that you made that people really need to pay attention to that number, and really, the message that kept coming through was parent intervention and parents making sure that the screen time is down.

Would the Honourable Minister be able to tell us whether there are any specific policies or anything specifically that the Government is going to do to try to get the public to understand the importance of this, because it is having an impact on our youth and specifically in their education?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Tinee. Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to ask my colleague, Minister Diallo Rabain. He has some information as it relates to that question.

The Speaker: Go ahead, Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for that question, and thank you for the Statement, Minister Furbert.

I would just like to announce that at some point, we would remember the Cybertips programme that was active several years ago that went inactive (I can't remember when). But we do intend to bring that back. And I am looking to bring a Statement next week, actually speaking to that fact, which will specifically target children and parents and caregivers.

The Speaker: Supplementary or new question?

Hon. Ben Smith: Thank you. It's a supplementary.

The Speaker: One second.

Hon. Tinee. Furbert: I just—

The Speaker: I think the Minister just wanted to add something.

Hon. Tinee. Furbert: I just wanted to also add, Mr. Speaker, I don't know if anyone else heard in the public domain but there is also a parent group that has recently been established that has made a commitment to bring parents together to talk about the effects and harms of social media on their children, and they've also made a commitment to not allow their children to have access to devices until the age of 14. I think that is an awesome opportunity for parents to get more information and get more support. If they are . . . because it is difficult trying to manage your child and their devices on social media. But a support group would definitely help parents to better navigate that particular area of concern.

The Speaker: Second supplementary . . . I mean, first supplementary.

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Hon. Ben Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Considering that the Government has already put in place some things within education to restrict within schools, I think the next point is really just increasing awareness. If the Minister could let us know whether there is some plan to maybe do an advertising campaign to really start to push this forward, if that is part of the process.

The Speaker: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Tinee. Furbert: Thank you for that question.

As Minister Diallo Rabain has mentioned, the Cybertips programme is definitely a programme that existed before. We are bringing it back. But usually that programme is put out every year, you know, it is a campaign, and it is an actual programme that exists for our children in the school system every year, so we are looking forward to having that programme start back up.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Second supplementary or new question?

Hon. Ben Smith: Second supplementary.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Hon. Ben Smith: So, Mr. Speaker, one of the issues with devices is that it's actually become a babysitting service for some parents. So, if the Minister could let us know whether there's any specific implementation that is going to be connected to that that helps parents, because they are using these devices as a babysitting service in many cases.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Tinee. Furbert: Thank you again for that question for a very important subject. Yes, tips will be available, and awareness will be available for parents in the Cybertips programme. But I also just wanted to share that TOYA's parent workshops, which are facilitated by Build-a-Brand, will also be addressing increasing this awareness for parents.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you, Members.

That was the last of the questions for this morning, so we can move on now to the next item on the Order Paper, which is the Congratulatory and/or Obituary remarks.

CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY SPEECHES

The Speaker: Would any Member wish to make a contribution at this time? None? Okay, we'll 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: That brings us to what we are here for today in the main, which is the resumption of the

Committee of Supply for the further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27.

Again, for the listening public, there are eight hours allotted each day for the debate on the estimates of revenues. That is split up between respective ministries. This morning, the first Ministry up will be that of Public Works, and there's . . . Public Works, and there are five hours. Oh, you wanted all eight hours, Minister?

Five hours. Five hours for the Ministry of Public Works—

An Hon. Member: And Environment.

The Speaker: And Environment, yes. And the remaining three hours will be for the Ministry of Sport.

And as always, when we go into Committee, the Speaker has to be out of the Chamber, and the proceedings will be in the hands of the Panel of Chairs, and the first Member in the Chair this morning will be MP Pearman. Once we get moved into Committee, MP Pearman will take the Chair.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now resume in Committee of Supply to consider the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2026/27.

The Speaker: Are there any objections?

No objections.

I will leave the Chamber now, and the House will be in the hands of MP Pearman in the Chair for the first sessions of this morning.

House in Committee at 10:44 am

[Mr. Scott Pearman, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2026/27

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, and good morning to the Honourable Members in this Honourable House and the members of the listening public.

We are in the Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the Year 2026/27, and as the Speaker has just announced to the Honourable House, we shall be having a five-hour debate now on the budget for the Ministry of Public Works and Environment.

We will be hearing first from the Honourable Minister Jache Adams. Would you please move your heads?

Hon. Jache Adams: Good morning, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I move the following Heads: 36, the Ministry of Public Works and Environment

Headquarters; 68, Parks; 79, Environment and Natural Resources; 81, Public Lands and Buildings; and 82, Works and Engineering be now taken under consideration.

The Chairman: It has been moved by the Honourable Minister that Heads 36, 68, 79, 81, and 82, all under the Ministry of Public Works and Environment be now taken under consideration.

[Are there] any objections? No objection.
Please proceed, Honourable Minister.

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you, Mr. Chairman
Mr. Chairman—

The Chairman: And it's 10:45 am [which] is the start time. Thank you.

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you.

MINISTRY OF PUBLIC WORKS

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, today I rise to address this Honourable House on the work and budget of the Ministry of Public Works and Environment for the fiscal year 2026/27.

At the outset, let me be clear. Leadership is not only about responding to immediate demands; it is about advancing, strengthening core systems, investing in modern tools, refining our strategy, and developing the talent that will carry this Ministry forward.

This is such a moment for our Ministry.

For many years, the Ministry of Public Works and Environment has carried immense responsibility. It has maintained the roads we travel, the buildings that house our public services, the docks that connect us to the world, and the parks, reservoirs, and natural spaces that define Bermuda's character. It has done so while managing ageing infrastructure, increasing service demands, fiscal constraints, and the accelerating pressures of climate change.

The challenges before us now require more than routine maintenance. They require foresight. They require modernisation. They require that we continue strengthening the foundations of our infrastructure, our environmental systems, and our internal operations while moving forward with delivery.

Mr. Chairman, strengthening our foundation does not mean slowing down. It does not mean pausing delivery, nor does it mean work will stop.

The roads will continue to be maintained. Waste will continue to be collected. Public buildings will continue to be repaired. Parks will continue to be cared for. Docks will remain operational. Reservoirs will remain safeguarded. The daily services upon which our people rely will continue without interruption.

What this year represents is a deliberate effort to improve how that work is planned, managed, and executed. We are enhancing long-term planning

frameworks. We are systematically addressing maintenance backlogs. We are modernising equipment. We are aligning staffing structures with future demands. We are embedding stronger asset management practices. We are improving accountability and project oversight.

Over time, the people of Bermuda will see the difference.

- They will experience more responsive tree trimming and vegetation management.
- They will benefit from more efficient waste collection.
- They will enjoy safer, better maintained beaches and public spaces.
- They will see more timely maintenance of public facilities and more coordinated support for infrastructure development across the Island.

The scope of our responsibility remains vast and central to daily life in Bermuda.

- More than 2,000 acres of public land and over 750 government buildings, valued at more than \$1.5 billion, must be maintained, modernised, and protected.
- A network of over 600 public roads, spanning approximately 225 kilometres, continues to serve as the arteries of our economy and our communities.
- More than 80 public docks and berths sustain maritime trade, tourism, and local livelihoods.
- Municipal waste services support residents and visitors alike, protecting public health and environmental integrity.
- Freshwater reservoirs with storage capacity exceeding two million gallons remain a critical strategic resource.

Over 75 public parks and nature reserves, more than 100 beaches, school grounds, and recreational spaces must be preserved for present enjoyment and future generations.

These responsibilities do not lessen as we strengthen our internal capacity. If anything, they demand sharper execution and greater strategic focus.

Mr. Chairman, this budget represents a clear shift from reactive maintenance to proactive management. It reflects our commitment to embracing technology, improving procurement processes, strengthening project management, and embedding sustainability into every level of decision-making. It ensures that every dollar invested delivers greater long-term value.

The allocation for 2026/27 represents a deliberate investment in capability while sustaining performance. The Operational Budget of \$90,901,000 (an increase of over \$6.8 million from the previous fiscal year) supports the essential day-to-day services upon which Bermudians depend. The Capital Budget of \$73,640,000 (an increase of over \$16 million compared to 2025/26) enables us to address deferred maintenance, upgrade critical infrastructure, acquire modern

equipment, and implement structural improvements that will strengthen service delivery well into the future.

This is about moving forward with stronger systems beneath us. It is about continuing to lay firm foundations even as we build upward. It is about ensuring that this Ministry is equipped—operationally, technologically, and strategically—for the demands of the next decade.

The people of Bermuda can be assured of this: The work will get done. Services will continue. Projects will advance. Standards will be upheld. At the same time, we are strengthening the structure that supports that work so that performance improves steadily and sustainably.

I wish to thank the 650 dedicated public officers across the Ministry. Their professionalism, adaptability, and commitment are the backbone of this forward progress. Their daily work keeps Bermuda functioning, and their continued development ensures we are prepared for what lies ahead.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I now direct Honourable Members to Head 36, Ministry of Public Works and Environment Headquarters, where the detailed financial and operational breakdown is available on pages B-202 through B-206, page C-5, page C-13 and page C-19.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

HEAD 36—MINISTRY OF PUBLIC WORKS AND ENVIRONMENT HEADQUARTERS

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, as I have said before, this is a year of disciplined progress and forward preparation.

That focus applies not only to our physical assets, but also to the systems that support and sustain the Ministry itself. If we are to modernise, enhance service delivery, and prepare confidently for the future, we must continue strengthening the foundation upon which our operations stand. That foundation begins with Ministry Headquarters.

Over the last fiscal year, the Ministry's HQ achieved the following:

- Updating and refining its payment procedures to include more electronic and automated tasks. This will improve the payment authorisation processes without sacrificing controls or oversight. This will lead to shorter turnaround times for the payment of goods and services for the entire Ministry, thus creating more predictable cash flows for local business of all sizes.
- The department's Finance team worked diligently with the Estates team and the Accountant General's Department to remove the audit qualification over the accounting for assets to be retired that had been a point raised by the

Auditor General's Office for two consecutive years.

- The department has improved the structure and consistency of the tender and purchase to payment processes, ensuring that adherence to policies and codes remain paramount in our procurement of goods and services throughout the Ministry.
- Instituted the Medical Review project allowing for staff in high-risk [work] environments (such as with chemicals, heavy metals, pollutants, et cetera) to maintain a personal medical assessment record. This will help the Ministry to keep track of the physical conditions of these staff in an effort [to] quickly identify potential medical irregularities that may have arisen from the workplace.

These accomplishments reflect meaningful progress. They demonstrate that we are not standing still; we are advancing. But responsible leadership requires that we build on that progress with intention and clarity.

The overarching objective of the Ministry Headquarters, Finance and Administration, is to serve as the central coordinating and support hub for the entire Ministry. Its primary function is to provide the essential financial, administrative, human resource, and strategic planning services that enable the effective operation of all Departments under the Ministry's umbrella.

In the year ahead, Ministry Headquarters will continue strengthening its planning, oversight, and governance functions. This means enhancing budgeting processes to improve forecasting accuracy and cost control. It means advancing procurement practices to increase transparency, efficiency, and value for money. It means refining performance monitoring and reporting systems so that we can better measure outcomes and demonstrate accountability. It also means improving workflows and internal coordination to ensure that resources remain aligned with our strategic priorities.

Much of this work takes place behind the scenes. The average resident may not immediately see an improved forecasting model or a refined procurement protocol. However, these advancements are critical. Stronger internal systems translate into faster project delivery, better contractor management, improved response times, and more consistent public services over time.

Headquarters ensures that departmental operations are properly resourced and aligned with Government policy, regulatory standards, and fiscal discipline. It plays a central role in budgeting, procurement oversight, inventory management, compliance, risk management, and strategic coordination. As we continue laying a firm foundation for sustained progress, this coordinating function becomes even more vital.

Simply put, Ministry Headquarters provides the administrative and financial backbone that allows each

department to focus on its core mandate, innovate responsibly, and execute its programmes with professionalism and integrity. By continuing to strengthen that backbone while moving forward, we are positioning the entire Ministry to perform with greater efficiency, accountability, and resilience in the years ahead.

With that said, Mr. Chairman, the services provided by the Ministry Headquarters are organised into the five following programmes which are found on page B-203:

1. 3601, Head Office Administration,
2. 3610, Accounts,
3. 3611, Purchasing,
4. 3612, Telecommunications, and
5. 3613, Central Office Administration.

The Ministry Headquarters' total operational Budget for 2026/27 is \$6,993,000, an increase of \$373,000 which will be explained later in this presentation.

Head Office Administration Programme 3601

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the Head Office Administration Programme 3601 encompasses three core components: the Executive Office, Headquarters Administration, and Safety and Health. Together, these units form the strategic and operational nucleus of the Ministry, ensuring coordinated leadership, policy implementation, and workforce safety across all departments.

Under the direction of the Permanent Secretary, Headquarters Administration provides centralised oversight and management support to the Ministry's departments. This includes ensuring that the Minister's strategic policy priorities are executed efficiently and effectively. Specifically, the unit is responsible for the implementation of the Ministry's Throne Speech initiatives, the execution and monitoring of the annual business plan, oversight of health and safety compliance, and the coordination of numerous administrative projects and special assignments. In essence, it ensures that the Ministry remains aligned with government goals while operating in a structured, accountable, and results-driven manner.

Mr. Chairman, the operational budget for programme 3601, Head Office Administration for the 2026/27 fiscal year is \$2,646,000. This represents an increase of \$173,000 over the previous year's allocation. The primary drivers of this increase are related to the hiring of one new position, pay scale upgrades for various staff positions, including upward adjustments such as from PS Grade 20 to PS Grade 21, and anticipated increases in service and utility costs.

Mr. Chairman, I also wish to take this opportunity to remind Honourable Members that the government continues to fulfil its commitment to place public sector workers ahead of inflation, while helping to offset the financial burden resulting from six of the eight wage freezes endured by civil servants in previous years.

This adjustment reflects the previously negotiated increases between the Government and our union partners continue to be in effect and is reflected across various Ministry programmes and will be referenced throughout this presentation to help explain some of the budgetary increases detailed.

Public Works Accounts Programme 3610

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the Accounts Programme 3610 plays a critical role in the financial stewardship of the Ministry by delivering a wide range of core accounting services to all operating departments. These services include accounts payable, accounts receivable, payroll processing, capital asset management, and both financial and non-financial reporting functions that are essential for transparent and accountable public administration.

This section is responsible for the preparation and distribution of both the monthly and weekly payroll, ensuring that staff are compensated in a timely and accurate manner. It also oversees the issuance of vendor cheques and invoices for services rendered by the Ministry's operational units. In addition, the Accounts Programme facilitates the collection and recording of all Ministry revenues, including payments made by online banking, credit card, cash, and cheque—ensuring accurate and secure reconciliation of funds received for public services.

A key enabler of this programme's effectiveness is the use of a centralised government accounting system, through which the team manages the annual budget preparation process and produces monthly financial management reports for the Ministry and the Budget Office. These reports serve as vital tools for informed decision-making, allowing for continuous monitoring and control of expenditures across both the Current Account and the Ministry's Capital Development and Capital Acquisition budgets.

Mr. Chairman, for the 2026/27 fiscal year, the operational budget for Accounts Programme 3610 is \$1,478,000 representing an increase of \$98,000 compared to the previous fiscal year's budget. This increase is largely attributed to staff-related adjustments, including the filling of a previously vacant position—which, in the last fiscal year, was only budgeted for half-year funding—as well as the public service salary increases referenced earlier in this presentation.

This investment in staffing ensures the Ministry maintains the capacity to manage its growing financial responsibilities, enhance internal controls, and improve service delivery through efficient and timely financial operations.

Purchasing Programme 3611

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the Purchasing Programme will focus on improving procurement and

supply chain management processes to enhance competitiveness, transparency and value for money.

Mr. Chairman, in the upcoming 2026/27 fiscal year, the Purchasing Section will continue its work in reviewing and updating internal controls, operational procedures, and policy frameworks.

Key priorities for the Purchasing Programme this year include

- the improvement and development of procurement and supply chain management processes to increase competitiveness and transparent engagement of our local suppliers and contractors as well as support performance delivery of operations and projects within our various departments; and
- a partial restructuring to execute improved performance delivery in project procurement, supply chain and materials management.

This strategic direction will deliver cost efficiencies, enhance accountability, and provide better service delivery across all Ministry departments.

Mr. Chairman, the operational budget for the Purchasing Programme 3611 for fiscal year 2026/27 is \$1,643,000, representing an increase of \$105,000 over the previous year's allocation. As with other programme areas, some this increase is staff-related, reflecting pay scale upgrades—for example, positions moving from PS [Grade] 20 to PS [Grade] 21—as well as the previously referenced public service salary adjustments. Additionally, the increase includes funding at half year, for the recruitment of one additional position.

This funding will ensure that the Ministry is properly resourced to professionalise procurement processes, optimise supply chain operations, and continue to uphold the principles of good governance in the management of public funds and assets.

Telecommunications Programme 3612

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, Programme 3612, Telecommunications, serves as a cornerstone of the Ministry's operational effectiveness. It is charged with managing the communications infrastructure that connects our departments internally and links government to the wider national network. In doing so, it supports efficient public service delivery, strengthens emergency response capability, and contributes to Bermuda's overall connectivity.

On the internal front, the programme equips Ministry personnel with the communication systems required to perform their duties effectively. This includes maintaining and upgrading telephone systems and associated hardware, as well as administering mobile service arrangements for staff across all departments. These tools enable seamless coordination, improve workflow efficiency, and ensure that field teams always remain connected and responsive.

Externally, the programme maintains oversight of seven government-owned telecommunications towers located at:

- Somerset Police Station
- Alton Hill
- Warwick Camp
- Police Communications Operations, Prospect
- The Quarry
- Fort George
- St. David's Lighthouse

These strategically positioned towers form a vital part of the Island's communications backbone. They support essential government operations, including emergency and security services, and in certain cases provide infrastructure that complements Bermuda's broader telecommunications framework.

Mr. Chairman, the operational budget for Telecommunications Programme 3612 for the 2026/27 fiscal year is \$807,000, reflecting a \$6,000 increase over the previous year's allocation. This increase is primarily due to higher service charges for government telephone and mobile usage, consistent with increased departmental reliance on mobile technology and external communication systems to support field and emergency operations.

This budget ensures that both the internal communications needs of the Ministry and the external infrastructure supporting Island-wide public communications are properly maintained, modernised, and positioned to meet Bermuda's current and future needs.

Central Office Administration Programme 3613

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the Central Office Administration Programme 3613 continues to carry responsibility for supporting recruitment processes, facilitating positive employment relations, and coordinating training and professional development opportunities across the Ministry's departments. These functions are fundamental to sustaining a capable, motivated, and well-supported public service workforce—particularly within a Ministry as operationally broad and labour-intensive as Public Works and Environment.

Mr. Chairman, the second major element of this programme is Central Filing, which serves as the custodian of the Ministry's official records. Its role encompasses the secure management, archiving, and retrieval of human resource files, Cabinet submissions, capital project documentation, and contractual records. Central Filing also safeguards records tied to the Ministry's legislative functions, ensuring statutory compliance while preserving transparency and institutional continuity.

As the Ministry advances its digital modernisation efforts, maintaining secure and reliable records management remains a priority.

Mr. Chairman, for the 2026/27 fiscal year, the Central Office Administration Programme 3613 has been allocated an operational budget of \$413,000,

representing a decrease of \$9,000 over the current year's budget.

Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, I now direct Honourable Members to page B-204 of the Estimates Book, which provides a detailed breakdown of the department's Current Account Estimates for the fiscal year 2026/27.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Minister.
[Page] B-204 for those following. Thank you.

Hon. Jache Adams: Upon review, you will note a collective increase of \$181,000 in salaries and an additional \$105,000 in wages, alongside a \$50,000 increase in the Ministry's other personnel budget. These increases reflect this Government's continued commitment to investing in our public officers by ensuring fair compensation in line with revised pay scales.

Revenue Summary

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the Ministry, through the Department of Public Lands and Buildings, administers the allocation of designated parking spaces within government-owned car parks. These spaces are made available to public officers and, where capacity permits, to members of the public for a modest fee.

In the 2026/27 fiscal year, this programme is projected to generate approximately \$16,000 in revenue. While the amount is not substantial in the context of the overall budget, it represents a practical effort to ensure that government assets are used efficiently and that opportunities to recover operational costs, however small, are responsibly pursued.

Full Time Equivalents (FTEs)

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the budgeted number of employees for the Ministry Headquarters is 40 as reflected on page B-205, an increase of one from the previous fiscal year.

Performance Measures

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, as outlined on page B-206, the Ministry Headquarters has established a number of key performance targets for the 2026/27 fiscal year to ensure continued accountability, safety, and operational excellence.

I am pleased to advise this Honourable House that we have consistently met our established performance benchmarks in the previous fiscal period, demonstrating disciplined management and effective oversight. We remain committed to maintaining that standard in the year ahead. The targets set for 2026/27

are both realistic and results-driven, and the Ministry is fully focused on achieving them, ensuring steady progress and sustained performance across all areas of responsibility.

Capital Development

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, turning to page C-5, I wish to highlight that there [are] certain cost centres reflected under the Ministry Headquarters which, in practical terms, are managed by other departments within the broader Ministry.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Jache Adams: While the Budget Book identifies five capital cost centres under the Ministry Headquarters, it is important to clarify that only two of these are directly overseen by the Headquarters team. The remaining three are managed by their respective departments and will be discussed in detail during their individual budget presentations under the appropriate heads.

Mr. Chairman, focusing now on the capital projects that are managed directly by the Ministry Headquarters, the 2026/27 Capital Expenditure Plan includes the following allocations under Capital Development:

- Cost Centre 75050—Minor Works: allocated \$300,000, and
- Cost Centre 75053—Miscellaneous Small Projects: allocated \$280,000

These particular cost centres are typically used to fund discretionary community-based projects—small but meaningful initiatives that enhance public infrastructure, improve amenities, or respond to urgent local needs that fall outside the scope of larger capital programmes. Examples of such works include minor building repairs for community partners, accessibility improvements, and enhancements to public-use spaces.

Mr. Chairman, you will note a new cost centre 75375, Community Beautification. In the budget presentation, the Honourable Premier stated that "This funding will support projects in constituencies put forward by Members of Parliament. Bigger capital budgets should not just fund large projects, but also the smaller improvements that increase the quality of life in Bermuda."

Capital Acquisitions

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, turning now to page C-13, while the Estimates reflect three cost centres under the Ministry Headquarters, I would like to clarify that the only cost centre managed by the Headquarters team is 76868, which is the Communications Equipment. The remaining two cost centres fall under the remit of the Department of Works and Engineering,

and their details will be addressed in that department's specific presentation.

The Chairman: That's vehicles and equipment and electric vehicles. Right?

[Pause]

Hon. Jache Adams: [Cost centre] 76868?

The Chairman: Yes, okay . . . no, [cost centre] 76868 is Communications Equipment.

Hon. Jache Adams: Yes.

The Chairman: Which you are addressing now.
Thank you.

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the total Capital Acquisitions Plan for the Ministry of Public Works, Headquarters for the 2026/27 fiscal year is \$943,000.

Mr. Chairman, I must advise this Honourable House of an important development regarding a significant infrastructure initiative under this cost centre.

In collaboration with the Department of Public Lands and Buildings, the Ministry had intended to construct a new communications tower in St. David's during the 2025/26 financial year. This project is designed to enable the relocation of communications equipment currently mounted on St. David's Lighthouse, thereby creating the conditions necessary for the long-awaited restoration of this important cultural and historic landmark. While the project did not advance within the original timeframe, our commitment to it remains firm.

The delays have provided valuable lessons. They have underscored the complexity involved in relocating critical communications infrastructure, coordinating multiple stakeholders, and carefully sequencing technical works alongside heritage restoration. They have also reinforced the importance of strong planning discipline, clear approval pathways, and coordinated project management when undertaking initiatives of this nature.

Mr. Chairman, regardless of these challenges, we intend to move forward decisively. The construction of the communications tower and the restoration of St. David's Lighthouse remain clear priorities. The vision remains intact, and the objective is unchanged. We are applying the insights gained to strengthen coordination, refine timelines, and ensure that the next phases proceed with greater clarity and efficiency. This project is an important step in safeguarding both essential communications infrastructure and one of Bermuda's valued historic assets, and we will continue advancing it with focus and determination in the upcoming fiscal year.

This targeted investment underlines the Ministry's ongoing efforts to ensure the reliability of our

critical communications infrastructure, while also supporting the conservation of Bermuda's heritage assets.

Conclusion

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, taken together, the programmes, allocations, and initiatives outlined today reflect a Ministry Headquarters that is moving forward. The work undertaken at Headquarters ensures that every department within the Ministry is better positioned to deliver results efficiently, transparently, and responsibly. These foundational improvements may not always be visible to the public, but they are essential to achieving the higher standards of service, accountability, and performance that Bermudians expect.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my presentation for the Ministry Headquarters, Head 36 and I will now turn to Head 68, the Department of Parks as found on pages B-207 through B-213, page C-6 and page C-13.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister, if you would just pause there for a second.

Honourable Members and members of the listening public, we are in the Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27.

This is a five-hour debate on the Ministry of Public Works and also the Environment. We have been hearing from the Honourable Minister Jache Adams, who has been presenting on the Ministry of Public Works and Environment Headquarters under Head 36 in the Budget Book, and the Minister is now taking us to Head 68, which is the second of five heads, and for those following in the Budget Book, that is page B-207.

Minister, you have the floor. Thank you.

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

HEAD 68—DEPARTMENT OF PARKS

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the Department of Parks is a cornerstone of Bermuda's commitment to preserving and enhancing our natural and recreational heritage. It is entrusted with the care and management of protected areas under the Bermuda National Parks Act 1986 and the Bermuda National Parks Amendment Act 2017, ensuring that our Island's treasured landscapes remain accessible, safe, and vibrant for all.

These protected areas are classified into three categories:

- Class A—Nature Reserves, under the stewardship of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (which I will address in my next brief).
- Class B—Amenity Parks, managed by the Department of Parks.
- Class C—Recreational Parks, overseen by the Department of Sport and Recreation.

Within Class B the department oversees 76 amenity parks, encompassing playgrounds, historic forts, landscaped gardens, and the iconic Bermuda Railway Trail. These spaces are more than public amenities—they are the heart of our communities, providing opportunities for recreation, education, and connection to Bermuda's natural and cultural heritage. They are essential to the well-being of residents, the visitor experience, and the overall character of our Island.

The department's mission is both clear and compelling: *To develop and maintain public amenity parks, beaches, forts, and public-school grounds, and to cultivate plants for use in areas under the department's remit. To provide safe, aesthetically pleasing, active and passive recreational and educational facilities for the enjoyment of residents and visitors alike.*

Mr. Chairman, the department also delivers a professional Lifeguard Service at four of Bermuda's most frequented public beaches: Horseshoe Bay, John Smith's Bay, Clearwater Beach, and Turtle Bay, ensuring the safety of thousands of beachgoers annually and reinforcing the government's commitment to public safety and community well-being.

Beyond parklands and beaches, the department maintains Bermuda's green and cultural assets through the careful stewardship of public-school grounds, health care facilities, post offices, community centres, and historic sites such as Clifton, The Laurels, Montpelier, and Government House. Its work in horticulture, plant propagation, and landscape maintenance enhances biodiversity while enriching the visual and environmental quality of public spaces across the Island.

Mr. Chairman, the importance of Bermuda's parklands cannot be overstated. They are integral to our environmental stewardship, public health, and the overall quality of life.

Aligned with the Ministry's broader objectives, we are moving decisively forward, investing in the systems, resources, and planning necessary to strengthen the department's foundation while delivering meaningful progress. This ensures that Bermuda's parks remain vibrant, resilient, and sustainable for generations to come.

Accordingly, the Current Account Expenditure for the Department of Parks for the 2026/27 fiscal year is \$11,839,000, an increase of \$292,000 over the prior year's revised budget, and is organised into five programmes:

1. Park Services,
2. Lifeguard Service,
3. Park Maintenance,
4. Administration,
5. Forts.

This funding reflects a deliberate investment in both the preservation of Bermuda's green spaces and the enhancement of services that make these spaces safe, accessible, and enjoyable for all. By combining

stewardship with forward-looking planning, we are building a stronger, more sustainable foundation for the Department of Parks and for Bermuda itself.

Park Ranger Service

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the first programme under the Department of Parks is programme 6801, Park Ranger Service, associated with cost centre 78000.

The Park Ranger Service is responsible for enforcing the provisions of the National Parks Act 1986 and the National Parks Regulations 1988. Rangers patrol Bermuda's national parks, beaches, and nature reserves, monitoring the condition of these areas and the activities taking place within them. Their duties include responding to incidents, ensuring compliance with park regulations, and supporting the safe and responsible use of public lands.

Rangers also play a key role in managing special events and functions held within the parks, liaising closely with community groups, event organisers, and industry partners to ensure smooth operations and minimal environmental impact.

Mr. Chairman, beyond enforcement duties, the Park Ranger Service is deeply engaged in community outreach and education. On an annual basis, Rangers support and participate in a range of public service initiatives, including:

- Charity walks and cycling fundraisers.
- CPR, First Aid, and AED certification courses.
- Guided interpretive tours for schools and summer camps.
- Organised clean-up campaigns—both scheduled and post-hurricane.
- Collaborative projects with civic and environmental organisations.

For the 2026/27 fiscal year, the budget allocation for the Park Ranger Service is \$447,000, representing a decrease of \$128,000 compared to the previous year. This decrease is primarily due to the reassignment of one staff member from the Service and one recent vacancy.

Lifeguard Service

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the second programme under the Department of Parks is programme 6802, Lifeguard Service, which falls under cost centre 78010.

This critical service is responsible for enforcing the National Parks Regulations 1988 as they pertain to public beach safety. The Lifeguard Service provides trained personnel at four public beaches—Horseshoe Bay, John Smith's Bay, Clearwater Beach, and Turtle Bay—and delivers water safety outreach across the Island.

In addition to their daily responsibilities, lifeguards support community events such as the

Bermuda Triathlon, providing essential water safety oversight. They also contribute to the Emergency Measures Organisation (EMO) by offering real-time surf condition assessments before and after storms and hurricanes.

Mr. Chairman, since 2023, Bermuda has experienced several tragic, beach-related fatalities. Each of these incidents has been a painful reminder of the indispensable role lifeguards play in protecting lives along our shores. These are not distant statistics; they underscore the very real responsibility we carry to ensure that our beaches are properly supervised, particularly as they remain central to both community life and our tourism product.

At the same time, this Government has remained focused on expanding and strengthening our tourism sector, including deepening partnerships with cruise lines to support more consistent, year-round visitation. Increased visitor numbers bring economic opportunity, but they also demand enhanced public safety coverage. As beach usage grows, so too must our capacity to safeguard those who enjoy them.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Parks has faced ongoing recruitment challenges within the Bermuda Lifeguard Service. At present, there is only one established full-time post, the Lifeguard Superintendent. Despite sustained recruitment efforts and two increases in pay offerings during the 2024/25 and 2025/26 fiscal years, there was no meaningful rise in applications or in the number of qualified seasonal lifeguards.

Faced with the immediate need to ensure adequate beach coverage, the department introduced a programme in early 2025 to engage eight full-time, year-round consultant lifeguards. Let me emphasise that this was always intended as a temporary and practical measure. It was a stabilising intervention—a necessary bridge to ensure public safety while we worked to address the deeper structural issues affecting recruitment and retention within the Service. In essence, it was a short-term solution that allowed us to maintain coverage while focusing on long-term reform.

The opportunity was initially offered to local residents. However, no qualified local applicants applied at that time. Consequently, six consultant lifeguards were recruited from overseas to meet operational demands. Importantly, two positions remain reserved specifically for Bermudians, spouses of Bermudians, or PRC holders. As of February 2026, those posts remain vacant due to a lack of local applicants, which continues to place additional pressure on the existing team.

Mr. Chairman, the impact of this service is measurable and significant. As reflected on page B-211, during 2025 our seasonal staff, alongside the consultant lifeguards, rescued 75 individuals from potentially life-threatening situations in our waters—an average of more than one life saved per week. They administered close to 500 major and minor first aid

interventions, again averaging over one per day. They carried out over 5,000 preventative actions—warning swimmers of dangerous rip currents, preventing hazardous dives into shallow waters, and addressing other safety risks before they escalated, averaging over 13 a day or essentially, once a daylight hour. In total, they directly assisted more than 11,000 beachgoers.

These are the interventions that often go unseen. They are the quiet moments where tragedy is prevented, not reported. Seventy-five families were spared unimaginable loss because our trained professionals were present, alert, and prepared to act.

Mr. Chairman, we have listened carefully to concerns raised by Bermudians regarding the structure and security of these roles. One of the consistent issues identified was the absence of stable, full-time career [pathways] within the Service. That is precisely what we are now addressing.

Our approach will reflect deliberate governance, stabilise operations in the short term, address structural barriers, and then formalise a stronger, more resilient foundation for the future. It is about public safety, national responsibility, and ensuring that as Bermuda moves forward, our protective services are equipped, professionalised, and built to endure.

In support of this commitment, the 2026/27 budget allocates \$1,542,000 to the Lifeguard Service, an increase of \$22,000 to support the potential recruitment effort for full-time staff and purchase replacement operational equipment.

Park Maintenance

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the third programme within the Department of Parks is programme 6803, Park Maintenance Service, encompassing nine distinct sub-programmes as detailed on page B-208. This division employs the majority of the department's staff and is integral to the day-to-day maintenance of Bermuda's protected areas.

In accordance with the Bermuda National Parks Act 1986 and its amendments, the Park Maintenance Service is responsible for

- landscape maintenance of amenity parks, beaches, and associated facilities,
- sanitation services across the Bermuda National Parks System, and
- horticultural upkeep of roadside verges, public school grounds, clinics, rest homes, post offices, and other government properties, including Clifton, The Laurels, Montpelier, and Government House.

Additionally, the department's versatile staff provide vital support to the Emergency Measures Organisation, assisting with recovery efforts following hurricanes and storms to ensure Bermuda's swift return to normalcy.

As such, the section's Budget Allocations for 2026/27 are as follows:

- Government House and Camden Programme [78015]: \$411,000 (an increase of \$54,000), reflecting staff reassignments and salary scale adjustments.
- Maintenance and Development Programme [78020]: \$884,000 (a decrease of \$190,000), due to staff reassignments.
- Eastern Parks Programme [78030]: \$735,000 (a decrease of \$120,000), resulting from staff reassignments and salary uplift adjustments
- Tree Service Programme [78035]: \$588,000 (an increase of \$157,000), attributed to staff movements and hiring of new staff.
- Western Parks Programme [78040]: \$1,566,000 (an increase of \$105,000), due to staff reassignments, salary [scale] increases and hiring of new staff.
- School Grounds Programme [78045]: \$722,000 (an increase of \$166,000), primarily due to increased material costs, staff reassignments, salary scale increases and hiring of new staff.
- Tulo Valley Nursery Programme [78055]: \$837,000 (an increase of \$142,000), reflecting staff reassignments, salary scale adjustments and additional hires.
- Botanical Gardens [and Arboretum Programme 78065]: \$1,510,000 (a decrease of \$39,000), resulting from staff reassignments.
- Railway Trail Programme [78100]: \$320,000, consistent with the previous budget cycle. This programme requires targeted landscape management, including the removal of invasive species and the introduction of native and endemic plants on the railway trails.

Mr. Chairman, through strategic staffing and budget allocations, we continue to ensure that these areas remain safe, accessible, and aesthetically pleasing for residents and visitors alike.

Administration

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the fourth programme at the Department of Parks is 6804, Administration and Planning, cost centre 78050.

The Administration and Planning Programme [78050] is responsible for supporting the administrative functions of the department and issuing permits to lease areas within the amenity parks and forts. The Planning component of this programme is responsible for drafting and developing plans for areas within the national parks, as well as park planning and design, the drafting of park management plans, the issuance of licences, and leases for concession operations in addition to capital project oversight, parks assets analysis and other key operational activities.

Mr. Chairman, the budget allocation for this programme is \$1,504,000, an increase of \$133,000

attributed to salary scale increases and the hiring of additional staff.

Mr. Chairman, the Administrative section also includes the Agricultural Exhibition, cost centre 78110 which has a \$298,000 budget, an increase of \$56,000 to support this annual tradition.

Forts

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the fifth and final programme under the Department of Parks is programme 6805, Forts and Historical Sites, listed under cost centre 78080.

The Department of Parks is the steward of Bermuda's rich cultural and historical legacy, including the preservation and upkeep of numerous forts and historical sites. These treasured locations are not only integral to our heritage but continue to serve as popular venues for both residents and visitors.

To preserve and promote these important sites, the department will continue to collaborate with key stakeholders, including the Bermuda Tourism Authority and other local partners, to enhance marketing efforts, improve accessibility, and ensure proper maintenance of these historical assets.

A total allocation of \$475,000 has been set aside for this programme in the 2026/27 fiscal year, a decrease of \$66,000 from the previous year attributed to a vacancy.

Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, I now draw Honourable Members' attention to page B-209, which outlines the Ministry's Current Account Estimates for the 2026/27 fiscal year in detail.

Upon review, Members will note a collective increase of \$47,000 in salaries and an additional \$130,000 in wages. These adjustments reflect this Government's ongoing commitment to fair compensation and investment in our public officers, particularly in recognition of their dedication and the increasingly complex demands of public service.

Additionally, Mr. Chairman, there is a \$151,000 increase under the Professional Services line item. This is to source additional assistance from external partners to support service delivery.

Revenue Summary

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the department anticipates generating \$247,000 in revenue during the 2026/27 fiscal year, an increase of \$20,000.

Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs)

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the budgeted number of employees for the Department of Parks is 132 as

reflected on page B-210, an increase of nine from the previous fiscal year.

Performance Measures

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, as outlined on page B-211, the department has set forth a series of key performance targets for the 2026/27 fiscal year to guide service delivery, ensure legislative compliance, and reinforce our commitment to operational excellence across all programme areas.

Mr. Chairman, Honourable Members will observe the introduction of several new performance targets across key operational units, including Eastern Parks, Western Parks, School Grounds, and the Botanical Gardens.

These additions are deliberate. They reflect this Ministry's commitment not only to maintaining services, but to strengthening how performance is measured, managed, and improved. If we are to move forward with clarity and purpose, we must ensure that the standards by which we evaluate our work are aligned with our broader objectives.

These new performance measures are designed to support our Ministry's focus on sustained progress while reinforcing a stronger operational foundation. They introduce clearer benchmarks for service delivery and maintenance response. In doing so, they enhance accountability, promote transparency, and create a culture of measurable performance across our park management operations.

Capital Developments

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, for the 2026/27 fiscal year, the Department of Parks will undertake several important capital projects that reflect the Government's continued commitment to enhancing Bermuda's public spaces and infrastructure.

To support this, the department has been allocated \$1.7 million under the Park Improvements line item [75101], as outlined on page C-6. This funding will be used to conclude a number of infrastructure upgrades, including:

- Repairs to the Kindley Field Boat Ramp at Stonecrusher Corner, improving access and safety for the boating community.
- Installation of a Temporary Lifeguard Station at Horseshoe Bay to enhance beach safety during peak periods.
- Repairs to the Tulo Valley Government Plant Nursery Greenhouse, which supports the propagation and care of flora used across public lands.
- Renovations to the Cacti House, Exotic House, and Visitor's Centre at the Botanical Gardens to improve visitor experience and preserve these vital assets.

- Replacement of playground and outdoor exercise equipment at various locations across the Island to support healthy recreation and public wellness.

Mr. Chairman, I also wish to address the long-standing issue of the department's administrative headquarters. Since 2016, the department has been operating from a temporary space on the first floor of Global House in Hamilton, following the deterioration of its previous facility. This current location, while functional in the interim, is not fit for the operational or administrative needs of the department.

Unfortunately, this project has been paused subject to a revaluation of the original designs. However, the government has allocated \$1,000,000 to continue the design and planning of a new purpose-built Headquarters as well as relocate maintenance and administrative teams to other government buildings closer to their designated work areas.

Capital Acquisitions

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, under Capital Acquisitions, cost centre 76474, Vehicles, as reflected on page C-13, Honourable Members will note that the allocation for vehicle purchases is recorded as zero dollars. I wish to clarify that, consistent with previous years, although this cost centre appears under the Department of Parks in the Estimates [Book], the responsibility for procuring and managing government vehicles rests with the Department of Works and Engineering. In order to more accurately reflect operational oversight and streamline accountability, the corresponding allocation has therefore been incorporated within the Works and Engineering acquisition budget.

Mr. Chairman, this now concludes my presentation for the Department of Parks Head 68, and I will now turn to Head 79, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources as found on pages B-214 through B-22 [sic], C-6, C-13 and C-19.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

We are now turning to Head 79, which, as the Minister has pointed out, is found at [pages] B-214 through B-221. I think Public Lands and Buildings starts at [page B-]222 for your reference, Minister, together with the reference to the grants in the back of the Budget Book.

For the benefit of the listening public and the Honourable Members, we are in a five-hour debate regarding the Ministry budget for Public Works and Environment, and we are listening to a presentation by the Honourable Minister Jache Adams. Right now, we are on moving from the second to the third of five heads, and as indicated, this is a five-hour debate due to conclude at 5:15 pm.

Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I do appreciate that clarification. It didn't seem right as I was reading it, so thank you for that.

HEAD 79—DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 79, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources [DENR], found on pages B-214 through B-221, C-6, C-13 and C-19 of the Approved Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure.

Mr. Chairman, as outlined on page B-214, the mission of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources is, *To protect Bermuda's environment and responsibly manage its natural resources.*

To achieve this, the department provides strategic leadership in developing and implementing legislation, policy, and standards that safeguard our natural environment, biodiversity, and marine heritage. Its work focuses on reducing environmental impacts, strengthening food security and local agricultural production, protecting threatened species and habitats, ensuring humane animal care, improving air and water quality, and fostering greater stewardship and appreciation of Bermuda's natural and cultural resources.

To meet these, the department has 14 business units as shown on page B-215, each of which comprises a varied complement of skilled officers.

Mr. Chairman, the specialised teams at the department have been working extremely hard on multiple projects, in addition to their regular duties. Let me take a moment to highlight the work they have been doing.

Firstly, Mr. Chairman, I would like to update this Honourable House on the Bermuda Ocean Prosperity Programme (BOPP). As noted in previous years, the government embarked on this programme, in partnership with the not-for-profit Waitt Institute and the Bermuda Institute of Ocean Science [BIOS] in June 2019.

Honourable Members may recall that the Blue Prosperity Plan provides a blueprint for establishing a framework that supports the sustainable management of ocean resources, coordinates decision-making about marine-based development, ensures that 20 per cent of Bermuda's waters are fully protected as marine protected areas [MPAs], and provides a strategy for the sustainable growth of the Blue Economy within Bermuda's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). This plan comprises of two primary initiatives:

- The Marine Spatial Plan [MSP]: a framework for implementing sustainable ocean development, protection and management in the Island's waters.
- The Blue Economy Strategy: a guideline for growing Bermuda's ocean-related industries and attracting investment opportunities.

In April 2024, a draft of the Marine Spatial Plan and Blue Economy Strategy was produced. Initial consultation on the draft Marine Spatial Plan revealed concerns about enforcement capacity, fairness, illegal fishing, unlicensed sales, and habitat damage. The independent panel which was created by the then Minister of Home Affairs to review the draft Marine Spatial Plan in 2024, further advised that a robust enforcement plan, including a clear demonstration of successful outcomes, should be established before advancing any new fisheries management plans.

As such, upon my appointment in this role, we committed to *pausing the implementation of new marine protected areas until an agreement is reached with local fishermen on better enforcement and fairer data collection rules to support any new marine protected areas.* As a result, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (which I will refer to as DENR going forward) began the establishment of an updated comprehensive and adaptive framework designed to strengthen enforcement, monitoring, compliance, and marine protection across Bermuda's EEZ—the Marine Resources Enforcement Strategy 2025 [MRES]. Public consultation on the draft strategy ran from [27] October to [13] November 2025.

Mr. Chairman, you may recall that we tabled the Marine Resources Enforcement Strategy during an earlier session of this Honourable House. This Strategy serves as a foundational enforcement mechanism for the government. This clearly demonstrated the objective of this Ministry, lay foundations while progressing forward. Furthermore, over the past two years, four cases of illegal fishing within existing marine protected areas have been prosecuted through the courts, a further four cases are currently in the courts, yet to reach sentencing, and a further three cases are being prepared for the Department of Public Prosecutions.

Mr. Chairman, in the last financial year this Government delivered meaningful environmental reform. We brought into force the Water Resources Pollution (Discharge Reporting, Abatement and Remediation) Regulations 2025, strengthening protection of Bermuda's groundwater and marine environment. Mandatory reporting for spills of one gallon or more is now in place. Oversight of more than 650 fuel storage tanks, many of which are buried in the ground, has been reinforced through a pollution liability register. Clear, risk-based remediation standards ensure contaminated sites are cleaned properly, and tougher penalties now backstop compliance. This is practical, enforceable protection for our communities and our natural resources.

We also advanced the Clean Air Amendment Regulations 2025, introducing stricter, science-based pollutant limits aligned with leading international standards, expanding enforcement to all controlled plants, and establishing Bermuda's first objective odour measurement standard. We strengthened monitoring capacity with trained inspectors and an expanded air-quality

network and equipped the department with sharper enforcement tools—including abatement orders and significant fines under the Clean Air Amendment Act 2024.

Mr. Chairman, these reforms are not symbolic. They are substantive. They demonstrate this Ministry's commitment to moving Bermuda forward while putting in place strong, durable foundations to protect our environment and public health for the long term.

However, Mr. Chairman, if we are serious about building a stronger foundation for long-term environmental stewardship, we must also be candid about where improvement is required. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources has therefore begun a deliberate process of internal reform designed to modernise its operations, strengthen coordination across its units, and enhance its overall enforcement capacity. This is not change for its own sake; it is a necessary evolution to ensure the department is structured to meet the growing and increasingly complex demands placed upon it while also helping to support industries focused on food security.

Effective enforcement is the backbone of effective environmental management. Whether we are speaking about marine protection, pollution prevention, terrestrial conservation, animal control, food security, or the safeguarding of our natural resources, laws and policies are only as strong as our ability to enforce them. At present, the department's capacity is stretched across a wide mandate: addressing climate adaptation, conducting research and monitoring to control invasive species, managing nature reserves, supporting agricultural resilience and freshwater sustainability, delivering animal control services, and carrying out regulatory and compliance functions. These responsibilities are critical, but the resources and structure supporting them must match their importance.

Mr. Chairman, to address these gaps and strengthen outcomes, the Ministry will consider proposals to bolster the department's operational and enforcement capacity. These enhancements are expected to include the addition of more animal wardens to improve responsiveness and humane animal management; expanded marine vigilance through the Blue Belt Ocean Shield Programme to better safeguard our waters; and the introduction of dedicated marine resource technicians to support research and monitoring priorities while ensuring compliance with marine safety and environmental regulations, including those governing boating and diving activities.

These measures reflect a clear commitment: to ensure that Bermuda's environmental protection framework is not only well-intentioned, but well-executed. By reinforcing the department's structure and strengthening enforcement [capability], we are laying the groundwork for more proactive management, stronger compliance, and a more resilient natural environment for generations to come.

And to accomplish this, Mr. Chairman, on page B-215 you will note that the department's total budget

allocation is \$10,210,000 for the 2026/27 fiscal year. This represents an increase of \$1,062,000, or 12 per cent, when compared to the previous year.

General Administration

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the General Administrative Programme is responsible for providing the policy leadership, strategic direction, and regulatory oversight that guide the work of the department. It serves as the central coordinating mechanism through which legislation is developed, standards are set, and compliance is monitored to ensure that Bermuda's environmental framework is both effective and enforceable. This business unit also includes the biodiversity section which is also responsible for controlling invasive species including feral chickens and the recent fire ant and crayfish discovery.

This programme supports the formulation of policy, the issuance of licences and permits, the monitoring of regulatory obligations, and the enforcement of statutory requirements across a broad range of environmental and natural resource matters. It ensures that departmental operations remain aligned with government priorities, fiscal accountability, and international best practice.

In practical terms, the General Administrative Programme underpins compliance efforts, strengthens governance structures, manages stakeholder engagement, and provides the institutional oversight necessary to translate policy into measurable action. It is the engine room that ensures environmental protection is not only aspirational in policy, but consistent in execution.

Mr. Chairman, the budget allocation for this programme is \$1,493,000, an increase of \$199,000 attributed to salary [scale] increases and funding to be re-allocated to the vacant unfunded biodiversity officer post in addition to administrative posts.

Marine Management

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the Marine Management Programme oversees the sustainable use and protection of Bermuda's marine resources. It maintains the register of commercial fishermen, assesses eligibility for benefits relating to vessels and equipment, administers commercial and recreational spearfishing and lobster licences, and enforces compliance under the relevant legislation.

The programme conducts fish stock monitoring and applied research, develops management plans for protected species and marine habitats, manages protected dive sites, and provides technical advice on fisheries development and the environmental impact of proposed activities. It also administers the fuel rebate system, inspects commercial fishing vessels for safety compliance, and advises the Marine Resources Board, the Commercial Fisheries Council, and the Historic

Wrecks Authority, ensuring that fisheries policy, marine conservation, and heritage protection are guided by sound science and responsible stewardship.

Mr. Chairman, the 2026/27 budget allocation for 89010, Marine Resources is \$775,000, an increase of \$243,000 above the previous fiscal year. The increase reflects the need for two local consultants to temporarily fill the role of marine resource technicians to support increased monitoring activities in addition to a grant to the Sargasso Sea Commission to assist the Commission in its efforts to support willing governments to work together to conserve the Sargasso Sea.

Mr. Chairman, the 2026/27 budget allocation for 89020, Marine Conservation is \$317,000, an increase of \$102,000 above the previous fiscal year. The increase reflects funding for the previously vacant and unfunded marine conservation officer post and also for a local consultant to provide additional support with monitoring thereby ensuring that necessary safety standards are met for diving operations.

Mr. Chairman, the 2026/27 budget allocation for 89030, Marine Heritage and Health is \$159,000, an increase of \$16,000 above the previous fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman, the 2026/27 budget allocation for 89040, Marine Enforcement is \$421,000, a decrease of \$72,000 [from] the previous fiscal year. The decrease reflects one recent vacancy due to retirement. The department is almost ready to commence recruitment for a replacement.

Terrestrial Conservation

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the Terrestrial Conservation section is responsible for the protection and management of Bermuda's land-based ecosystems and species. It oversees the 26 Government [Nature] Reserves, implements management plans for terrestrial and bird habitats, and develops recovery plans for threatened species. The section also provides ecological assessments and technical advice on proposed developments that may impact conservation areas, ensuring informed decision-making. Equally important, it promotes public awareness and community stewardship, fostering a shared responsibility to safeguard Bermuda's natural landscapes for future generations.

Mr. Chairman, the 2026/27 budget allocation for this section is \$585,000, an increase of \$14,000 above the previous fiscal year attributed to salary increases related to the previously mentioned uplifts.

Animal Management

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the Animal Control section is responsible for safeguarding animal welfare, public health, and ecological integrity across Bermuda. It administers and enforces legislation governing dogs, animal welfare, veterinary practice, and the import and export of animals and animal products, including the issuance of permits under CITES [Convention on the

International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora] and the regulation of international animal movement. The section investigates dog-related incidents and suspected cruelty, conducts port inspections, manages quarantine controls where necessary, and has enforcement powers to seize animals and address contraventions of the law. It also promotes responsible animal husbandry, supports local agriculture, responds to livestock disease, ensures proper standards for commercially used animals, and works closely with veterinarians and regulatory bodies, including providing advice to the Veterinary [Practitioners] Council. Through enforcement, education, and regulation, the section plays a critical role in protecting both the community and Bermuda's environment.

Mr. Chairman, the 2026/27 budget allocation for 89060, Veterinary Services is \$350,000.

Mr. Chairman, the 2026/27 budget allocation for 89070, Animal Control is \$517,000, an increase of \$91,000 above the previous fiscal year. The increase largely reflects the need for an additional animal warden employed through a local consultant contract to help address increased incidents involving illegal dogs.

Plant Management

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the Plant Management section safeguards Bermuda's plant health and agricultural biosecurity by regulating the import and export of plants, plant products, soil, growing media, and pesticides in accordance with international best practices. It inspects incoming and outgoing agricultural shipments, monitors for invasive pests and diseases, and oversees the treatment or destruction of infested materials. The section supports farming and beekeeping by storing farmers' produce in dedicated chill rooms at the Agricultural Service Centre, provides embargoes to promote local crops when available, provides essential supplies, and the supply of ice to registered farmers and fishermen, while advising the Board of Agriculture on policy matters critical to Bermuda's food security and agricultural sustainability. The section also maintains pesticide controls, assesses applications for agricultural imports, and enforces quality standards for local produce.

Mr. Chairman, the 2026/27 budget allocation for 89080, Plant Protection is \$511,000, an increase of \$24,000.

Mr. Chairman, the 2026/27 budget allocation for 89090, Agronomy is \$948,000, an increase of \$76,000 above the previous fiscal year. The increase reflects the need for a local consultant to provide additional support at the Agricultural Service Centre thereby allowing the principal agriculture officer to spend more time visiting farms and providing added support to farmers.

Pollution Control

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the Pollution Control section, comprised of specialists in environmental engineering and hydrogeology, plays a central role in protecting Bermuda's air, groundwater, and marine environment through strong regulation, monitoring, and enforcement. The section administers the legislation governing emissions from controlled plants, groundwater abstraction and discharge, marine pollution, and the importation of controlled chemicals, while establishing and enforcing the necessary licensing, monitoring, and reporting conditions under the Clean Air Act and the Water Resources Act.

It conducts inspections on land and at sea, investigates complaints, oversees spill response and remediation in accordance with the regulations, and maintains oversight of environmental liabilities such as fuel storage tanks. The team monitors ambient air quality through a contract with the Bermuda Institute of Ocean Sciences [BIOS], the sustainability of Bermuda's freshwater lenses. It also manages the Island's Marine Pollution Contingency Plan, maintains required maritime waste records, advises the Department of Planning on environmentally responsible development, and serves as secretary to the Environmental Authority, ensuring that pollution prevention, compliance, and environmental restoration are grounded in sound science and firm accountability.

Mr. Chairman, the 2026/27 budget allocation for the Pollution Control section is \$664,000, an increase of \$82,000 above the previous fiscal year. The increase reflects local consultant funding to provide functions of an additional technical officer to increase pollution monitoring in line with the regulations and to also assist with stakeholder consultation for suitable alternatives to single-use plastics for a new Act that will be presented shortly.

Bermuda Aquarium, Museum and Zoo (BAMZ)

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum and Zoo is well-known to the public as one of Bermuda's premier institutions, but beyond its visible attractions lies a significant governance and management responsibility. The programme provides full administration and operational oversight of the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum and Zoo in accordance with the Aquarium [and Museum] Regulations 1997, including responsibility for staff, facilities, vehicles, marketing, and daily operations. It ensures the proper care and maintenance of animal and aquatic collections, exhibits, veterinary services, and specialised training, supported through the operating budget that enables it to meet international accreditation standards.

In addition, the programme manages the Natural History Museum and library, safeguarding Bermuda's scientific collections of specimens, images, data, and publications that document the Island's geology, biodiversity, and conservation history. It also serves as the principal government liaison to the

Bermuda Zoological Society, overseeing coordination in areas such as development, membership, education, volunteer services, and research. Through this structure, the programme ensures that scientific research is translated into meaningful public education and that BAMZ continues to operate as a world-class institution dedicated to conservation, learning, and environmental stewardship.

Mr. Chairman, the 2026/27 budget allocation for the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum and Zoo section is \$3,470,000, an increase of \$292,000 above the previous fiscal year. The increase largely reflects the filling of vacant unfunded posts including the librarian and an aquarist in addition to covering the increasing costs of running a facility such as BAMZ.

Subjective Analysis of Current Account

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, upon review of the Subjective Analysis of Current Account—

The Chairman: Minister, actually if you are moving on to the next section, maybe that would be an appropriate moment to break, if it is convenient to you. I can't quite see the clock in the back, but it looks like we are almost at half past twelve.

Hon. Jache Adams: No objection here.

The Chairman: Would you kindly take us to lunch, Minister? Or—

Hon. Jache Adams: What do I move?
I move—

The Chairman: I see the other . . . no? Okay.

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, I now move that we—

The Chairman: Adjourn for lunch—

Hon. Jache Adams: —adjourn for lunch—

The Chairman: —and return—

Hon. Jache Adams: —and reconvene at 2:00 pm.

The Chairman: It has been moved that we adjourn for lunch and reconvene at 2:00 pm.
No objection? So moved.

[Gavel]

Proceedings in Committee suspended at 12:27 pm

Proceedings in Committee resumed at 2:02 pm

[Mr. Scott Pearman, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2026/27

MINISTRY OF PUBLIC WORKS AND ENVIRONMENT

HEAD 79—DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

[Continuation thereof]

The Chairman: Honourable Members and members of the listening public, we are in the Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the fiscal year 2026/27, and we are currently about a third of the way through a five-hour debate for the budget of the Ministry of Public Works and Environment, Heads 36, 68, 79, 81, and 82. And when we broke for the short adjournment, the Honourable Minister, Jache Adams, was addressing the Honourable House on Head 79.

Honourable Minister, if you want to pick up where you left off, you have the floor.

Subjective Analysis of Current Account

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, transitioning to the subjective analysis of current account, Mr. Chairman, upon review of the subjective analysis of current account estimates found on page B-216, Members will note a collective increase of \$287,000 in salaries. These adjustments reflect this Government's ongoing commitment to fair compensation and investment in our public officers, particularly in recognition of their dedication and the increasingly complex demands of public service.

In contrast, wages have decreased by \$193,000. This is due to the anticipated departmental restructuring that Cabinet will soon consider. As roles shift from more industrial functions to more technical responsibilities, the associated posts will be transferred from the wages category to the salaries category.

Additionally, Mr. Chairman, there is a \$617,000 increase under the professional services line item. This is to source additional assistance from external partners to support service delivery including engaging with local consultants for contractors to address shortfalls in our service that will ultimately be addressed through additional recruitment to previously lost posts.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, the budget reflects a collective increase of \$160,000 in allocations for repairs and maintenance as well as materials and supplies. This adjustment is necessary to address rising costs across the board, including both labour and materials, ensuring that our facilities, equipment, and infrastructure remain fully operational, safe, and well-maintained. It also provides the department with the flexibility to

respond promptly to unexpected maintenance needs, support ongoing preventative maintenance programmes, and maintain the high standard of service delivery that residents and visitors expect.

Revenue Summary

Hon. Jache Adams: Transitioning to Revenue Summary, Mr. Chairman, the department's Revenue Summary is found on page B-217.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Jache Adams: The department generates revenue from a variety of licences, permits, services, and other fees including licensing of dogs, lobster and fishing activities, water rights, clean air operating licences, crop storage fees, and daily visitor admissions to the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum, and Zoo [BAMZ]. The department is anticipating an increase of \$80,000 attributed to both greater admissions to the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum, and Zoo and increased inventory of chemicals held at the Agricultural Service Centre that are sold to registered farmers.

Manpower

Hon. Jache Adams: Transitioning to Manpower, Mr. Chairman, as outlined on page 218, the department currently has 84 full-time equivalent posts, representing an increase of five positions over the previous fiscal year.

Honourable colleagues will recall that earlier in this presentation, I highlighted the Government's intention to strengthen the department's operational and enforcement capacity. These additional roles are part of a broader strategy to ensure the department is fully equipped to meet its expanding responsibilities, from environmental protection and conservation to animal and plant management and enforcement of relevant legislation.

With Cabinet's consideration of proposed measures to further bolster staffing, we anticipate that the number of full-time equivalents will continue to grow in the upcoming fiscal year, providing the department with the personnel needed to deliver its mandate effectively, enhance compliance, and support Bermuda's long-term environmental and natural resource objectives.

Performance Measures

Hon. Jache Adams: Transitioning to Performance Measures, Mr. Chairman.

While a complete tabulation of the output measures for the Department of Environment and Natural Resources can be found on pages B-219 to B-221, I will endeavour to highlight some of the measures of note.

The number of feral animals, largely chickens, removed has increased significantly as a result of both increase in budget and resources to cull these animals in addition to a new public reporting system that connects directly to the cullers in the field and, recently, the traps provided at cost to the public.

The department continues to meet its key performance indicator—time-based deliverables for licences, permits, and responses to other departments as stakeholders in other processes.

The freshwater lenses remain at a high capacity, suggesting that greater abstraction can be allowed in line with the conditions of the water right.

Capital Development Expenditure

Hon. Jache Adams: Transitioning to Capital Development Expenditure, Mr. Chairman, the capital expenditure budget for the department can be found on page C-6.

The department has four active capital accounts. Due to the need for specialised facilities and educational displays, \$240,000 has been allocated to the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum, and Zoo for repairs to exhibits and life support systems, an increase of \$100,000. This is shown in project number 75236 under Aquarium Refurbishment. This includes repairs to ensure the continued operation of the zoo and aquarium.

Project 75271, Minor Works—Environment and Natural Resources, is a capital Minor Works budget of \$150,000 that will provide for the general maintenance and upgrading of the headquarters facility and Plant Protection Laboratory located in the Botanical Gardens, the Coney Island facility for marine resources management and enforcement, the government Agriculture Service Centre in Prospect, the government kennels, the Shorelands facility in Flatts, and improvements in the 200 acres of government-owned nature reserves and associated buildings managed by the department.

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to announce that \$2.5 million has been allocated to continue the work for the replacement Agriculture Services Centre. This is shown in project 75367. I can advise that at this time a new replacement centre has been designed and received full planning permission. This funding will allow for the completion of the project's contract and preparation of the new site adjacent to the current facility. The cutting and clearing of a large embankment have recently commenced, and I look forward to briefing this Honourable House on this and other important agriculture-related projects that are aimed at providing important support to our farmers and bolstering the Island's food security.

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to announce that \$1,732,000 has been allocated towards the implementation of the Master Plan 2025–2038 to improve and transform the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum and Zoo.

This is shown as 75371 under the line item BAMZ Master Plan Infrastructure.

Grants and Contributions

Hon. Jache Adams: I will now transition to Grants and Contributions, Mr. Chairman, as found on page C-19. I am pleased to announce that the Government will provide a \$30,000 grant to the Bermuda Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals [SPCA] under cost code 6970. This funding will support the SPCA in continuing their vital work protecting the welfare of animals across the Island, from rescuing and caring for stray and injured animals to promoting responsible pet ownership and public education. This grant underscores the Government's ongoing commitment to animal welfare and ensures that the SPCA can maintain and expand its essential services for the benefit of both animals and the community.

Mr. Chairman, a new grant for research and extension will be provided to the Sargasso Sea Commission to assist the commission in its efforts to support willing governments to work together to conserve the Sargasso Sea.

Mr. Chairman, last but certainly not least, the department has traditionally engaged local entities to undertake specialised studies, such as the ambient air quality programme through the Bermuda Institute of Ocean Sciences [BIOS]. The funding for the programme can be found under 7006. The grant for \$230,000 will enable the department to meet its monitoring requirements mandated by the Clean Air Act 1991. I can confirm that seven monitoring stations are currently active in areas around the island, including in the vicinity of BELCO, Tynes Bay, [a] clinical waste incinerator, [a] crematorium, and busy roads, to monitor the Island's air quality.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, the 2026/27 budget for the Department of Environment and Natural Resources reflects a clear and deliberate strategy to protect Bermuda's environment, safeguard our natural and cultural heritage, and strengthen the foundations for sustainable growth. From the Marine Management programme and Terrestrial Conservation to Animal and Plant Management, Pollution Control, and the ongoing development of BAMZ, this budget equips the department with the resources, personnel, and operational flexibility needed to meet its expanding responsibilities.

By investing in enforcement capacity, modernising internal structures, supporting research and monitoring, and enhancing public education and stewardship initiatives, we are ensuring that policies are not only robust on paper but effective in practice. The increases in capital, operational, and grant funding, including support for BAMZ, the Agricultural Service Centre, and the SPCA, underscore our commitment to safeguarding Bermuda's natural resources, promoting sustainable food security, and advancing community and environmental well-being. This budget is a

statement of intent and action. We are laying strong foundations today to ensure a healthier, more resilient, and environmentally secure Bermuda for generations to come.

Mr. Chairman, this now concludes my presentation for the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Head 79.

I will now turn to Head 81, which is the Department of Public Lands and Buildings, as found on pages B-222–B-225, C-6, and C-26–C-28.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister, if that is a convenient moment to pause as we move from Head 79 to the fourth of the five Heads, namely Head 81, I would just like to recognise in the Gallery Senator Simmons.

And we will be changing the Chairman, and we will be having another—

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: No relation?

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Scott Simmons: No relation.

The Chairman: MP Scott Simmons.

[Mr. Scott Simmons, Chairman]

The Chairman: Thank you, Mr. [Pearman], and also good afternoon, everyone. Good afternoon to the Minister.

The Minister has already outlined where he will be beginning, so I am happy to let the Minister continue on where he is. I believe he said that he is going to be continuing on with [Head] 81, if I am correct.

And you are going to go forward. Minister, I am happy to accept. Go ahead.

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you, Mr. New Chairman.

The Chairman: And just to let you know, Minister, this debate concludes at about 5:15 [pm]. My contribution will be for the next two hours, so go right ahead. I am at your leisure. Minister.

HEAD 81—DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC LANDS AND BUILDINGS

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, today I present the strategic role, responsibilities, and planned activities of the Department of Public Lands and Buildings for the fiscal year 2026/27.

The department's guiding mandate is clear—to effectively manage government property and provide national mapping to enable the delivery of effective public services. While that may sound straightforward,

the reality is far more complex. The department is not simply a custodian of land and buildings. It is a foundational enabler of service delivery, a strategic partner to the ministries, and a steward of national infrastructure.

Mr. Chairman, the department oversees more than 2,000 acres of government-owned land and approximately 750 buildings including schools, police and fire stations, courthouses, public service offices, residential properties for public officers, national lighthouses, farms, and community areas throughout. Each of these assets plays a critical role in the everyday functioning of our government and the well-being of our people. We are also responsible for 75 active leases with private landlords and quangos, ensuring that operations that cannot be housed within government-owned facilities continue without interruption.

The department's work is essential for enabling all ministries to deliver their services effectively. Without safe, modern, and strategically located buildings, no ministry can fulfil its mandate. That is why we act not just as property managers but as strategic partners, aligning physical infrastructure with operational needs while ensuring compliance with building codes, accessibility standards, and health and safety regulations.

For the 2026/27 fiscal year, our operations are organised into six core programmes: Administration, Buildings, Estates, Land Surveys, Mapping, and Project Management. Each represents a pillar of service delivery, whether modernising maintenance protocols, improving energy efficiency, digitising mapping records, managing land acquisition and leases, or overseeing capital projects. Collectively, these projects ensure that government infrastructure is responsive, resilient, and ready to meet both current and future demands.

Mr. Chairman, this year, the department is taking decisive action to improve government buildings and infrastructure, creating a foundation for change that Bermuda has not seen in a significant amount of time, and we will be sharing our plans in due course. However, just know we are modernising facilities, enhancing safety, improving accessibility, and planning for a more resilient future. Through strategic investment, focused oversight, and an unrelenting commitment to modernisation, we are laying the groundwork for a government estate that supports effective service delivery today and is equipped to adapt to tomorrow's challenges.

In short, the Department of Public Lands and Buildings is no longer simply a caretaker of property. It is a driver of transformation, ensuring that the physical foundations of government are strong, reliable, and forward-looking. This work establishes the groundwork for long-term progress, giving every ministry and every Bermudian the facilities they need to thrive.

With that said, Mr. Chairman, I am pleased that for the fiscal year 2026/27 the department has been allocated a total budget of \$22,682,000 reflecting an

increase of \$213,000 over the previous fiscal year as reported on page B-222.

I will now transition to Administration.

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister.

Administration and Training, 8100

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I now turn to programme 8100, under the name Administration and Training, which plays a central role in ensuring the effective operation and strategic direction of the Department of Public Lands and Buildings. Its core objective is to provide senior management leadership and administrative support for the Estates and Buildings sections. In essence, programme 8100 underpins the department's overall capacity to deliver its mandate by ensuring sound governance, well-coordinated internal operations, and a trained and capable workforce.

Administration, 91000

Hon. Jache Adams: I now transition to cost centre 91000. This cost centre is allocated \$292,000 for the upcoming fiscal year. It supports the department's senior management team, administrative personnel, and internal operations. This includes human resources, financial oversight, communications, internal audits, and interdepartmental coordination.

Effective administration is not merely clerical; it ensures that planning is strategic, operations are accountable, and resources are optimally deployed. This team serves as the backbone of the department's structure, ensuring all programmes are properly supported.

Training and Apprenticeship, 91001

Hon. Jache Adams: Transitioning to Training and Apprenticeship. This cost centre has been allocated reflecting the department's continued and growing commitment to skills development, capacity building, and the nurturing of local talent. This allocation supports technical and professional training for existing staff; apprenticeship programmes designed to prepare young people for careers in estate management, building maintenance, surveying, mapping, and project management; certification and continuing education initiatives; [and] partnerships with technical schools and local institutions to support practical on-the-job training. These investments are critical in ensuring the long-term sustainability of the department's operations by cultivating the next generation of skilled professionals within the public sector.

You will note, Mr. Chairman, a reduction of \$311,000 in this cost centre. While this may seem surprising at first, it is actually good news. The trainees funded here have now successfully moved into full-time roles within the department, taking advantage of

vacancies created by retirements and others leaving. Additionally, this department is expecting to onboard two additional trainees who are now in their final year of studies in the UK. This not only shows the success of our training programmes but also represents a smart use of resources.

As usual, we have an incoming cohort of summer students joining us this season. These young individuals bring energy, fresh ideas, and a valuable perspective to our work, and we are proud to support their development. Should any of these students express an interest in continuing their careers in the public service upon graduation, funding for their positions will come from this cost centre.

This approach ensures we are not only providing meaningful learning opportunities but also investing in the next generation of public servants. By supporting these students early in their careers, we are fostering a skilled, committed workforce that will continue to serve the public with dedication and professionalism for years to come.

Buildings, 8101

Hon. Jache Adams: Transitioning to buildings, Mr. Chairman, I now turn to programme 8101, under the name Buildings, which is a cornerstone of the department's operational framework and a critical component in ensuring the safety, functionality, and longevity of the Government's built infrastructure.

This programme carries the mandate to effectively manage the maintenance, repair, and renovation of all Government buildings. This essential responsibility spans a diverse range of properties, from schools, police stations, and post offices to government offices and residential buildings, ensuring that these assets remain safe, serviceable, and fit for purpose.

Mr. Chairman, the Buildings programme is organised into two dedicated cost centres, each with a distinct operational focus. The first is 91002 Services Management, [which] oversees the strategic and technical coordination of all maintenance activities across the government estate. This includes staffing, regular inspections, compliance with building codes and safety regulations, and centralised management of maintenance requests.

This cost centre has been allocated \$1,535,000, an increase of \$284,000. This rise reflects the successful transition of one trainee into a full-time role, the hiring of additional staff members, and the previously mentioned salaries and wages uplift. Adjustments have also been made to account for revised pay scales, outcomes of union negotiations, and cost-of-living increases. These measures ensure that the department remains competitive in attracting and retaining highly skilled technical staff, supporting the ongoing maintenance and safety of our government facilities.

The other cost centre is 91003 Maintenance, which covers the direct costs of maintenance, including

repairs, renovations, contracted services, emergency responses, and material procurement. It is the primary operational arm of the Buildings programme. This cost centre has been allocated \$10,032,000, seeing an increase of \$1,319,000 attributed to hiring of additional staffing complement, salaries and wages uplifts as aforementioned. Additionally, rising material costs and contractual costs due to regular inflation and global supply chain pressures have led to increased costs for essential materials such as electrical components, plumbing supplies, HVAC parts, and roofing materials, as well as for outsourced labour and services.

Estates, 8102

Hon. Jache Adams: Transitioning to [the] Estates section, Mr. Chairman, I now turn to programme 8102, Estates, which is a vital division within the Department of Public Lands and Buildings.

This section is tasked with delivering comprehensive property and land management services to all government ministries and departments while also providing a range of services to the general public in matters relating to government-owned land. The core responsibilities of the Estates section include

- property insurance management for government-owned assets,
- land and building acquisition to support the expansion of public services,
- leasing arrangements, both inbound and outbound, ensuring efficient and lawful use of government property, and
- oversight of government-owned land including licensing and leasing of strategic national assets such as islands, the foreshore, and the seabed.

As the official custodian of these critical national assets, the Estates section plays a key role in safeguarding the public interest and ensuring the responsible stewardship of land and property resources.

Mr. Chairman, Programme 8102, Estates, is structured into two distinct cost centres, each with targeted responsibilities.

Property Asset Management, 91004. This cost centre focusses on the day-to-day and strategic management of the Government's property portfolio. It includes activities related to leases, licences, acquisitions, valuations, and ensuring compliance with legal and regulatory requirements. The cost centre has been allocated \$5,437,000, an increase of \$484,000 attributed to the transition of one trainee into a full-time role, the hiring of one additional staff member, and the previously mentioned salaries and wages uplift.

Mr. Chairman, the other cost centre is 91005, Insurance, which administers the insurance coverage for government buildings and properties, ensuring that assets are protected against loss, damage, and unforeseen events. It also handles claims processing and insurance policy management. For the fiscal year

2026/27, the cost centre has an allocation of \$3,650,000.

Land Survey Management, 8103

Hon. Jache Adams: Now transitioning to Land Survey Management—

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister.

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, I now turn to programme 8103, Land Surveys, administered under cost centre 91007. For fiscal year 2026/27, this programme has been allocated \$627,000, an increase of \$242,000 over last year. This boost reflects funding for recruitment to fill vacancies and the previously mentioned salaries and wages uplift.

The Land Surveys section is essential not only to the Department of Public Lands and Buildings, but to the wider government of Bermuda providing critical surveying, mapping, and geospatial services. Its key responsibilities include the establishment and maintenance of Bermuda's national control monument network, which ensures all land measurements are accurate, consistent, and internationally recognised. This network underpins land ownership, development, and planning across the Island.

The section is also responsible for national mapping and geospatial services, producing and maintaining official maps and data sets that support urban planning, infrastructure development, emergency response, and environmental management.

In addition, the section has brought hydrographic surveying and data collection in house, including seabed mapping and coastal profiling. This move delivers cost savings, builds internal capacity, and strengthens maritime safety and environmental protection.

Beyond national functions, the section provides direct operational support for engineering and construction projects, including boundary identification, topographic surveys, construction layout, and verification of government buildings. These services reduce delays, ensure legal compliance, and enable efficient project delivery.

Finally, the section manages primary civic addresses across Bermuda, a critical foundation for public services from emergency response and postal delivery to utilities and voter registration. A robust and accurate address database is essential to effective governance and public safety.

Programme 8103 is not just about maps and measurements. It is about building a safer, more efficient, and better governed Bermuda.

Project Management, 8104

Hon. Jache Adams: Transitioning now to project management, Mr. Chairman, I now turn to programme 8104, Project Management—

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister.

Hon. Jache Adams: —which has been allocated a budget of \$1,109,000 for the fiscal year 2026/27. This is an increase of \$383,000 over the previous year, reflecting the hiring of one additional project manager, the rising cost of professional consultancy services, and the growing number of capital development projects across government.

The Project Management unit plays a central and strategic role in planning, implementing, and overseeing government capital projects. This section ensures that every facility upgrade, property improvement, and new construction projects align with service delivery objectives, safety standards, and long-term infrastructure priorities. The unit manages capital development projects undertaken directly by the Department of Public Lands and Buildings and ensures that modifications to existing facilities support efficient operations, enhance public access, and meet the evolving needs of the community.

The work of this section is not only technical but also transformational. Through careful planning, oversight, and coordination, the Project Management unit ensures that government infrastructure evolves in step with the needs of Bermuda's public services. From the expansion and modernisation of schools to the redevelopment of police stations and government offices, this programme plays a critical role in enabling safe, efficient, and forward-thinking public service delivery.

Mr. Chairman, now transitioning to the subjective analysis of current account estimates.

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister.

We are in Committee of the Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27. That will be for Heads 36, 68, 79, 81, and 82. And the Minister is currently on Head 81 going to subjective analysis of current account estimates.

Minister?

Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I now draw Honourable Members' attention to page B-223, which sets out in detail the Ministry's current account estimates for the 2026/27 fiscal year. Upon review, Members will note a collective increase of \$674,000 in salaries and a further \$320,000 in wages. These increases reflect this Government's continued commitment to fair and competitive compensation for our public officers. They recognise the dedication of our staff and the increasingly complex demands placed upon the public service. A portion of this

adjustment also reflects the hiring of new personnel to strengthen capacity and ensure that the key functions are properly resourced.

Mr. Chairman, Members will also observe an increase of \$902,000 in professional services. As with all other departments within the Ministry, we are laying the groundwork for meaningful and long-overdue transformation. To support this work, we will engage external expertise on a temporary basis to assist with priority projects while the department undertakes restructuring aimed at modernisation and faster, more efficient project delivery. This is a strategic investment in building a stronger, more responsive Ministry.

Additionally, there is a \$150,000 increase under the rentals line item. These funds will support renovations to several government rental properties addressing ageing infrastructure and ensuring that these properties remain safe, functional, and fit for purpose.

Mr. Chairman, these estimates reflect not only operational needs but a clear commitment to strengthening our people, modernising our systems, and improving the infrastructure that supports public service delivery across Bermuda.

Revenue Summary

Hon. Jache Adams: Transitioning to Revenue Summary, Mr. Chairman. The department projects revenue of \$3,256,000 for the 2026/27 fiscal year. This income will be generated primarily from the rental of government-owned apartments to public officers and the leasing of government foreshores.

Full-time Equivalents

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the budgeted number of employees for the department is 157 as reflected, a decrease of five from the previous fiscal year owing to retirements. We are beginning recruitment efforts for replacements.

Performance Measures

Hon. Jache Adams: [Under] Performance Measures as outlined on page B-224, the Department of Public Lands and Buildings has established a comprehensive set of key performance targets for the 2026/27 fiscal year. These targets serve as a strategic framework to guide the department's operations, enhance the quality and consistency of service delivery, and ensure full compliance with relevant legislative and regulatory requirements.

These performance benchmarks have been carefully designed to support our overarching mandate—managing government property and land assets with integrity, transparency, and efficiency while also reinforcing our commitment to operational excellence across all programme areas including Administration,

Buildings, Estates, Land Surveys, and Project Management.

These enhancements are [intentional] and form part of our broader effort to sharpen oversight and improve operational discipline across the ministry. As we continue to modernise, it is essential that our evaluation tools evolve alongside our strategic priorities. Clear standards and measurable outcomes are critical to delivering consistent, high-quality public services.

The updated performance framework introduces more defined service benchmarks, clearer timelines for maintenance and project delivery, and improved monitoring for operational outputs. This approach strengthens internal oversight, increases transparency, and reinforces a results-driven culture throughout the department.

Mr. Chairman, this is about ensuring that our work is not only carried out but carried out efficiently, effectively, and to the standard the public can trust.

Capital Works Plans

Hon. Jache Adams: Transitioning to Capital Works Plans, Mr. Chairman, page C-6 outlines the Capital Works programme for fiscal year 2026/27, which reflects this Government's continued investment in strengthening and modernising the public estate.

Under capital cost centre 75112, Major Buildings Upgrade Projects, an allocation of \$4.5 million has been provided. This funding supports significant improvements to government facilities to ensure they are modern, compliant, and fit for purpose. While the demand for upgrades consistently exceeds available resources, the department carefully prioritises projects to ensure the most effective use of capital funds.

Planned works this year include the replacement and upgrade of the central air conditioning system at the Government Administration Building, improvements to buildings at the Botanical Gardens, refurbishment works at Gibbs Hill and St. David's lighthouses, and exterior upgrades at Prospect Depot.

An allocation of \$250,000 under cost centre 75298 will fund bathroom renovations at the Government Administration Building and the General Post Office.

Additionally, \$3 million has been earmarked under cost centre 75309, All Schools Maintenance, to support scheduled repairs, painting, and air conditioning improvements across the public school estate. Maintaining safe and functional school facilities remains a priority, and this work continues in coordination with the Department of Education to ensure alignment with the long-term Education Reform programme.

Capital cost centre 75327 provides \$150,000 to complete sewage disposal infrastructure works at Horseshoe Bay Beach House.

The Government also remains committed to sustainability initiatives. Under cost centre 75357, \$1.4 million has been allocated to advance rooftop solar

photovoltaic installations across the government estate, including feasibility studies and preparation for long-term supply arrangements, which will soon be considered by the Cabinet. Several government buildings already benefit from solar installations, including the Government Administration Building, the government Post Office, the Department of Public Transportation's headquarters, and the Transport Control Department.

Further, \$500,000 has been allocated under cost centre 75366 to continue expanding electric vehicle charging infrastructure in support of the Government's transition to an EV fleet. Initial sites have been identified, and preparatory infrastructure works will soon be underway.

Mr. Chairman, Members will also note that certain capital accounts appearing in the Budget Book are managed by other departments. For example, cost centre 75180, under the name Indoor Air Quality/Environment, reported under the Department of Works and Engineering, has been allocated \$350,000 to address hazardous materials such as asbestos and mould through survey, abatement, and disposal works.

Under cost centre 75099, Office Relocations, reported under Ministry Headquarters, \$5,413,000 has been allocated to support the planning, fit-out, and improvement of government office spaces. This includes the relocation of the Registrar of Companies and improvements at Global House and the Government Administration Building.

In addition, the department continues to provide design, planning, project management, and capital oversight for a range of major Government initiatives, including education reform projects, works at Government House, Marine and Ports workshops, Lefroy House Care Community, parish clinics, the Royal Bermuda Regiment Coast Guard facility, the Royal Bermuda Regiment officers' mess bathrooms, and the Police Headquarters at Prospect.

Mr. Chairman, this capital programme demonstrates a balanced approach, a maintaining [of] critical infrastructure, modernising key facilities, advancing sustainability goals, and ensuring that public assets are equipped to support high quality service delivery across Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, as I conclude the budget brief for Head 81, I wish to draw Honourable Members' attention to pages C-26 to C-28, which outline the Government's rental commitments. The total allocation of \$11,145,626 reflects the significant costs associated with leasing office and operational space across the Island. Mr. Chairman, these rental costs remain substantial, and they underscore a broader challenge. Simply put, there is insufficient space within the existing government estate to accommodate all ministries and departments. As a result, the Government must rely on leased facilities to ensure that public services continue to operate effectively and remain accessible to the community. That said, we are actively examining long-

term strategies to reduce this financial burden. This includes reviewing space utilisation across the government estate, identifying opportunities for consolidation, modernising existing buildings to increase capacity, and assessing where strategic capital investment may reduce the need for external leases over time.

Mr. Chairman, our objective is clear. While rental space is presently necessary to maintain service delivery, we must pursue a more sustainable and cost-effective accommodation strategy for the future. By building a foundation, by planning carefully and investing wisely, we aim to gradually reduce these recurring costs and make better use of government-owned assets for the benefit of the people of Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to take this opportunity to recognise and sincerely thank the dedicated men and women of the department for their continued hard work and professionalism. Every day, often behind the scenes and outside of the public spotlight, they maintain and improve the facilities that make the delivery of public services possible.

As we move into the next fiscal year, we look forward with confidence to the successful completion of key projects now underway and those scheduled to commence. These initiatives will further strengthen the government estate, improve service delivery environments, and advance our broader goals of modernisation and sustainability.

Mr. Chairman, I extend my sincere appreciation to the entire team for their dedication to serving the people of Bermuda. Their efforts are instrumental in building and maintaining the infrastructure that supports a strong and responsive public service.

I will now move to Head 82, Works and Engineering, as found on pages B-226–B-232, C-5, C-6, and C-13, the last in my presentation.

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister.

No, I am prepared to say that, Members, we are currently in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27. These Heads include Heads 36, 68, 79, 81, and 82. This particular debate, this particular consideration in the Committee, is due to finish at around 5:16 [pm]. Am I correct? 5:15 [pm]? 5:15 [pm], 5:16 [pm].

The Minister currently is looking for Head 82, and he is speaking on those matters.

Minister?

HEAD 82—DEPARTMENT OF WORKS AND ENGINEERING

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, the mission of the Department of Works and Engineering is clear, *To ensure the effective and prudent management of all engineering services related to the construction, improvement, maintenance, and repair of government infrastructure,*

together with the operation of essential water and waste treatment services. At its core, this department is about rebuilding and strengthening the foundations of Bermuda while moving our country forward.

Infrastructure is not simply concrete and steel. It is the platform upon which our economy functions, our communities operate, and public services are delivered. When our roads are safe, our water is clean, and our waste systems are reliable, Bermuda moves forward with confidence.

The Department of Works and Engineering remains one of the fundamental pillars of public service. It is entrusted with maintaining and modernising government infrastructure and delivering essential services such as water supply, waste management, and protection of our public infrastructure support system. Much of this work happens behind the scenes, but its impact is felt every day by residents and businesses across our Island. Over the past year, the department has continued its work to stabilise, repair, and improve critical assets across the Island.

Mr. Chairman, this is where I wish to highlight a number of projects that have been successfully completed:

- Repainting the steelwork and replacing the bearings of Glebe Road.
- Repairing a failing seawall at the outfall of Pembroke Canal.
- Partial reconstruction of the public quay at White's Island.
- Repairing a failing retaining wall near Somerville along Middle Road Smith.
- Completion of procurement of specialist equipment and vehicles, including beach cleaner, mowers, two tractors, paving equipment, road sweeper, and other construction equipment.
- Water trucker outlet commissioned for use by private truckers at Southside.

These completed works reflect our commitment to restoring what must be restored, upgrading what must be modernised, and ensuring that Bermuda's infrastructure remains resilient and fit for purpose.

To fulfil its mandate, the department operates through seven specialised programmes:

- Programme 8200, Administration, provides leadership and oversight to ensure the effective coordination of all operational areas.
- Programme 8201, Engineering, delivers electrical, mechanical, and structural engineering expertise that underpins safe infrastructure.
- Programme 8202, Highways, is responsible for delivering and maintaining the public road network to ensure safe passage for motorists and pedestrians.
- Programme 8203, Waste Management, oversees the collection and safe disposal of Bermuda's solid waste.

- Programme 8204, Quarry Transport, manages fleet operations and mechanical maintenance for the majority of government vehicles.
- Programme 8205, Quarry Products, operates the government asphalt plant and supports paving operations.
- Programme 8206, Water and Sewage, manages the planning, design, construction, operation, and maintenance of government water extraction, treatment, and wastewater systems.

Each of these programmes plays a vital role in reinforcing the foundations of our country. Together, they ensure that Bermuda's infrastructure is not only maintained but progressively strengthened and modernised.

As we look ahead to fiscal year 2026/27, continued investment in this department is essential. Rebuilding foundations requires discipline and sustained effort. Moving forward requires vision and strategic investment. Our approach balances both.

Before turning to the specific budget allocations, it is important to distinguish between the operational budget and the capital budget. The operational budget funds the day-to-day work of the department. It covers salaries and wages, utilities, fuel, routine maintenance, supplies, and the recurring costs required to keep services running safely and reliably.

The capital budget, in contrast, funds long-term infrastructure investment. It supports major road resurfacing, bridge rehabilitation, water and sewage upgrades, heavy equipment replacement, and other large-scale construction projects that extend beyond routine maintenance. While the operational budget sustains daily service delivery, the department's most transformative work is largely funded through the capital accounts. This is where we invest in renewal, resilience, and long-term national development.

For fiscal year 2026/27, the capital allocation has increased significantly to address infrastructure renewal, strengthen climate resilience, and advance key national projects. I will speak to those investments shortly.

With that foundation established, Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to present the Department of Works and Engineering's operational budget, which reflects our commitment to rebuilding Bermuda's foundations while confidently moving our country forward.

2026/27 Operational Budget

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, as detailed on pages B-227 and B-228, the estimated current expenditure for the Department of Works and Engineering for the 2026/27 fiscal year is \$39,177,000, which represents an increase of \$4,861,000 from the 2025/26 revised budget levels.

8200, Administration

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, beginning on page B-227, programme 8200, Administration provides funding for the salaried senior management team of the department. As previously outlined, the mandate of this team is to ensure the effective and efficient oversight of the department's seven operational sections which include:

1. Highways
2. Structures
3. Electrical/Mechanical
4. Solid Waste;
5. Water and Sewage
6. Tynes Bay Waste-to-Energy Facility
7. Quarry Operations

Mr. Chairman, an operational budget allocation of \$390,000 has been designated for programme 8200 for fiscal year 2026/27. This represents an increase of \$78,000 compared to 2025/26. The increase is primarily attributed to salary adjustments as previously explained in previous presentations as well as a multi-year subscription for specialist software.

8201, Engineering

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the mandate of the Engineering Services programme is to provide quality electrical, mechanical and structural engineering services. Within this, there are three separate functions:

- 92001, Electrical/Mechanical—They manage the provision of planning, design, construction, installation and maintenance services for electrical and mechanical systems associated with the government's facilities.
- 92002, Electrical—Which support is mainly used to provide the budget for street lights.
- 92003, Structures—Which focuses on the upkeep and improvement of bridges, docks, retaining walls and other civil infrastructure and performs services such as structural inspections and project management.

A budget of \$1.684 million has been allocated for this programme.

8202, Highways

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the Highways programme is entrusted with the vital responsibility of developing and maintaining the nation's public road infrastructure. Its core mandate is to ensure the safe, efficient, and reliable movement of both motorists and pedestrians across the country. This encompasses the full spectrum of activities related to the planning, design, and execution of road infrastructure projects, with a particular focus on the following operational elements:

- routine and periodic road resurfacing,
- installation and maintenance of proper drainage systems,

- erection and upkeep of signage and road markings,
- construction and reinforcement of retaining structures, and
- provision and maintenance of public bus shelters.

In addition to these infrastructure-related duties, the programme is also mandated

- to provide expert technical advice to other government ministries, departments, and agencies on matters related to highway engineering,
- to oversee and manage the continuous of public roadways, to support citizens in enhancing privately owned roads and authorised under the Private Roads (Improvement) Act [1969], and
- to serve as the government's functional authority on all highway engineering-related issues.

It is important to underscore, Mr. Chairman, that the provisions being discussed here fall strictly within the scope of the programme's operational budget. This means these allocations are intended for the ongoing minor maintenance, management, and support activities necessary to keep the road infrastructure functional on a day-to-day basis. These are distinct from capital investments, which relate to large-scale infrastructure development projects and new construction works which will be discussed soon.

The scope of work undertaken by the Highways Programme is both vast and multifaceted, covering hundreds of kilometres of roadways across the Island. It involves not only direct physical interventions, but also coordination with local authorities, utility companies and other government agencies to ensure that infrastructure remains responsive to the country's evolving transportation needs. This ongoing effort requires meticulous planning, rapid response capabilities and a sustained presence on the ground to address emerging issues such as weather-related damage, increased traffic volumes and public safety concerns.

The sheer scale of this mandate demands continuous operational support to keep the nation's road network safe, functional and resilient. However, Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to report that a \$7,286,000 budget has been allocated to this programme, representing an increase of \$1,482,000 as compared to the 2025/26 budget. This increase is primarily due to the salary uplift negotiated, the hiring of additional personnel and most importantly, a million dollars for cost centre 92008 for private roads, a topic I will speak upon shortly.

Mr. Chairman, the budget allocated to cost centre 92004, Management, stands at \$1,104,000 for the fiscal year, reflecting an increase of \$135,000 over the original 2025/26 allocation. This increase is primarily due to salary adjustments arising from the government-approved wage uplifts and funding for a training position which has recently been filled.

Mr. Chairman, the budget for cost centre 92005, Road, Asphalt and Signs, is \$1,274,000, reflecting a decrease of \$238,000 compared to the previous allocation. While this may seem negative, in reality, it is just a reallocation of staffing and associated funding within the highway section.

The budget for cost centre 92006, Public Roads Maintenance, is \$1,755,000, which represents an increase of \$137,000 when compared to the original 2025/26 budget. This unit is responsible for maintaining retaining walls, sidewalks and other masonry works and the highway's drainage systems. This increase is attributed to the hiring of additional personnel within the unit and salary uplifts negotiated.

Mr. Chairman, the budget for cost centre 92007, Public Road Cleaning, is \$2,153,000, representing an increase of \$448,000 over the previous fiscal year. This unit is tasked with cleaning and maintaining public highways, including tree trimming and vegetation control, and oversees the Solo Sweeper Programme.

The additional funding is primarily due to salary adjustments stemming from government-approved wage increases, hiring of additional personnel, and expanded support for hiring additional solo sweepers to enhance the frequency and reach of road cleaning operations.

Mr. Chairman, in September of 2025, I addressed this Honourable House and the people of Bermuda regarding a matter that has been quietly affecting far too many families for far too long, the condition of private roads across our Island. I spoke about what many residents continue to face each day, potholes that damage vehicles, inadequate lighting that compromises personal safety, and deteriorating retaining walls that pose real hazards.

These challenges are not isolated incidents. They are systematic issues compounded by an outdated and overly complex legislative framework that limits the government's ability to respond swiftly and fairly. Currently, two Acts govern private road improvements: The Private Roads (Improvement) Act 1969 and the Private Roads (Lighting) Act 1984. While the 1969 Act allows the government to initiate works without collecting full payment up front, it does not permit us to waive resident contributions entirely. In reality, this means that communities with limited financial capacity often struggle to move forward with essential safety upgrades.

At the same time, the requirement for broad neighbourhood consensus frequently results in gridlock, leaving unsafe conditions unresolved for extended periods.

I shared the example of a grandmother who avoids walking home at night because her private road lacks proper lighting, an issue that remains outstanding simply because neighbours cannot agree. Mr. Chairman, public safety cannot be subject to stalemate. That is why I announced our intention to modernise these

frameworks. The reforms we are preparing will expand ministerial authority to implement critical safety measures such as lighting, traffic calming devices, and safety mirrors. They will streamline administrative processes so that when safety is at risk, the government can act decisively while still respecting community engagement.

In preparation for bringing these legislative changes before this Honourable House for consideration, we have taken a concrete step. We have reinstituted cost centre 92008, Private Roads, and allocated \$1 million to ensure that once the amendments are approved, we are financially positioned to act. This funding signals our seriousness of purpose.

We are not simply talking about reform; we are preparing to deliver it. Prior to beginning our policy reviews, we launched a public consultation process beginning September 22, 2025, inviting residents to participate through the government forum website and a structured phone survey. This reform effort is informed by the lived experiences of the people it is intended to serve.

Mr. Chairman, this initiative is about fairness, safety, and restoring confidence that government can respond effectively where the system has previously fallen short. It is about ensuring that essential infrastructure does not depend on one's postal code or the ability of neighbours to navigate complex legal processes.

I remain committed to bringing forward balanced, practical legislation that rebuilds trust and strengthens public safety.

8203, Waste Management

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the mandate of the Waste Management Programme is to arrange for the collection and safe disposal of Bermuda's solid waste. The aim of the Waste Management Section is to serve the people of Bermuda by providing a comprehensive Waste Management Programme utilising the best technologies for disposal, recovering of materials and energy resources, protecting public health, and safeguarding the environment. This includes

- education regarding waste reduction, reuse and recycling,
- waste recycling,
- waste collection,
- composting,
- land creation,
- high-temperature mass burn incineration with energy recovery (Waste to Energy),
- special and hazardous waste disposal,
- the management and maintenance of the Tynes Bay Waste-to-Energy Facility in a reliable, safe and cost-effective manner, and
- to act as the Government functional authority on all matters relating to solid waste,

environmental engineering, waste-to-energy and process engineering.

Mr. Chairman, a budget of \$19,286,000 has been allocated to this programme for fiscal 2026/27. This represents an increase of \$99,000 as compared to the 2025/26 budget. This increase represents mainly salary uplift negotiated.

Mr. Chairman, the budget for cost centre 92009, Management, Education and Enforcement, is \$467,000, which represents an increase of \$80,000 attributed to salary increases and the funding for the hiring of a trainee solid waste manager.

Mr. Chairman, the budget for cost centre 92011, Recycling, is \$1,287,000, which is a decrease of \$28,000 when compared to the fiscal year 2025/26 budget. While this seems negative, in actuality, it is just a reallocation of funding within the solid waste section.

Mr. Chairman, the budget for cost centre 92012, Airport Disposal Facility, is \$1,324,000, an increase of \$87,000 from last year's budget. This increase is again attributed to salary uplifts and the funding for one additional employee.

Mr. Chairman, the budget for cost centre 92013, Composting Operations, is \$1,735,000, which represents a decrease of \$86,000.

Mr. Chairman, cost centre 92014, Special and Hazardous Waste, has a budget of \$1,767,000, representing an increase of \$440,000, mainly attributed to changes [in] cost for shipping and protecting of hazardous waste materials.

Mr. Chairman, the Tynes Bay Waste-to-Energy Facility plays a critical dual role in Bermuda's national infrastructure by providing both refuse disposal and renewable energy generation. As the Island's primary waste management facility, it is responsible for the safe and environmentally sound incineration of household and commercial waste, significantly reducing landfill dependency and helping to manage the country's limited land resources. In doing so, the facility also harnesses the heat produced from incineration to generate electricity, which is then supplied to the national grid, contributing to the country's renewable energy portfolio and supporting energy resilience. This integrated approach not only addresses the pressing challenge of waste management but also aligns with broader goals for sustainable development and environmental stewardship.

Mr. Chairman, the budget for cost centre 92016, Tynes Bay Administration, is \$771,000, reflecting an increase of \$47,000 over the 2025/26 allocation. This increase is primarily due to government approved salary adjustments. Similarly, the budget for cost centre 92017, Tynes Bay Operations, stands at \$5,615,000, representing a decrease of \$313,000 compared to the original 2025/26 budget. This decrease is attributed to the retirement of several individuals at the facility. Recruitment efforts have begun for their successors.

Mr. Chairman, the budget for cost centre 92018, Tynes Bay Maintenance, is \$2,792,000, which

is an increase of \$93,000 from the original fiscal 2025/26. This increase is primarily due to the salary uplift negotiated and material cost increases for maintenance.

Mr. Chairman, turning back to the Solid Waste Section, the budget for cost centre 92029, Collections, is \$3,528,000, a decrease of \$221,000 compared to the original fiscal 2025/26.

8204, Quarry Transport

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the mandate of the Government Fleet and Operations Section, (more commonly known as the Quarry), is comprehensive and operationally significant. The section is responsible for the management of the government's fleet and equipment, as well as the mechanical maintenance of vehicles and machinery. These functions are essentially to support the delivery of public services across various ministries and departments.

Overall, the section is considered as the Government's functional authority on all matters related to fleet management and mechanical engineering. This includes providing technical oversight, setting standards, and ensuring best practices are [followed] in the procurement, maintenance, and operation of government vehicles and equipment. Their work is vital to maintaining operational readiness and efficiency across the public sector.

Mr. Chairman, a \$4,575,000 budget has been allocated to this programme, representing an increase of \$1,436,000 as compared to the original 2025/26 budget. This increase is due to the hiring of additional personnel, salary uplift negotiated, and increases in maintenance and parts budgets across the section.

Specifically, the budget for cost centre [92019], Quarry Administration, is \$860,000, representing an increase of \$181,000 from the fiscal year 2025/26 and is attributed to salary uplift negotiated as well as hiring of personnel.

Mr. Chairman, the budget for cost centre 92020, Quarry Vehicles and Equipment Operation, is \$3,558,000, which is an increase of \$642,000. This increase is for the rental of additional vehicles and heavy equipment until such time as replacement equipment can be procured, as well as an increase in fuel costs.

Mr. Chairman, the budget for cost centre 92021, Quarry Vehicles and Equipment Maintenance, is \$5,657,000, an increase of \$286,000 compared to the previous year, attributed to the uplift in salaries, and the cost of maintenance materials and parts.

Mr. Chairman, the budget for cost centre 92034, Quarry Receipts, is set at negative \$5,500,000, consistent with the 2025/26 allocation. This cost centre functions as an internal recharge budget, where the negative value represents the recovery of costs for services provided by the Quarry programme to other government departments and agencies. These services include vehicle repairs, equipment leasing, and

mechanical maintenance, with expenses offset through internal charges applied to the users of those services, essentially meaning that other departments must budget for this.

However, it is important to note that this internal recharge system is outdated and no longer accurately reflects the current structure or scope of operations. As such, we have initiated a review and are working toward modernising this accounting framework to ensure it better aligns with actual service delivery, improves transparency, and enhances budgetary accuracy. Further updates on this effort will be shared as the review progresses.

8205, Quarry Products

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, a budget of \$3,171,000 has been allocated for cost centre 92023, Asphalt Plant, representing an increase of \$1,055,000 over the previous fiscal year.

In addition, a rechargeable budget of \$3,140,000 has been allocated for quarry products under this programme for fiscal year 2026/27. Like the structure used for Quarry Receipts, this internal recharge mechanism is balanced by the Highways capital budget which is charged each time asphalt is produced. This ensures that the cost of materials used in capital projects is captured and accounted for.

However, again, this internal recharge system is outdated and no longer accurately reflects the current structure or operational realities. We have therefore initiated a review to modernise the framework so that it more accurately reflects actual service delivery. Updates on this process will be shared as the review progresses.

8206, Water and Sewage

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, as seen on page B-228 the mandate of the Water and Sewage programme is

- to provide planning, design, construction, operation and maintenance of the Government water extraction, treatment and distribution systems and the wastewater collection and distribution systems,
- to produce potable water on a cost recovery basis to meet demand,
- to provide septage receiving facilities for private sanitation truckers and for limited public facilities, and
- to act as the government functional authority on all matters related to water and wastewater engineering.

Mr. Chairman, a \$5,925,000 budget has been allocated to this programme. This represents an increase of \$712,000 as compared to the original 2025/26 budget. This increase is all attributed to government-approved salary uplifts, material cost

increases, hiring of staff in vacant positions and increased fees for contractors.

Mr. Chairman, I am now transitioning to subjective analysis of current account estimates.

The Chairman: And just before you do, Minister, I would just remind Members that we are in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27. We are looking at Heads 36, 68, 79, 81 and 82. The Minister is in Head 82, for Works and Engineering. The Honourable Jache Adams.

Minister, you may go right ahead with subjective analysis of current account estimates.

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, I now draw Honourable Members' attention again to page B-228, which outlines the Departments' current account estimates for the 2026/27 fiscal year in detail.

Upon review, Members will note an increase of \$302,000 in wages. These adjustments again reflect this Government's ongoing commitment to fair compensation and investment in our public officers, particularly in recognition of their dedication and the increasing complex demands of public service.

Honourable Members will observe increases under Transport and Professional Services. These adjustments are largely attributable to the temporary rental of vehicles and equipment while permanent replacements are being procured, ensuring that operations continue without disruption. They also provide for the engagement of specialised consultants to support the Ministry in areas such as engineering design and project management, where technical expertise is essential to advancing key initiatives.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, there is a notable increase in Materials and Supplies to support frontline service delivery, including the purchase of concrete, blocks, and other essential construction materials required to carry out infrastructure repairs and maintenance works efficiently and effectively.

Revenue Summary

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the department projects revenue of \$12,502,000 for the 2026/27 fiscal year. This increase of \$1,080,000 is primarily driven by ongoing repair work at the Tynes Bay Waste-to-Energy Facility, particularly the refurbishment of the turbines, which has enhanced operational efficiency and resulted in higher electricity generation.

Full Time Equivalents (FTE)

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the budgeted number of employees for the department is 321, which reflects an increase of 13 posts compared to the original count for the previous fiscal year.

Performance Measures

Hon. Jache Adams: As outlined on pages B-230 through B-232, Mr. Chairman, Honourable Members will note the introduction of revised performance indicators within the Department of Works and Engineering across several key operational areas, including Solid Waste Management, Recycling, Composting, and Quarry Vehicle Maintenance.

These enhancements are deliberate and reflect our continued commitment to strengthening accountability, improving efficiency, and embedding a culture of measurable performance across the department. As we modernise our infrastructure and systems, it is equally important that we modernise how we assess results. Clear benchmarks, defined service standards, and transparent reporting are essential to ensuring that the public receives reliable and high-quality services.

Review of Major Capital Projects

Hon. Jache Adams: I now refer Members of this Honourable House to pages C-5, C-6, C-7 and C-13 of the Estimates [Book], where I will provide an overview of the status of the major capital projects being managed by the Department of Works and Engineering. These projects represent not only an investment in our physical infrastructure but also a commitment by this Government to the long-term development and resilience of our country.

For the fiscal year 2026/27, the capital expenditure plan for the Department of Works and Engineering totals \$40,283,000, reflecting a \$9,045,000 increase over the previous year. This increase is both deliberate and strategic, aligned with our government's broader agenda to stimulate economic growth, modernise essential infrastructure, and create jobs for our people.

At a time when prudent financial management is essential, this administration has taken a balanced approach: prioritising investments that will yield tangible returns for the public, while maintaining our commitment to fiscal responsibility. These capital works will directly support [improvements] in transportation, public safety, and national infrastructure, areas that are foundational to our social and economic well-being.

We remain focused on ensuring that every dollar spent serves the public interest and contributes meaningfully to the betterment of our communities. This capital plan is a reflection of our belief that effective governance means planning not just for today, but for future generations.

Road Works
(Cost Centre 75042)

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, as the Honourable Members are aware, the Ministry has advised that the shipment of the new asphalt plant has been delayed to allow for an independent assessment regarding the potential relocation of the Government Quarry. Commissioning of the new plant will not proceed until we have a full understanding of the financial, operational, and strategic implications of any long-term decision.

While potential developers have expressed renewed interest in the site, I want to make it clear that there have been no negotiations and no agreement. Should any proposal ever be deemed to be in Bermuda's best interest, the full cost of relocating the Quarry and constructing modern, fit-for-purpose facilities would be borne entirely by the developer, not the taxpayer. I also wish to reassure this Honourable House that road paving and maintenance continue uninterrupted, as the existing asphalt plant remains operational and capable of supporting our current Works programme.

The estimate for this cost centre stands at \$5,000,000, consistent with previous years. While this funding is critical for ongoing major maintenance work, including road resurfacing, junction improvements, and road widening. We are all acutely aware of the deteriorating state of our roads, and the concerns raised by the public are both valid and justified. The frustrations of the public are not lost on us, and we remain committed to tackling these challenges head-on.

To support these efforts, we are taking significant steps to address immediate needs while laying the groundwork for a more sustainable, long-term solution. Improving Bermuda's roadways remains a top priority, and investments in new equipment and modernised infrastructure are essential to achieving that goal.

Solid Waste Capital Maintenance
(Cost Centre 75043)

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the 2026/27 estimate for this cost centre is \$650,000 and will primarily be used to replace aging equipment and infrastructure at four sites: Special Waste in Sally Port, Recycling at the Government Quarry, Composting at Marsh Folly and the Land Reclamation at the Airport Waste Management Facility. Additionally, the funds will be used to ship hazardous materials overseas.

Water Projects
(Cost Centre 75044)

Hon. Jache Adams: This programme is part of our ongoing efforts to ensure the reliability and sustainability of Bermuda's public water supply through major refurbishments to our potable water storage infrastructure. As we know, reliable access to clean water is critical to

both our daily lives and the future growth of our Island, and maintaining the integrity of our water storage systems is a top priority for this Government.

The 2026/27 estimate for this cost centre is \$1,100,000, which will be allocated to the essential repair and refurbishment works on key water storage tanks. A primary focus will be on the Fort Prospect Reservoir 1 water storage tank, a vital part of our network. This tank, like others across the Island, requires substantial repairs to ensure that it continues to meet the growing demand for water and withstands the wear and tear caused by both time and environmental conditions.

Improvements in Street Lighting
(Cost Centre 75046)

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the estimate for this cost centre is \$120,000. This budget is used to maintain the LED street lighting system.

Bus Shelters
(Cost Centre 75048)

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the 2026/27 estimate for this cost centre is \$175,000. This budget is used for new bus shelters.

Private Road Street Lighting
(Cost Centre 75051)

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the estimate for this cost centre is \$25,000. This budget is used to provide extra lighting on private roads and is tied to the Ministry Private Roadworks Initiative mentioned earlier in the presentation.

St George's Sewage Plant
(Cost Centre 75061)

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the estimate for this cost centre is \$250,000. The funding will be used to support the maintenance of the newly developed water and wastewater infrastructure in the East End of the Island.

Asbestos Disposal
(Cost Centre 75064)

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the estimate for this cost centre is \$575,000, which will be used to continue the repacking of containers that have deteriorated at the Government Quarry and also to ship adequately packed materials to the United States for permanent disposal.

Swing Bridge Refurbishment
(Cost Centre 75096)

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the 2026/27 estimate for this cost centre is \$9,436,000, reflecting an increase over previous years. This additional funding has been allocated in direct preparation for the upcoming Request for Proposal (RFP) for the construction of a new bridge, a major infrastructure project that has been long in the planning stages.

It was originally intended that the RFP would be released in the current fiscal year; however, there were delays to ensure that the documentation is fully appropriate and complete for a project of this scale. This additional time has allowed us to finalise detailed designs, complete necessary permitting, conduct thorough site investigations, and prepare the groundwork to support a smooth and transparent procurement process.

Mr. Chairman, this new bridge is more than just a replacement structure—it is an investment in safe, modern infrastructure that will improve transportation resilience, support economic activity, and enhance connectivity for residents and visitors alike. The increased budget ensures we are well-positioned to move forward efficiently and responsibly once the RFP is issued, setting the stage for the timely delivery of this long-overdue piece of national infrastructure.

Structural Refurbishment of Bridges
(Cost Centre 75116)

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the 2026/27 Estimate for this cost centre is \$450,000. For the upcoming year, this will be used for repairs and maintenance of various bridges.

Refurbishment Ferry Docks and Public Landings
(Cost Centre 75117)

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the 2026/27 estimate for this cost centre is \$492,000 and will be used to help extend the life of the infrastructure at Hamilton Public Ferry Docks.

Foreshore Protection Work
(Cost Centre 75144)

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, this cost centre is used to carry out repairs and coastal erosion mitigating measures to the foreshore. The 2026/27 estimate for this budget is \$900,000. This funding will be used for engineering design works to tackle various areas around the Island impacted by erosion, particularly around the Westgate Facility, Fort St. Catherine and the Pembroke Canal Outfall.

Causeway Refurbishment
(Cost Centre 75207)

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the 2026/27 estimate for the cost centre is \$50,000. This is for regular maintenance and minor repairs that may be necessary.

Middle Road—Warwick Sidewalk Scheme
(Cost Centre 75209)

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the 2026/27 estimate for the cost centre is \$100,000. This is for the continuation of the Island-wide sidewalk scheme.

Tynes Bay Waste Treatment Expansion
(Cost Centre 75210)

Hon. Jache Adams: The capital allocation for fiscal year 2026/27 stands at \$8,800,000. These funds will be directed toward critical infrastructure upgrades, including boiler repairs, building envelope refurbishments, and HVAC system upgrades—all essential to improving the energy efficiency, functionality, and longevity of our facilities.

Additionally, a portion of this funding will support predesign and planning efforts aligned with the long-term vision for the facility. This forward-looking investment will help ensure that future redevelopment is thoughtful, sustainable, and responsive to the evolving needs of the community.

Dangerous Walls and Rock Cuts
(Cost Centre 75258)

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the 2026/27 estimate for this cost centre is \$1,500,000. This cost centre is used to carry out repairs to legacy ill-constructed walls and rock cuts at risk of collapse. It has been increased to deal with the many walls that have been identified over this past year.

Quarry Refurbishment
(Cost Centre 75264)

Hon. Jache Adams: The 2026/27 estimate for this cost centre is \$7,000,000. This funding will support critical infrastructure upgrades at the Quarry Depot, including the decommissioning of the existing asphalt production plant, and site preparation for the installation of the new asphalt plant when the project continues.

In addition, a portion of these funds will be allocated toward the establishment of paving, training and testing sites, which will enhance our operational readiness and support the development of a skilled workforce capable of operating and maintaining the new equipment efficiently.

This investment represents a major step forward in modernising our asphalt production capabilities and improving the long-term sustainability of Bermuda's road maintenance programme.

Pembroke Canal Upgrade

(Cost Centre 75293)

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, this programme is for improvements to the Pembroke Canal. The 2026/27 estimate for this cost centre is \$700,000. This funding will be used to advance initiatives to address flooding issues associated with the canal, including cleaning culverts and removing canal vegetation and debris.

Reverse Osmosis Plants Electrical Systems
(Cost Centre 75294)

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, this programme has been created for the continuous upgrade of all the electrical control and remote monitoring systems in each of the water facilities. In addition to the build-out of control and monitoring systems, the 2026/27 estimate for this cost centre is \$1,000,000. The \$1,000,000 will be used to complete the upgrades to brackish water well networks that supply the Government's reverse osmosis plants.

Tynes Bay Capital Maintenance
(Cost Centre 75308)

Hon. Jache Adams: The 2026/27 estimated total cost of this cost centre is \$950,000 which will be used for upgrades to the site security and safety measures across the site.

Morgan's Point Works
(Cost Centre 75324)

Hon. Jache Adams: This cost centre will receive \$75,000. This budget is used to address any further contamination discovered during the Morgan's Point site development.

Water/Sewage Capital Maintenance
(Cost Centre 75345)

Hon. Jache Adams: The 2026/27 estimate for this cost centre is \$585,000. This line item will be used for the supply and installation of a replacement generator for the Tynes Bay Sea Water Reverse Osmosis Plant on Northshore.

Review of Major Capital Acquisitions

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, I would now like to provide you with a summary of the status of the major acquisitions being managed by the Department of Works and Engineering under the Fleet and Operations Section, the details of which can be found on page C-13 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure [for fiscal year] 2026/27.

Vehicles and Equipment
(Cost Centre 76495)

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, since 2013, and well before my time in this Honourable House, budget constraints have significantly limited the replacement of vehicles and equipment, resulting in a fleet that is now, on average, over 12 years old. This has led to increasing maintenance challenges, particularly due to the difficulty in sourcing replacement parts for outdated models.

Although a 2015 report recommended a phased replacement strategy, it was unfortunately not implemented at the time due to a combination of ongoing budgetary pressures, management turnover at the Quarry, and the widespread disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, I am pleased to report that as of late 2023, the department has begun actively addressing these long-standing issues. Updated procurement and maintenance strategies are now being implemented to improve fleet reliability, reduce operational downtime, and prepare for the transition to electric and hybrid vehicles, in alignment with the Government's broader sustainability goals.

Mr. Chairman, under the 2026/27 budget, vehicle and equipment replacements will focus on units that have clearly surpassed their useful economic life, are in poor or unsafe condition, or are no longer suitable for their intended purpose. While many of these replacements will not yet be electric vehicles, they are being treated as "bridge vehicles"—essential interim solutions to support Government operations while we work toward our target of achieving a fully electrified fleet by 2035. The estimate for this annual allocation is \$5,277,000.

Electric Vehicles
(Cost Centre 76917)

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, this capital programme is aimed to have government lead by example with the replacement of combustion vehicles with electrical vehicles [EVs]. Using the data from our pilot study, we have identified areas within government that provide the best opportunity for adoption based upon the upgradability of locations to provide the necessary charging infrastructure. It is envisioned that as our charging infrastructure is established that this budget will grow to accelerate the transition to EVs.

However, until this time, mild-hybrid diesel utility vehicles are being introduced to support the gradual transition of operational vehicles to electric vehicles. Offering improved fuel efficiency and lower emissions, they provide the performance required for government operations while giving drivers and fleet managers valuable experience with hybrid technology. The 2026/27 estimate for this annual allocation is \$482,000.

Mr. Chairman this concludes my presentation, on the Department of Works and Engineering, and ultimately my presentation for the Ministry of Public Works and Environment. Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, very much, Minister.

And to just remind Members that we are in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27. And we were looking at Heads 36, 68, 79, 81 and 82.

We are now about 10 minutes to the hour of four. This debate was due to continue until at least 5:15 pm, so there is sufficient time left. The Minister has indicated that he has completed his presentation.

Does anyone else wish to speak to this?

At this time, I recognise the Honourable Member Linda Smith. You have the floor.

Ms. Linda Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and good afternoon, Honourable Members and members of the listening audience. I want to thank the Minister for his very comprehensive brief today, the presentation of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2026/27 for the Ministry of Public Works and Environment.

The Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Linda Smith: It is obviously a very broad and diverse portfolio, as we heard, that covers things that we see and depend on every single day, like our roads and our infrastructure as well as the protection of things that we sometimes take for granted and expect that they will always be there for us, namely our environment, the beautiful parks and beaches, and our rich maritime assets. And so often we go through our day, and we sometimes forget that it takes the hard work of many, many people that allows us to enjoy our amenities and the beauty of Bermuda. So, to all of you who work at the Ministry of Public Works and the Environment, thank you for everything you do every single day.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Honourable Member. Go right ahead.

Ms. Linda Smith: Okay, thank you.

I do have obviously a number of questions, and like I said, I very much appreciate the comprehensive presentation that the Minister gave. So, some of those questions were answered and some have been left open or maybe not completely understood.

But we can start with Head 36, and I only have two questions with respect to that. On page B-203, business unit 3611, Purchasing, specifically the line item Purchasing Administration, which has increased by \$90,000. And my question is, What is driving that increase?

Would you like me to just continue with my questions and then we will roll with the answers?

The Chairman: Yes, by all means. Honourable Member, you can go ahead with all of your questions. The Minister will make the necessary—

Ms. Linda Smith: Okay.

The Chairman: —and the Ministry will make the necessary note. And then at the end, [he] will answer all the questions. However, once that is completed, you may have further—

Ms. Linda Smith: Right. Okay.

The Chairman: —questions from those answers that you do get. And there will be a furtherance. That is, of course, allowing if time does allow.

Ms. Linda Smith: Absolutely.

The Chairman: Carry on, Honourable Member.

Ms. Linda Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Ms. Linda Smith: [Page] B-204, under Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates, Revenue Summary, specifically line item 8615, General. In 2024/25, this unit realised revenue of \$2.2 million, but zero since then. And my question is, What was the source of that revenue and why does it no longer exist?

And also, line item 8877, Reimbursements, which realised \$1 million, is no longer booking any revenue. So, my question is about that as well.

We can move on now to the Ministry of Public Works and Environment Head 68, which is Parks.

The Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Linda Smith: Page B-209, Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates is at \$11.8 million has been allocated for Park Services. And this is an increase of \$292,000, or 3 per cent. This includes \$1.3 million allocated for professional services. And my question is, Could you give us some sense of what those services are and how many consultant positions does this budget estimate entail?

On page B-210, Employee Numbers, the estimated full-time equivalents for 2026/27 is 141 employees. And that is up 30 from revised 2025/26. My question is, What is driving the need for increased numbers and where are these positions residing?

On page B-211, Performance Measures, business unit 78020, Maintenance and Development, the total number of washrooms serviced in 2024/25 was 3,500. The original forecast for 2026 was also 3,500. However, the revised forecast is 625 and the target for 2026/27 is also 625. I'm assuming that that's an error because that is a lot of toilets that have gone missing in this estimate.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: Let's not presume, Honourable Member.

Ms. Linda Smith: I just wanted to get a clarification on that.

The Chairman: Yes, I'm sure they would be more than happy to provide a reply for that.

Ms. Linda Smith: Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Ms. Linda Smith: Okay.

On page B-211, Performance Measures, business unit, Eastern Parks, 78030. These are new metrics as all previous time periods read, "non-applicable" or "not available." But there is a target of 24 for 2026/27. So, I am wondering whether this is a new metric or whether the results from previous years just haven't been posted there.

On page B-212, continuing with Performance Measures, business unit Administration and Planning, 7805, the seventh line down. The total number of Department of Planning applications reviewed. My question is, What types of planning applications do get reviewed by Parks? And why did that number go from a 2025/26 forecast of 10 to a revised forecast of 23 in 2025/26 with a higher target of 25 for 2026/27? So, I'm really asking about the nature of the reviews of those applications as well as what is driving the fluctuation in numbers there.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Ms. Linda Smith: [Page] B-213, continuing with Performance Measure, business unit 75101, Park Improvements. The total number of capital works was six. And my question is, What capital projects were completed as part of that six?

Moving ahead to Head 79, on page B-19 *[sic]*, Performance Measures.

The Chairman: Under Environment and Natural Resources?

Ms. Linda Smith: Let me just turn to that page . . . I believe so.

The Chairman: Yes, carry on.

Ms. Linda Smith: Yes, under Environment and Natural Resources, page B-219—

The Chairman: Thank you.

Ms. Linda Smith: —business unit, 89000, Administration. The number of protected species licence and permit applications received. The percentage processed

within five days jumped from 5 to 18 with the 2026/27 target back at 5. And my question is, What caused the jump in 2025/26? And in a general sense, What is the nature of these types of applications? So that the public understands what the department is being asked to provide to the public. And whether these are scientific or whether these are just general questions being asked by members of the public. So, it just is a matter of interest.

Also on page B-219, Performance Measures, and still on business unit, 89000. The number of feral animals removed increased from 6,000 to 10,000. The Minister did indicate that most of those were feral chickens. But I would like to know how many were feral chickens; and also what other animals were removed. And roughly, how is the rate of removal improving? There doesn't seem to really be anything specific in the budget about picking up the pace on the eradication of feral chickens.

And I know that the government has introduced the traps on sale to the public. But I'm wondering whether there is a plan, because we don't see anything in the budget, to kind of pick up the pace on that. Because it is a major project, a problem, and people are very concerned about it from a number of perspectives.

And I'm wondering whether we are trying to achieve eradication or reduction. And I think probably from a public perspective, they would like to see an eradication. So, if we could get a bit more information about what might be the next step in what is a very serious public nuisance, but also a potential health problem.

On page B-220, Performance Measures, business unit 89040, Marine Enforcement, the number of vessels searched at sea to improve compliance with fisheries legislation. We seem to be moving up and down on that target. In 2025/26, the number increased from 30 to 300, with 30 achieved. And yet again, we are targeting 300. There is obviously a big difference between 30 and 300. So, are we doing something different that makes us think that we are going to achieve 300 when we seem to be moving in the area of an achievement of about 30?

Page B-220, performance measures continued, business unit 89060, Veterinary Services. The metric is *number of farm visits for animal health*. And in 2025/26, the forecast was 415; the revised is 8; and the 2026/27 target is 10. And I have two questions there.

Under what circumstances do government vets conduct farm visits? Is this a routine thing that happens, or is it a call out? What are the causes and the reasons for a vet to go to a farm? And why was the target increased from 3 to 15, and we now have a target of 10? So, is there something happening that is making government feel like we need to have more visits, and we are trying to control something? Just to get a sense of how those targets were arrived at.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Ms. Linda Smith: Continuing on page B-220, Performance Measures, business unit 890790 *[sic]*, Animal Control, again. The number of dogs licensed in 2024/25 was 2,464. Mr. Chairman, 4,000 was the target for 2025/26, which was then revised to 2,600. And now the target for 2026/27 is 3,000. So, my question is, How is this attempting to be achieved? Apart from the online portal, which is really only for renewal of dogs that are already registered, is there an active initiative to get more dogs licensed?

The Chairman: Mm-hmm. And I want to make note that that is business unit 89070, Animal Control. Am I correct?

Ms. Linda Smith: [Business unit] 890790. Is that correct, or did I put that down wrong? Let me just look—

The Chairman: It looks to me like 89070.

Ms. Linda Smith: Okay, thank you.

The Chairman: On page B-220.

Ms. Linda Smith: Uh-huh. On page B-220.

The Chairman: We're good.

Ms. Linda Smith: Okay. Thank you.

And so, this is a follow-up on that same . . . well, the next metric on the same page.

The Chairman: Go ahead.

Ms. Linda Smith: And this is *the number of dogs licensed as a percentage of eligible population*. So, the revised 2025/26 forecast was 25 per cent, which means that three quarters of the dogs are not licensed. And that at 2,600 dogs registered, it means that some 7,800 dogs are not registered. And I just want to make sure that that is correct. If it is, it's obviously a very high number.

Also, the dog wardens respond to between 9 and 1,000 calls a year. And my question is, Is there a concern about that? That does seem like a very high number as well, and certainly the number of dogs not registered. And my question is, Is it a concern? Is it a priority? And is something going to be done about it?

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Ms. Linda Smith: Okay. Moving to Head 81. Now I note the objective for Public Lands and Buildings is . . . one of the objectives is to provide property and land-related management services to all government ministries. So, my question is, Does that mean (and I believe it does so I'm going to go ahead with the question assuming that it does) that Public Lands and Buildings

negotiate and arrange for rental office space for government ministries?

So, before we continue with the current account estimates for Head 81, I would like to go to Schedule C, page C-27 under Government Department Accommodation Rentals, specifically number 23 on that page, Child and Family Services, which operates under the Ministry of Youth, Social Development, and Seniors. That department appears to have the highest rent of any government department. It rents space at Customs House at 131 Front Street, and according to the Budget Book, the rent in 2025/26 was \$795,638, and it is being estimated that it will increase to \$919,818. That is an increase of \$124,180. I am asking whether that is correct, and also what the justification for that is, if it is correct.

And then moving to page 28, C-28, the same Ministry. is also occupying two floors at Veritas House, the same building we are in today, with one costing \$165,031, and the other floor costing \$656,971, and that also puts at one of the highest government department rents, actually second to the other one. And my question is, Why are those rents so high in comparison with others, and what, if any, justification is there for that type of anomaly?

Okay, if we could now move back to the current account estimates for Head 81, again, Public Lands and Buildings, and move to page B-222, General Summary, business unit 8101, Buildings, specifically line item 91003 Maintenance. There is a \$3.1 million increase in the 2026/27 estimate. My question is, Is there any specific work or projects in that number that are taking the lion's share of that allocation, or is this mostly based on volume?

Also, on [page] B-22 *[sic]*, General Summary, business unit 8102, Estates, specifically line item 91005, Insurance. Now, everybody likes to see costs go down, but for good reasons. The insurance estimate there has gone down from \$5.87 million to \$3.6 million, so that's down by \$2.2 million, or 38 per cent. And my question is, What is the cause of the reduction in the insurance premium estimate? What is that attributed to?

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Ms. Linda Smith: Give me just a second.

The Chairman: We remain at your leisure, Honourable Member. Go ahead.

Ms. Linda Smith: Thank you.

Okay, page B-223, under Expenditure. There's been a large increase estimated for professional services from \$1.3 million to \$2.2 million. That's up \$902,000, or 68 per cent. And my question is, What specifically is behind that increase? I know that there are some projects that are taking place, but I would like to know what is driving that high number.

On page B-224, Head 81, Performance Measures. We are still in Public Lands and Buildings. business unit, 91000 Administration. It looks like 75 per cent of the government asset plan is up to date. The forecast for fiscal year 2025/26 was moved to 100 per cent. That means completely updated. But it is still at 75 per cent, and the budgeted target remains at 75 per cent. So, if 100 per cent was desirable, why isn't it being given greater priority? Why aren't we shooting for 100 per cent if we did before, as opposed to revising back to what we did not achieve, or the lesser amount?

Also, on [page] B-224, performance measures, business unit 91002, Building Management. *Number of sites to have completed asbestos reports in the year.* The standard appears to have been five. However, the budget lists the 2026/27 target outcome as n/a, or non-applicable, or not available. I am not quite sure what that actually means. And my question is, What's made it suddenly not applicable or not available when it was before?

And the same question actually applies to the next three items, which would be the *number of key operational government buildings with condition surveys and maintenance plans completed.* And the other one would be, *number of government departments renting from the private sector with at least six months prior to their lease expiry to be provided with advice on options on lease renewal or other rental options, including moving to government-owned property.* And then the third one was, *number of expired commercial and residential leases—out reviewed and renewed or relet.* And the question again was, there were metrics for these, there are not metrics now, and I'm just wondering whether they are still relevant or why they are not there.

On page B-225, performance measures, business unit 91007 and 91008, Land Surveys and Projects. That page actually, it's a quarter of a page that basically does not have any metrics in it except for one. So, I'm wondering what the value of the page . . . why that isn't being updated and why it's there if it's not going to be updated.

Okay. Moving to Head 82, Works and Engineering. The first department objective is *to develop and maintain the public road infrastructure.* And that's one that we all know has everybody talking and a lot of people very disappointed. On page B-227, general summary, business unit 8202 Highways. It's good to see that the estimate for the business unit has increased by \$1.4 million to \$7.28 million. But it also is important to note that the allocation of that \$7.28 million covers a lot of ground, including road cleaning, lighting maintenance, some asphaltting and signs, and \$1 million for private roads, which does not really seem nearly aggressive enough. So, it's being split amongst a lot of activities there when there is a lot of need. So that's an observation.

On page . . . continuing on page [B-]227, business unit 8203 Waste Management. The estimate for special hazardous waste has increased by \$444,000

from \$1.3 million to \$1.76 million, or 33 per cent. And my question is, What is driving that increase?

Continuing on page B-227, business unit 8205 Quarry Products, line number 92023, asphalt plant has an additional \$1 million applied to it for the 2026/27 estimate of \$3.17 million versus \$2.1 million in 2025/26. That's 50 per cent. And my question is, How has this higher estimate, or has it been driven by, and if so, how has it been driven by the delay in the arrival of the asphalt plant?

I would like to now just move to Schedule C, and if we could just take a look at page C-6, please.

The Chairman: Honourable Member, if you would just hold just for a brief minute while we transition.

Ms. Linda Smith: Sure.

The Chairman: My time in the Chair is complete, and then we now have the Honourable Deputy Speaker of the House who is going to come now and take the Chair of Committee.

We will remain in Committee of Supply for the further consideration of the Estimates and Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27. We are now in the Opposition's Replies as it relates to Heads 82, Works and Engineering, having gone through the initial ones.

And so, there's just going to be a transition, and in the Chair will be the honourable new Chair, [Ms. Foggo.]

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

The Chairman: Thank you.

Member from constituency 31, please continue.

Ms. Linda Smith: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Okay, moving to Schedule C, particularly page C-6, under line item 7542, Madam Chairman, \$5 million has been allocated for road works, which is described in other places as a continued aggressive paving programme. And my question is, In kilometres, how much paving does \$5 million buy? So we can get a sense of roughly what we can expect to see. It does seem that it's a slow process, and I know that a previous Minister had mentioned that he predicted that it would take 10 years and \$100 million to pave half of Bermuda's roads.

So, when you take a look at the \$5 million, I guess that moves us to maybe 20 years. But I would just like to get a sense of where that puts us on the schedule, and if it's intended that that will pick up pace at some point in the future, particularly when the new asphalt plant comes online, although I've seen in other places that it looks like that plant will be producing the same amount of asphalt as the old plant when the old plant was in better running condition. So, I guess my question is really in relation to how much paving will we

see as a result of that \$5 million? What does it buy? And then also, what is the schedule going forward?

[Crosstalk]

Ms. Linda Smith: There's a saying that *infrastructure planning is a long-term cycle*. And I don't know whether it's true or not, but they say that the Golden Gate Bridge gets painted on a regular basis and that by the time the team gets to the end, they start all over again. And it does seem that the same would be for roadworks, particularly paving, that when you get to the end or you get to a point you restart yourself because it's an ongoing process. So, at some point it would be nice to hear what the long-term plan is to make paving our roads a continuous process.

On that page, C-6, \$7 million has been allocated for capital investment on quarry refurbishment. It would be interesting to hear more about that. That's an allocation. What is being done? And if there is some discussion about the possibility of moving from that location, is that allocation of \$7 million still something that is likely to happen? So, what does that do to the plans for the quarry refurbishment, if anything at all?

Back to the operating budget, if we can go back to page B-228, please. Professional Services Expenditure there is estimated to increase by \$2.4 million from \$7 million to \$9.4 million, or 34 per cent. And my question is, What are these additional professional services and what projects specifically will they support?

Still on [page] B-228, there is a \$1.7 million up-lift in materials and supplies from \$6.2 million to \$7.9 million, or 27 per cent. And my question is, What is that increase supporting?

Moving to page B-30, under performance measures, business unit [92005], Asphalt and Signs. The amount of road centreline marked out during the year in kilometres was zero in 2024/25. And it has been non-applicable ever since, according to the performance measures here. I guess my question is, Is that why there are so many areas without centrelines? I mean, I can't imagine that that metric is not applicable or not available. And obviously, there is a great deal of interest in having the centreline there, particularly for older drivers who depend on that centreline to help navigate them. So, it would be nice to know what the plan is for that. And of course, that all rolls into as well, the kind of continuous road improvements and road maintenance to ensure that if a road is paved, that it is paved on both sides, and that if a road is paved, it is completed with a centreline.

So that is the end of my questions. Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other persons who wish to speak to Heads 36, 68, 79, 81, and 82?

I recognise the Member from constituency 10. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Robert King: Madam Chairman, Members of the Honourable House, and the listening public.

[Page] B-206, Head 36, [business unit] 46111, Administration, Safety and Health. The measurement is 12. The question is, What is best practice regarding the designation of 12 for safety and health assessments? Is this the industry standard safety and health training for employees? How many employees receive this training? And what is the measurable impact being on accidents and injuries? Is it trending up or down? What are the outstanding safety issues? And what is the plan to address them with timelines? Is the training for six employees or four employees? It's a bit unclear as to how many.

[Page] B-206, [business unit] 46112, Central Office Administration. Just wondering about the performance measure, why it is 99 per cent and not 100 per cent.

[Page] B-206, performance measures, [business unit] 46030, Reduction of Water Age Debt, 2 per cent. What accounts for the low target? How much money is outstanding? What difficulties are being experienced with collecting outstanding monies owed?

Business unit 78000, [Page] B-211, Park Ranger Service. What's the purpose of this measure? Is there a goal to increase permits? Is there a concern about there being too many permits? What is the maximum number of permits that can be issued? Is there a plan to promote camping and culture towards increasing revenue?

[Page] B-212, [business unit] 78050, Admin and Planning, Park Management Plans Drafted. Out of the plans that were drafted, how many were achieved? How many parks have a management plan? Don't all parks have a management plan? Shouldn't they have a plan and measures to ensure that the goals are achieved?

[Page] B-213, [business unit] 75101, Park Improvements, Gym Installations. What's the goal? How many parks are going to get them? What's the plan? Total number to be installed and by what timeline? Has consideration been given to collaborating with the Department of Corrections for labour and installation? Will gym equipment be installed at the co-ed prison farm in Westgate? Us, you know, especially when we understand that exercise is good for mental and physical health.

[Page] B-215, Pollution Control, 7906. What has been the outcome in terms of the enforcement measures? I know that we have got odour. What is it? Odour detectors we have got now. I'm just wondering because there has been a farm that has been a chronic violator. So, I'm just wondering how with the more robust controls and the added training and skills, how that's impacted on enforcement?

[Page] B-220, Head 7[9], ENR, PMs, [business unit] 88070, Animal Control. Dog licence 40 per cent decrease. Why is the target so low? What is preventing the necessary field checks to ensure dogs are

licensed? Is there consideration for making it mandatory for all dogs to be tagged to make sure they are legal and are having geo tags? Out of the number of complaints, how many resulted in criminal charges and convictions? How many dogs were euthanised? How many dogs were reported as causing injuries?

[Page] B-222, Public Lands and Buildings, looking at the C-section, rental expenditure is \$15,397,000 each year. What is the Ministry's strategic plan to ensure that that amount is reduced by a set amount, say, 10 per cent each year towards government ministries being in government-owned buildings?

[Page] B-224, [business unit] 91000, Administration, vacant government buildings inspected. How many government buildings are left? What is the purpose of the inspections? How many have been identified as suitable for dormitory-style housing, seniors' homes or other? Of those expected, how many have been scheduled for repair? For what use and when will they be occupied?

Business unit 8201, Engineers, Bridge, Docks, that's on [page] B-227. This is going to help me for Friday. Regarding the bridge and docks, that has nothing to do with HM Customs and Immigration on Ordnance Island, right? That's not you guys.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Robert King: Okay, that's helpful.

What is the . . . Okay. [Page] B-231, [business unit] 92012, Airport Disposal Facility. What's the strategic plan for the land that has been created? You are measuring truckloads of material that are being dumped. How many acres has been created? Has the area been surveyed? When was it last surveyed? Is it possible that Bermuda is now larger than 22 square miles? What is the strategic plan for Marsh Folly? Is there a plan to use the compost from Marsh Folly to cover sections of the airport dump to create green space?

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Robert King: Is there also the possibility of Government considering using other parts of the Island to create new land, for example, pontoons that can then be used for housing developments? Currently, the Government's approach and previous Governments' approach has been to do the same thing we have always done as it relates to waste. Instead, we should look at waste as a building material that we can use to make land in a sustainable and beneficial way for the benefit of this and future generations.

[Crosstalk]

Mr. Robert King: And those are my questions. Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Heads 36, 68, 79, 81, and 82?

I recognise the Member from constituency 12. Member, you have the floor.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Thank you, and good afternoon, colleagues, and to our Deputy Speaker and Chair.

[I] just want to flip over to [page] C-26, and we'll go between [pages] C-26 and C-28. I brought up some discrepancies concerning rent last year, and I see that the same issues are pervading this year. So, I'm hoping on the second round that we clear this up once and for all.

If you look at [page] C-26 under Legislature, and you see the rent there, which is consistent, \$84,000 for the 3rd floor, \$98,000 for the 4th floor, and then the 2nd floor, Legislative Offices is \$51,000. I can only assume . . . I figure that's because we just started renting it. We know some renovations are going on there. So, my first question is, for \$102,000, I know that we are doing a lot of renovation there. We are doing the actual work itself. Government is doing that actual work. So, I'm curious as to why it's \$102,000. It seems a bit hefty considering we are outfitting the whole building. It is just a shell, and we are spending the money on outfitting it. So, if they could give me some sort of reasoning why it's \$102,000.

Now, as far as the 3rd and 4th floors, if you flip over to page C-28, you will see again that under Head 86, Ministry of Social Development and Seniors, it says Veritas Building, 4th floor. This is something I brought up last year, and it says \$656,000. So, we need to clarify why this is the way that it is. We know that Parliament occupies the 4th floor, so it could be just a typo. But what's astounding is the total amount.

The Chairman: Member, could you just tell me the page number again?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: [Page] C-28.

The Chairman: Oh, it's [page] C-28.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, [page] C-28.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, we are just going to go between [pages] C-26 and C-28, as I mentioned in the beginning.

So, if we could get some clarification on that huge amount. And then again, we are still making the error of saying the 4th floor when you know it belongs to Parliament. So, a breakdown of that \$656,000 we need to have, which was asked before, but in addition to that, we need to correct the floor.

Now, Ministry of Social Development is either on the 5th floor or it's on the 6th floor. I believe it's on the 6th floor, but I don't know because of the discrepancy here, because if you look at under Head 86—

The Chairman: You said the Ministry?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, the Ministry, yes.

The Chairman: Yes, I see—

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors. I believe that is on the 6th floor.

The Chairman: As far as I know, it is.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, I . . . we are in the building all the time. I am assuming that it is on the 6th floor. But I do not see any 6th floor mentioned at all in the Budget Book this year. We know it is occupied by government departments and it's not in the Budget Book at all. What we are paying for that floor? Now, it could be a case that it's mixed up into this 5th floor . . . I mean, sorry, the 4th floor, as you see there for the \$656,000, I don't know. But we do need to have that clarified.

And then if I look at the Office of Youth Affairs under the same Head 86 on page C-28, Veritas, 5th floor. Well, there's nothing there at all either . . . last year . . . for this year, but upcoming year it's \$165,000. If you take a look at this building, every floor is the exact same. The exact same square footage. The exact same square footage. But yet the rent for TOYA is \$165,000 in comparison to the 4th floor. If you go back to [page] C-26, Madam Chairman, \$84,000, \$98,000 for the 4th floor. That's a rather large amount. It's even larger than the Veritas 2nd floor, which we are outfitting. So, I'm just trying to understand why that amount is so high at \$165,000. I mean, it could be a legitimate reason. I don't know. But if we can get an explanation as to why these variances are so wide and huge differences.

In addition to that, the other question is TOYA, are they only on the 5th floor? Or do they have another space that they are using as well? Because I also thought that we were using a base floor here or basement for storage or something like that. It's government that is renting it. So, I don't know who has that space, if it's TOYA, if it's Parliament, but I do know we are in the building all the time, so we see people going back and forth. Is that the only rent, or is there another rent for TOYA for storage and the like, so that discrepancy is there?

On the same page C-28, also, I see under Head 81, Paradigm Hamilton Parish. It's a new . . . new . . . \$198,000. I would assume, but I don't want to assume, that it's probably somebody's . . . it's a home that's being rented or something like that. Who is

renting this particular space here? It is a new one. But having been in the Ministry before, it looks like it's probably someone, one of our officers renting it out or something like that. So, if we could get an answer to that.

So, just to be clear, we need to find out this [Head] 86. It has to change. I brought it up last year. Please, for next year, let's fix this. It should not continue like this. It's completely misleading. And what is the \$656[,000] for? Just making sure they understand the question.

And let's clear up the 4th floor because they have never been on the 4th floor. And what's happening on the 6th floor? I don't see any rent for the 6th floor, and we know that it's being rented out by government. Okay?

The other . . . Ah, yes. I think I was trying to get an answer. I wanted to ask the Minister. I should have asked him before. I forgot about it. I apologise. The verges. I know that in some of the parishes we have these guys that come in, and they kind of clean up the verges. One or two of them, three of them. I don't know how many we have right now. If you could let us know how many we have.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: They . . . yes. They were trimming the . . . yes, sweeping. Yes, they are usually sweeping and, yes, that kind of thing.

How many parishes . . . or, sorry, how many *constituencies* do we have someone in, and which constituencies are they?

An Hon. Member: Woo-hoo!

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: And which constituencies are they?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I'm not sure if I have one, but—

[Laughter and inaudible interjection]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: And I will say this, and I'm asking the Minister the next question on that. I don't see it in here. Is it under professional services? I know it falls in one of these categories, but which category does it fall under?

I think it's a great idea, [Madam] Chairman, to have these. But I think every constituency should have one to help out. It's . . . it's . . . you can see the difference in the constituencies with these guys. A great, great, great job they do. And I commend the Minister for ensuring that we have this going on. But it would be nice to have 36 for all of the constituencies. So, again,

which constituencies do we have those in? I'm looking forward to that answer.

And . . . ah, yes, on page B-204, just . . . my colleague, the Shadow Minister, did bring up about professional services. On [page] B-204, you will see where, in actual 2024/25, we actually accounted for \$567,000. Now, we have tripled that, plus a little bit more, in professional services. If the Minister can point out to us if that was for a specific area. It could be if it is the verge guys. It could be them. I don't know, if they don't fall under that . . . It could be due to something else, but why triple the amount? Within two years, we have tripled the amount of professional services. And if the Minister can (sorry) let us know who are these professional services that have accounted for triple the amount?

And I can say within one year, we actually tripled the amount, because if you look in the 2025/26, we went to \$1.7 million. We've gone a little up now, \$33,000, but we tripled that within a year. What do we get for that?

And that's it. Thank you.

The Chairman: Good day.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Heads 36, 68, 79, 81 and 82?

I recognise the Member from constituency 31. Member, you have the floor.

Ms. Linda Smith: Thank you, very much.

On page B-227, under heading 82, Works and Engineering. Item number 8203, line [item] 92029 Solid Waste Collection. There is a \$3.5 million *[sic]* decrease, or 6 per cent decrease in that allocation and I was wondering—

The Chairman: There is a \$221,000 decrease.

Ms. Linda Smith: I'm sorry. It was . . . yes, I'm sorry. It is \$221,000 decrease in that line item and I was wondering why solid waste collection would be less in this budget than in previous ones? Thank you.

The Chairman: Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the heads under the Ministry of Public Works?

I see no others at this point in time, so I will call on the Minister, who will attempt to answer some of the questions.

Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you.

The Chairman: Minister, let me just indicate that we have about 35 minutes before this debate ends.

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and [I] certainly want to thank colleagues for their questions. I will do my best to respond.

I know, in particular, MP King's question sort of was rapid fire—

[Laughter]

Hon. Jache Adams: —so we will do our best to sort of catch as many of his questions, but if we miss, he is more than welcome to remind us of his questions.

The first question we received was, What is the \$90,000 increase under the purchasing administration? And that was simply staffing related. We had one new position, the buyers post filled versus prior year, and was also pay scale upgrades, particularly with the principles of purchasing and payments principle, as well as assistant principles.

There was a question of, in 2024, the general revenue had \$2 million. Why is it zero now? Same with reimbursements. So, \$1 million was an accounting adjustment for the Tudor Hill cleanup. I suspect that the \$2 million is also an accounting adjustment, as this department does not generate income to that level, and we will have to give a response later after discussions with the Accountant General's department to actually further investigate this.

The question was, What is the professional services line in Parks? Quite simply, those professional services are on the education side, as well as consultants for the botanical gardens. You could appreciate that our staff often need training, and the like, and so often there are . . . as well as lifeguards, as well as the lifeguards would add to the professional services.

There then was a question of, Why did the number of toilets reduce in Parks?

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Jache Adams: I will say that it was actually a misprint. That we increased the number of toilets and toilet servicing. So that was simply a misprint on that particular side. So, not a decrease; it should have been an increase.

Is the eastern—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: Yes, yes, yes.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: Are the eastern parks performance measures new? The short answer is yes. They were revised in order to present a more accurate depiction of our figures.

What type of planning applications get reviewed by Parks, and why is it a . . . why is it a higher target? Well, effectively any application that comes to Parks, any planning applications that affect any park, beach, or property stated in the Parks Regulations Act

are the applications that we receive or get reviewed by Parks.

What capital projects were completed as part of the six listed in the performance measures? Those were playground and exercise equipment completed. The Botanical Gardens Cacti House is almost finished. I'm looking forward to that, just in time for the ag show.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Jache Adams: Yes. And all other projects are actually still in progress.

Question, as we sort of transitioned . . . (MP Smith) into the environment, what has caused the jump from . . . in relation to business unit 89000? What has caused the jump from 2025/26? What is the nature of these applications? These licences are for research-type projects using protected species and the variability in the numbers is purely a measure of volume as and when researchers wish to carry out such research. So, for example, BIOS, the Bermuda Zoological Society, and also visiting universities as well.

Then there was . . . the number of feral animals removed increased. How many chickens were there, and what other animals were there? So, DENR has received more funding for the existing contractor. (Wait, let me see. Let me make sure . . .) Yes, DENR has received more funding for the existing contractor to operate for more hours in the year to cull chickens. DENR also has two new contractors due to start culling chickens once they have received suitable training. So, I believe you will recall in December I spoke to measures that we are putting in place to increase and ramp up our efforts to address the feral chickens. And so, you will note that there are two new contractors who will take on . . . begin the role of culling chickens on top of our additional staff.

We also already have a full-time employee dedicated to this task. As I mentioned, the employee . . . the online reporting application also connects complainants reporting on feral chickens directly to cullers in the field, which improves efficiencies. So, as you can appreciate, there is a . . . what I would call the "recipient" app that our cullers have so that when people make the complaints, it can go straight to the cullers rather than some sort of interception, which then can prolong the efforts to address this.

On top of feral chickens, our team actually cull both pigeons and crows. So, the primary focus and the majority of the focus is feral chickens, but certainly part of the team's efforts is to address and cull crows and pigeons. The question then was, Is there a plan to increase the pace of chickens? So, yes. As I stated earlier, we have the two additional contractors due to start after training. So, they will go through a bit of a training period, and then they will be out in the field.

[There is] a pilot study with farmers for them to be permitted to cull the chickens on their farms. So, that is . . . they . . . I just visited two local farms in St.

George's, Madam Chairman, and I was privileged to meet with them and discuss some of their concerns. And it's interesting because I did ask them. I said, *You know, if there's anything we could do that would make your life easy or your work easier, what would it be or what is your primary concern?* And of course, they mentioned feral chickens. And so, again, we are continuing those . . . so, to say all that, and [now] I know where I was going with it. Part of our effort is actually training farmers who are willing to participate. Give them the—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: No, not the air rifles and other measures.

But they can, amongst themselves, be better tooled and equipped to address these feral chickens. The supply of chicken traps to the public at cost from the Agricultural Service Centre, so we are pleased with that. We brought in about 100. I think . . . about 75 to 80 have been purchased already.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: In fact, . . . yes, yes.

So, in fact, we are preparing to order some more to give individuals—

An Hon. Member: Good.

Hon. Jache Adams: —within the public. And this is, obviously, I should continue to emphasise, at cost because this is not a profit-making scheme. This is just simply allowing the public the ability to catch the chickens. They will then notify the cullers. The cullers will then go and address the chickens themselves.

So, you as individuals of the public, you are not asked or required to do anything with the chickens other than let the trap do its thing.

Greater consultation with the public is required to prevent feeding. Yes, so greater consultation was required to educate the public not to continue feeding these feral chickens. I will say that we are a data-driven government. And so, I would say that we have ramped up our efforts and we are pleased to say previously we were culling about 1,000 to 1,200 chickens a month. Since we have revamped our efforts, and this is prior to the two consultants coming on, we have now gotten to roughly 2,000 chickens a month.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: And yes—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: How many boxes?

[Laughter]

Hon. Jache Adams: So, to say all of that, that is . . . 2,000 is the number before we get to the consultants. So, we are anticipating even further . . . or increased number of feral chickens.

Are we looking to reduce or eradicate chickens and what is the plan? So, DENR is looking to help manage the number of feral chickens because eradication would require many more resources and would require more buy-in from the public than current to help address this issue. It is worth noting that DENR is currently working with the Department of Health and the UK Health Security Agency to survey [the] feral chicken[population] for Avian Flu, which is prevalent in other countries. A sampling study is currently underway noting that [if] Avian Flu got into the feral chicken population, then this would remain in Bermuda as the feral chicken population provides a large reservoir, thereby increasing the risk of Avian Flu virus impacting mammals. To say all of that, to say it is . . . it isn't a concern at the moment; but we are doing the survey and the work because as we . . . I believe all of us can attest to is that ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure.

Vessels searched. What makes DENR predict 300 searches of vessels? So, currently we have two vacant posts in the Marine Enforcement Section that need to be filled. This will help to increase the numbers of vessels searched.

DENR is also working with the Royal Bermuda Regiment Coast Guard to second fisheries wardens into the Coast Guard shifts, thereby increasing the fishery enforcement capability while maintaining two officers in an enforcement boat.

Then, veterinary services. So, number of farm visits for animal health. Then there was a question of under what circumstances do government vets conduct farm visits? The number of farm visits result from callouts by the respective dairy farmers and complainants by neighbours that relate to animal welfare. Routine inspections will increase once the veterinary officer post becomes funded from October of 2026. This post has been vacant and unfunded for many years and so we are pleased to now see us moving in a positive direction. The government senior veterinary officer used to be involved more with artificial insemination of local cows, but farmers now pool their resources to bring in experts from the US to assist.

The number of dog licences. How is the number of dog licences attempted to be achieved? What is the plan? The number of dogs licensed is estimated at 25 per cent of the total number of dogs in Bermuda. Many dogs are unlicensed and technically illegal.

The new GovPilot online renewal licence system is helping to increase the percentage of dogs licensed. We plan to undertake greater consultation with the public and outreach programmes. And I know efforts to address dogs is of grave concern to a number

of . . . or you know, a great majority of the public but in particular Members on both sides of the House, to be fair. And so yes, work is being done to ramp up our efforts particularly when it comes to the licensing of dogs and I would say I could say that we will be on the lookout in the near future for efforts and initiatives that are in the works.

Is there a plan to increase dog warden responses? So, the Animal Warden Section is fully resourced but is challenged with the increase in cases of dogs, whether it's dog attacks, complaints, threatening behaviour, animal welfare concerns, unlicensed dogs, more than two restricted breed dogs. So, if you have a restricted breed, you are only allowed two . . . there are instances where individuals have more. Management consulting services recently reviewed the functions and operations of DENR and recommended two more new animal warden posts due to demand. And so, we have now received that recommendation, and we will take that under advisement.

Moving on to Child and Family Services. [They] appear to have the highest rent. Rent in 2025 was less. Is the increased number correct? What is the justification? And we will look into that and hopefully within the next 20 minutes I will look to have a response.

DCFS is renting in Veritas Place as well, and why is the rent so high in this building? DCFS now comes under the Office of Youth Affairs . . . I think it's the other way around. The Office of Youth Affairs now comes under DCFS. This is their headquarters for the new department and so therefore additional space was required for the amalgamation of Youth and DCFS headquarters. So, this is a department now falling under the Ministry therefore they need to have an expanded footprint, if you will.

In 2026, there was a \$3.1 million increase. Is there a specific project that is taking a majority of the funds or is it mostly volume? Again, still looking into that matter and hope to look to get it within the next 20 minutes.

Performance measures \$91,000, [Administration] 75 per cent government asset plan. Target remains at 75 per cent. Why aren't we shooting for 100 per cent? So, the asset management plan is a living document and forms part of our ongoing operations. For the 2024/25 period, the plan reached 75 per cent completion as the actual outcome. While the target for 2025/26 was full completion, our ability to progress has been constrained by ongoing challenges and recruiting for several critical roles directly linked to this work. As a result, the plan remains at 75 per cent completion consistent with its status at the close of the 2024/25 fiscal period.

I'm just going to do a bit of skipping here. There was a question of \$ 5 million allocated for roadworks. And so, the question was how much paving does this cover and will it pick up pace in the future when the new asphalt plant comes? So, \$5 million roughly gets us about 10 to 11 kilometres of paving. Again, this is with

the recognition that we are operating at an old asphalt plant. And when we do finally have the new asphalt plant up and running, you quite rightly stated from my Statement, that the early stages of the new asphalt plant would simply be tempered. So, it would not reach its full . . . so we are not going to erect the plant and immediately go full throttle. So, it will be: [We] erect the plant, temper its output on the early stages, but eventually we will continue to up the throttle.

And so, with the new asphalt plant in place, we will get to a position where we will be tripling and possibly quadrupling our output. And so, trust me, all of us are quite eager to have this new asphalt plant here but the reality is at the moment we have . . . we are operating with what we have, and that \$5 million ultimately gets to a space of 10 to 11 kilometres of paving.

What is the paving schedule over the next six months? I will refer Honourable Members to my most recent Statement where I spoke exactly on what the next plans are. And to be fair, it is likely the plan for the next year. I'm going to say 10 months, to be a bit modest, but 10 to 12 months—weather permitting, parts permitting. I don't know. But it is reasonable to assume that for the next foreseeable future, in my Statement, I spoke to the areas that we will be addressing in terms of road paving and why.

Madam Chairman, \$7 million dollars has been allocated for quarry refurbishment. What specifically is that for and will it be impacted by a potential move? This is for costs associated with the installation of the new asphalt plant. So, there are funds set aside because it is actually our intention to have a new asphalt plant erected in this fiscal year, as well as site work preparations and new labs.

Another one is, What is the increase in materials and supplies under Works and Engineering? So increased costs in bringing in maintenance materials, such as shipping costs, and the new buzzword of the day “tariffs,” and stuff like that are just the catalyst (if you will) of the significant increase in materials and supplies.

Moving along. MP King asked, How many employees received training and is 12 sessions industry standard? There is no industry standard. This reflects one session per month. That is generally achievable with the resources available. Total training numbers equal 150. Training topics include first aid, CPR, landscaping safety, hazard ID and controls, and occupational dog bite safety.

Performance measure. Why is it 99 [per cent] and not 100 [per cent]? So, we do not anticipate 100 per cent completion of all the administrative and clerical tasks; however, the vast majority will be addressed.

What accounts for the low target? What difficulties are being experienced collecting outstanding monies owed. Many challenges have come to light in the collection of monies owed to the government. Customer contact information is proving to be challenging

in light of transient customers. We are working on a current customer contact list as the one we are working with is dated.

Also, the recent move to require street addresses over PO Boxes is a work in progress. Current mailing addresses are tied to the metre address and not necessarily the customer receiving the services. Additionally, we are coming out of a decreased enforcement posture which was put in place during COVID-19. This will include deceased customers and, again, transient customers who cannot be contacted. In the coming year, we will put more focus in this area starting with commercial customers.

Mr. Robert King: How much was outstanding?

The Chairman: Minister, you have approximately 15 minutes remaining.

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you.

How much was outstanding? We will look to get that.

Mr. Robert King: Because that was part of it.

Hon. Jache Adams: What is the outcome in terms of enforcement measures? How will this impact enforcement? I think you were at this point referring to the Clean Air Act, MP King?

Mr. Robert King: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Jache Adams: The pollution control section administers the Clean Air Act 1991, the Water Resources Act 1975, and associated Regulations. Enforcement includes the issuance of stop orders for controlled plants operating outside the conditions of the licence.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: When I say controlled plants, we are referring to facilities, spray paint facilities, rock crushers, and sand filters.

Enforcement that proceeded through the courts by this section includes three cases through the courts in the past three years, including

1. sewage discharge in St. George's Harbour by a visiting yacht,
2. oil pollution in dockyard for a construction barge, and
3. illegal spray-painting operations in a residential neighbourhood.

Then on the question of odour management. The Clean Air Amendment Act [2024] and Regulations commenced on the 31st of January in 2026 and will apply to existing facilities after a six-month transitional period. So, that will take us to the 31st of July of this year. This includes the recently added definition of a

controlled plant, including facilities for the treatment and storage of manure.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Jache Adams: And so, MP King, you will note that the farm that perhaps you are referring to, the farm that you *perhaps* are referring to—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Jache Adams: —will be subject to the Clean Air Act and the Regulations.

And I think it's important to note that the machines that we have,—

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Jache Adams: —the machinery that we have, is not for smell. It's for microscopic pollutants. For smell, there is an operation where—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: You got it. Nothing beats the nose.

And so, there is a tactical measure that is taking place, and we have licensed individuals or trained individuals who are trained to better detect these sorts of things. And so, they are there.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: Understood. Understood. And I will say to you that I met with the owners of the farm just last week, and I will also say that I reminded that farm that the Regulations are in place and they are subject to those Regulations.

How many criminal convictions from dog attacks? Noting that a survey of dog attacks and resulting medical treatment from 2021 through 2023 revealed either a doubling and possibly tripling of dog attacks and threatening behaviour since 2023, these attacks have remained high. Criminal convictions, including warrants issued, dogs confiscated, and cases pending includes:

- total complaints in 2025 were 847;
- warrants issued was 25.
- injury cases on persons were 30;
- injury cases on another animal were 36;
- convictions was one; and
- pending prosecutions, seven.

Most victims wish . . . I don't know what this means. So, pending prosecutions is seven.

Mr. Robert King: And how many dogs were euthanised?

Hon. Jache Adams: Did you ask that?

Mr. Robert King: Yes.

Hon. Jache Adams: Okay.

Mr. Robert King: Don't worry, I—

Hon. Jache Adams: No, no, I got you. I got you. It's not here. So, I will—

The Chairman: Speak to the Chair, please.

Hon. Jache Adams: Yes. Fair enough.

The Chairman: All right.

Hon. Jache Adams: Understood. Thank you, Madam Chairman, for that reminder.

Government rentals. Legislature rental has been consistent. Why is the rent at \$102,000 when the Government is renovating the floor itself? The space was rented as a shell with Government undertaking the fit-out works. The space still has rental value.

Parliament occupies the 4th floor. Needed clarification to the huge amount. Is it on the 5th or 6th floor? We know the 6th floor is occupied by government, but it is not mentioned in the Budget Book. So, yes, we accept that this was a typo. You are correct, obviously, that Parliament is on the 4th floor. Oh, . . . Yes, Parliament is on the 4th floor.

The Ministry of Youth, Social Development, and Seniors are on the 6th floor. And the Office of Youth Affairs is on the 5th floor. And both are under now the same Ministry.

Why is TOYA . . . Who is renting this particular space? Is it an officer? Madam Chairman, \$198,000. Who is renting this particular space? Is it an officer? This is a new executive rental accommodation for Government which is leased at the stated rent.

[Pause]

Hon. Jache Adams: I will then just pop back up. Sorry.

MP King asked, What is the plan for playground and gym equipment? Has labour for prisoners been considered? All repairs were completed last fiscal year to playgrounds Island-wide. And this is monitored each year to determine when the next capital project to repair, set, or replace will happen.

I will say, MP King, that there is an RFP out at the moment for the installation of park equipment. I'm going off memory here, but I believe one is Mullet Bay, one is Parsons Road, and there are two others. But an RFP is out for vendors to bid on the import and installation of parks throughout the area. So, in our efforts to improve park lands and park land equipment throughout the country, it is [a] demonstration that it is an active process, and it is in process, and we are . . . and we will get it done.

MP Smith asked, solid waste. Notice that there is a [\$]221[,000] decrease. Why is that? So, this decrease is in budgeted overtime, and so that's it.

[I'll] continue to scroll through. Sorry. Again, MP Smith asked, how has this, how has . . . and this is going to paving works, How has this higher estimate been driven by the delay in arrival of the asphalt plant? Much of the increase in this work is simply related to the increase of the cost of the raw materials, not necessarily asphalt plant, the new asphalt plant related. This is stuff like aggregate, tap coat, bitumen, as well as fuel. All of those increases actually resulting in, as I said, the cost of paving going up.

The Chairman: Minister, you're down to your final five minutes.

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

What is the large increase in professional services under the public lands and building? So based on our current capacity and the recent surge in construction activity, we have had to engage a number of local contractors to maintain continuity of service to the government. We acknowledge the increase and are preparing to bring additional contractors on board to address gaps in these critical areas.

At the same time, Madam Chairman, an ageing workforce is already driving higher attention. This adjustment, which aligns more closely with the 2024/25 financial year, is intended to help manage the pressure and sustain service delivery.

Performance measures, they are again in relation to public lands and buildings. There was a question of 91000 Administration. Did I cover this? I think I did.

Again, in public lands and buildings, there was a question, why are performance measures listed as n/a? The performance measures listed as not applicable for the 2024/25 and 2025/26 with a targeted figure for the 2026/27 fiscal year represents new measures, KPIs, which we wish to incorporate as part of our service standard going forward.

And so, if we plough through, Madam Chairman, MP Cannonier asked in relation to why has the professional services figure tripled and asked to point out the increase of specific areas. So, the budget has increased to reflect the trend of actual costs experienced. It relates mainly to an increase in the anticipated use of overseas consultants. Also, increases in the event that legal services will be necessary. Consulting services are budgeted in the areas of procurement, finance, recruitment, policies, and et cetera.

Ploughing through as best I can.

The Chairman: You have two minutes remaining.

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

So, the verges. So . . . interesting. Now, this is off head, but I got one minute left. Let's go off top of my memory. So, specifically, if we are referring to the solo

sweepers, we just expanded the programme from 16 to 20 or 21. Scrolling down . . . I want to get you the answer in my 60 seconds, but I can't find it.

The Chairman: Your 60 seconds are running out.

[Laughter]

Hon. Jache Adams: Ah, roadside verges. How many solo sweepers? What parishes and what constituencies? So, we have one in Sandys, one in Southampton, three in Warwick, two in Paget, two in Pembroke, four in Devonshire, two in Smith's, two in Hamilton Parish, two moved to temporary relief posts with the section. And so, these are not selected by constituency. They are selected by main parishes and need and applicants. I don't know what that means, but we have 20 to 21. So, naturally, we do not have one for all constituencies, but I will say, and I just want to close on the note that notwithstanding that, that programme has expanded from 16 to now to 21, and certainly willing to relook at this in the near future.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Minister, I'm going to need you to move your heads, but I would like to at least let you know that St. David's is waiting for their . . .

[Laughter]

Hon. Jache Adams: Aah! Understood, Madam Chairman, understood.

Madam Chairman, I move that Heads 36, 68, 79, 81, and 82 be approved as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Heads 36, 68, 79, 81, and 82 be approved.

Are there any objections to that?

I recognise no objections.

So approved.

[Motion carried: The Ministry of Public Works and Environment Heads 36, 68, 79, 81 and 82 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2026/27.]

The Chairman: Thank you to the Ministry of Works.

And now we will continue in Committee of Supply on the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27, and we will be looking at Head 20, which falls under Sport, under the Ministry of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport. I'm going back in time.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: Minister, whenever you are ready, you have the floor.

[Pause]

MINISTRY OF TOURISM AND TRANSPORT, CULTURE AND SPORT

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

And thank you to everyone who is listening while I just get myself sorted. It will be just two seconds, if you will allow me, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes, and I am just going to remind you upfront, Minister, that this is indeed a three-hour debate, and I believe the start time is considered to be 5:16 [pm]. Thank you.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I move that the following Head 20, Sport and Recreation, be now taken under consideration.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Head 20, Sport and Recreation, be taken under consideration.

Are there any objections to that?

There are none. Minister, continue.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, thank you.

Madam Chairman, I will be going through Head 20, which is found on pages B-238 through B-243 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure [Book].

HEAD 20—MINISTRY OF TOURISM AND TRANSPORT, CULTURE AND SPORT

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 20, the Department of Sport and Recreation, found on [pages] B-238 through B-243 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure Book. This budget invests in growing participation, supporting elite athletes, and ensuring our recreational facilities and programmes continue to thrive.

Mission Statement

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, the mission statement is found on page B-238 and is, *To foster a vibrant sports and recreation culture in Bermuda by increasing participation, achieving regional excellence, and ensuring equitable access to sports and recreational facilities. Through collaboration, we aim to inspire and develop young talent, promote community well-being and elevate the value of sports and recreation in our society.*

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, as found on pages B-239 through B-240, a total of \$10,708,000 has been allocated for this head. This represents an

increase of \$760,000, or 8 per cent, from the previous year. This change is due primarily to the increase in operational grants for the public golf courses and to the negotiated salaries and wage uplifts for employees.

Madam Chairman, as found on page B-239, General Summary Expenditure, this amount is broken down by business unit, and will now be explained:

Business Unit 30025, School Sports Events

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, the budget allocation for this business unit is \$85,000, representing a \$42,000, or 98 per cent, increase from the previous year. This business unit represents the allocated funding dedicated to supporting school sports across the Island.

Following one full year of School Sports being placed under the department's remit, a comprehensive review has identified the need for increased investment to strengthen programme delivery, enhance safeguarding and operational standards, expand participation opportunities, and ensure long-term sustainability. Investment in school sports [lays] a vital foundation for the continued growth of Bermuda's sporting culture and supports the long-term development of national athletes.

Business Unit 30045, General Administration

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, the budget allocation for this business unit is \$974,000. This represents a decrease of \$17,000, or approximately 2 per cent decrease. This decrease is due to reallocating the housing allowance assigned to the caretakers of the Government Recreation Islands. The allocated funds provide for the administration and operations of the Department of Sport and Recreation's Headquarters. In addition, the administrative section provides administrative support for five programmes within the department and is responsible for monitoring departmental spending to ensure that policies and procedures are adhered to in achieving efficiency and effectiveness.

Business Unit 30055, Sports Programmes

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, the budget allocation for this business unit is \$690,000. This reflects an increase of \$32,000, or approximately 5 per cent when compared to the prior fiscal year. The increase is primarily attributable to the negotiated salaries and wage uplifts for employees. The allocated funding also supports the planning and delivery of key annual initiatives, including the National Sports Awards and National Junior Athlete Sponsorship Programme ceremonies, as well as the ongoing delivery of the Active Kids Programme.

Business Unit 30065, Sports Investment

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, this business unit is focused on demonstrating how the Bermuda Government supports and invests in the community through sport. The department is currently in the fourth year of implementing the 2022–2027 National Sports Policy [NSP]. This funding supports strategic sport development initiatives, strengthens National Sport Governing Bodies [NSGBs], and advances participation, athlete development, and community engagement across Bermuda.

Madam Chairman, to support the continued delivery of NSGBs' objectives, business unit 30065 has been allocated a total budget of \$2,120,000. This represents an increase of \$14,000, or approximately 1 per cent, compared to the prior fiscal year.

This increase will be allocated directly to the Bermuda Sport Anti-Doping [Authority] [BSADA], to assist with the rising costs associated with athlete testing, particularly for Bermudian athletes training and competing overseas. BSADA is a statutory body mandated to ensure Bermuda's athletes meet international anti-doping standards and remain eligible to compete at the highest levels of sport.

Madam Chairman, funds within this business unit are also allocated through the Sports Investment Programme [SIP], which provides financial assistance to National Sport Governing Bodies to support sport development initiatives, including Coach Education, Junior Development, and High-Performance programmes.

For the upcoming funding cycle, 25 sporting bodies have submitted applications for funding support. Additionally, this business unit provides funding toward the Bermuda Olympic Association's [BOA] operational expenses, enabling the administrative functions necessary to facilitate Bermuda's participation in international sporting events and competitions.

Madam Chairman, during fiscal year 2026/27, the Department of Sport and Recreation, in partnership with our recognised NSGBs, intend to continue to implement objectives of National Sport Policy, specifically as it relates to Long-Term Athlete Development Plan.

Business Unit 30030, Athletic Awards

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, the budget allocation for this business unit is \$360,000, which is a decrease of \$50,000, or 12 per cent, compared to the prior fiscal year. However, this decrease represents a reallocation in the funds to support business unit 30025, School Sports, enhancing the delivery and development of school sports, which we talked about earlier.

Madam Chairman, this business unit provides funding to support elite athlete development, including financial contributions through the Bermuda Olympic Association and the Department's Elite Athlete Sponsorship Programme. Additionally, the unit facilitates performance-based recognition in the Outstanding

Performance [Incentive] Programme, rewarding elite athletes for exceptional achievements in sport.

Madam Chairman, during the 2025/26 fiscal year, the department supported 27 elite athletes. Among these recipients were Junior Male Athletes [of the Year], Elijah Daley and David Maycock. Both athletes have represented Bermuda with distinction. Sorry, Madam Chairman, Mr. Daley was in Swimming and Mr. Maycock was in bowling. And the department is proud to support and be part of their continued sporting development and success. Additionally, in the 2025/26 fiscal year, Ryan Outerbridge was the recipient of the [Dame] Flora Duffy Award, receiving \$10,000 in support of his continued pursuit of excellence in track and field.

In addition, this business unit also funds the National Junior Athlete Sponsorship Programme [NJASP], which financially supports the development of Bermudian junior athletes aged 15 to 19. This support aims to develop future elite athletes who [will] represent Bermuda at major international competitions.

Business Unit 30060, Sports Facilities

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, the budget estimate for this business unit is \$3,211,000. This is an increase of \$571,000, or 22 per cent. The majority of this budget increase reflects the additional funding of \$560,000 toward the operational budget for the Government's public golf courses at Port Royal and Ocean View.

Similar to the School Sports unit, following one full year of the Government golf courses being placed under the department's remit, a comprehensive review identified the need for additional funding to support operational requirements. This funding will enhance accessibility and affordability of public golf course opportunities, while maintaining a high service standard and facility quality. The remaining balance of the increase will support the negotiated salary uplifts for employees.

Business Unit 30075, WMC Preece Softball Park

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, this business unit has been allocated \$160,000. This is an increase of \$11,000, or 7 per cent, from the prior year. This business unit supports the salaries and wages of facility staff, as well as the operational and maintenance requirements of the softball diamond. The increase is primarily attributable to the negotiated salaries and wage uplifts for employees.

Business Unit 30080, WER Joell Tennis Stadium

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, this business unit has been allocated \$484,000. This reflects an increase of \$22,000, or approximately 5 per cent, compared to the prior fiscal year.

The increase is primarily attributable to the negotiated salaries and wage uplifts for employees. This business unit supports the salaries and wages of facility staff, as well as the operational and maintenance requirements of the tennis stadium. The facility serves as a key national sporting venue, providing public access to seven tennis courts and eight pickleball courts, and plays an important role in supporting community recreation, athlete development, and the hosting of local, regional, and international sporting events.

Business Unit 30090, Motor Sport Park

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, this business unit has been allocated \$8,000. There is no change in budget funding to this business unit from the 2025/26 budget. The funds are used for insurance, maintenance, and water at the Motor Sport Park.

That's in your neighbourhood, Madam Chairman.

Business Unit 30390, Sports Community Fields

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, this business unit has been allocated \$47,000. There is no change from 2025/26. The funds for this unit are allocated for the maintenance and operation of the community fields under the department's remit.

These investments help to ensure that every Bermudian has a place to play, every Bermudian has a place to train, and gather, in an open and clean recreation area.

Programme 2007, Camping

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, business unit 30148 Camping Administration has been allocated \$214,000. This is an increase of \$15,000, or 8 per cent, from the prior year. The [allocated] funds provide for the administration and operations of the Department of Sport and Recreation's Camping Unit. The increase is primarily attributable to the negotiated salaries and wage uplifts for employees.

Madam Chairman, to improve operational efficiency and financial oversight, the department has consolidated four previous business units—30150 Darrell's Island, 30160 Paget Island, 30165 Ports Island, and 30170 White's Island—into a single business unit, now titled 30150 [Recreation] Islands. This consolidation allows for more effective management and allocation of funds across these business units, supports streamlined administration, and enhances overall financial monitoring and operational coordination.

The combined budget is \$903,000 and represents an increase of \$574,000, or 174 per cent, from the prior fiscal year. It must be noted that this increase is primarily attributable to the negotiated salaries and wage uplifts for employees and the reallocation of the housing allowance for the caretakers of the islands

from business unit 30045. This allocation supports 10 full-time [staff] managing approximately 80 acres of land, facilities, and marine equipment.

Business Unit 30180, Recreational Programmes

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, the budget allocation for this business unit is \$1,452,000 and represents an increase of \$33,000, or 2 per cent, from the prior fiscal year. This adjustment primarily supports salary alignments to ensure that the programme remains competitive within the current market. By providing market-aligned compensation, the department aims to attract trained and committed programme staff, enabling the delivery of high-quality supervision, care, and mentorship to Bermuda's most vulnerable—our youth.

Subjective Analysis

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, the Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates of the Department of Sport and Recreation is found on page B-240. I will highlight a few of the material object code descriptions:

- Salaries and Wages combined, increased by \$152,000, or approximately 10 per cent, from the prior fiscal year. These increases are primarily due to negotiated salaries and wages uplifts.
- Training increased by \$4,000, or 31 per cent, due to staff training required for the upcoming year. All Summer Day Camp [staff] and Camp Connect Programme personnel will be offered structured online safeguarding training workshops to strengthen safeguarding awareness and best practices.
- Grants and Contributions increased by \$524,000, or 11 per cent, from the prior year. This is mainly due to the increase in the operational grant of the government golf courses.

This allocation will enhance public access to affordable golf opportunities and sustain the high operational and facility standards at government golf courses.

Capital Development Expenditure

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, the capital development estimate for the department can be found on page C-7 and is \$3,416,000. This capital funding will be used to maintain and enhance the facilities at Ocean View Golf Course, Port Royal Golf Course, and the National Sports Centre.

Capital Acquisition Expenditure

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, the capital acquisition estimate for the department can be found on page C-14 and is \$69,000. This capital funding is allocated for the purchase of a replacement runabout boat

to support the caretakers responsible for the Government Islands.

Manpower

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, as found on page B-241, the Department of Sport and Recreation administers five programmes and 13 business units that encompasses 46 full-time equivalent manpower. This remains unchanged from the prior fiscal year 2025/26.

Performance Measures by Business Unit

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, I am pleased to report that most of the department's forecast performance measures for fiscal year 2025/26 were achieved. The performance measures for the Department of Sport and Recreation can be found on pages B-242 and B-243.

Business Unit 30030, Athletic Awards

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, this business unit supports the delivery of the Athletic Awards administered by the department. During the 2025/26 fiscal year, 16 National Sport Governing Bodies received funding through the National Junior Athlete Sponsorship Programme, with an average award of \$3,000 allocated to each National Sport Governing Body to support the development of junior athletes.

Business Unit 30065, Sports Investment Programme

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, the department requires all National Sport Governing Bodies to maintain compliance with established policies, reporting requirements, and governance standards. During the 2025/26 fiscal year, 28 National Sport Governing Bodies were formally recognised by the department. Of these, 26 recognised NSGBs have submitted funding applications for the 2026/27 [fiscal year] to support the continued development of their respective sports. These applications focus on key priority areas including junior athlete programming, coaching and officials' development, and high-performance initiatives aimed at strengthening Bermuda's sporting pathway and international competitiveness.

Business Unit 30075, WMC Preece Softball Park

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, this business unit is responsible for the [WMC] Preece Softball Park, where our target of 500 participants was reached. The continued field usage by youth baseball has made the facility more user-friendly and appealing.

I commend the dedicated staff at the softball diamond and Softball Bermuda for their continued

efforts in making softball once again a thriving option as a recreational sport of choice in Bermuda.

Business Unit 30080, WER Joell Tennis Stadium

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, this business unit is responsible for the WER Joell Tennis Stadium, where the average monthly usage target was surpassed with approximately 897 individuals utilising the facility each month. This growth is largely attributed to the installation of new lighting on Courts 1 through 3, which has extended playing hours, as well as the continued rise in popularity of pickleball within the community. The department has also experienced an increase in the percentage of users who rated the facility as satisfactory or better over the last fiscal year, rising from 50 per cent in 2024/25 to approximately 77 per cent in 2025/26.

Business Unit 30150, Camping Facilities

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, this business unit is responsible for the government camping facilities, which continue to experience strong public demand, with annual bookings typically selling out within the first week of applications opening.

Although overall facility usage declined over the past year from 5,735 to 3,460, this decrease was primarily due to necessary renovations and infrastructure upgrades at several sites, in particular the significant infrastructure upgrades to bathroom facilities at Darrell's Island, which required the site to be closed for several months. Additional essential improvements, including upgrades to docks on two islands, were undertaken to enhance safety, functionality, and the overall user experience.

Madam Chairman, despite these temporary impacts, the department remains committed to providing safe, enjoyable, and customer-focused recreation spaces that offer year-round camping opportunities for the Bermuda public, particularly during holiday periods. This commitment is reflected in strong user feedback, with 93 per cent of users reporting overall satisfaction with their experience.

Business Unit 30180, Recreational Programmes

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, when we speak about return on investment, Camp Connect has delivered! Since the launch of Camp Connect three years ago, participation has nearly tripled, addressing the community's demand for affordable, safe, and high-quality summer programming. This business unit has seen a dramatic enrolment surge, growing from 1,700 to 4,333 participants over the last three years.

Madam Chairman, this increase of 155 per cent reflects the high demand for safe, affordable child care and shows how vital collaboration with private operators can assist in meeting this mandate. The

programme's success is underscored by an 88 per cent satisfaction rate, with 98 per cent of users intending to return.

Madam Chairman, from the evidence of our performance measures, the Department of Sport and Recreation was able to have a successful year delivering valuable and very well-received programmes to the community.

Madam Chairman, if you allow me, I would like to speak on some of the plans for the upcoming year.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, in the upcoming fiscal year 2026/27, school sports programmes will deliver a comprehensive calendar of events designed to promote participation, learning and competition among students. These include 12 primary school festivals which introduces students to new sports through fun and engaging learning experiences, 26 inter-school leagues, 58 tournaments, and 13 all-star matches spanning four different sports.

Madam Chairman, by providing structured opportunities for competition and skill development, this programme supports the Government's broader objectives of promoting health and wellness, enhancing educational outcomes, empowering youth, and strengthening community engagement. These outcomes directly align with the priorities outlined in the National Sports Policy, particularly increasing participation, fostering athlete development pathways, and enhancing the overall value of sport within the community.

The Department of Sport and Recreation will continue to advance and fulfil the policy goals and objectives outlined in the National Sports Policy "Sport Matters." Commitment remains focused on strengthening Bermuda's sport system and creating sustainable pathways for athlete and sport development.

Madam Chairman, central to this progress is the continued partnership with the National Sport Governing Bodies. These partnerships remain critical in providing structured and inclusive platforms that allow for the ongoing evaluation, development, and support of sports programmes and athletes at all levels. Through collaboration, the aim is to enhance governance, athlete performance standards, and long-term sport sustainability across the Island.

Madam Chairman, a key strategic priority for this fiscal year will be the development of a comprehensive High-Performance Framework, designed to establish clear performance pathways and support systems for Bermuda's elite and emerging athletes. This framework will focus on strengthening athlete [preparation], enhancing coaching standards, improving access to sport science and medicine, and ensuring that athletes are equipped to compete successfully at regional and international levels.

Additionally, the department will prioritise the implementation of the Long-Term Athlete Development

(LTAD) plans across sporting disciplines. These plans will promote age-appropriate training, athlete wellness, and progressive skill development, ensuring that athletes are supported throughout every stage of their sporting journey from grassroots participation to high-performance competition. Through these initiatives, the Department of Sport and Recreation remains committed, Madam Chairman, to fostering excellence, promoting athlete well-being, and strengthening Bermuda's sporting landscape while ensuring alignment with the vision and objectives of the National Sports Policy.

Madam Chairman, this summer 2026, the department is launching a series of high-impact upgrades across recreational properties to enhance accessibility and community engagement. This includes digital transformation, capacity expansion as well as youth employment. These advancements represent continued commitment to a robust, inclusive, and technologically forward-thinking sports and recreation culture.

Madam Chairman, while the department continues to strive to meet the needs of parents during the summer months, it must be acknowledged that the demand for camp spaces continues to exceed our current capacity. However, the Department of Sport and Recreation is committed to enhancing access to Summer Day Camp opportunities. That is why, in this third year of running Camp Connect, the department is proud to announce significant upgrades to the Camp Connect online registration system.

Building on the success of previous seasons, the platform will be enhanced to become even more robust, more user-friendly and more transparent, ensuring a smoother experience for all families.

Madam Chairman, this year the department will introduce a modernised Summer [Day] Camp lottery system as part of its broader digital transformation and service enhancement initiatives. The system is designed to improve transparency, fairness, and operational efficiency in the allocation of Summer Day Camp spaces, ensuring a more equitable and user-focused experience for Bermuda's families. Key enhancements include upgraded digital infrastructure to support high user demand, improved allocation logic to ensure equitable access, expanded partnerships with private camp providers through a centralised platform, and a continued commitment to affordability.

These improvements respond directly to stakeholder feedback and aim to provide a more transparent, efficient, and equitable registration experience for Bermuda's families. Information via a marketing campaign will be released in the coming months regarding the Summer [Day] Camp lottery system.

Madam Chairman, alongside Camp Connect, the department will provide summer employment for 150 young people, offering aspiring counsellors and specialists valuable hands-on experience in child care and youth development through this meaningful program. The Department of Sport and Recreation remains resolute in advancing the vision set out within the

National Sports Policy, strengthening participation, supporting athlete development, improving access to quality recreation facilities, and reinforcing the value of sport within national identity. Guided by the belief, Madam Chairman, that *sport matters*, sport and recreation will continue to be positioned as essential pillars of health, youth development, community cohesion, and national pride.

Madam Chairman, I extend my sincere appreciation to the department's staff, the National Sport Governing Bodies, the athletes, and the community partners whose collective efforts drive this work forward. Together, we will continue building a stronger, healthier, and more resilient Bermuda through sport.

Madam Chairman, this concludes my presentation on the fiscal year 2026/27 budget allocation for Head 20, the Department of Sport and Recreation. And, Madam Chairman, the Ministry of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport yield the rest of our time to the Honourable Opposition Leader.

The Chairman: Are there any other persons who wish to speak to Head 20?

I recognise the Member from constituency 8, the Opposition Leader.

Member, you have the floor.

I will let you know that you have approximately two hours and about 28 minutes.

Hon. Ben Smith: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and good afternoon.

Firstly, I would like to thank the Honourable Minister for his brief, brief. We did have a quick conversation yesterday at the National Sports Centre where he told me that he was going to be brief to give an opportunity for me to ask the questions, to get the information that I think is important under Sport.

Before I get into the heads, I would just like to start with—

The Chairman: One head.

Hon. Ben Smith: —before I go forward with the Head 20, I just want to have the opportunity to just speak to the connection of sport. The Minister, he said it a couple of times, and I think it is important that we continue to reiterate it, that *sport matters*. As the national coach for swimming, this has been part of my life. I do fully understand what sport can do for the community, what interaction with our young people does, and this is an opportunity for us with this specific Ministry to really connect positive interaction with our young people that can have an impact on their life going forward.

So, like the Minister, I would like to thank everyone within the Department of Sport and all the different people who are involved with sport. So, it's the athletes, it's the coaches, it's the officials. Most of sport in Bermuda is actually run by volunteers, so [I] thank all the people who volunteer their time to make sport

happen in this country. I think is important that when we get the opportunity, we should thank everybody who is involved that makes this important Ministry move forward.

Madam Chairman, in my position, specifically, I would like to say that I will continue to advocate for sport, and the Minister knows this. I will always advocate for more funding for Sport because I believe that it is an important connection for us to create positive connections with our young people that set proper role models for them.

Sport in our community can lead people away from negative social situations, away from drug use, and I think that the more that we can support sport and support people being positive in front of our young people, I think every opportunity we can do that, we should. So, the only part that I will point out before I move into the actual heads is that with \$10 million put forward to this Ministry, compared to \$30 million that we put towards Corrections, I think that we should spend more of our finances and more of our commitment on something that can prevent the end result. So, I will continue to advocate for more finances to be put towards this so that we can do everything we can to put our community on the correct path.

So, Madam Chairman, starting on [page] B-238, under the department objectives, the second objective, implement the digital augmentation plan for departmental properties. I believe this was something that the Minister discussed in last year's Budget Debate, so can the Minister give an update on the implementation of the digital augmentation plan for department properties? What has been done over the last year to improve accessibility, and what is the plan for this budget to improve accessibility?

Moving on to [page] B-239, starting with [programme] 2001, Administration and Sports. So, we start with [business unit] 30025, which is school sports events. The Minister explained the increase in the budget after there had been an assessment after the first year that this had been moved here.

I think the Minister and I both agreed that having school sports come under this Ministry was a great move to happen, have the people who are always involved with sport be the ones that were moving sport forward in this way. Can the Minister give us a list? He gave us an idea of some of the events that were going to be increasing, but could he give us an example of some of the sports that will be part of this upcoming year under the school sport programme, and whether there are any new sports that are being introduced with the increase in the budget?

Would the Minister be able to provide the level of participation? So, has he seen an increase in participation from the numbers that would have been provided when it was transferred from Education to Sport to see whether this change, which we all agree should have happened, has had an impact already? Or hasn't he had the opportunity yet to get that data?

One specific thing that has been a push around the world and specifically in Bermuda is to get an increase in participation of girls in sport. Would the Minister be able to provide whether they have seen any data that says that the increase in sport participation within schools is happening with the transfer to this Department of Sport?

What percentage of students in primary school are participating in the sports programmes? So, if the Minister can let us know whether there is a baseline for the participation so that we can, as we go forward, see whether there is growth. And I'd ask that same question for middle school and that same question for secondary school to see what is the percentage of students that are participating so that we can go forward and figure out if we are growing that percentage and what programmes or what incentives are being put in in order to get that growth of participation?

The Chairman: Just for clarification, Member. So you are asking if all students within each respective school have to participate in sports?

Hon. Ben Smith: So, out of the school body, let's say there are 100 people in the school, are we seeing that 30 students are actually participating in the programmes that are being provided under the Ministry? And if that is the number, then going forward we can grow it to 50, we can grow it—

The Chairman: Okay. That's better. Yes.

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes.

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Ben Smith: And if the Minister does have that information, whether they have been able to identify any obstacles towards increasing that number.

Madam Chairman, one of the things that's important . . . you will see that I'm looking for data because that way we can see the growth. One major issue is that you want to know whether our children are participating in sport at a young age and if they are staying within sport. So, within school, this gives us an opportunity to be able to collect that information to find out how many students in each of the age groups are actually participating. So, is there a national talent identification programme and if there isn't, is this part of the plan that the Minister is going to implement in order for us to see the growth of participation in sport going forward?

The Chairman: Just for clarification, because the student bodies within each respective school are required to do PE. And I'm trying to make certain that the Minister is able to answer the question you are asking the way you need him to. Are you [asking if] there are any extra programmes on top of that? Because students—

Hon. Ben Smith: So, what we are actually—

The Chairman: —in school have to participate in PE.

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes, but what we're discussing right now is not PE. This isn't—

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: Okay, thank you very much for that clarification because that's where I was getting confused.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: Yes, thank you.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Point of information if I may, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes, please, please.

POINT OF INFORMATION

Hon. Owen Darrell: The Physical Education, of which I think you are speaking of, comes under the Ministry and Department of Education. Sport, as the Honourable Opposition Leader is speaking of, and what I spoke of in my brief, comes under mainly the Bermuda School Sports Federation [Ltd.], and they take care of what was typically known as extracurricular activities, but now we just call it school sport.

The Chairman: Yes. Thank you.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Yes. Absolutely.

The Chairman: And that's the clarification that I needed because he kept saying *sports*.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Yes.

The Chairman: And I just wasn't—

Hon. Owen Darrell: Yes, not PE; Sports.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Hon. Ben Smith: Not PE. So, this would be an example, cross-country. It would be having football games.

The Chairman: I'm very clear. Thank you.

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes.

The Chairman: Thank you. I appreciate both Members for the clarification.

Hon. Ben Smith: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

And Madam Chairman, I would also like to know whether the Minister can give us an idea whether there is a coordination with the education system so that if a young person is identified as being talented in a sport, whether they have a way to coordinate that to get them involved in clubs, to get them involved in another programme. Because I think it's important that we connect those dots.

So, a gym teacher sees, you know, in the gym class that you are referring to, then they are showing up in a school programme. Are they then being referred to a club programme which then could put them on the path to international representation? So, I think it's important that we put those dots together because I think that leads to the outcome that the Minister was referring to.

I did have some questions on some of the slight uptick, but the Minister has answered that. It's all with increase in salary. So, I'm just going to move to [programme] 2002, Sports Development. It's [business unit] 30055, Sports Programmes. Can the Minister please provide a breakdown of the \$690,000 and how it will be used? I believe that that is information that he can break down. Just what programmes are being involved within that \$690,000? Just so that we have an understanding what that is going to lead to.

Sports Investments, [business unit] 30065. This is the amount for grants for sport. The Minister pointed out that there is a slight increase. I note that on page C-23 in the [Budget] Book, it is actually just going to give you the information from the expenditure for 2024/25. And I know that you don't get the new number until the new year starts, but if the Minister can give us the information for last year, which would be 2025/26, the breakdown for each sport and what organisation gets it because I think the public would be interested to know what those numbers are and what sports got what funding.

So, Madam Chairman, you will see that I'm continuing on the data line because I think it's important that we have a baseline of where we are and also that allows us to see growth, whether . . . in Bermuda, we all know that with a low birth rate, we do not have as many children in the community. So, we need to make sure that every child who can be participating in sport . . . that we are doing everything we can to encourage that. So, does the Ministry track the total number of Bermudians participating in organised sport? And he would be able to get that by collecting it from the National Sport Governing Bodies and from the different sports organisations. So, I'm asking whether that total number is actually collected.

Now, with that data collection, the important numbers that I would be looking for is the retention of athletes between the ages of 12 and 18, because that's the period where we see a lot of athletes fall out of sport. So, knowing whether we are collecting that data to find out whether we are seeing a reduction in that

period, the way it is seen in other jurisdictions, and if so, are there any plans and programmes being put in place to try to encourage our young people to stay in sport in these critical times of development?

And then, once we have the number of our athletes that are participating in organised sport locally, could the Minister also let us know if they have a total number of Bermudian athletes who are competing internationally? And that would also be data that would be collected from all the different sports that are travelling. And if those numbers have been collected, that would give us the ability to compare one year over the other. And if that is the case, can the Minister let us know whether there has been an increase in participation in sport?

What are the ages that are being covered by the sports? Has there been an increase in girls participating in sports? Because that has been a significant push, trying to get more of our young girls to be involved in sport and then trying to get those girls to stay in sport longer. Because once again, that is the critical time as they are going into preteen and teenage. They move away from sport, and that is when you can have problems. And I know parents also want to make sure that their young people are involved with a positive activity at that time. So, knowing whether those numbers are increasing, I think, would be an important thing for us to know.

Madam Chairman, also, the Minister would have talked about the fact that there are officials and coaches. And there are some certifications that are being presented. Would the Minister be able to let us know whether there has been an increase in the officials that are being certified, whether they are collecting that data to find out whether more of our volunteers are now taking on that certification so that they can give back to programmes? Because none of these sports can happen without having the officials. So, anything we can do to encourage more people to get involved, get the certifications, so that not only are they making sure the rules are followed, but they are also following safe sport.

That same question would follow along for coaching, because having positive people standing up that are certified in front of our young people is important. So, would the Minister be able to let us know whether they have seen an increase in the amount of coaches that are involved, and whether those coaches are now increasing the amount of certifications that they are getting so that we are seeing an improved level of the skills that are being presented from coaches to athletes?

So, Madam Chairman, I did mention it just now that it's also important for us to make sure that our sports are safe. So, can the Minister please provide data on the percentage of sports officials, managers, and coaches that have received SafeSport certification?

And with that, what percentage of officials, coaches, and managers have SCARS certification? Because at all times we need to make sure that we are protecting our young people at the same time that we are developing them going forward. We must make sure that they are safeguarded at all times. So having certification on SafeSport, and having certification from SCARS, and redoing your SCARS certification. I think that it's important that every opportunity we can to remind people that these things are available, and they should try to get this certification so that we can protect our young people is important.

And at this time I would also like to add that the Minister of Health mentioned that there is this opportunity for people to take courses within Health that will allow them to be able to recommend our young people who have mental health issues. So, I believe that this is another area where sport can lead by the Department of Sport recommending that if sports want to get funding, they should have SafeSport, they should have SCARS, and now they should add this piece that is being put forward by the Department of Health.

So, Madam Chairman, so still under this, this is where we are investing in our young people. This is where the funding goes to the National Sport Governing Bodies so that they can, you know, pay for training, they can pay for overseas competitions. The question that I have is . . . because the cost of living has continued to increase it actually makes it very difficult. The money that's provided doesn't go as far. And I think it's important that we give some examples of what that is.

So, when a team travels, there is a significant cost to get on the flight. Then there's going to be feeding those athletes. Then there's the fees for the competition, the hotels. Those numbers have continued to increase. So, this is why I continue to advocate for the funding, because although it seems that the numbers have increased within sport, the Minister himself said that the majority of the funding increase is actually for the public golf courses. It's not really going to increasing the amount of money that's going to go to the investment for these teams to be able to travel, for our athletes to be able to get the extra training that's necessary.

So, in order for us to dig a little deeper and find out whether what I just said is correct, that there's an increased demand that is not being matched, it would be important to . . . I have asked the Minister to provide the information for how much funding is going to be provided to each National Sport Governing Body. But the question is, what is being requested from the National Sport Governing Bodies? So, the reason I ask that question is, if what's being asked for is number "X," and what's being provided is 10 per cent, 5 per cent of that number, where does that gap get filled?

And the reason that I bring that particular thing up is what you do not want is that sport starts to become separated by finances. And we know that in our community that can be a real thing. Most sports are

also charities so that they can fundraise for the shortfall in funding. But as we have an increase in the need for charities that are supplying food and shelter, this means that there is less available for things like sport. Because if we're honest, people are going to more likely want to give for things that are for survival, and for housing than they are for what would be deemed as extra. But I've said this is a priority. I think that the more that we can invest in our young people, this is an investment that takes us forward. So that's why it's important for us to know what that difference is, if there is this gap, and how we are going to be able to fill that difference.

Madam Chairman, I believe that this is a conversation that you and I would have had quite some time ago. There is an increase in the number of athletes that are participating for Bermuda who come under the category of "belonger." And the reason I bring that up is because the finances of many of those athletes is significantly different from the finances of what I call *average Bermudian*. So, if we don't really focus on this part that I'm talking about right now, that gap gets bigger.

So, Madam Chairman, I'm asking the Minister whether he has identified what I am saying, and he would be able to clearly look at it by who's winning sports awards, who's participating on overseas trips. You'll be able to look at the data and see if this change is real, and if it is, how do we make sure that we are giving support so that we are levelling the playing field, and not creating an "us versus them." That means that athletes with a lot of talent might not be able to reach their full potential because they do not have the finances to get the extra training, to get the extra opportunity, to get the extra travel opportunities and competition.

So can the Minister let us know whether this is something that he's looking at? And if it is something that he's looking at, have he and his Ministry tried to identify solutions for trying to level that playing field so that we can make sure that all of our athletes are getting the same opportunity to be able to perform and reach the highest heights of international competition for the country?

Madam Chairman, how does the Ministry measure whether Government investment in sport is actually increasing participation in Bermuda? So once again, if you know what the numbers are that I'm asking for, you can look year over year to see whether sport participation is growing, whether the number of sports that are being participated in is growing. That will allow us to know whether the investment is actually leading to what the goal is, and is that leading to regional competition, is that leading to world competition? Which then puts us on the path to reaching the Olympic finals in some cases, if that is the destination for the end of that particular sport.

Madam Chairman, in preparation for this debate, I did look at some of the data worldwide just to

see kind of where we are that would gauge some of the questions that I would ask. So, the major barrier to youth sport worldwide right now is considered [to be] the rising costs. So that is why that has to be a focus for us, because it seems that the rest of the world is seeing the same thing. Youth sport, there's becoming a separation for people who can afford it and [people] who cannot afford it, and it is creating this difference. So, can the Minister provide the following numbers for the last year?

- The number of athletes qualifying and participating in regional competitions.
- The number of athletes qualifying and participating in world-level competitions.
- The number of athletes who have reached podium at both of those levels.

Once again, you have to have the baseline to see whether you are growing, whether the investment is actually leading to the success that is part of the department objectives.

[Mr. W. Lawrence Scott, Chairman]

Hon. Ben Smith: Mr. Chairman, if we are serious about growing sport in Bermuda, we have to measure in order for us to see the growth. Reliable data on participation, development, and outcomes is how we know whether the investment is leading to success in sport. The stakeholder survey that was done for the sports policy revealed several structural issues. There was a large number who were saying that there was a cost barrier to participation. Some of it was the lack of facilities, and then there was lack of qualified coaches. Those were the major factors that were put forward that athletes were saying were barriers towards them participating and then thriving in sport.

Can the Minister please provide an update on how these issues have been dealt with and what the plan is for the upcoming year in order to improve in all three of these areas?

Mr. Chairman, so on one hand, I have been talking about the youth part of sport. But we all know that sport doesn't end when you are a young person. I think you yourself, football player. The question is looking for what is adult participation in sports? Can we get an idea of what percentage of the over 18 population is participating? And then what is the percentage in the younger ages? Because what you want to see is that we are retaining people participating in sport, and if we are not retaining them, what is it that we can do to make sure that we are retaining them?

The reason why I think that's important is because that is the health part of our community. If we are pushing towards participation in sport, people are going to do extra work to stay fit in order to play in the football game, in order to play on the softball team. So those changes will also have an impact on the health of the community which, in the long run, is also going to help with the cost of health in the country. More participation.

So can we get the numbers that say this is the amount, this is the percentage of the population over the age of 18 who are participating, whether it's recreational, what level of sport, and the same thing for our young people from 6 to 18 who are participating, so we see what are the levels, what's the participation, and then what the retention rate is?

So, Mr. Chairman, [programme] 2003 Sports Incentives and Awards, it's [business unit] 30030 Athletic Awards, there was a drop in funding for this. And the Minister explained that that money . . . I believe he said that money was taken from here and given to the school sports. It just seems odd that you would take money from athletic awards and put it over to school sports. If we need to grow school sports, we need to get the funding for that, and it shouldn't mean that you're actually impacting people who potentially would be receiving funding to help them to move forward in their sport in order for us to increase over here on the sports in school

Mr. Chairman, [programme] 2004, Sports Facilities Management, the Minister talked about the increase. Most of that increase is going to be for the golf courses. There was only a small amount that was left that was for the increase in salaries. Can the Minister let us know exactly what that was and what that percentage is for that increase? Because there did not seem to be a lot left out of this \$571,000 increase that would have been for increase in salaries. So, if he can let us know what that is.

Mr. Chairman, the Minister did touch slightly on the softball park, [business unit] 30075. There has been a slight increase in the funding which was for salaries. Can the Minister let us know if there are any plans being put forward in order to increase participation in softball and to increase the usage of the softball park?

Mr. Chairman, [business unit] 30080, the tennis stadium. Once again, a slight increase. Obviously, the Minister talked about the fact that we have an increase in usage. One was for the lighting, the other was because of the introduction of pickleball. But I'm actually more interested in the tennis side of this because I know that now it has a dual use with the pickleball, but considering the results that we have just had from our tennis team, I want to know whether there is any request for increasing the courts for tennis, increasing the whatever is needed for the tennis stadium for improvements that allow us to continue to grow our tennis programme considering that they have done this historic feat and we want to make sure that we are doing everything we can to support them so that they continue on that track.

Mr. Chairman, on [page] B-240, under Professional Services. This line was \$517,000 in 2024/25 and is now \$732,000. Can the Minister please give us a breakdown of professional services and what has increased from 2024/25 until now for that difference in the payment?

Mr. Chairman, I'm going to move to [page] B-242 under the Performance Measures, starting off with [business unit] 30030 Athletic Awards. In 2024/25, there were 19 athletes who were awarded under the junior athlete investment. That number has been consistently down, and now the target is 15. Why are there less athletes being awarded? Is there anything to encourage more athletes to be able to get awarded? And having that reduction, would that have given an increase to the amount that each athlete is provided?

The reason I bring that up is because if you look at 2025/26, the average awarded was \$3,000 and then it was revised to \$3,125. But if you look at the original forecast, there were only 14 awardees who were in the original forecast to get \$3,000 each. But if you look at the revised, there's actually 16 athletes and more funding, \$3,125. So, was there an increase in funding that allowed for that increase in athletes and increase in funding?

And the reason I ask that is because now we have moved to the target for the upcoming year of 15 athletes at \$3,000, where I would prefer to see both of those numbers grow so that we are increasing the number of athletes who are being awarded and that the award would increase. Because as I said before, cost of living has gone up, cost of travel has gone up. So, the amount of support that is needed obviously has also increased.

Still, in that under [business unit] 30030 Athletic Awards, the number of elite athletes awarded. So, in 2024/25, there were 25 athletes. The forecast for 2025/26 was 18, but the actual amount that received the award was 26. So now the target is 20. So, can we anticipate that this number is going to grow again? Because it seems like we are forecasting for a lower number than the number of athletes who are actually in the programme and receiving the award.

If that is the case, shouldn't we see an increase in funding to match that increased number, rather than have a target that is lower than the number who are actually in that award programme? I just think that if you aim for a target that's a little higher, it means that you should give further support because we should be growing the number of athletes who we are supporting so that we can reach the targets that the Ministry has under their department objectives.

Mr. Chairman, [business unit] 30065, Sports Investment Programme. So, the number of sports awards presented for 2025/26 was 36. Once again, I see that the target for the upcoming year is 30. So, does the Minister anticipate less athletes applying? If so, what is the reason for less athletes applying? And what are we going to do to try to increase that number to incentivise more athletes to fill out the paperwork, to be part of the programme so that they can receive the kind of support that allows them to get to the next level

So, Mr. Chairman, I'm now going to move to [page] C-20, Grants and Contributions, 6878, Contribution to Sports Development. Would the Minister be able

to let us know what data is being collected from sports in order to know whether the investment is leading to the expected results? Does the Ministry have expected outcomes for the development? And is that connected to the amount of funding that that sport might receive in the following year?

So, Mr. Chairman, how is the progress gauged? Does the Ministry have a formal performance-based funding framework for NSGBs? This would mean that improved international results, rankings, qualification standards would trigger funding review and may unlock a higher tier of support for that sport.

I'll use an example that I brought up just now, which is the Bermuda Lawn Tennis Association and their historic result in the Davis Cup. So, will this significant improvement in international performance lead to a corresponding increase in funding for the Lawn Tennis Association?

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Ben Smith: And if so, by what criteria and on what time frame? I like that.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes, Mr. Chairman, the Minister is pointing out—

The Chairman: Focus on the Chair.

Hon. Ben Smith: Mr. Chairman, the Minister is pointing out that the president of tennis happens to be my next-door neighbour.

[Laughter]

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Ben Smith: Got to be early.

[Laughter]

Hon. Ben Smith: And the Minister is up early. I do see it when I'm coaching. He's walking the track and then going to the gym.

An Hon. Member: There you go!

Hon. Ben Smith: Can the Minister identify other sports that might have also had significant achievements over the last year? And would those achievements lead to increased funding in the upcoming year?

So, I am now still on [page] C-20, Mr. Chairman, 6880 Elite Athlete Assistance. So, Mr. Chairman,

here is a spot where I'm going to once again put a proposal to the Minister, and he can use it for himself. And I will support him if he's able to get this across the line. I believe that we should look at our elite athletes differently than we do now.

One of the issues that we have with our elite level athletes, specifically the ones who are in Olympic sports, that are doing Olympic training, where in most cases that is never going to lead to any professional funding. They are not going to be able to be professionals and make significant money. Specifically, in most of the Olympic sports, that's the case.

But what happens is in the pursuit of the Olympic dream, they have to put their life on hold. So now this athlete that has been supported by the grants from a young age, they might have received the Junior Sports Award, they then have gone through the programme, they are now an elite athlete, they receive that funding.

A lot of times, if they go to university, the university will cover a lot of their costs during that period. But then it's that next step where they have to continue the training in order to pursue the dream for the Olympics. And in that period is when they can fall into trouble, because there's not enough money to be able to support them, to be able to get the kind of training that they need, to be able to access the competitions that they need, and the level of competitions that they need.

So, in many cases, this is the period that leads to athletes retiring from the sport, not because they don't love the sport anymore, not because they don't have the ability, but it is this juncture where this issue happens, this crossroads.

But even more importantly, the ones who persevere and continue to work and get to that Olympic Games, and there's no funding at the end of that Olympic journey, they then have to go to the world of work. And in many cases, you're now putting a résumé forward that says you've been an athlete for the last 15 years, which doesn't have the same kind of impact. People are going, *Well, you have been missing from the age of 18 to 31*. Even though they have had accolades, they have had, you know, people in Bermuda celebrate them, but you can't really take that celebration to the bank, and you really can't put it on your résumé, which has now put them behind.

And in so many cases, what you find is that that athlete who has been giving all of their time and energy to compete and make Bermudians proud is now in a hurt position. And we never talk about what happens after they retire and what that journey is. So, what I'm proposing is how we help that.

The proposal that I am saying is that we should make those elite athletes employees of the government. This way, they would have insurance to protect them from injuries and allow them to have the therapy that they need, mental and physical. They would also have access to pensions, because in that period of time they would not have had pensions going in, even

though they were sacrificing. They are not going to put the government grant into their pension. So [allow them the] ability to have insurance, to have pension, and to have the money which allows them to do the training so that they can continue on this journey.

And I'm not saying this is going to be the kind of money that is going to make them wealthy, but it is the kind of money that will support them. And it will give this kind of support [with] health insurance [and] pension that will help them as they go forward. But now look at what you get with that. Every time our athletes travel, they are ambassadors of the country. So now I said an employee of the government. So, when they travel, they are representing us for tourism. They are provided with the information to take to whatever destination they are going to. This is their opportunity to sell Bermuda wherever they go.

When they return home, this is an opportunity for them to do public service announcements, for them to show healthy eating, exercise. This comes under the Ministry of Health. This is an opportunity for them to show our people that putting in that work and doing things the right way makes you healthier.

But then let's look at what they can do in our schools. They come back, and now they have a certain number of times each year that they have to go into our schools and give talks to our young people which provide . . . they are already positive role models that we see in the newspaper, but now they're in front of our young people giving that message in our schools. And now that comes under Education. But, Mr. Chairman, then this gives the opportunity for public service announcements against antisocial behaviour, against using drugs. That helps under National Security.

So, I am hoping that the Minister will take me up on this, and we can work together to try to make this a reality, to have our elite athletes become ambassadors for the country, which gets covered under multiple ministries. So, if the Minister wants to know how we can finance it we take a little bit from each of those, because the give back will cover multiple ministries.

Mr. Chairman, we don't normally push for the growth of government. But I think this is the kind of growth in government that everybody would support. We already have these positive role models. Let's figure out a way to support them while they are on their journey, after their journey, and allow them to give back while they are on that journey.

Mr. Chairman, now I'm going to move on to 6884, National Stadium Trustees. I know that the Minister is keenly aware of what's happening at the National Sports Centre, because he is there quite often. So, he is utilising the gym, he is walking around the track. Yesterday he had the option . . . still on [page] C-20, 6884 on [page] C-20, National Stadium Trustees. So, the Minister said that it was buzzing yesterday. You had people on the track, you had people in the pool, there were people on the fields, which is always good to see people participating in healthy activities.

Mr. Chairman, I think it is important that we start to get data again. So, would the Minister be able to let us know what percentage of the available hours at the National Sports Centre facilities are currently used by, 1) sports organisations; 2) schools; and 3) the public? Those are the three areas, if he could give us the information. So, percentage of the available hours at the National Sports Centre facilities covering those three areas.

But as we are talking about the numbers, can the Minister please let us know if the National Sports Centre has updated financials, and whether they now have their updated audited financials? Because I know that this was a problem in the past, so if the Minister can give us an update of whether that has been corrected.

The National Sports Centre was a multi-phase project, and it seems that at the end of the last phase we have paused. And that pause has gone on for a significant amount of time. Can the Minister please provide an update on when the next phase of the National Sports Centre will be budgeted and started? The reason I bring that up, Mr. Chairman, is because at the end of the last kind of project within this build phase of the National Sports Centre was the Aquatic Centre, which then led to the gym. But in that, there were temporary facilities that were put there because there was supposed to be a centre core that was built in the next phase.

The problem with that not happening is that those facilities, being temporary, had a lifespan. That lifespan ended several years ago. So, would the Minister please provide what the lifespan was of the facilities at the National Sports Centre that were temporary, and when that lifespan was exceeded? Because what happened in the last year is that the changing facilities at the aquatic centre/gym have been closed for safety reasons. And now a new set of changing rooms, significantly smaller in a container, have been put next to the pool.

So, can the Minister let us know what the lifespan of the new temporary—to cover over the original temporary—is? And, is he able to let us know what the capacity was for the original which has been closed for safety, and what the capacity is for the new temporary changing rooms so that everybody can see the significant reduction in what is available?

Mr. Chairman, while I am at it, one of the significant changes in moving from this much bigger changing facility is that it allowed for proper safe sport, separation of adults, separation from athletes, and no ability for people to see into the changing rooms. That has been a significant obstacle with the new set of changing rooms that have been put there.

So, Mr. Chairman, I am now asking, when will the old changing rooms that are unsafe be removed? Or will they continue to sit there and rot? But as I am talking about those changing rooms, there are offices that are attached to those changing rooms. So, I am

asking the Minister whether, considering that the changing rooms are unsafe, there has been a health and safety check on the offices that are attached to this temporary building that became permanent that now is being condemned. What is the plan to move the people that are in those offices, so that they can be in a safer environment?

Mr. Chairman, as I mentioned, the Minister is somebody who does take the opportunity to use the gym at the National Sports Centre. And I do thank the trustees for creating an opportunity for anybody that has been an Olympian to be able to work out at that facility for free. I think that was a really important change, because this is a bare minimum that we can give back to the people who have represented us at that highest level. Can the Minister let us know what the usage of that gym is, and whether there is an anticipated growth in the usage of that gym? And if so, what are the plans in order to get that increase?

Mr. Chairman, I am now going to ask a question on what is the overall purpose and philosophy of the National Sports Centre? And the reason I ask this question, and I think it is important that we get an answer from the Minister, is because that philosophy, I believe, is an issue on how we are dealing with the National Sports Centre. Because if it is supposed to be for the community for participation in sport and increase in health, then we should really revisit how we are operating the National Sports Centre.

And now I will ask the questions that will let you know why I make that statement and I asked that question.

Can the Minister let us know how many National Sport Governing Bodies, that receive funding from the Government, also pay fees to the Government to rent the facility? Because you give money from the Government and then take that money and give it back to the Government. And then, Mr. Chairman, when teams come into Bermuda and use the facilities, it is my understanding that the Tourism Authority (which I know the Minister will be able to help me out there, because he also wears that hat) covers the cost of using the facilities as an incentive to come to Bermuda for training and competition.

So, would the Minister be able to tell us, once again, does that mean that the grant provided to the Tourism Authority, a portion of that is being paid to the National Sports Centre Trustees—

The Chairman: You can only speak to Head 20, even though it comes under the same Minister. But you are asking about Tourism Authority grants.

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes, but, Mr. Chairman, what I am talking about is National Sports Centre Trustees. So, if that money is coming in from Government to them, then I can ask that question. That is the fees they are receiving.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes.

Hon. Owen Darrell: It's sticky, Mr. Chairman. It's sticky.

The Chairman: Yes—

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes, the Minister wants it to be sticky because he doesn't want to answer the question. So Mr. Chairman, one more time.

The Chairman: So, what line . . . show the line item that shows where . . . show the line item which shows the money coming in.

Hon. Ben Smith: So, I am under National Sports Centre Trustees, correct? Do the National Sports Centre Trustees collect revenue?

The Chairman: [Line item] 6884.

Hon. Ben Smith: Mr. Chairman, do the National Sports Centre Trustees receive revenue for rental of the facilities?

The Chairman: Where does that show it? You have to show me the line item.

Hon. Ben Smith: I am going to ask the question. Does the National Sports Centre receive funding?

The Chairman: Okay, you can ask that.

Hon. Ben Smith: From rental. If they do receive funding, Mr. Chairman, is some of that funding for rental coming from the Tourism Authority?

The Chairman: You can ask that question.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Ben Smith: Thank you.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Rental or usage?

Hon. Ben Smith: Rental, usage, whatever way you want to tap dance on this one, Minister.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Go ahead.

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. Owen Darrell: Just for completeness, Mr. Chairman, I would like the Honourable Opposition Leader who is asking questions to be 100 per cent clear whether we are talking about rental or we are talking about usage. They are two different things, I believe.

The Chairman: The question that . . . the way I interpreted the question was rental. The word "rental" was used. So, if the BTA is renting. Now, if the BTA is "using," that was not the question.

Hon. Owen Darrell: It was rental fees, and then there's usage fees.

The Chairman: He asked about rental fees.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, [Mr.] Chairman.

Hon. Ben Smith: So, Mr. Chairman, so that we are 100 per cent clear on this, either you are "renting" one of the facilities, a field, a track, the swimming pool—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Ben Smith: —or they are "using" those and there is a fee attached to that usage. Can the Minister let us know whether some of that money is coming from the Tourism Authority? And if that is the case, once again, money going from one part of Government to another part of Government.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes, but you are funding both of them. They are both two different entities. Government is funding and then sharing the money. Most people would call that borrowing from Peter to pay Paul.

So, has the Government considered moving the National Sports Centre to a core funded grant model that covers the baseline cost of operating the facility? Then the focus would be on usage. This would increase the access to schools. This would increase the ability for us to get health for our community. That seems to have been the philosophy. But the model we are using doesn't lead to it.

So now, within that facility, still on the National Sports Centre, can the Minister provide an update on the heating system at the National Aquatic Centre pool? Has the facility lost any revenue this winter due to not being able to maintain the appropriate pool temperature? If so, please let us know what the revenue loss was, how many months this occurred, and whether it has been rectified.

Will the maintenance be done on pool tiles that have chipped at the pool? Will there be painting of the diving tower? Can the Minister provide total revenue from swimming rental of the pool? Can the Minister provide total revenue from diving facilities at the pool? How many competitive divers have been produced at the

facility since it opened? Does the National Sports Centre have a transparent scheduling system available to sports organisations and the public? If so, what is done with conflicts?

When major events are held on the main field, does this impact the use of the track? If the track cannot be used during these events, where are Bermuda's track athletes expected to conduct their training? What alternative arrangements are made for Bermuda's track athletes to prepare, particularly those on elite athlete pathways, which also comes under this Ministry?

Can the Minister let us know what venues are available, and in what training periods they should expect this interruption?

The Chairman: Just going back to the BTA question, this is under Head 20 Grants and Contributions for the National Stadium Trustees, which would suggest that this is the money that the Government is giving or has allocated to the National Stadium. And thus, what you're asking is about funds that have been granted to the BTA and that they would be spending. Therefore, that would fall outside of Head 20. So that question would not be able to be asked.

Hon. Ben Smith: That's okay, Mr. Chairman, because I will ask them in parliamentary questions, since you seem to want to not have me ask the question. I will figure out another way to get it. That's what I will say.

The Chairman: This is not about not wanting; this is just about following the procedure.

Hon. Ben Smith: The point is still the same.

Can the Minister provide an update on the solar energy project at National Sports Centre? Is the system fully operational? What is the actual reduction in electricity costs achieved by the solar installation since commissioning? What was the projected reduction in electricity costs when the project was first approved? Is the project currently meeting those projections?

Will the Minister commit to publishing an annual National Sports Centre renewable energy fact sheet similar to what is publicly available for The Bahamas Sports Centre? (You can research it if you want, Minister.) What long-term operation and maintenance arrangements are in place for the NSC solar project?

Still on [page] C-20, Mr. Chairman, 7092 Golf Courses. So, the Minister said that a significant amount of the increase in funding was because of the golf courses. Would the Minister be able to tell us what that increase specifically is going to be used for, breaking it down? And as there are some rules within the granting of the funding for this, can the Minister please let us know when the last set of financials for the golf courses was provided, as that is set out to be done annually in the legislation?

With the funding that's being given, would the Minister be able to provide what is covering the

operating costs of the public golf courses? Is it green fees, membership, and then the government subsidy? And if he can give us what that breakdown is so that we have an understanding of how the funding is used. And with that, would the Minister let us know whether this also helps us to reduce the fees for our seniors and for our junior golfers so that they have access to golf that they might not otherwise have access to? Because once again, this is talking about how we're going to support our athletes. And one of the things that we can do to do that is to make sure that we are giving them access to facilities that they might not normally have access to.

Mr. Chairman, I am going to go back to page B-239, [business unit] 30055. The Minister did speak to ACTIVE Kids programme. Can the Minister just give us a little bit of information about that programme so that, for the listening audience, they know what is available with that? That would be helpful.

And [business unit] 30065, the Minister mentioned a couple of times Long Term Athlete Development Plan. Could the Minister give us a review over the last year on the Long Term Athlete Development Plan [LTADP] and then what is expected to be implemented in the upcoming year for that plan?

And with that, Mr. Chairman, I will sit and see if I can get some answers from the Minister.

The Chairman: Thank you, MP Smith.

This is the debate for Committee of Supply. We are debating Head 20, which is Sport. It is a three-hour debate, which ends at 8:16 [pm]. The Minister has presented.

Is there anybody else, any other Members that would like to speak to Head 20?

I see no other Members. Minister.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: Does any other Member want to speak to Head 20?

No other Members.
Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am quite surprised, Mr. Chairman. I gave them two and a half hours, and they only used some of it. That's okay. I have no problem answering questions, Mr. Chairman.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Oh, yes. You will love these.

So, Mr. Chairman, it brings me great pleasure to answer all of the wonderful questions that have been—

The Chairman: And you are aware that the BTA question was disallowed.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Oh, it was, yes. Absolutely. Thank you.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Sure.

So, it brings me great pleasure to give fulsome answers that came from the Honourable Opposition Leader, who . . . he never declared his interest, Mr. Chairman. I don't think he declared his interest as one of the top swimming coaches in Bermuda.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Yes, National Swim Coach in Bermuda. There was some time he went missing, but I think he was dealing with other matters. But he's back now. It's good to see him, Mr. Chairman.

But with that said, we will answer the questions that were so eloquently put towards the Department of Sport and Recreation by the Opposition Leader.

And the first question, Mr. Chairman, comes from [page] B-238 of the Budget Book. And the question was asked, Is there an update on the digital augmentation and implementation plan to improve accessibility? And, Mr. Chairman, I am happy to report that the plan for 2026 and 2027 is to transform at least 50 per cent of the WER Joell [Tennis] Stadium and the Darrell's Island facilities into digital environments. [Mr.] Chairman, this will include interactive digital signage where at least 50 per cent of the visitors interact with assistive or experiential digital layers, resulting in at least a 20 per cent increase in accessibility satisfaction and a 50 per cent boost in audience engagement.

And, Mr. Chairman, this brings me to the WER Joell [Tennis] Stadium. And if you go down there, Mr. Chairman, especially an evening like tonight where the days have gotten longer, Mr. Chairman, you can see a litany of individuals that not only are taking part in traditional tennis, but they also are taking part in pickleball. And the participants, Mr. Chairman, at the WER Joell Stadium range from young participants to older participants. There are also corporate clubs that have pickleball tournaments down there. And, you know, this digital implementation plan improves the accessibility for everyone. And, you know, that brings us to—

An Hon. Member: Do you play?

Hon. Owen Darrell: Absolutely, Mr. Chairman. I have been known to be invited to a pickleball tournament here and there. The Bermuda Union of Teachers, which I once was a member of, have graciously invited me in the past to take part in some pickleball tournaments. I think they invited me once, and I am not sure why they haven't invited me back. But nonetheless—

[Laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: I have taken part. So, it's very important that we bring the digital access of our facilities up. So, I am really glad that the Opposition Leader, Mr. Chairman, asked that question. Because as you can see the world over, paddle sports have definitely increased. You know, the Government, not yet. We do not have paddle courts yet. But that is something that we may look into in future times. But right now, we are very happy with the WER Joell [Tennis] Stadium and the access that it provides.

Now, we do know that there will be some upgrades happening, but that will come under a different ministry. But we are happy with the actual usage of the individuals that are using that. And again, I reiterate thanks to the Opposition Leader for asking about the digital augmentation that we are implementing to improve the accessibility of this stadium.

Which brings us to the second question. And there was a lot of talk about school sports events. And this came from [business unit] 30025. And the Honourable Opposition Leader has asked that we give him a list of sports that will be part of the new sports programme. And he asked specifically if there are any new sports. While I do not have a list of what was done before, I can give a comprehensive list of all of the sports that we are currently looking to provide for our school students.

In the primary school festivals, we have netball, which has long been a sport that the women in this country have been very proud of. And I am happy to see that it wasn't brought up by the Opposition Leader. But I would like to take some time here, Mr. Chairman, to speak on where netball has now come to, by getting back into the international tournaments.

We see that their winter season has just ended. And congratulations to, I think it was the Tigers, who had an undefeated season. So, we can see that they get to this level by where it starts in the primary school level. So, I am glad the Opposition Leader asked that question.

Cricket, that was one I remember. When I went to Harrington Sound we had the double-wicket tournament. We had a lot of different cricket tournaments that we played at school that, for whatever reason, have dropped off over the years. So, I am happy to report that there will be festivals coming up in cricket that will be put on by the Bermuda School Sports Federation. And that is the organisation that has now come under the Department of Sport and Recreation. And they handle sports programmes, not to be confused with physical education.

Also, field hockey. You would have seen, Mr. Chairman, that I had the opportunity to be invited by the Bermuda Hockey [Federation] to go to the National Sports Centre and take part in some of their, you call them, clinics, that they were specifically putting on for primary school students. And I was happy to see . . . and I think it is well documented if anybody has seen the pictures. The first thing I did wrong, Mr. Chairman,

is I picked up the hockey stick wrong. And it was a young person who came over, and he said to me, *No, you have to do it this way*. So, it is good to see that field hockey is one of the sports that has been implemented into the primary school list of sports, including basketball.

Basketball is another one of them. Not usually a traditional sport in Bermuda, but it is one that, you know, with the access of television and superstars like, in my day, Michael Jordan, LeBron James, and Kobe Bryant. Yes, and we have one, Mr. [Ralph] Scott, who is now getting ready to enter university. So, we can see that basketball, especially if you follow him . . . and I never forget. There are pictures where he is so much taller than me when I try to give him an award.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: I know. So that is an example of a sport that is now in primary school.

Pickleball is in primary school. And I would have never believed it if my son one day had not picked up a pickleball racket and said, *Daddy, I want to play pickleball*. So, now we go [play] pickleball. I said, where did you learn how to do this? He says, *Oh, Mr. Smith taught us at school*. His PE teacher, ironically, is named Mr. Smith. So, we could now say we have pickleball in schools.

We also have tennis. And you know, Mr. Manders, Gavin Manders, who is also a facilities manager down at the W.E.R. Joell, and does MTM, which is Manders Tennis Management, often puts on these tournaments for school students. So, we have linked up with different tennis providers, who are part of the school programme, as well as rugby, which is now being implemented into the school sports programme at the primary level. So that is just the primary school level, Mr. Chairman.

And when you talk about the senior school leagues, again, the senior school leagues also have basketball. This has become a popular one that takes place not only as beach volleyball, but also as traditional volleyball, which has taken off quite a bit, and is being implemented in schools.

Fun fact, and I think I have probably said this before, but when I went to Berkeley, Mr. Chairman, they had volleyball in school then. And I tell you, you know, Arnold Manders, who is a PE officer now, gathered everybody in the gym. And there were a lot of football players and the like, and he said, *Look, you know, we are going to have a volleyball team*. So, there were the guys who actually wanted to play volleyball on one side of the net, and we put the guys who were athletes and were just messing around on the other side of the net. And I am telling you, there were some good hooks in there.

But that just goes to show that way back in the day, when I was in high school, they said volleyball had kind of fallen off. But it is good to see that volleyball is

now back in secondary schools as part of their lineup for sports, as well as netball. Again, netball is in primary schools and senior schools. Cricket is in senior schools and primary schools, as well as rugby.

Primary schools also host 26 leagues between primary, middle, and senior schools. So, it is not just something that they do once in a while other than the festivals. They also have leagues, 34 single-day tournaments in football, netball, basketball, volleyball, cricket, softball, and field hockey.

Thirteen All-Star Games in football. And I was very pleased to be invited this past Friday, Mr. Chairman, to the All-Star extravaganza which took place on the lush grass of the National Sports Centre. And I happened to be there for, I think, the middle school girls, and I watched that game. Congratulations to the East for winning that. I am sure my colleagues who are in the Chamber are happy and not surprised that it was the East All-Stars who won. I had to come back to the House as the primary school boys were getting ready to start. So, we have 13 All-Star Games in football, netball, basketball, and volleyball.

Twelve tournaments in pickleball, badminton, and tennis, as well as this one, which I am sure the Honourable Opposition Leader will be well versed in. There are 12 meets that take place in swimming, track and field, and cross country.

So that answers the question regarding the list of sports that will be part of the sports programmes and any new sports. I would probably classify pickleball as a relatively new sport. I know badminton has been around for a while, but it has probably fallen off a bit. So, we will put that in the new sport category as well. So, I thank the Opposition Leader for asking that question.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: No, I do not see sailing in the list of sports offered by schools.

[The] level of participation is another question. The Opposition Leader, the Honourable Opposition Leader, Mr. Chairman, has asked about the increase of numbers that were provided before the transition. So, the transition from when the school sports were under the Ministry of Education, it has now come over here. The Opposition Leader asked about the data. One of the good things that we will say is that when the transition happened, they actually allowed the administrator to come over with the BSSF, Mr. Manny Faria. I want to publicly acknowledge him; he has been a long-serving school sports administrator for the BSSF. And that valuable resource for a number of years. At least for 20 years, he has been that administrator. He came over and has been able to ease the transition into the Department of Sport and Recreation. And we are very happy to have him, Mr. Chairman.

So, the data is that there have been more festivals at the primary school level. And as a result, this

has introduced and exposed students to these new sports, which were talked about in the previous question. These were done in collaboration with the National Sport Governing Bodies. And since parish schools have been added in the primary Year 7 tournaments have been [added] solely for students in this year in order for them to have an opportunity to compete with students in their own birth year. Because they were caught in that transition where they were not quite middle schoolers, they were too experienced to be primary schoolers. So, we created that age category for the primary school adding [Year] 7 tournaments.

The fourth question, Mr. Chairman, would the Minister be able to provide data [on the] increase in sport participation in schools regarding girls? The data in this area are currently being collected for this academic year, which will be used as a baseline for future years. Mr. Chairman, I am glad that the Honourable Opposition Leader has asked that question, because when he comes next year and asks, as I am sure he will ask a similar question, we will have the data that was brought forward from this baseline data.

And maybe, I do not know, just maybe that question was asked. I know it was [from] some Honourable Member of this House that has always been concerned about the level of participation in sport by girls. So maybe that question came up, and maybe this was implemented due to those concerns and those questions in previous years. And by next year we can say categorically that we will have that data.

Each sport [category] on our calendar is offered to both boys and girls. So, there are sports for both boys and girls. And I am seeing even netball.

What percentage of students in primary school, middle school, and high school are participating? Are we growing their percentage? Mr. Chairman, currently, that data is being collected for this academic year. And when it is made available, we will make sure that we share that with the Honourable Opposition.

The next question, is there a national talent identification programme? Is there a way to coordinate or get them involved in clubs, [and] refer to the international representation?

Mr. Chairman, at this time, to answer that question I will tell a little bit of a story. Because I have a brother who is six years younger than me. Mr. Speaker, I will never forget, I mean, it seems like it was just yesterday. But I will never forget that he came home one day with a letter. And this was a letter from his primary school teacher way back when he was about five years old in P1 at Harrington Sound Primary School. And he had a letter signed by Ms. Anne Hines, who was a long-time PE teacher at Harrington Sound. She also has a daughter, Ms. Hines, who is also a PE teacher now at Harrington Sound, I am made to understand.

But I will never forget that letter that came home with my brother, who was five years old at the time. And they said, *We were playing football in PE class and noticed that he was really good. We noticed*

that he likes it. So, we would welcome you to try calling a club and see if he wants to get involved at the club level.

So, this is something that is not new. This is something that has been going on. And when you have PE teachers like that, who are actually involved in sports, and they actually recognise what we call raw talent from a young age, it is those PE teachers who should get more credit than they do for actually referring those athletes to the clubs.

And as this story continues on, the question that the Opposition Leader asked was, do we refer them on the path to international representation? So, from the age of 5, you know we call them peewees. Everybody will be familiar with that because every Saturday morning up and down this country there are individuals who take part in peewee football. It goes up to under-7s, under-9s, under-11s, and under-13s. I know because I have to get up now, as I have a son who was not identified through primary school. But, you know . . . and this takes me back to my story. I remember my brother through that whole process with [the] Devonshire Colts. When he was 16 years old he went to Cuba to represent the national team that played in Cuba. Then he came back, he played top-flight football for [the] Devonshire Colts, and he is now the president of [the] Devonshire Colts.

So, what we say is that happened way back then, and it is continuing to happen. There are still, you know, some individuals, maybe like the Honourable Member from the other side, who admits, *Hey, I'm not really a sportsman. I don't really get involved in sports.* But through individuals or parents having their children at the school level, they might be able to say, *Hey, we know that you're not really a sportsman, but we think your son or your daughter has some talent.* And we know that that is still happening. And a shout-out to some of the PE teachers who are coaches at the club level and they may just say, *You know what, bring them to me.*

And I can tell you that Harrington Sound still acts as a feeder club to X-Roads. It will act as a feeder club to the mighty Cleveland County.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Deputy Speaker, did you hear that? The mighty Cleveland County.

She's not paying attention.

[Laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: So, we still have these primary schools that . . . and I'm only talking about one sport here. But there may be some PE teachers who may say, *You know what, I introduced swimming, but I do not really have much expertise in swimming.* So, they will take these students and they may call the national swim coach and say, *Hey, listen, I threw this kid off the*

dock and basically [he's] pretty fast. How can we channel that raw talent to the international level? So, the aim is to continue building that formal bridge with the National Sport Governing Body and the schools to implement the long-term development plans for all athletes.

This is in collaboration with what we have with the Active Kids programme. This allows coaches to identify which sports suit their body type, which sport they can excel in, and also, with these collaborations we will be able to align sport development in the same direction throughout each sport. Right?

And I sat in on one of these long-term athletic development plans. And I know the national swimming coach has also been in there, and I was shocked to learn that this particular facilitator was from Canada. And he was saying that some of their greatest athletes in Canada, some of their greatest athletes who are in some sports that you may have just seen . . . because I always wanted this, right? Well, how do you become a guy who one day wakes up and says *I'm going to be a ski jumper*? Like, how do you do that, right? How do you wake up and decide that, you know, *I'm going to be a snowboarder who does flips*?

What they were saying . . . and this gentleman, who actually provided the long-term athletic development plan . . . is that most of these athletes would have been athletes in multiple sports growing up. And you may say, *Well, the Canadian team may only be able to take 10 swimmers*. And you may be swimmer number 11 or 12. But because you have had that long-term athletic plan across multiple disciplines and sports, you may say, *Well, you're not going to make the swim team, but let's see if your athletic ability might get you introduced to another sport*. And then, what it does is just become natural because you already have what they call body composition and muscle memory as an athlete.

So, what you see is what we are trying to get to in Bermuda. Because there may be some individuals who, you know, started off at one of these football clubs at 5, 6, and 7 [years of age], but, you know, when they get to 17 [years of age], may say, *You know, I've got this athletic ability. I didn't make the top team for football. But you know what, rugby needs a guy who runs the flank really fast, and . . .* they could use that athletic ability and that speed in a different sport. So, that is what we are trying to get to. And our long-term athletic plans, especially through the Active Kids Programme, as I have said, Mr. Chairman, are going to bring us to possibly seeing that type of athletic saturation here in Bermuda.

The next question that was asked was one about providing a breakdown of the \$690,000 and how it would be used, and what programmes are involved? And this was a question regarding line item 30055.

If you can, Mr. Chairman, can you just remind me what is that \$690,000 that asked for in 30055.

The Chairman: [Item] 30055 is under sports development, sports programmes, and the estimate is —

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you. So, sports development and sports programmes. Thank you.

So, I will speak to that now. So, this funding allocation supports the planning and delivery of the annual initiatives. And this is the annual sports awards that are coming up. We have the annual sports awards, and I know the Honourable Member, Opposition Leader, has been invited to it this coming Saturday. So, I invite anybody who has any connection to sports to come out and see and listen to what some of the great athletes have done over the past year and watch them get recognised.

It also includes the National Junior Athlete sponsorship programme and ceremonies. And this is one of the ceremonies where I told you [that] Ralph Scott came [to]. We provided him with a National Junior Athlete Award, and he was towering over me, Mr. Chairman. As I mentioned before, the delivery of the Active Kids Programme also reflects the increase in wages of full-time staff. So, when you put that all together, that is where you get the \$690,000. So, it was the programmes, and very important programmes, I might add, for sportsmen in this country, sportswomen in this country, whether they be young or old.

I am looking at question eight on 30065, and I think this one asked about the specific grants that were given and allocated through the Sports Investments programme. And the 2024/25 Sports Investment programme highlights [those] allocations. And I am going to go through that list because it is important, as I have said, and I am on record many times, that sports matter and support comes in many different ways. I do not often bring up the amounts, but I think for this budget debate it is important that individuals know that some of the sports they may not think are actually quite well supported.

So, I will start with—

The Chairman: What is the —

Hon. Owen Darrell: This is for [2025/26].

So, I will start with one of the favourites of the Opposition Leader, which is a towering figure for the Bermuda Amateur Swimming Association of \$70,000. I think that has got to be an increase from what we signed off on before, Mr. Chairman. So, I think I am hearing the Honourable Opposition Leader, who is also the National Swim Coach, shaking his head and saying, *Yes*. We did give swimming more money than we did in the previous year.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: He said they earned it.

Yes. They did have a couple of swimmers in the Olympics and the like. So, you know, the Bermuda

Amateur Swimming Association got \$70,000, Mr. Chairman.

I will go on to the Bermuda Basketball Association, which received \$10,000. And I would just like to point out that this is from the Sports Investment Programme. That does not mean that there are some grants that, you know, they will come in for special grants. I know the Bermuda Basketball Association had an event. I think it was a golf tournament, that they were doing to raise money for their funds. We granted some money towards that event. But this goes directly to their Sports Investment Programme.

The Bermuda Bicycle Association, another one that has done quite well. And you have heard of Kaden Hopkins, who I think has been recognised in this House a couple of times. I think he is still recovering, MP. So, he is still recovering. So, it is Kaden Hopkins as well as Conor White. You have seen me . . . I am on record with photographs and presenting cheques for the rewards that they have received for winning medals in certain competitions. So, this money from the Bermuda Bicycle Association has clearly been well spent to develop their athletes.

The Bermuda Boxing Federation received \$15,000, and you would say, *Well, why is the amount so different?* Well, some sports, unfortunately, do not have as many activities as others. I can vouch for swimming. They are in their pool every single morning, every afternoon. They have competitions. They have meets. They are sending people to the Olympics, CAC games, and the like. So, you may see that their allocation is larger than maybe a boxing association or boxing federation that only has maybe a few bouts per year. So, we try to proportion it out.

The Bermuda Cricket Board, one of our national sports, \$100,000 has been allocated to the BCB.

The Bermuda Equestrian Foundation, \$25,000.

The Bermuda Golf Association, \$70,000.

The Bermuda Hockey Federation, \$50,000. And remember they use predominantly . . . their home is also at the National Sports Centre which is very convenient if you have an individual that does swimming, an individual that does field hockey, you may have an individual that does track and field. You can make it a whole evening at the National Sports Centre, which we saw last evening.

The Bermuda . . . am I saying this right? The Bermuda Karate Federation. The Bermuda Karate Federation, \$15,000. And again, you see that karate was not a sport that I grew up knowing much [about] when I was coming along, but you see that they say that these disciplines actually —

The Chairman: You have two Black Belts sitting right here.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Oh, there we go see —

The Chairman: And a third down in the back.

Hon. Owen Darrell: I see that; but that means we are in great hands, Mr. Chairman.

But I say that to say that I am starting to even see more, and the Karate Federation has branched out into maybe different disciplines. So, while you may say, *Well why only \$15,000?* There may be, I don't know . . . you will see, I will get to it in a minute. But Sanshou is a situation completely different from karate. And if you do not know the difference, you just think, well, it's all the same. But it is not, and the like.

So, we will go through the Bermuda Lawn Tennis Association. And you know, across the heads, they might have a conversation about why you got \$70,000, and I only got \$25,000? But the Bermuda Lawn Tennis Association received \$25,000. And I know another question I will answer a little later is whether we will see an increase in funding based on the performance level. So, we will get to that in a [another] question.

But let me just finish this list, which is very extensive. And what this shows and what this demonstrates, Mr. Chairman, is that the Government supports athletes. Not only do we show up, Mr. Chairman, but we put our money where our mouth is when it comes to support because, as I have said over and over, and will continue to say, sports matter in this country.

The Bermuda Motorcycle Racing Association was allocated \$10,000, and you know they have a dedicated track down the South Side. It is in our Deputy Speaker's constituency, and not only did we give them \$10,000, but we also invested in the track.

Bermuda National —

The Chairman: Minister, did you not also participate down there in —

Hon. Owen Darrell: Well, that was different. We will get to that one in a minute. That was actually . . . and again . . . See? That one is coming, but that was motocross. A little different, but we will get to them in a minute.

The Bermuda National Athletics Association, we gave them \$50,000. And it is timely that we talk about the Bermuda National Athletics Association, the BNAA, because they are producing athletes to run in the Track and Field arena. And we know that every year I attend CARIFTA [Games]

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: I knew that was coming.

I do attend the Track and Field at CARIFTA. Yes, I will try to get to the swimming one; I did have an opportunity last year. I will say that there were some transportation issues. But for the first time, I think ever, they had swimming in CARIFTA in the same country. It was Trinidad last year as track and field, but as we said, the Bermuda National Athletic Association is preparing

athletes to qualify for the CARIFTA Games, which are on Easter weekend, 3rd of April through 6th of April, Mr. Chairman. So, they received \$50,000.

The Bermuda Netball Association was awarded \$25,000.

The Bermuda Rugby Football Union, \$30,000.

The Bermuda Sailing Association, Honourable Member, Bermuda Sailing Association, \$50,000. Mr. Chairman, almost up there with swimming. Imagine that. I tell you.

The Bermuda Sanshou Association received \$35,000.

The Bermuda Squash Racquets Association. I had the opportunity to go and watch squash for the first time last year, and I was quite impressed, Mr. Chairman. They received \$20,000.

The Bermuda Triathlon Association received \$70,000.

The Bermuda Volleyball Association, \$40,000.

Boccia Bermuda, and we know we have had athletes who have done very well on the world stage for Bocce. And Boccia is very fortunate as well; they get a lot of really good corporate funding, Mr. Chairman. So, I am happy that we were able to add to that by giving them \$10,000 in their sports investment fund.

The Bermuda Gymnastics Federation received \$20,000.

The Bermuda National Archery Association has a nice facility down there at South Side. They got \$25,000. And again, that is another one; they have excelled on the world stage. They are doing well. So, we may be able to see that increase. And that again will get to a question I will answer in a moment.

The Bermuda Pickleball Association. And I say this is one of our newer National Sport Governing Bodies. And, you know, I talked about it earlier, they are doing international tournaments now. I think coming up, maybe next week, I think there is a massive International Caribbean Pickleball Championship that will be held and hosted here in Bermuda at the W.E.R. Joell [Tennis] Stadium. And I think there is also another purpose-built private facility that, if there is inclement weather, we will be able to host pickleball, the World Caribbean Pickleball Championship. So, we have awarded them with \$35,000.

The Bermuda Olympic Association and their operations have gotten \$125,000. And I say operations because we break that up a little bit. And I will get to another one.

The Bermuda Olympic Association Elite Athletes Fund, which is where the national swim coaches and athletes that go to, you know, the Olympics will get an additional \$150,000. So, if you take the operations of the Olympics, as well as the elite athletes, it is almost \$300,000 that they have received. And that is important because we sent, I think, seven Olympians to Paris last year in an array of different disciplines. And that is a big deal, especially for a country that has a gold medal.

So, I am happy to continue, and the Government is happy to support the Bermuda Olympic Association as well as the Bermuda Paralympic Association. Our National Athlete of the Year. Not last year, maybe the year before that, it was Jessica [Cooper] Lewis, who is part of this Paralympic Association, so we support them.

The Bermuda Karting Association received \$10,000. And this one here, this will be interesting because they are not a sporting organisation. But through the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation we gave them \$100,000. And they distributed that to a few different sports clubs to develop their economic development plans.

Basically, what we are trying to do with these clubs is how do we . . . because you know, the Cabinet Office actually gives funds for capital development. But what we are trying to do, and this is what the BEDC does and the Department of Sport and Recreation partnered with them and said, *We want to show these community clubs how they can generate their own revenue. How can we do that?* We do not have the expertise in the Department of Sport and Recreation, so we gave that money to the BEDC. The BEDC then had, I think, a competition, if I remember correctly. Dandy Town Western Star Sports Club got the bulk of it, Bailey's Bay got some, and I believe it may have been Warwick's Workman [Club]. I could stand corrected, Mr. Chairman, as to where —

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: No, no, no, Cleveland's doing quite well, I would say. We have the Eastern County Cup.

And I see the Deputy Speaker over there. I know she loves that every time I bring it up, so glad you brought that up. The Bermuda Football —

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Well, hey, hey, not everybody could be winners. I'm sorry.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: You like that one, MP Tucker?

So, the Bermuda Football Association, what has been dubbed, by previous Ministers way before me, as one of our national sports, received \$300,000. And you see how that money has been used wisely by the BFA. Just as recently as last fall, we saw that our men's football team made it to the farthest part in World Cup qualifying as they had never before. And a couple of more goals, a couple of more victories and we would have been right there in the World Cup this summer.

But that \$300,000 . . . I would say this about the Bermuda Football Association. They have been extremely good stakeholders with the Bermuda

Government, and sports in general in this country. Because every opportunity . . . everybody thinks that the Football Association is just about kicking a ball. But they take part in the development of their athletes . . . no, sorry, not the athletes, their officials. And we have some young individuals, Mr. Amaury Majors, and Clinton Hayward is the other, and I wish I could remember the third. But they have invested in these officials, because now —

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: She told me she had retired or something, but yes, her as well, yes.

So, what happens is they go around the world and they officiate and put Bermuda on the map that way. So, the Bermuda Football Association not only does that, but they give administration courses. So, people that want to get into football administration, because that is important, you do not want your administrative affairs all over the place. So, this money is well spent to the BFA, and congratulations to them.

The Bermuda Anti-Sport Doping Authority. I will never forget, I think it was when we used to have these sessions in the Senate that the now Opposition Leader questioned me about the BSADA, and was that money that we were putting into BASDA money well spent? And I think the argument or the discussion, the debate it was (I am sorry, Mr. Chairman), went back and forth as to, is that money well spent?

And I think it was probably less than a year after that, we saw that we had to make some significant legislative changes so that Bermuda was on the right side of the World Anti-Doping policy put forth by WADA [World Anti-Doping Agency]. So now, I do not think that I have heard much from the national swim coach and Opposition Leader since. Because it is not evident that the money is well spent. And we put it in the brief that these athletes that are participating around the world, that I am sure he would know, especially with the elite athletes that come out of his camp, anti-doping is very serious. And it must be taken seriously. And unfortunately, the cost to do testing around the world is quite significant. So, a good job to Ms. Hunter for the work that she continues to do in leading that organisation.

And the last one is the elite [athlete], and this is one which the Government is very proud of, Mr. Chairman. I think two years ago, we were approached by some of the elite athletes on this Island. One would be Mr. Daniel Augustus; another would be an athlete by the name of Mr. Dage Minors, and others. And they said, what else can we do? And I think this speaks to what the Opposition Leader was talking about, which is that it gets to a point where they get a little advanced for the regular Sport's Governing Bodies. They age out of the junior athletic programme, and they say, *Well, this is kind of like my job. How can you support me?*

And not only . . . I mean, the figure here is \$200,000, and that has increased year over year. We

started at \$150,000 and are now at \$200,000; it will go up a bit more. But we also give them, as was alluded to, access to the National Sports Centre, and we assist them in some areas when it comes to insurance costs and others. So, I am very proud that the Government continues to support our elite athletes,

So, with that said, I have gone through the 32 line items, Mr. Chairman, as asked for by the Opposition Leader, of the exact amounts that were allocated from the Government for the sports investment programme last year.

Mr. Chairman, can I go on to my next question?

The Chairman: Yes, you can.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Don't worry, it will go quite nicely.

The question was about whether the Ministry tracks the number of Bermudians participating in national sports. The Department of Sport and Recreation is actively implementing a National Sport Governing Body online hub that will provide factual statistics on the demographic makeup of all participants in all sports representing Bermuda. Because I tell you, I mean, there has never been a time that we did not go to an international football game at the National Stadium. And there are individuals that are playing, and you say, *Well, who is that individual?*

And they say, *Oh, that's so-and-so's son.*

I say, *I haven't seen him play before.*

They say, *Oh, he has been playing overseas, at a very young age.*

So those are some of the statistics that we are trying to grab, we are trying to get this online hub. So, just because you do not see them every Saturday, or just because they may not be making headlines in the daily every day, they are still doing great things in the arena of sports. And, whether representing directly or indirectly, they are participating in national sports overseas.

Retention of athletes between 12 and 18 [years of age]. Is there a reduction in that period? Are there plans to try to encourage them to stay in sport?

So, I think the question that the Honourable Opposition Leader is asking is, there seems to be a drop-off when . . . and you see this every day, right? You know, you go watch the 7-year-olds play, and there may be 15 kids playing. You put seven on the field, you might have eight on the bench, and you are trying . . . and the coach is having a headache trying to rotate how many minutes each player gets, right? But it changes completely when they get to maybe under-13s and under-15s. So, this continues. And I acknowledge that this continues to be a challenge worldwide in sports, as well as in Bermuda.

To combat this we have developed, again, the Active Kids Programme so that in multiple sports there is a hope that they can find a sport that they like, and they can stay in it a little longer. And this speaks to what we talked about, about getting them to be kind of

athletes in many different disciplines. Because if a young person is athletic, and they only have football to fall [back] on, they may be tired of sitting on the bench when they become 13 or 15 [years of age].

I have a brother who is also a coach of football, and he said, *Listen, when they get to 13 [years of age], you know, this is not when everybody gets to play.* You know, when participation day is over.

And then if you are an individual who says, *Well, I'm not start at 11.* After you don't make the start at 11 a couple of times, they just fall off. If that kid says, *You know what, I may not make the start at 11 in football, but you know what, I might go and play badminton, and I might be good at that.* This may see individuals stay [in sports] a little longer. But this is a worldwide problem, and we are doing other programmes to try to keep them involved.

Can the Minister let us know the number of Bermudian athletes competing internationally? Current statistics from the National Sport Governing Body, from those who have answered, show that Bermuda currently has 46 elite athletes competing internationally. Now, what I cannot tell you at this time is what is the benchmark and what is the line between elite and non-elite, but we will go with 46. And I hope that answer is sufficient for the Honourable Opposition Leader and Shadow Minister of Sport.

Can the Minister let us know whether there has been an increase in participation or in girls' involvement? The department is actively implementing this hub, which I talked about before, that will gain the statistics of the demographics in each sport each year, and this information will be collected to measure [it].

Is there an increase in the [number of] officials being certified and the increase of coaches involved in these certifications? And this is something that the BFA has been the champion of for a very long time. And the BFA is now in a position where if you do not have certain certifications, not even at the peewee level will they allow you to coach in their football leagues. So, you have seen that the BFA has kind of led the charge in this, as far as official certification. Unfortunately, we do not have the data from all NSBs at this time. But they will conduct the certification [of] their officials, and I am sure that the Director of Sport [and Recreation], the first female Director of Sport, Ms. K. [Kimberly] Charryse Bean, will reach out and have that information readily available when we do get it.

They have asked about the percentage of sports officials, managers and coaches that have received SafeSports certification as well as SCARS [Saving Children and Revealing Secrets] certification. This is a question for the NSGBs. In the next sports policy this will be an area of consideration because we do see that in the sporting arena safeguarding has become more and more of a household name, right?

Unfortunately, we do have to take greater measures to safeguard our kids. But fortunately, we do have an organisation, and we have had it for a while,

which is SCARS, and it has been doing this certification. But, yes. So, while it does happen, and I acknowledge that, in the next sports policy we will put this as consideration to be mandated to safeguard our students. And I know that the Olympic Association, I believe it is, has brought somebody on board. I believe it is one of my constituents, Ms. Mia Bean, who is now taking charge of safeguarding. So, we are going in the right direction, but I do understand the spirit in which the Opposition Leader has asked for that to be mandated, so we will move in that direction.

Can the Department of Sport and Recreation tie in funding to ensure that the above are certified in SafeSports and SCARS? We will take it under consideration to tie our funding to SafeSports and SCARS in the next sports policy. This current policy runs from 2022 to 2027, so we may still be about a year and a bit away from that, but we are going from there.

Can you provide funding for each National Sporting Governing Body? What is asked [for], and how much is allocated? How is the gap filled? So, for the upcoming fiscal year (2026/27), 26 National Sport Governing Bodies have currently applied for funding.

The total requested funding is \$3 million. One point six million dollars has been requested for high performance; \$700,000 has been requested for junior development; \$600,000 has been requested for coach and official development. The budget available is \$1.2 million. So, the National Sport Governing Bodies will work to fill the gap via their charitable funding and international association funding.

Now, as you may say, what is the international association funding? That would be an international organisation like FIFA. So, there may be programmes that FIFA will give money to the National Sport Governing Body to assist with. So that is where some of those gaps will come from. And revenues generated by the organisation, we will look into that as much as possible.

Is there an identified change in supporting Belongers versus Bermudians? Is the Ministry identifying the solution? Currently, the answer to that is no. Not currently. We would encourage a conversation, via the association of the National Sport Governing Bodies, to propose a way forward. So, I am sure that the National Sport Governing Body of swimming is involved in that organisation, and I would ask that that be placed on the next agenda when they meet again.

How does the Ministry measure the budget amount allocated versus increased sport participation? This is via the National Sport Governing Body hub, where we collect data from the National Sport Governing Bodies on their membership across the sports.

Can the Minister provide the number of athletes qualifying and participating in regional, world-level, and podium levels? This information is in the process of being collected via the end-of-year reports that come from the National Sport Governing Bodies. And at the end of the current fiscal year, which ends in a few weeks, the request for information will be publicised via

the 2025/26 sports highlight booklet, which will be available on the Department of Sport and Recreation website right after the year.

And I hear a request that the Honourable Opposition Leader would like that tabled. So, we could talk about that once we get to that point.

What is the adult participation level in sport? Percentage of individuals over 18 [years of age]. Well, that all depends, Mr. Chairman. I mean, because that is like you. They told me that you thought that you were still a goalkeeper. I would not consider you still as adult participation in sport. I do not know if that is sport or you, you know, playing around.

An Hon. Member: But here we go.

The Chairman: Yes, imputing improper motive.

[Laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Well, absolutely. And it is difficult. At what point do you say whether an adult is participating in sport or not? Because I know there are a couple of people who go down to . . . let me not go there. But if you have a Sunday kick with your mates, and they organise these leagues. I think they call them the Breakfast League. Is that considered sport? Or are we only considering national sports? I am not sure.

But the bottom line is that the data, Mr. Chairman, is not currently available. Because I mean, you could have a debate about that all the time. You know, I have seen a couple of people play softball, and they show up. But do they really play sports? I do not know.

What is the increase in salaries? The \$571,000 increase, what is that? Five hundred and sixty thousand dollars of the \$571,000 is an increase in the operational grant for golf courses. I guess salaries would only be \$11,000.

Are there any plans to increase softball participation and the use of the softball park? The department continues to work with Softball Bermuda to ensure that the sport of softball thrives on the Island. There has been an increase in teams in the league this year, from 24 in 2025 to 30 teams that have registered for the upcoming season. Due to the increased popularity of this sport, Saturday evenings will be added to an already extensive weekly schedule. So, we see how we are getting back.

I remember when I was young, my parents used to take me down to the softball diamond. They used to have some wonderful food there, and you would sit and make a night out of it. So, we are getting back to that by having the softball diamond open on Friday evenings and Saturdays.

The tennis stadium, are we going to increase the number of courts for tennis? This has been discussed and will require further consultation with the Ministry of Public Works.

Professional Services, I guess that means Professional Services. The Honourable Opposition Leader has asked for a breakdown of Professional Services and why they have increased. The Professional Services include a variety of services for the Active Kids Programme, the School Sports programme, the Summer Day Camp programme, and Camp Connect, in collaboration with private camps. The increase was due to school sports events as well as the Active Kids [Programme].

Then we talk about why the Junior Athlete Award is down to 15. Why are there fewer awards? Is there anything being done to increase the awards? Awards were given to the National Sport Governing Bodies that applied for them and that has to be their responsibility. All National Sport Governing Bodies are invited to apply, and we have noticed over the years that some National Sport Governing Bodies are very good at administrative paperwork, and some are not. And we had offered courses for these National Sport Governing Bodies. And I see that the Opposition Leader, who would have knowledge of this. We have offered Saturday afternoons. *Please come up, and we will help you apply. We will walk you through the paperwork.* And unfortunately, the reason it is down to 15 is that not everyone applies.

And I was asked on the street the other day by someone, *Why can't (I won't call the sport) get funding? Why can't I get funding?*

And I said, *You have to go through your National Sport Governing Body.*

And the sports individual said, *Well, you know, I don't really talk to them, and I don't want to be a part of them.*

I said, *Well, that's the way that the Government has to distribute the funds because if not, everybody will come . . . and we have seen it. Everybody will come and say that, you know, my cousin or my son or my godson is a good footballer.* And they want me to give money for them to go overseas to a camp, or a trial, or anything else. So, it has to be funnelled through the National Sport Governing Bodies. And it is unfortunate that some athletes do not have that relationship with their National Sport Governing Body for whatever reason.

And it is unfortunate that some National Sporting Governing Bodies do not inform their athletes that this funding is available. And, you know, it [needs] more communication on this. We will put out more press releases to make people aware of what we are doing. So, all are invited to apply. Unfortunately, not all apply for this funding.

The number of elite athletes, will this number grow again? And should the budget be increased? This funding is open to athletes who qualify to apply directly to the department. Each year, the number has increased. And I did point that out a little bit [ago]. So, I think we started at 125 one year. We went up to 150. We are now at 200. So, as they say, it is evidence that

when we say we support sports and then say sport matters, Mr. Chairman, we have demonstrated that and we have shown that over the years coming to this point.

Sports investment. Does the Minister anticipate that fewer athletes will apply? Why are there fewer athletes? Is there anything being done to encourage applications? Twenty-five out of the 25 National Sport Governing Bodies applied. Each National Sport Governing Body has regular reminders to apply.

And then we start talking about grant contributions. How is the progress gauged? Is there a formal performance-based funding review? Specifically, the Honourable Opposition Leader asked about tennis and the Bermuda Lawn Tennis Association. And we did see . . . and congratulations again to the individuals who have just advanced in the Davis Cup. We know that this coming fall, they have now been awarded a home match, I think against Mexico in Bermuda. And we are going to make upgrades to get our facility ready so we can give them the real home-court advantage that they deserve.

So yes, at the end of the year our report, which is coming out (I talked about that) . . . these reports will identify which initiatives have been completed. The Bermuda Lawn Tennis Association has put in its funding requests. They have met with the department for an increase, which is under consideration based on their international performance.

And I will also go a bit further that not only does support just come in this type of funding. But they are going to be meeting with us, I think next week, along with the Minister of Public Works, when it comes to the facility upgrades at the [W.E.R.] Joell Stadium. So, we want to not only give them a cash injection to help but also be able to tell them we are giving them an increase and an upgrade in the facilities that they use.

Can the Minister identify other sports with significant achievements that will lead to increased funding? Yes, the 2025/26 funding allocations will clearly show that those sports and National Sport Governing Bodies that have athletes achieve regional international success have received an increase in their funding. It is in there.

And then we start getting into questions that were asked about the National Stadium and the Board of Trustees. They would like to know the percentage of available hours that are, 1) used by sports organisations; 2) that are used by schools; and 3) used by the public. And we have those stats. So, the sporting organisations, the National Sporting Governing Bodies, and the associated clubs are the largest users of the facility. I will say that one more time. The National Sport Governing Bodies and their associated clubs are the largest users of the facility. At 70 per cent, Mr. Chairman. Schools use this at 25 per cent, and the public uses it at 5 per cent. The pool use is split between members and clubs roughly about 50-50.

Can you let us know if the National Sports Centre has updated financials, and whether these updated

financials are available? The National Sports Centre, which is run by the Board of Trustees of the National Sports Centre, is currently working on an audit with the . . . they are currently working with an auditor for the fiscal year and will try to get them up to date with their financials. So, they are working to get it out.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: The answer is no. It is not fully updated, but they are working to get there.

The Chairman: And Minister, you have roughly 20 minutes.

This is the Committee of Supply of the whole House. We are actually debating Head 20 under Youth, Sport, and Recreations. It is a three-hour debate. It started at 5:16 [PM] and will end at 8:16 [PM]. And we have currently 20 minutes left. The Minister is answering questions now posed by the Opposition.

Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Honourable Opposition Leader, in his questions, has asked [me] to provide an update on when the next phase of the National Sports Centre will be budgeted and started. What is the lifespan of the current facilities, especially the temporary facilities, and when was it exceeded?

He has asked just a bunch of questions in one, it looks like. What is the lifespan of the new temporary changing rooms? And what is the capacity of, or what are we doing, I guess, with the original ones that are now closed, and the capacity of the new changing rooms?

So, I think what the Opposition Leader was asking is for the difference between what the closed temporary changing rooms were able to hold, and what the capacity of the new ones is. He already knows the answer to this. It is a lot less in the new one than it was in the original ones.

There is currently no budget for the next phase to replace the changing rooms that have been closed. The lifespan of these facilities was 10 years. The original changing room capacity included 3 units, which was male and female, 6 showers, 8 toilets, and 10 separate changing rooms each. It also had family rooms with 4 showers, 4 toilets, and 3 separate changing rooms. The current capacity is 2 units (a male and a female), 3 showers, 1 toilet each, and no separate changing area. So, it is significantly smaller.

But the National Sports Centre Board of Trustees felt that something was better than nothing, Mr. Chairman. And I can tell you, even with the reduced changing facilities, the National Sport Governing Bodies, led by the national swimming coach, still find a way to give extensive and quality training at that world-class pool we have up there. So, I am glad that they still find

it fits, that these changing rooms, the facilities are fit to get Olympic swimmers into the Olympics.

So, thank you. Thank you, Mr. Opposition Leader, for continuing to see value in the pool at the National Stadium. When will the old changing rooms, which are now unsafe, be removed? They will be removed once a replacement plan has been put in place.

Is there a health and safety check on the offices in the temporary building that has now been condemned? The facilities manager, a relatively new facilities manager, and I want to congratulate him publicly for the work that he is doing at these facilities. He replaced Mr. James Pace, who had a stellar career working as a facilities manager at the NSC, and now we have a new facilities manager who continuously reviews. I would say he is a Cleveland County fan as well. I am sure the Deputy [Speaker] loves that.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Here we go. Here we go. He is . . . definitely.

The facilities manager reviews the state of the facility regularly and provides updates to the trustees. A job well done to him.

Can the Minister let us know the usage of the gym, and is there anticipated growth for the usage, and if so, what are the plans? I will tell you. I can speak to this gym, Mr. Chairman. It is a marvellous facility. It has increased in participation over the three years that I've been going there regularly. You know, a lot of individuals go there, and they are surprised at the facility that is kind of down the steps, around the corner, and tucked away. But it is currently the size that it is, and increasing the size of the gym will coincide with the redevelopment plan for the currently closed changing rooms. It is anticipated that the new space will be larger than the current gym space.

So, we are looking to increase that size. But for individuals who currently use the gym, I know they are very pleased with this facility, pleased with the cleanliness of it, and pleased that it keeps them in tip-top shape.

You know, we also have National Sport Governing Bodies that use it often. The BNAA [Bermuda National Athletics Association] use it quite a bit with their track clubs. Even some swimmers come down there and they do a lot of, you know, shoulder exercises and leg exercises. I'm sure that's part of getting swimmers ready for the competitions that they have led by the national swim coach, also the Opposition Leader. So yes, the gym is definitely a facility that I think that we can be proud of.

What is the purpose and philosophy of the National Sports Centre? How many National Sport Governing Bodies that receive funding from the Government also pay fees to the Government? All National Sport Governing Bodies that use the facility pay usage fees.

However, I will say this. In advance of international competitions, the rule used to be that they could use it for free for two weeks before these international competitions. But this Government saw fit many years ago to increase that to two months before international competitions. And you may say, *Well, is that a material difference?* It is.

And you get organisations like the Bermuda Sanshou Association that often come down there and, you know, they ramp up their training right before international competitions. And they may use very heavy weights that they cannot get at other places to get themselves ready for these competitions. So, the tenants, there are no tenants of [The] National Sports Centre.

But the purpose and philosophy of the [The] National Sports Centre is to encourage and provide a place for individuals to move, develop, train, and achieve. So that is the purpose and philosophy of the national sports centre. And I encourage anyone to have a look, especially now that the days are getting longer. Go up, and you will see that. There are people running around the track. There are people cycling around the track. There are people walking around the track. People in the pool. We need to get some more people on the diving board. But I know the first Black Olympic diver who has a camp every year, Star Diving, will be there as the sun is getting stronger, with her camp showing young people how to develop and how to dive off that.

I will tell you, one day I am going to take the national swim coach with me, and we are going to go up on a platform. I do not know if I will dive off, but I will jump off, and then he can teach me how to swim to the side.

An Hon. Member: Did you say jumping?

Hon. Owen Darrell: Yes.

Incoming teams that use the facility, does the BTA cover the cost of renting the facilities for this initiative?

And while I know the Opposition Leader wanted to put questions on the BTA, I think he should have given those, I think last week—

The Chairman: Correct

Hon. Owen Darrell: —when we debated that here, to the Honourable Member Robinson, who actually did carry that debate. So, Mr. Chairman, I will be guided by you, as I apparently cannot answer any questions.

The Chairman: Correct, because that falls outside of the Head 20, and that was . . . he was speaking to [page] C-20, which is basically capital funds, I believe, and it was grants and contributions that the Government was giving to the National Stadium.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, absolutely. So, I will skip that question on your guidance, Mr. Chairman.

Has the Government considered moving to a core grant model to focus on usage and increase the ability for schools and sports organisations? A core grant model does provide for flexibility with funding versus the current funding model. As the funding is from the consolidated fund and it is the people's money, it is required that we currently follow the grant policy and procedures in financial instructions, which is to provide the details of the need for funding. However, the NSC can request the specifics required in each fiscal year to ensure that the needs of the public are met.

Update on the heating system at the pool. Has the facility lost revenue because it could not maintain the temperature, and the maintenance of the chipped tiles? Due to heating issues in January and February, there was a loss of revenue of approximately \$8,000 a month, and maintenance is planned for the next fiscal year.

Total revenue for swimming and diving, the aquatics revenues for the first three quarters of the fiscal year are \$63,404 [sic]. Just a second —

The Chairman: And just to let the audience know and the hosts know that there are approximately 10 minutes left in this debate.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Yeah, so it's \$63,404 [sic], and this includes all aquatic activities.

When major track events are held on the main field, does this affect the track? What alternative arrangements . . .

Okay, let me go back to the previous question, please, Mr. Chairman. I thought that was wrong. The total revenue for swimming and diving is \$463,000. We got that straight. Thank you. There was a digit missing in there. It did not make sense to me. The total revenue for swimming and diving is \$463,000, Mr. Chairman. I just want to correct the record on that.

When major sporting events are held on the main field, does it affect the track? What alternative arrangements are made for elite athletes to train?

Under the access to facility policy, the National Sport Governing Bodies can apply for grants for athletes to train at the facility throughout Bermuda. Major activities include track and field, football, rugby, and cricket. The National Sports Centre booking policy outlines priority bookings as well as protocols. And this policy can be viewed on the National Sports Centre website.

The Honourable Opposition Leader has asked for an update on the solar energy project. Is it in full operation? What was the cost reduction? What was the projected cost savings? Will the Minister publish an annual renewable fact sheet? What maintenance schedules is in place for solar?

The renewable energy project has not been fully commissioned. There are parts of it that are on,

but in order to get it fully commissioned, the National Sports Centre is diligently working with the Regulatory Authority as well as BELCO, and we expect this to be completed in the next fiscal year. This will include the execution of the maintenance contracts. Annual updates will be published once the system is fully commissioned.

Are we seeing some savings? Yes, we are. What is the increase for golf courses going to be used for? To maintain the PGA operational standards year-round. Because what I did not like was that a few years ago, we got complaints from golfers who went out every single day and said, *You know, this course looks beautiful in October and November when we are preparing for the PGA, but why can't I get the same level of course conditions in other parts of the year?* So, we took that under advisement, and we are going to maintain the standards year-round. So, when the Opposition Leader goes out with his mates to play golf, they can rest assured that they are playing on the exact same level and standard of golf course that the professionals do.

When were the last set of financials for the golf course published? The financials are currently under active audit with the Office of the Auditor General. We will proceed with the preparation and submission of all financial statements for all fiscal years as they are ready through sequence. So, we will bring them up to standard.

What is covering the operational cost of the public golf courses? Does it help to reduce the fees for seniors and junior golfers? The grant is used to subsidise salaries, maintenance utilities, and other day-to-day operating requirements necessary to ensure that the courses remain accessible and properly maintained for the public. Senior and junior fees have not increased at the golf courses.

Active Kids programme. Can the Minister give information? The Active Kids programme is aimed at giving kids aged 4 to 10 access to multiple sports and reduce financial barriers to participating. Kids have participated in swimming, pickleball, golf, field hockey, rugby, track and field, and gymnastics. This upcoming year we will introduce them to additional sports like squash, sailing, archery, tennis, and karate.

Could the Minister give a review of last year's long-term athletic development plan? Absolutely! One of the most encouraging developments that we are seeing is the implementation of our long-term athletic development plans across many of the National Sport Governing Bodies. And because there are long-term athletic plans, I look forward, Mr. Chairman, to some of the young people that I see training in the pool. And I look forward to the day when I can see them on the world stage and say, *Wow, I remember when Coach Smith had them up at the National Sports Centre. And now look at them on the world stage.*

I mean, I had a young man who was a student of mine at the Berkeley Institute. And, you know, shout out to the Bermuda Bicycle Association because they

did a programme, [where] they donated bikes, and they donated time to come and instruct young people in this. And I see [this] young man now. He is a lot taller than he used to be. He has a lot more muscles in his legs than he used to because, since that time he has been riding on the bicycle circuit for many years. And while that was not part of their long-term development plan, that is an example of how you can come in and take a young person of very raw talent and develop him into an elite athlete.

And, Mr. Chairman, I see that I only have two minutes left and it is just unfortunate, but I am happy that I'm able to get to the very last question that was asked by the Honourable Opposition Leader. So, the timing was absolutely perfect, Mr. Chairman.

These plans are helping organisations like, you know, the National Sport Governing Bodies to take a more systematic and structured approach to athletic development, ensuring that athletes are supported at every stage from grassroots participation to elite competition.

And Mr. Chairman, with that, it looks like I have gotten through all questions that were asked in the two and a half hour time frame. And I want to thank the Opposition Leader for asking those robust questions so that individuals who are listening and individuals in this community can have no doubt, Mr. Chairman, that sport does matter.

Thank you.

[Desk thumping]

The Chairman: With the minute that we have remaining, is there anybody else who would like to speak to this?

With there being nobody else to speak, Minister, would you like to move your head?

Hon. Owen Darrell: I will, Mr. Chairman. I move that Head 20 be approved as printed.

The Chairman: Are there any objections to Head 20 being [approved]?

No objections.

Agreed to.

[Motion carried: Ministry of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport, Head 20, Sport and Recreation, was approved and stands part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2026/27.]

The Chairman: Minister, since this is the end of the debate for today, would you like to have us rise and report progress?

Hon. Owen Darrell: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Committee rise and report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Committee rise and report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

Is there any objection to that motion?

No objection.

Agreed to.

[Motion carried: The Committee of Supply rose and reported progress and sought leave to sit again.]

House resumed at 8:16 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair]

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2026/27

The Deputy Speaker: Good evening, Members. I understand that the Committee has risen to report progress, and has sought leave to sit again. And I believe you are sitting again on Friday, March the 13th.

Members, that brings us back to the Order Paper, and my understanding is that there are two other matters that we will deal with today. So, I call on the respective Minister who will be speaking to the Payroll Tax.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Deputy Speaker: Is it the pay—?

[Inaudible interjection]

The Deputy Speaker: Oh. Okay, it is the Minister of Transport.

I will call on the Minister of Transport to speak to item 3 on the Order Paper, the Motor Car (Licence Duties Reduction) Amendment Act 2026. Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, I move that the Bill entitled the Motor Car (Licence Duties Reduction) Amendment Act 2026 be now read a second time.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved that the Motor Car (Licence Duties Reduction) Amendment Act 2026 be read a second time.

Are there any objections to that?

There are none. Continue, Minister.

BILL

SECOND READING

**MOTOR CAR (LICENCE DUTIES
REDUCTION) AMENDMENT ACT 2026**

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Deputy Speaker, the Bill before this Honourable House is the Motor Car (Licence Duties Reduction) Amendment Act 2026, which seeks to reduce by 10 per cent the licence duties or fees payable in respect of private motor car licences.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this Government remains committed to providing practical relief to the people of Bermuda wherever possible. This amendment continues that commitment by delivering a 10 per cent reduction on annual private motor car licence fees, building on the 10 per cent reduction that was already introduced in 2018.

In simple terms, Madam Deputy Speaker, this means that subsequent to the 2026 amendment, families across Bermuda will pay less to license their private cars. Depending on the vehicle class, residents will be experiencing savings of approximately \$57 to \$318 for the range of a Class A vehicle to a Class I vehicle. While this may appear modest to some, for many households, every dollar saved helps to ease the cost of everyday living.

Madam Deputy Speaker, families throughout Bermuda continue to feel the pressure of rising global cost. Measures such as this are intended to provide real tangible relief to thousands of residents who rely on their vehicles to go to work, to transport their families, and to go about their daily lives.

Madam Deputy Speaker, some have suggested that relief should only be targeted to a limited group of individuals. However, the Government takes a different view. When [the] Government is able to reduce costs, the benefit should be shared broadly. Every resident who pays vehicle licence fees contributes to our system and should be able to share in the relief when the circumstances allow.

Madam Deputy Speaker, by reducing licensing fees across all classes of private vehicle, we ensure that working people and families in every parish feel the benefit rather than limiting the support to only a few.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in terms of revenue impact, this reduction will result in an estimated \$1,867,000 less in government revenue annually. Bermuda currently has approximately 24,000 private motor cars licensed each year, which is estimated to be roughly \$16,806,000 in annual licence revenue for private cars in fiscal year 2026/27.

This revenue from private car licensing fees is inclusive of the 2026/27 total revenue for the Transport Control Department, which is estimated at \$29,807,000. Despite the reduction in revenue for the Transport Control Department . . . and this is estimated at \$29,807,000. Despite the reduction in revenue, the Government believes that it is a responsible and worthwhile measure as it returns money directly back to the pockets of our residents. Those funds will instead

circulate within the local economy as families spend money on everyday goods and services.

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

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Speaker, this Bill represents another step in the Government's ongoing efforts to ease the cost of living and provide meaningful relief to Bermuda's residents. While no single measure can address all economic pressures, initiatives such as this demonstrate our continued commitment to supporting working families and ensuring that the benefits of Government policy are felt across the community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Does any other Member wish to speak this evening?

MP Robinson, you have the floor.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good evening to colleagues and to the listening audience.

The One Bermuda Alliance does support this Bill. And, as mentioned in the Minister's brief, we do believe that relief should be targeted. But not in the way in which it was presented in the brief, as far as a limited amount, limited to a few. I believe, and so do my colleagues, that it should be targeted towards those who need it the most. That is a big distinction. And I want to make sure that that is clear for those who are listening, because as we see, you know, this particular legislation does provide relief, and the One Bermuda Alliance will support all relief provided for Bermudians.

But at the same time, things need to be sustainable. And by sustainable, we mean for the long term. And when you are using a certain amount of funds, could you have used those funds for a bigger relief for folks who are in much more need, versus using that same amount to spread that relief across everyone? And as you look at the size of cars, one would believe that those who can afford larger cars can pay more. And therefore, when they get a larger saving you are actually helping those who are at the top, rather than those who are at the bottom.

However, as stated before, we do support relief for Bermudians. And some relief is better than none. But we need to be clear about the positions that we have taken.

And with that, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

Junior Minister? Would you like to —

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is clear that the OBE does not care about everyone. Because most of the people who have—

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Wait, wait, wait, wait—

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Point of order.

The Speaker: You have a seat. You have a seat.
Junior Minister, I ask you to reframe that. I am sure you are skilled enough to be able to reframe that.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes

Well, they did say that they thought that the individuals who can afford it should not get a reduction. That means they do not care about everyone.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. That is completely incorrect. The Honourable Member is misleading the House. He should try to reframe again, please, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker: Mr. Junior Minister?

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

The Speaker: I know that you have been around, and you understand—

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I know, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: —it is not necessary to throw stones unnecessarily.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I understand that, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: But, Mr. Speaker, if they do not realise that there are individuals who cannot afford it who have got larger cars, families. I had a person in my constituency who had about seven children. They needed a larger car. Are you saying to me, or are you telling this House, or telling the people of Bermuda, that they should pay more?

Well, tell me how they would have done it, Mr. Speaker, because based on the basic condition that we have the—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: A point of information, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: No, Mr. Speaker. No information.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Oh, okay.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: No, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Not taking a point of information.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker. You cannot just speak when you want.

But, Mr. Speaker, it is clear to me . . . [as a] matter of fact, there are very wealthy individuals driving around in small cars. There are some very—
[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: That's my point. That is my point. You said for those who cannot afford it. That was the issue. Those who cannot afford it. That is what you said. So, there are a lot of—

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay.

POINT OF ORDER [Misleading]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: The Honourable Member is misleading the House. I said that the One Bermuda Alliance supports all relief for Bermudians. We gave a suggestion. And the Honourable Member needs to withdraw that.

Thank you.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: No, Mr. Speaker, I am not withdrawing because it was clear—

An Hon. Member: Whoa, whoa, whoa.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I will, Mr. Speaker . . . and look, I may not have heard exactly what he said.

[Laughter]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: But if you can clarify it . . . clarify to the public exactly what he means, and I will wait for the next Member to get up and say it. What do they really mean when they say that individuals, not everyone, should get benefits? To help—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of information, Mr. Speaker. I would be happy to answer the Member's question.

The Speaker: Point of information?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes

The Speaker: Okay. The Member is taking your point of information.

POINT OF INFORMATION

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As was outlined in the OBA's Reply to the Budget, we, in fact, look to successful government programmes such as the child day care credit, where individuals can go up there and, based on their payroll tax stubs, will receive targeted relief. Now, I am complimenting the Government on that because it was a very well-designed programme, and we would suggest something like that with respect to relief for motor [car] licensing fees.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, we are talking about tax reductions on . . . right now duty relief, licence reduction on cars. That is what we are talking about right now.

So, the Honourable Member . . . are they saying that everyone should get it right now? Or they should not get it? Because it is not clear to me. At least, it is not clear to me.

My understanding from them is that not everyone should get a reduction on the car. That is plain and clear. Not everyone should get a reduction in the licence [fee]. And what I am saying, Mr. Speaker, there are individuals who are very wealthy, very wealthy, who have some—

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.
I am sorry.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes, the Honourable Member continues to mislead the House when he says that we have said some people should not get. We, the One Bermuda Alliance, support relief for all Bermudians. It was stated in my initial remarks. [He] cannot continue down that line. It is incorrect.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The point that you are trying to make, Member, is that you support a reduction for everybody. You just did not support it in the structure of this particular matter.

An Hon. Member: All right, here we go.

The Speaker: So, Minister, you cannot say that they do not support relief for everybody. It is just in this situation.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker . . . Mr. Speaker, that is not what is clear to me. That was not what is clear.

Now, if they are making up things right now, I have no problem with that. If that is what they are saying that they support the Government's Bill right now, I have no problem with it. So, I can sit down right now because I understand that you now support what the Government's views are on this reduction. I appreciate that.

The Speaker: I don't think that is what you are saying on this one. But go ahead.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: In their short words . . . that is what I want to make clear so the public is very much aware that the One Bermuda Alliance supports the amendment to the House right now.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Does any other Member wish to speak?
Member DeCouto

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Laughter]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I know we are coming to the end of a long couple of weeks here, and this year feels longer than last year, but I will try to be brief, Mr. Speaker.

Now, as I said in the point of information, we used an example of a government programme that we like that provides targeted relief. That is an idea.

And so, we view this as a lost opportunity. And in fact, if I quote the Minister's own words, the original Minister, the Honourable Minister Darrell, *Every dollar counts, Mr. Speaker.*

We know that, for example, the Tax Reform Commission asked for \$30 million for senior health care, but the Government could only find \$15 million. Now, Mr. Speaker, half a million dollars here, half a million dollars there. Next thing you know, maybe you can find that \$15 million. And that is why we do support this.

No one is against a break in fees, Mr. Speaker, but we do believe this could have been done more effectively and efficiently, and we will be applying that same principle across many other areas.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you. Any other? You want this one, DJ?

MP Lister?

[Laughter]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Good evening, Mr. Speaker. Good evening to the listening audience and to this Honourable House.

Mr. Speaker, without reflecting back on our economic debate a few weeks ago, I do just want to reflect on some comments I made in that debate in regard to us having a ripple-effect economy in regard to the budget that was presented. Mr. Speaker, if you recall, I named off a number of ripple effects that this budget [has on] the economy.

Mr. Speaker, this is another ripple effect. As I said, you take this rock or stone and throw it in the water, and the ripples go as far as they can go. Mr. Speaker, this ripple effect coming . . . and Mr. Speaker, with your leave, can I read out of our Budget Statement for 2026/27, under Vehicle Licensing?

"Mr. Speaker, this Government will keep its commitment to reduce private car licensing fees by a further 10%, effective 1 April. For Bermudian families, vehicle licensing is a fixed annual cost, and this reduction provides direct and predictable relief."

Mr. Speaker, that is a ripple effect of what this budget has allowed us to do: Reduce the cost of licensing by 10 per cent. Mr. Speaker, as the Minister mentioned, we did it last year. So, Mr. Speaker, this is a 20 per cent reduction from two years ago, Mr. Speaker. So, this is real impact, real relief that this Government is bringing to our citizens, Mr. Speaker, putting money back into their pockets.

As the Minister mentioned, depending on the class of your car, from an A to an I, you can get \$300 relief, or you can get more, Mr. Speaker. And for those who are on fixed incomes, seniors, people who are struggling to make ends meet . . . this is a reduction to keep money in their pockets to help them, so that they can put money in other areas, whether it's buying groceries or maybe paying a utility bill, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is a promise made, a promise kept.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: And, you know, Mr. Speaker, I can go on and on, but I know there are other speakers, and I don't want to take up all the talking points, Mr. Speaker. But, as I said, this is a ripple effect out of this budget that we have presented, and ripples will continue to come, Mr. Speaker. And as they do come, I know I will stand up and speak on the ripples and the relief that we are bringing.

So, Mr. Speaker, as I said, promise made, promise kept. And the community can look towards more relief.

And thank you, Mr. Speaker, for my comments that I can add to this debate. Thank you.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Any other Member?
Minister?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My comments will be brief, Mr. Speaker, for sure.

I just wanted to stand to say that I fully support Minister Darrell in bringing this forward. It makes practical sense. And I do understand the argument that is being made by the other side. But I want to take this opportunity to thank them. To thank them for coming to the conclusion they are coming to now, by advocating for more cuts and more relief for the citizens of Bermuda. Because it only takes one who has been here long enough—and I do reflect on the other side, most of them not being here long enough—to remember six months after they came in, how they changed the fees—

Some Hon. Members: Uh-oh! Uh-oh!

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: How they changed the fees for FutureCare and raised them—

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, they did.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: —and raised them for seniors in the years that they were [the] Government. How they raised taxes on Bermudans to the highest level they have ever been in the history of this country, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: That's right. That's right.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: How they raised the debt when they were in power that did not allow us.

[General uproar]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: How a year before they were voted out of Government, Mr. Speaker, that the Morgan's Point development had been in default for a year. And we came into [office] and found ourselves \$200 million in the hole.

So, I actually thank them, Mr. Speaker, for now having the common sense and saying, *Let's give relief*. Because, Mr. Speaker, they put us . . . a lot of their actions that they did put us in the position where we are now. But thankfully for this Government, and the direction and the steady hand of the Finance Minister that we have, and the steady movement of this country forward, we are able to have surpluses. We are able to offer the relief that we have. We are able to have the people of Bermuda paying the lowest taxes they have ever had in their entire life, Mr. Speaker. This is the reality of it.

So, I thank them for coming up with the ideas of more relief, because we will continue to put more relief in place for the citizens of this country, Mr. Speaker. And I [thank them for] continuing to push us so we can keep proving to them that it is possible to run this

country the way it should be run and provide the relief for our people as we should.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you.

Is there any other Member?

MP King.

Mr. Robert King: Just for the sake of variety, Mr. Speaker, I feel compelled to rise to my feet.

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

Mr. Robert King: All right.

I believe that Members on the other side are correct that there is a ripple effect. The ripple effect that you get when you throw a toaster in the tub. That is what is happening because you are talking about Bermuda being better. More people are homeless now than before. More people require housing than they did before. More seniors are lined up like cordwood waiting for surgeries and stuff because they cannot be released because there is nowhere for them to go.

Our kids are graduating from schools, but the grades that they are getting are not to international standards. You are right. There is a ripple effect, but it is going in the wrong direction. And it is directly a result of the decisions that are being made with the world-class surplus of money, because it is not about money. It is about results. And the people in the street will tell you exactly what life is like.

How many times do we hear about what is going on at Westgate? How many times are we hearing about what is happening with the kids who are not getting the education that they require? Despite \$8.8 million in consultants, \$99 million in consultants. And what do we get for it? We get ripples. We get a lot of talk about ripples and how great things are, and how many people are getting handouts of financial assistance.

More people should not be on financial assistance.

[General uproar]

Mr. Robert King: They should be getting up—

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Point of order Mr Speaker.

Mr. Robert King: —what we should be hearing—

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Robert King: —what we should be hearing is that people are not as reliant on it as they were before.

The Speaker: You are calling a point of order?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes. Yes, I am, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member is misleading the House. And I think he just maybe done it unintentionally because he is so *rippled* by Junior Minister Lister. So, I understand he is a little flustered. But I think he should be very careful when he is talking about financial assistance and talking about handouts. We are talking about people who really, really need this help, Mr. Speaker. I do not think they should be referred to in that particular way.

The Speaker: Continue.

Mr. Robert King: It's about semantics. The point is that more people require assistance than they did before. That is not normal if things are going well in this community. If business is doing well, if local business is doing well—

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, point of order—

Mr. Robert King: —if employment rates are high, you do not have more people on assistance.

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: There is a point of order.

We will take a point your point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: The Honourable Member is misleading the House. He cannot come here and talk about more people who require assistance while the Ministers have tabled, and even *The Royal Gazette* reports, that the number of people who are receiving financial assistance has decreased due to the *ripples* inside the economy.

An Hon. Member: That's right!

Mr. Robert King: And more people are on the critical list for housing. So, yes—

The Speaker: Just be mindful of the statistics that have been put out.

Mr. Robert King: The point is, if you speak to the people on the street, what is being said here is completely different from what the average person is experiencing. So, either we are refusing to accept that things are different outside of this Honourable House, and God

forbid if we are, because we are doomed to make the same mistakes and pat ourselves on the back for a job well done for a few.

We must do better for this community. This is ridiculous.

[Laughter and desk thumping]

The Speaker: Does any other Member—

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet!
MP Simmons.

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: Good evening, all. Good evening, all.

I would like to commend the Member who just took his seat for allowing us to have a little energy and excitement in the Chamber. It has been a very long, tedious day for those of us who have low attention spans. So now I am wide awake.

And I think that his mentioning of the word “handouts,” . . . Handouts. While not related to this Bill, one of the reasons why I support giving a blanket relief to everyone is because I do not want the people who need it to have to be subjected to means testing.

An Hon. Member: Ah!

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: I do not want the people who need it to have to go fill out a form and then put their business on the street and be embarrassed and go through that.

An Hon. Member: Like they used to make us do.

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: Like they used to do . . . as my Honourable Member says, as they used to make us do.

But let it be clear. This is a good thing for the people who need it. It is a good thing. But it is particularly good because if you need it, you do not have to have the embarrassment of being told you are getting a handout. You do not have the embarrassment of being made to feel that you are getting a handout. And that is—

An Hon. Member: A hand up.

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: I hear about a hand up. About a hand up, like, like, like —

The Speaker: Just talk to the Chair and you will be all right. Talk to the Chair.

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: This organisation is not one that should talk about a hand up when they spend \$100 million of taxpayers’ money on the America’s Cup—

An Hon. Member: Ooh!

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: —which their own economic report revealed 64 per cent of the financial beneficiaries did not look like me.

So don’t talk to me about hand ups.

An Hon. Member: That’s right, Jamahl!

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: Your record speaks for itself.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: So, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, I do not hear any points of order because they know it is truth. Mr. Speaker—

An Hon. Member: Just sit down.

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: Oh, when you tell me to sit down—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: That’s okay.
So, he wants to talk about the UBP.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Oh-oh!

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: Let me tell you something about the UBP. I want to know, since the Honourable Leader of the Opposition has raised this point, how you are comfortable with the racists in your party?

How are you comfortable with the White supremacists in your party? More than once by a bunch—

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading and imputing improper motive]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. Point of order. The Honourable Member is misleading the House and imputing improper motive

Whoa! He’s gonna gaslight us now.

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: That’s not a point of order. I asked a question.

The Speaker: Ah, ah, ah—

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: I asked a question.

The Speaker: No, no, no, no—

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: I asked a question.

The Speaker: No, no, no, no. Both of you take your seat.

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: I asked a question.

The Speaker: Take your seat for a minute.

MP Simmons, I know you are a very skilled auditor . . .

An Hon. Member: Orator.

The Speaker: Orator.

I know you can cleverly get your point across without it being offensive. So, I am going to just ask you to be mindful of that.

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: I am guided by your wisdom, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: But I do want to take the point because I will not be distracted by their foolishness. Their record is known. People know who they are. And all of these . . . Premier Brown, once said, *All the shuffling around of the faces does not change a thing.*

Ms. Robin Tucker: Mr. Speaker, point of order, please.

The Speaker: Yes.

POINT OF ORDER
[Imputing improper motive]

Ms. Robin Tucker: Point of order, because the Honourable Member just said that everybody knows—

[Inaudible interjection]

Ms. Robin Tucker: The point of order is he is imputing improper motive. He just said . . . he just said that everybody knows who we are. That is not correct. And I would appreciate if he would correct that statement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: You are correct. Not everybody knows who you are because some are fooled by your performances.

The Speaker: Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah—

Ms. Robin Tucker: Mr. Speaker—

[General uproar]

The Speaker: Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait.

Take a seat, take a seat.

MP Simmons. I gifted you with being able to take . . . to not take us down certain roads to get your point across. We are well aware of what happened in this Chamber before we broke before for Christmas.

And the impact of that was supposed to be on how we address each other in this Chamber.

I know you are skilled enough to not have to take us back down that road. So, I am going to ask you to be very careful in how you deliver your points as you get back on your feet.

And in kindness to everybody, this message goes to everybody who may participate in this debate as it remains this evening. Okay?

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. But I think, again, let us get back to the point of the Bill that we were discussing.

The Bill, again, when we talk about relief, I think for people who have a lot of money in their pocket, they do not understand the difference when you go in to get—

An Hon. Member: Stay on point.

The Speaker: Let him.

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: —when you, on your birthday, when you are going to get your car licensed, and you have got this Bill, and you dread it. And you are sitting up there and you are dreading that you have got to scramble this money together to get it. And that is something that I think that when you have not lived that, you cannot relate to. And I think it is so important for those people to know that 20 per cent down from the first time we took office is a big deal for people who need it.

And I think that the people who need it should not be forced to have to put their business on the street, to be made to feel like they are getting a handout, to be looked at like they are getting a handout, and have to go through means testing that is potentially embarrassing and heartbreaking for them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Is there any other Member who wishes to make a contribution? MP Swan.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

We certainly drifted a far way away from the Motor Car amendment that the Honourable Minister responsible—

The Speaker: I know you are going to keep us on point.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: I certainly am, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Because I have heard a lot of reflection on a lot of things that deflect us from the fact that the reason why the Government is able to

show favour across the board to people—a Labour Government showing across the board recognition in a fee reduction that impacts every single motor car user in Bermuda—is because for the first time in decades, I believe, we are making a substantive reduction on the debt of Bermuda. We are surrendering \$600 million in debt.

I think for those who were the same people that were calling for an election every single week, and when they got it, were not ready for it, are the same people that were calling for us to reduce the debt, and then we put the mechanisms in place by doing what?

What did the PLP do since 2017? Operate on a course of prudent fiscal management that allowed us to move closer and closer to a balanced budget. And I have the [Budget] Book from 1998/99, when I first came into the legislature. And I tabled the Book that showed this country being passed over to the PLP with a \$300 million deficit. Which, contrary to what most people believed, was actually the truth. But most people believed the okey-doke, because when you tell people the same wrong thing over and over again and make people think that the PLP came into Government and it was a zero deficit and the like, people believe what is not true.

So, I had to table [in] the House the fact that this Government started in 1998/99, which was reflected in the 2000 budget, the actuals, that there was a \$300 million deficit at that particular time.

And, and, and, and—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: You had your turn.

And the fact is this: That \$300 million, when calculated using CPI [Consumer Price Index], equates in modern terms to almost \$700 million, which I said at that time was a few hundred thousand, give or take, short of a billion dollars in relationship to 1998/99.

An Hon. Member: How does that relate to the Motor Car amendment?

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: I will tell you how it relates to the Motor Car Amendment Act.

The Honourable Member who just took his seat ended on a note that I am going to pick up on. It is the fact that when you go to pay your licence, it is usually around your birthday. And I do not care if you got a lot of money or you got . . . people who have a lot of money. It is because they are what? The ones that I know have been very prudent and are very appreciative of a savings. Right?

Some Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And I know folks who, with a little bit of gift, will invest it where? Back into the Bermuda economy. And who would benefit? Persons who work in the Bermuda economy. Persons in restaurants

may benefit because the person says, *Hey, it's my birthday, I paid my car licence. My good Government gave me some money back. Honey, let's go out and have a little lobster tonight. And let's go down to Wa-hoo's, or WhiteHorse, or somewhere in St. George's—* where you get the best value for money—and *let's enjoy ourselves.* That is what people do.

That is the mind-set of what people do.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: That is what people do. And so, when the Government says, and when the Honourable Member DL III [MP Dennis Lister, III] comes and talks about the ripple effect, it is a good analogy. Because it is a feel good.

Look, the love that we are showing is not just for one segment of society. We want everybody in this country to feel good about this country. And this is an opportunity to be able to put that on the table. Why? Because as my late neighbour (may he rest in peace), the Director of Transportation, when he worked for the civil service for many years, Herman Basden said, *You gotta feel some pain in order to be able to enjoy some good times.*

And yes, we got a windfall because of the corporate income tax. But it would not have happened had we been spending like drunken sailors. We have not been. We have been exercising fiscal prudence and working hard. And the only thing that got in the way of us balancing the budget in 2000 and 2021, the only thing was a big global thing, COVID-19. And so, we had to recalibrate. And what did we do then? We invested in people.

And the Honourable Members who poke fun at people who might have a little bit more than the rest will remember. I know people who the Honourable Finance Minister, Mr. Dickinson, had to make provisions for during COVID-19 were persons who may have had a lot more than the average person who relies on government help all the time. Many people humbled themselves and had to go and get relief. And this Government was there.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And we did not spend the \$200 million on Morgan's Point, like they did.

An Hon. Member: No!

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: We did not spend the \$100 million on America's Cup. And we did not take it and tell people that we need to reduce the debt. But, when given the chance, said *I'm looking under the hood. Oh! I need to borrow another \$1.5 billion because I looked under the hood and found out I need to spend it.* And then go spend it on those, like they are saying . . . Oh, my word.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And so, Mr. Speaker, to put it in real terms, the Minister of Transport has been able to figure out how he can put a little bit more money in Bermuda's pocket across the board. And I applaud him for that. Because you know what? Had we gone the other way . . . had the Minister responsible for Housing and Seniors said, *Listen, I want all of that*. And we gave it all in one direction, they would have come up with an argument contrary to what they are saying now.

They remind me of . . . Look, I remember having a very skilled lawyer who once I wrote a very good speech. But I had to go get him out of court. Right? I knew he hadn't seen the speech before, right? So, I asked another very skilled preacher. I said, *Listen, I need you to hold this debate. I got to go up in the court and get this fella*. And this fella came down there and looked at this speech and read about five lines ahead and delivered it like he had written it. In fact, he delivered it far better than it was written.

And then I watched the same lawyer get up and speak on gaming and speak for one side of Front Street that had ships in favour. And speak for another group on the other side of Front Street that had gaming. The two were competing, and you would have thought that. . . he represented both of them equally.

And that's what Oppositions do. They talk out of both sides of their mouths better than anybody.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Imputing improper motive]

Mr. Scott Pearman: The Honourable Member is imputing improper motive. We are standing on this policy ground because we believe it to be the right thing to do.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Well, I appreciate the Honourable Member providing a clarification of where they stand. But I have had a little experience of being in Opposition as well. And I have had a little experience where . . . and I embrace the people that I once stood with. Unlike them who are not even prepared to embrace their own grandparents, parents, uncles, and cousins.

But I am not here to talk about that. I am here to say that there are times—

The Speaker: Ah, ah, ah—

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: —when Oppositions have proven —

The Speaker: Keep your line, keep your line a clean line now.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: It is.

The Speaker: Don't go down the wrong road.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: What I am saying . . . I know. I am saying, Mr. Speaker . . . I am saying, Mr. Speaker, I listen to people throw out barbs. And I embrace who I am, where I come from, and where I learned it from. So, I am a little bit [INAUDIBLE]. And I was once an Opposition Leader. And I know Oppositions can sometimes deliberately be irresponsible.

I was not talking about this one. If they took . . . if it hit a nerve, I am only speaking from a position of Opposition, of having been schooled by their grandfather's grandfathers, uncles, and so forth.

[Laughter, inaudible interjections and general uproar]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And I declare my interest. I was born in there, no different than Moses.

[Laughter]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And I spent a little time in the wilderness too. Yes.

No, I am grateful for where I stand. And I am grateful for the desert that I had to travel through to get where I am.

[General uproar]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: But I am here to tell you, I have seen what the promised land looks like.

We are not there yet, but we are striving to get there, Mr. Speaker. And I am here to tell you that people will give you an argument, whether or not you go left, or whether or not you go right, and convince other people that it is right, when it might not necessarily be so.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: [Laughter]

The Speaker: And guess what? He never mentioned golf!

[Laughter and general uproar]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Point of order, Mr. Speaker, point of order, Mr. Speaker, point of order.

If you want me to mention golf—

The Speaker: It's quite all right.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: If you want it, Mr. Speaker, I can go there if you need it.

[Laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: First time in history.

The Speaker: That was a first; that was a first, definitely.

Premier, go ahead.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: That was a maiden speech.

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I do believe that the House Assembly is currently doing the debate on the second reading of the Government Fees Amendment . . . yes, Motor Car Amendment, to reduce vehicle licensing fees.

The Speaker: Yes, bring it back around, Premier. Bring it back around.

Hon. E. David Burt: So, as the last speaker on this side before the Minister who brought this Bill closes, I want to just make sure I clear up a few issues.

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: Because we hear endless amounts of, in my opinion, Mr. Speaker, nonsensical rhetoric from the other side. And it is nonsensical rhetoric because it does not make sense.

And I am going to explain why it does not make sense, Mr. Speaker. Because as we know, on this side, oftentimes, we need to learn up the Opposition.

Some Hon. Members: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: So, I am going to take a little bit of time to learn up the Shadow Minister of Finance. Because, surprising to me, the Junior Minister took his intervention, and his intervention just proved the point that he does not get it.

So let me just start, Mr. Speaker, if I may, refer to the general terms when we talk about what you should have when it comes to a tax system. And one of the things that is very important with a tax system is (I am going to read the point), *simplicity and administrative ease. A tax system should be easy to understand, administer, comply with, and enforce.* These are the global things, the standards come from the OECD, [and] other bodies that talk about how you design a tax system.

This is important. It says, *Complex tax structures increase compliance costs for taxpayers, administrative costs for government, and opportunities for avoidance and evasion.*

Now let's stick to the first two. Compliance costs for taxpayers.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: Doug, you should listen instead of talking. I am going to teach you something here.

The Speaker: Ah, ah, ah—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: What's your point of order, Doug?

The Speaker: Premier—

Hon. E. David Burt: The Shadow Minister should listen.

The Speaker: Do not get caught up in a side conversation.

Hon. E. David Burt: But Mr. Speaker, he is going to miss the points of which I am giving, and it is an important one. It is an important one, so I am going to say it again, because he keeps on talking, but he is not listening. I want to focus on the two —

The Speaker: Don't talk, don't talk . . . Just talk to the Chair.

Hon. E. David Burt: Don't worry, Mr. Speaker, I'm talking to the Chair.

The Speaker: Those who want to hear it, will hear it. If they don't want to hear, they don't want to hear it. But let me hear it. Just let me hear it. That is all.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, if you would, Mr. Speaker, I would like to take my time, because this one is an important one.

Compliance costs for taxpayers. Now, the Honourable Member from constituency 33 said, and was a very plain and simple term, that we do not want people to have to go somewhere to prove that they are eligible for a benefit. That is just the reality.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Here we are. I am waiting for it. They are just playing right into my trap,

The Speaker: Just talk to the Chair.

Hon. E. David Burt: No problem, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I know who I am talking to. I promise you, Mr. Speaker, I'm good.

So that is the first thing, compliance costs for taxpayers. So, what they want is, in addition to what happens on a birthday, unlike this Government, which has given people birthday presents by reducing the amount of money of which they pay. Remember, twice we have reduced the amount of vehicle licensing fees. Two times, Mr. Speaker. The first time in the history of the country that we are having a reduction.

First, we stopped the biannual fee review, which was something that always happened in 2020 when the former Minister of Finance, the Member from constituent 21, tabled a Bill. It was the first time that we did not have a biannual fee review. We have not had one since, and now we are moving in the opposite direction, reducing fees and taxes.

Okay, now here we go. Compliance costs for taxpayers. So, what they would have you say is, the 24,000 vehicle owners should go to a department, the Department of Financial Assistance apparently, and fill out an application form.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The Premier is, I am sure, unintentionally misleading the House because I did not mention . . . I never mentioned the Department of Financial Assistance. So that is a figment of his imagination. Thank you.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member made reference to the child day care allowance and said how you bring payroll tax subs and everything else to a department. People bring that to the Department of Financial Assistance—the only department in government, by the way, which does have the ability and the capacity to measure and to means test those particular items.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: The Honourable Member is intentionally misleading the House. No Member incited or said that we had to follow the same process as he is speaking of. He was using an example, just an example of some of the ways that we could address this. That's

it. Never stated that it had to be the policy going forward. And the Premier knows that.

The Speaker: Okay, thank you.

Premier, he was using that as an example.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I am going to continue, because I am clearly striking a nerve, because they are now seeing how their position is unravelling, and they are trying every way to say—

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. E. David Burt: —No, no, we did not say that. No no, we did not say this.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order, Mr. Speaker!

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading and imputing improper motive]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Again, he is imputing improper motive and trying to tell the Speaker that he will continue on after being warned.

Addressing the Speaker like that?

[General uproar]

The Speaker: Member.

Premier, I know you are skilful enough. You have gone down the road without having to cross lines that impute improper motives to Members. So, I'm going to allow you to call on the skills that you have to go forward.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I should apply all those skills. But the Honourable Member said, as an example, the Department of Financial Assistance. Now here we are.

Let us pretend it is some new department that they have created.

By the way, it's not financial assistance, so now we are creating a new department to process these things.

Now just hear me out, Mr. Speaker, because the point that I am getting back to is tax systems need to be simple. Compliance costs for taxpayers, and the other thing it says that complex tax structures increase administrative costs for [the] Government.

So let us pretend in the example of which they gave, when they talk about child day care allowance, the Honourable Minister told me there are 270 families that do child day care allowance, Mr. Speaker, which is processed by two persons in the Department of Financial Assistance. There are 24,000 private cars, 88 times the volume, Mr. Speaker. If we were to hire the people

to match that process, it would cost the Government of Bermuda \$15 million, Mr. Speaker.

The point is—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: The point . . . No, I am very happy to give it to you.

Mr. Speaker, 270 divided by 24,000 equals 88.8 times 2 multiplied by \$85,000, in which the amount of cost to the people who process the applications gives you \$15,011,000. So, there we are.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Now, Mr. Speaker, because here is the thing, I have balanced budgets, I have done things, I know and understand how finances work.

An Hon. Member: He balanced the budget!

Hon. E. David Burt: Do you see how excited they are getting?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: But here is the thing, Mr. Speaker, the reality is it gets better, Mr. Speaker. Because I want to say, because I continue to say this all the time, and it is like they do not get it.

You do not get to target taxes until you have a tax system that allows the targeting of taxes. And the only system that allows the targeting of taxes, as we all know, is an income tax system, Mr. Speaker. It is a statement of which has been made. But the challenge of which they have, Mr. Speaker, is that even though the Tax Reform Commission would recommend this, a bipartisan Tax Reform Commission . . . we already know they have walked away from the recommendations. Because Mr. Speaker—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: He is misleading the House. He says the OBA walked away from the recommendations. That is a false statement and not based on any reality, and I would wish for him to retract it.

The Speaker: The Members indicated that they did not walk away from it. They did not *walk* away from it.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, walked, ran, jumped, ducked, dodged . . . he forgets what he said on Friday!

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. Point of order.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: He cannot walk away from it.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, he continues to mislead the House. Let me lay out the facts. I was on the Tax Commission as an OBA representative, and then I had to resign because of time commitments.

Some Hon. Members: Ooh!

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Which I know many of the MPs here understand, time commitments.

Then there was another OBA representative put on and there was a report put out. Now, that report, the OBA representative on that acted as an individual.

An Hon. Member: What do you mean?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: As an individual.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: And as you know, Mr. Speaker, and as the Premier has been very kind to remind everybody multiple times, the deliberations of that committee are secret. So, we do not know what that individual said in that committee, [what that committee] agreed with or disagreed. We do not know what I said. We do not know what I was involved in, and I could not even tell you if I wanted to, Mr. Speaker.

Now, like any political party that carefully assesses its policy options, there are some—

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: No, I am informing this House about the involvement of the Tax Reform Commission.

The Speaker: Points of order are supposed to be brief.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: All right.

The Speaker: Just be brief.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: We have, in some areas of the report, we agree, some we like, some we do not like, and some we partially like. And that is just the way things go, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

So, in a nutshell, there are parts that they agreed, that they did not walk away from.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, nerves are being struck. I will tell you what happened. There were seven people on the Tax Reform Commission. There was an OBA representative. The OBA representative signed the report.

Now, here is the thing. They can either accept it or not, but they cannot cherry-pick and say, *we like this and we do not like this; we like this, we do not like this; we like this, we do not like this*. Because that is the perspective where they are.

But let me try to go back to it, Mr. Speaker, because this is important. We continue to hear this conversation, discussion around targeting as though if it is magic. And I have given examples inside this House before, because Mr. Speaker, trust me, we tried it. We tried it in 2022 when we said, let us go ahead and give a benefit for school children and uniforms, et cetera, all the rest. The administrative burden and the work of what we need to do under our things is complex. That is the reason why you put in place blanket items.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Here they are, Mr. Speaker, they continue to talk about, *Oh, too hard, too hard, too hard*. But the reality is that governing is a lot different than writing things on pieces of paper. You actually have to implement and do.

And here is the challenge, Mr. Speaker, because this is where their argument falls apart. Their argument falls apart in, quoting from the Honourable Shadow Minister's Budget Reply. It says, "The Premier has floated the trial balloon of implementing an income tax in Bermuda." Now let us be clear, Mr. Speaker, they love to quote the Fiscal Responsibility Panel. The Fiscal Responsibility Panel has made the same recommendation for four years in a row.

An Hon. Member: What Bill were we talking about?

Hon. E. David Burt: They love . . . they love to conveniently praise the people of the Tax Reform Commission. But the recommendation came from the Tax Reform Commission.

Here's the thing, Mr. Speaker, I will make this point every single time the Opposition gets up and talks about targeting. It is a fantasy under our current tax system because it is difficult to administer. And the cost of administration, just like this, for which we are giving \$3 million in tax breaks, but to follow their item would cost more to administer than the taxes that you would give back, makes absolutely no sense.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let me close out here, because it is just a very, very simple thing. In this particular tax change, Mr. Speaker—the second time we are cutting taxes—there are some families who would have

saved over \$300 since we have cut these taxes, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Fact, fact, fact.

That, Mr. Speaker, is the record and reality of which this Government has put in place, Mr. Speaker. It is that we had cut those taxes in 2022 for \$137 . . . Actually, Mr. Speaker, it is a little bit higher than that. It is a little bit higher than that.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: No, no, no. Don't worry, I will use AI when I am ready, but this is actually a spreadsheet, so we are going to get it.

It is a lot higher, Mr. Speaker.

I am so happy that the Honourable Member made me pause, because I will do some math in my head myself.

Families have saved—

[Crosstalk]

Hon. E. David Burt: Families have saved, Mr. Speaker, families have saved more than \$700, some families. And you heard someone talking about that large vehicle? Imagine the cut that they got in 2022 was \$167. They paid \$167 last 2003, \$167 in 2024, \$126 in 2025, and now they are going to have an additional cut, Mr. Speaker. This is real relief for families that builds on the relief of which they have had.

Here is what I will say, Mr. Speaker. Would it be better if we could target it to those who would?

An Hon. Member: Mm-hmm.

Hon. E. David Burt: Sure. Absolutely.

[General uproar and desk thumping.]

Hon. E. David Burt: No, no, no. Hold a second.

That is always the place we are. But here is the reality, Mr. Speaker. You cannot do it under our current system, because if you were to do it, it would cost a fortune. And in that particular case, and instance, Mr. Speaker, that is the reason why it is being done this way.

So, every single time, Mr. Speaker, that we hear the Opposition talk about this, the question that they should answer when they do that is, How much will it cost to administer whatever it is they are doing?

The reality, Mr. Speaker, is that we must press forward with a change in transition of our system of taxes. But remember and remind that families all across this country will be paying less in vehicle licensing than they did last year, and far less in vehicle

licensing than they did in 2022, and that is a record of delivery of relief for the people of this country, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

Does any Member . . .

Opposition Leader.

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I will be brief.

I think the Honourable Premier has just said that for those people who were talked about, who have to scrounge their money together to make the payment, you cannot make their number lower because it is too hard. It is too complicated. He cannot get to that. So, the people in this country—

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Ben Smith: —who need it the most—

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker

I did not say that. The reality is it is expensive. It is not possible to do because it will cost more money than the relief will deliver. End of the story, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, just so we are clear, I delivered facts. I said how much it costs to administer financial assistance, the departments, the figures, the numbers, the amount of people. I am delivering facts. I have been in a space where we have delivered relief that is targeted, and it costs more money than it did with the relief we gave. That is why we do not do it anymore.

Hon. Ben Smith: So, Mr. Speaker, he can also find ways of reducing money, like the Gaming Commission. That is a particular way that he could look to do that.

Some Hon. Members: Ooh!

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Ben Smith: If it is so important that we lower the taxes for the people who need it the most, and you just agreed, targeted, but you just also said it is too complicated for us to be able to do it. And then you said it is too expensive, but—

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Honourable Member cannot put words in my mouth.

An Hon. Member: What's your point of order?

Hon. E. David Burt: I did not say it was too complicated.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: It is not too complicated.

The facts are that it costs more to administer. So, the people here are saying, *Oh my gosh, we can lower people more. There is \$3 million, and we can give more.* It is nonsense, Mr. Speaker. And the reason it is nonsense is that it will cost more to administer than it does in relief. Those are the facts.

The Speaker: Okay. I got that.

Hon. E. David Burt: And if you are concerned about a budget, you cannot do that.

The Speaker: I got that, go ahead.

Hon. Ben Smith: So, Mr. Speaker, the Premier has changed the position slightly, and now it is only because it is expensive, not because it was complicated, like he said at the beginning of his speech, but that is okay. The Hansard will make sure that everybody knows that is what he said in the beginning part of the speech.

So, I just want to make sure that the part of our community that needs this money the most, which the Opposition has been doing everything we can to advocate for . . . it is too complicated for them.

[Laughter]

Hon. Ben Smith: And the part that is interesting with the laughter from the Premier is because he believes that he is the only one who is looking out for that group.

An Hon. Member: Yes, yes.

Hon. Ben Smith: That is the part that is the falsehood of this Premier. So, he needs to figure out whether he can sharpen that pencil and figure out the things that he is spending money on, and make sure that he is doing everything he can for the people who need it the most.

Because that is what actually has to happen in this country. Because the Cabinet glasses that you continue to wear that tell you that the people in this country are not suffering and getting on planes and having to leave this country, that is your legacy. And that is what you have to stand on.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Does any other Member wish to—

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes!

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes.

Mr. Speaker, I did not intend on speaking. But when the Opposition Leader makes the statement like he just said and talked about the legacy that this Premier will leave, let us talk about some of the things that relate to legacy.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Things that have been reduced, starting with tonight.

An Hon. Member: Do not change the rules.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Tonight, we are reducing the licensing fees for the second time. We have reduced land taxes for the people of this country. We have given seniors pension increases every year since 2017.

They talked about housing just now. How many houses did they build in five years? You know how many, Mr. Speaker? Zero. Zero houses. And then they say we are in a housing crisis. When they helped to contribute to it by hosting the America's Cup for \$100 million. By putting this country in debt for \$220 million over Morgan's Point.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. Scott Pearman: The actual debt since 2017 was \$800 million from the PLP.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I did not say anything about that, Mr. Speaker. I said the America's Cup.

[Laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I said the America's Cup. And let us talk about the debt. They doubled it in five years. They doubled it in five years.

An Hon. Member: Another lie—

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. Again, the Honourable Deputy Premier is misleading the House. I have taken him repeatedly, probably three or four times, to the Budget Book on how it is not doubling the debt.

But it is \$800 million of new debt of the PLP since 2017.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Speaker, when I went to school, one in one was two.

[Laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: And I do not think it has changed since. And that debt has doubled.

Mr. Speaker, the America's Cup. They found \$100 million for the America's Cup. And the week before, the week before, they told our seniors that money don't grow on trees.

Mr. Speaker, they made our people take furlough days. They wanted to close Lamb Foggo [Urgent Care Centre]. You might remember they marched around the House on that, too.

The employee tax reductions—

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Five times—

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order, Mr. Speaker

The Speaker: Yes.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: The Honourable Member is misleading the House. The OBA Government did not make anyone take furlough days. That was negotiated with the unions on how to move forward because we were so in debt we could not pay people.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Speaker, they had to negotiate, that is why people slept down on Cabinet [grounds] for three nights. Remember, they camped out on the Cabinet grounds?

Yes, they negotiated, all right. That is what they did. But, Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker: Just bring it to the Bill now before you.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, let me finish on the Bill, Mr. Speaker.

Taking the words out of Dennis Lister, [III], the new ripple man in the House. Mr. Speaker, I think he said it well. It is that this party continues to give our people ripples of relief. Ripples of extra money in their pocket.

Look, the taxes have been reduced for the working man in this country for five out of the last seven years. We continue to give, give, and give. And, Mr. Speaker, as long as we continue, and I have said it before, all we have to do as a Government is keep our people right there in focus, and they will keep doing

what they have done in the last three elections and vote in the Progressive Labour Party.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Minister, are you ready to wrap us up here?

Hon. Owen Darrell: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill be committed.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

No objections to that, right?

Deputy [Speaker].

House in Committee at 9:16 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

COMMITTEE ON BILL

MOTOR CAR (LICENCE DUTIES REDUCTION) AMENDMENT ACT 2026

The Chairman: Good evening, Members.

We are in Committee of the Whole House on the Bill entitled the [Motor Car \(Licence Duties Reduction\) Amendment Act 2026](#). I call on the Minister in charge.

Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I now move that clauses 1, 2, and 3 be [considered].

The Chairman: The Minister has moved that clauses 1, 2, and 3 be considered.

Are there any objections to that?

There are none

Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam Chairman

The purpose of this Bill is to amend the Motor Car Act 1951 (the Act), to reduce by 10 per cent the licence duties payable in respect of private motor car licences.

Clause 1 provides the title of the Bill.

Clause 2 of the Bill amends [Schedule] 2 of the Act by replacing paragraph B, which sets out the licence duties for different classes of private motor car.

Clause 3 provides for the commencement.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other persons who wish to speak to clauses 1, 2, and 3?

There being none . . . Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, thank you.

I move that the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the preamble be approved.

Are there any objections?

There are none. So moved.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, I move that the Bill be reported to the House as printed.

The Chairman: It has . . . I think you missed a step.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Sorry, yes. I move that clauses 1, 2, and 3 be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that clauses 1, 2, and 3 be approved.

Are there any objections to that?

There are none.

Minister.

[Motion carried: Clauses 1 through 3 passed.]

Hon. Owen Darrell: I move that the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the preamble be approved.

Are there any objections?

There are none.

Hon. Owen Darrell: 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?

There are none. So moved.

[Motion carried: The Motor Car (Licence Duties Reduction) Amendment Act 2026 was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed without amendment.]

[Gavel]

House resumed at 9:18 pm

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

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

MOTOR CAR (LICENCE DUTIES REDUCTION) AMENDMENT ACT 2026

The Speaker: Members, are there any objections to the Bill entitled the Motor Car (Licence Duties Reduction) Amendment Act 2026 being reported to the House?

There are none.

Thank you.

We now go to the second reading of the Payroll Tax Amendment and Validation Act 2026 in the name of the Premier and Minister of Finance.

Premier?

Oh, the Junior Minister. Sorry.

Junior Minister Furbert.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Bill entitled the Payroll Tax Amendment and Validation Act 2026 be now read for a second time.

The Speaker: No objections. Continue.

BILL

SECOND READING

PAYROLL TAX AMENDMENT AND VALIDATION ACT 2026

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I anticipate this will be a very short discussion.

The Speaker: We hope so.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Although there are about four tax reductions included.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a piece of legislation that is not merely a piece of technical legislation. It is a fundamental pillar of this Government's vision for a more equitable, prosperous, and compassionate Bermuda. As we navigate the complexities of a global economy, our mandate remains clear: To protect the workers and businesses and help fuel our local and international business.

The Payroll Tax Amendment and Validation Act 2026 stands as a testament to this Government's unwavering commitment to building an economy that works for everyone, an economy where growth is inclusive and where hard work is rewarded.

As the Honourable Premier and Minister of Finance so boldly declared in the 2026/27 Budget Statement, our guiding principle is simple. No business, no business in Bermuda will pay more in employer payroll tax under this budget, and no worker will pay more in employee payroll taxes.

I repeat: No business in Bermuda will pay more in employer payroll tax under this budget, and no worker will pay more in employee payroll taxes.

Every employer rate will either remain at its current level or will decrease. Similarly, the total tax bill for every worker on this Island will go down. This is our promise, and this Bill is the mechanism by which we fulfil it.

Mr. Speaker, we recognise that for Bermuda to thrive, our businesses must have the breathing room to innovate, to expand, and most importantly to hire. This Bill introduces the New Hire Relief 2026, a strategic initiative designed to extend employer portion relief to the remuneration earned by approved qualified new hires. By lowering the barrier to entry for new employment, we are signalling to the private sector that this Government is a partner in their success.

Furthermore, we are extending the payroll tax relief for those individuals who receive dividends from local companies not listed on the Bermuda or any other stock exchange. This ensures that local investment is encouraged and that capital staying within our shores is utilised to strengthen our domestic market.

In a move that addresses the changing demographics of our workforce, we are also providing specific relief for our seniors to support those who wish to remain employed and to incentivise employers to keep that invaluable experience within their ranks. The employer portion of payroll will be exempted on a maximum of \$96,000 paid to applicable senior employees age 65 and over.

Mr. Speaker, at the heart of this legislation is a fundamental shift towards greater equity. We understand that the cost of living remains a primary concern for our people. Therefore, this Bill amends the Payroll Tax Rates Act 1995 to significantly reduce the applicable rates in bands 1 and 2. These changes specifically target those earning \$96,000 or less, providing immediate and tangible relief to the backbone of our workforce.

However, the benefits of this progressive structure do not stop there. It must be emphasised, Mr. Speaker, that the lowering of these first two bands will also benefit those earning over \$96,000. Because of the progressive nature of our tax system, every taxpayer, from the entry-level employee to the executive, will see a reduction in their payroll tax burden as a result of the adjustment, although it is very small.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance and Premier mentioned the Budget Statement (and it's worth repeating here) the cumulative tax savings for workers from 2017 to 2026:

- [Those earning] \$36,000, [have saved] \$9,900.
- [Those earning] \$48,000 have saved \$13,200.
- [Those earning] \$60,000 [have saved] \$10,470.
- [Those earning] \$72,000 [have saved] \$7,740.
- [Those earning] \$84,000 have saved \$5,010.
- [Those earning] \$96,000 will [save] \$2,280.

And those who are earning much more have saved less, but everyone has saved.

This Bill also moves to lower the employer portion in most remuneration categories. This ensures the relief is comprehensive, touching every sector of our economy and providing a universal lift to our business community.

Mr. Speaker, this Government believes that the strength of a society is found in how it treats those who require care and those who provide it. For too long, the essential work of caregivers has been undervalued in our tax code. Today, we change that.

In line with our platform commitments and to support the dedicated workers in the care industry, we established a zero per cent employer portion rate for self-employed caregivers. This is more than a tax break. It is a recognition of the dignity of the labour and an essential step in making home-based care more affordable for Bermudian home families.

Additionally, we are introducing a new category for employers who operate licensed residential care homes with annual remuneration exceeding \$350,000. Their rate will go down to 3 per cent. This targeted measure ensures that our care facilities, the places where our loved ones will call home, have the financial stability to provide high-quality service without being overburdened by taxation.

Mr. Speaker, as we look forward, we must also ensure that our house is in order. Mr. Speaker, zero per cent rate for the employer of a Bermudian musician or entertainer ceased to have effect on the 31st of March 2022. Zero per cent employer rate for Bermudian musicians and entertainers ceased to have effect on the 31st of March. That was not corrected, although they still received it. But today this Bill provides for the validation of the zero per cent tax rates that were previously granted under expired statutory provisions.

Codifying these rates provide the legal certainty and transparency that both the public and business community expect from a responsible government.

What is the impact on Government revenue? Employer payroll tax reduction is \$10,840 . . . \$10 million, sorry, 840 . . . \$10,884,000 *[sic]*. Employee payroll tax reduction will be \$2,647,000. Employer payroll tax exemption for seniors who continue to stay at work was estimated to be \$4.5 million. And local dividend exemption \$1 million.

Mr. Speaker, this is a Bill to support all workers. It is a Bill that rewards job creators, honours our elders, and provides direct financial relief to the thousands of Bermudians who keep this Island running every day. We are not just adjusting percentages. We are increasing the take-home pay of our citizens and lowering the cost of doing business in our beautiful Island home.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, this Bill is a testament to our belief in the Bermudian spirit. It is a Bill that says to the worker, *we value your labour*. It says to the employer, *we support your growth*. And it says to the caregiver, *we see your sacrifice*.

This is a comprehensive package of relief, fairness, and economic stimulus. This is a Bill to support all workers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you. Thank you, Junior Minister. MP DeCouto.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, good evening, Mr. Speaker, and good evening to the listening public.

As before, Mr. Speaker, I am mindful of the hour, the week, and the prior debate. But of course, as they say, the Government gets its way, but the Opposition has its say.

So, it is important that I put down on the record some of our views on this, which you may . . . people may have heard in other venues as well. And I hope that the Government will take it in the spirit in which it is intended, and not be (let me choose my words carefully) . . . Let me just leave it at that.

I hope that they will take it in the spirit that it is intended. Because you know, some prior discussions tonight, there were some good counterarguments from the other side. Now, it is not my job to highlight them, but they were there. So hopefully, we will hear counterarguments on the merits of the case.

Now, look, Mr. Speaker, obviously, we support this.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: And, Mr. Speaker, we wish the Government had taken better advantage of the opportunity in front of them today. Okay?

Now, lots of things . . . lots of things to like in this Bill, care homes, caregivers, supporting artists, the new hire relief, which we asked for in our Budget Reply, because we knew that was expiring. So very glad to see that, Mr. Speaker.

Look, obviously, as we have mentioned, we support, we support targeted—

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker, and the Honourable Member is misleading the House. The new hire relief was not expiring. So, it is incorrect that he says that. It was not expiring; it just has to be readjusted for the base.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: No, that is not correct. It is not correct. The [INAUDIBLE] was not expiring. You have to adjust the period, so it does not spread out and thing. It is not expiring. That is incorrect, Mr. Speaker, he is misleading the House.

The Speaker: The Premier made a correction to your statement of—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, well, thank you.

The Speaker: The Premier is providing more factual information on it.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I will certainly accept that correction. I will just say that I got my information from the gov.bm webpage. So, I hope that webpage will be updated to reflect the reality of the situation.

Now, I gave the example of why it is important to target it, because of how we need these dollars everywhere. Now, the cuts are fine. Cuts are fine. But the key point about cuts is you can only go so far. It's mathematical. Eventually, you run out of things to cut.

Now, the OBA's approach is, yes, let's do some of those cuts. We would love to see growth because growth has unlimited upside. I am not going to get into a long discussion about that, but we would like to see more initiatives for growing the economy from here. And I know that the Government has put forth its ideas, but it is important to note that you need to have the growth along with the cuts. And really trying to pick and choose here to really stick to the concrete facts, like I said, it was a lost opportunity.

Why do I say that? We know inflation over the past seven years has been something like 14.1 per cent. We know the median salary is something like 10.8 per cent, which is obviously below inflation. We know that for many occupations, it is lower than that. Service workers, 7.7 per cent. Craft and trade workers, which includes construction workers, 2.8 per cent. The point being, those salaries have not kept up with inflation.

But because of inflation, when you think about where the right place is to set the bands, right, it makes sense that the bands should also rise, so that if an employer, for example, wants to give inflation-linked pay rises, employees and employers are not penalised for giving that extra pay just to keep up with the cost-of-living. Which, as I have mentioned, many people in Bermuda, at least half, if not more, are not even keeping up with it.

We would have liked to have seen ideas such as, how about don't include the employer's portion paid for things like health insurance and pension deductions. Again, we know that health insurance costs are going up, and so the fraction of the employer's —

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: A point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: As said in a previous debate, as per the Payroll Tax Act, employer contributions to

health insurance plans are not subject to payroll tax. He is misleading the House.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, actually, the Premier is correct. I misspoke. I meant to say the *employee's* contribution.

So, let's say an employee makes \$5,000 a month, and then they pay \$500 as their share of the health insurance. That is taxed.

Now, let's say the health insurance goes up . . . Oh, wait. The health insurance did just go up, excuse me. The health insurance did just go up. So, their take-home pay is less, but their tax would be on the full amount.

So, for example, the Government could have looked at ideas such as exempting the amounts of the employee's pay—*employee*, not employer, my mistake—that is going to the insurance or pension, and things like that. So that was another opportunity that could have been looked at.

We also think that the employer portion should be put on a tiered approach, like the employee portion. Because, although I know that some senior Members on the other side do not agree with this, it is a fact. And this is a fact that has been relayed to us by, for example, accountants who work with small businesses, or directly from small business owners. They very carefully watch the size of their payroll to avoid flipping into the next higher band. Now, this doesn't affect all businesses, but there are businesses that are suppressing their growth to avoid taking a higher tax rate. So, again, that would have been an opportunity.

And, of course, you know, we appreciate the seniors' part. And I know we talked a lot about the expenses of doing these things in a more complicated [way], and I would urge the Government to bring the kind of energy and enthusiasm to this project, to ideas like the type that I am talking about here, that they are bringing to things like their digital transformation project and their FinTech projects. And I do not want to get too into it, but we know there is great enthusiasm from the Government benches to use technology to help people in Bermuda. And I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that directly applying it to things that are directly impacting those people's pocketbooks would be one such application.

And I have to be honest, I am really holding back here, Mr. Speaker, because I want to get home. I want to get home tonight. And I am going to leave us . . . and I have some questions for the details [in] Committee. I am going to leave us on this one. I noticed that no one would pay more. No one will pay more. But let's be honest, Mr. Speaker. Some of us in Bermuda could pay a little more, and some of us should be paying even less. And I wish that the Government would take that into account.

So, I will reserve the rest of my remarks for the Committee.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you. Is there any other Member who wishes to make a contribution at this time?

If not, Junior Minister . . . Oh, MP Swan.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I just want to say in the spirit of speaking on the budget that turning around this country's economy in such a way that a Government can deliver a balanced budget and forecast reducing the debt systematically takes time. And it is easy to be in Opposition and find fault with whatever the Government does. It's easy. But the proof of the pudding is in the eating. And I just want to thank the Ministry of Finance for the work that has been done that allows us to be in this position today to do exactly that.

There was a time in budget debates back in the 90s, [when] there were protests on budget day. There were sin taxes [that] were the thing of the day, increasing of alcohol. The anticipation of it was every budget, Mr. Speaker. You would remember that. You have not heard that. You have actually had a budget breakfast that was, you know, very conciliatory. I think it speaks to the fact that the Government has been responsive to some of the concerns about the high debt that this country had.

Let me say this. Let me remind people that the debt grew during the 2008 to 2011 recession. The debt grew then. The most buoyant economy this country ever experienced happened (and I remember that) between 2003 and 2007, just before that recession dropped and came out. And the narrative was to pin the tail on the Government. And it is easy to do when you are in Opposition, to say, you know, it is all the Government's fault.

But hindsight will be very kind to say that the recession that caused the Government to have to invest in its people, not too dissimilar to what this Government did in 2020, which was the only time . . . 2021, the only time when the Government had to engage in some deficit spending in a fiscal year, to do what? To protect and insulate the people of this country. So, it's easy for persons to look at the budget and try to find ways to poke holes.

But the proof of the pudding is this. Successive PLP Governments since 2017 have charted a course that has allowed this country to now have a budget that has an actual surplus in operating [and] projects in January a \$600 million reduction in debt. And you heard an Honourable Member interject to say \$800 in new debt since 2017. Yes, but they would not go and say, but that will be \$200 if you paid down \$600 of it.

And why can you be in that position? Because of the fiscal discipline and the trajectory that was charted to be able to put us in that position. And so, you know, when you do things structurally, you have to be disciplined and chip away at doing structural things correctly. Fiscal prudence does not come in one fell swoop.

And the mind-set that put the tax burden that we got saddled with on the working-class people of today is rich for persons who were the benefactors of that to come here and say, *Well, we should be doing more over here*. We would certainly like to do more across the board.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading and imputing improper motive]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: He really is . . . the Honourable Member is really misleading this House, Mr. Speaker, and imputing improper motive.

It's kind of a bit of a grab bag. I do not understand why any Member would not want to come to this House and talk about how to improve the tax system to increase the money in Bermudians' pockets.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: That was not a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I am speaking specifically to the fact that the Government is in a position to be somewhat benevolent with fees and tax reductions because of the physical prudence that was shown. And while we did so . . . and let us look at the mind-set of persons that are trying to tell me how to suck eggs and speak to what I am speaking to.

That is the same Government that did not increase pensions for seniors until it was an election year. And what did that mean to persons who needed it most?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading and imputing improper motive]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: The Honourable Member is misleading the House and imputing improper motive. He mentions the *mind-set*. He is not sitting in our rooms, in the OBA rooms, in a caucus, or any of the such, to say that the mind-set is, as he states. Not the case at all. He was not there.

The Speaker: The point that he was making, though, was that there wasn't a rise until that time.

But you cannot speak . . . you cannot—

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: You cannot, you cannot speak to the mindset. You can speak to the fact there was not a reason until that one time.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes, I am speaking . . . I am speaking to . . . I am speaking to the fact that during their tenure seniors were told money doesn't grow on trees, and seniors and seniors' pensions were allowed to remain stagnant.

So, when this Government came into fruition in 2017, and the Government, whilst it was crafting a course to balance [the] budget, found ways to put more money in the working-class person's pocket, found ways . . . but still found a way to balance the budget to achieve two objectives, right? It is a mindset that causes you not to increase pensions.

You can call it what you want. It is a mindset.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I think . . . I think that time he was . . . he was speaking to . . . I think he did not direct it at you. The first time he did direct it. The second time, he said a mindset makes you do this and makes you do that. He did not point at you. One person looks at it this way, one looks at it that way. He was just saying one mindset; one mindset . . . or the word philosophy. One philosophy says do not do it now and another one says do it now. He did not . . . the first time he did point it at you guys.

Mr. Scott Pearman: It is contrary to the Standing Orders, Mr. Speaker, to impute an improper motive, suggesting the mindset of a person is exactly that. He is imputing an improper motive.

If, if, if, if MP Swann wants to, you know, speak about the—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Scott Pearman: And there the Premier just goes and does it again. It's the mindset of your party, he just said. Again, that is imputing an improper motive.

The Speaker: I would —

Mr. Scott Pearman: What he is saying to us is that we actually have some sort of belief that that makes us do horrible things, which is just not true.

And now the Premier's proved my point.

The Speaker: Members, Members, Members, Members, Members, the night is long. The night is long. Let us not go down a road that's going to deter the positivity that came out of the day thus far.

Certain words have certain implications; other words do not. We all have philosophies. Everybody's philosophy is different. Everybody's viewpoint could be different. But there are words that can be used versus

“mindset.” “Philosophy” is one. We all come in here with different philosophies, and it is a common philosophy that joined us in the gathering of a group or a political group that we stand in. So, you can talk about philosophy rather than mindset.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take your guidance. And I was speaking to the actions that I can speak to. I do not have to make this up. Their actions—

The Speaker: You can speak to the facts. You are not in their head as to why they did it.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Absolutely. I am just looking at the facts. The fact is that what they chose to do for seniors was to leave their pension stagnant for the majority of their term.

An Hon. Member: That's a fact.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: That is a fact.

And the implication of that meant that they lost ground, ground that even this Government could not make up.

And so, as a consequence . . . I was just using just that one example of how the . . . I can speak to the, I can—

The Speaker: Ah, ah, ah.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: No, no, I can speak to the mindset of this party.

The Speaker: The *philosophy*.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: The philosophy of this party —

The Speaker: That way you don't have to . . .

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: The philosophy of this party came into fruition to say, *Listen, we are going to make sure that seniors do not fall behind at least the cost of living as best we can.* And that is what was done, which is in direct contrast to their actions.

And, and, and, and, and, and, yes. But now, because this Government has gone on a course answering the call, even from you, to reduce the debt, settled on a course where we are now projecting surpluses into the next two and three years.

Now, I mean, I don't have a . . . I do not have a crystal ball like the next person. So, let's pray and hope that we do not have another pandemic. We have a war in the rising, and the like. So, you know, projections can be called into question when circumstances change.

This Government made a decision that it was in the national interest to have the Southampton Princess reopen. By the end of this year, it will be so. But

you say, how long will it take? But it will be open this year. And that is a very positive thing. But it did not happen [in] one fell swoop. Just like turning around that tanker, it does not happen. Just like a speedboat going around Ferry Reach, it takes time. And you have to stay the course.

And so, I just want to point out just a couple of . . . I'm sure there are Members . . . Member De Silva probably has a long litany of those types of examples. I just wanted to speak to a couple of them that impact seniors. And I declare my interest. I am a senior. And he who feels it knows it. And he who feels it appreciates the fact that those little incremental ripples are having a positive impact.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

Do any other Members [wish] to make a contribution?

Premier . . . MP Lister.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Speaker, thank you.

Mr. Speaker, as I rise to my feet, you did mention to keep it positive, Mr. Speaker. And I don't think that is hard to do, Mr. Speaker. Because when I stand and reflect on this Bill being brought to us, the Payroll Amendment Validation Act, and how it ties, again, to our budget statement, Mr. Speaker, where we are reducing payroll not only for the employee, but for the employer, I think anyone who looks and reads this can see how positive it is, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in an earlier debate on a Bill just now where relief was provided, we heard it was not targeted enough. Well, this relief provided is targeted for the employers, employees, you know, to help provide relief for all people, all sectors of our economy, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I think another word that can be used is *investing*. Investing in our economy, whether that is new hire relief, Mr. Speaker, to encourage businesses to hire new people. There was a mention about growth, not enough growth. Well, Mr. Speaker, that new hire relief encourages employers to grow, hire new employees, so that will grow the business, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the relief for employers also with relief for keeping on persons over the age of, I believe, 70, Mr. Speaker, or once they are a senior. You know, a senior will hit that age and they have to worry about their employer letting them go while they still have value [and] experience to bring to the job, and even still have bills to pay, Mr. Speaker. [They] still have other expenses. So, what does that relief do? It encourages employers to keep on seniors because it reduces the payroll that they have to pay for that senior employee, Mr. Speaker.

And then for the employees, depending on which band you make, Mr. Speaker, I think it is targeted [for] under \$48,000, Mr. Speaker, you will receive a

reduction of 0.25 per cent. Forty-eight thousand dollars to \$96,000, Mr. Speaker, you receive a reduction of almost two points. And then as you go higher up this reduction is not just aimed at the lower, but is across our bands, Mr. Speaker, so that it is targeted so that everyone can get a piece of relief.

And, Mr. Speaker, as we look at the categories of employers, Mr. Speaker, whether that be self-employed farmers, fishermen, caregivers, there is no payroll for them, Mr. Speaker. And I think anyone self-employed, Mr. Speaker . . . I declare my interest. My wife is an entrepreneur self-employed. And so, this is a benefit that she, amongst many other entrepreneurs and self-employed people, will feel this benefit, Mr. Speaker.

Again, if you are education or educational, a sport, a scientific institution, you will receive a one-point reduction to zero in your payroll, Mr. Speaker.

This will also go for charities, scholarships, and other religious organisations, which is zero right now, but it will continue to be zero. So, for charities that need assistance in whatever that charity is designated to, this helps them to keep [employees] and for the employer to not have to take that extra benefit, that extra burden, Mr. Speaker, of having to pay the payroll, Mr. Speaker.

So, I am not going to . . . it is easy for me, Mr. Speaker, to go on about the ripples. And, you know, I have been called the "ripple man." And, well, Mr. Speaker, it is evident and plain to see how these ripples go on. They keep rippling until they hit a buoy, a boat, the shoreline, Mr. Speaker. That means everyone will feel this impact.

So, Mr. Speaker, you know, the hour is late and long, and, you know, I don't want to belabour the point. But this is real relief for our constituents, our members of the community, Mr. Speaker.

And, again, I thank the Junior Minister on behalf of the Minister of Finance for bringing this amendment. This is relief that we can feel, we can see, and I know the people, the public of Bermuda, are happy for this relief and can look forward to more relief being provided by this Government, Mr. Speaker.

So, my support to this, and thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight, Mr. Speaker. And to the listening public. To all of you, have a good night and look forward to more relief.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

Any other Member?

Premier?

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, of course, this matter is tabled underneath my name, and it is a payroll tax reduction. But, Mr. Speaker, I cannot allow this debate to pass without reminiscing the fact of how this Government

has consistently reduced payroll taxes for workers in this country.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: Consistently reduced payroll tax for workers in this country.

Mr. Speaker, I remember when I was in the Shadow Minister's position, as Shadow Minister of Finance. I want to say that was when we were in Opposition together, Mr. Speaker. I want to say it was probably 2017 when the Shadow Minister . . . when the then Minister of Finance at that point in time tabled a Bill. And I remember speaking in my reply and basically stating that they had raised the level of payroll taxes on workers to the highest level in history. And I remember the shock-and-awe look from the benches, then looking at each other. *Is that true? Is that true? Is that true?*

Well, you know, I do a pretty good job of doing my research and getting my facts straight, Mr. Speaker. And it was true.

And here is the thing, Mr. Speaker. We have gone from the highest rates of payroll taxes on workers in history to the lowest rates on payroll tax for workers in history, Mr. Speaker. That is what this Government has delivered.

When you look at it as the Shadow Minister, sorry, as the Junior Minister said, when you look at those persons in the lower bands, Mr. Speaker, they have seen their payroll taxes reduced by 95 per cent. But even if you go, Mr. Speaker, to places where you are looking at median income and look at median income of \$72,000, those persons are paying 46 per cent less in payroll taxes today than they were when we came into office, Mr. Speaker. A significant reduction.

And here is what is very interesting, Mr. Speaker, because we hear a lot of talk about targeting all the rest. You know how much more people who make a million dollars a year, pay a year? Thirty-eight thousand dollars more a year in payroll taxes, which allows for us to cut the payroll taxes for lower workers.

And, Mr. Speaker, I remember when we made these significant changes. I remember when we increased the rates of payroll taxes for those persons at the higher end so we can reduce the payroll tax at the lower end. And I remember the cries from that side saying, *No, this is bad. No, business will go away. No, you should not do it.* And they did not support it, Mr. Speaker. But we did it because we knew it was right. It is because our *philosophy* is to ensure, Mr. Speaker, that we give to those persons at the bottom who need it, while increasing the tax to those at the top, Mr. Speaker. We have been able to do it on this occasion.

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: They may laugh, Mr. Speaker. But here is the thing, Mr. Speaker. That is the reality. That is the record. That is what this Government did. And,

Mr. Speaker, they speak out of both sides of their mouths because when there was the opportunity to increase taxes on wealthy persons and reduce taxes on lower rates, they opposed it.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading and imputing improper motive]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Honourable Premier is misleading the House. First of all, he said we speak out of both sides of our mouths. That is imputing a proper motive. But how, might I add, he is misleading the House. If I may quote from his Budget Statement, quote, "Every working Bermudian will see a reduction in their payroll tax burden."

Hon. E. David Burt: And that is what I am saying now, Mr. Speaker, because this Act says.

[General uproar]

Hon. E. David Burt: But see, here is the problem, Mr. Speaker. They are so busy talking that they're not listening. But I know you are listening, Mr. Speaker. And you know who else I know is listening, Mr. Speaker? The people at home.

So, I am going to repeat it again, Mr. Speaker. Because the fact is, just like I demonstrated last week, they can't even keep their pledges that they made in their Budget Reply for one week.

Here is what, Mr. Speaker . . . and this is a very important point. In 2022, when we increased taxes on those people who were making a million dollars a year by \$38,000 a year to cut taxes on persons who were at the bottom, they opposed it, Mr. Speaker. They got in this House. They spoke about it. They opposed it inside of their Budget Reply. They were not in support of it, Mr. Speaker. That is the fact. That is what happened. They opposed it.

We, Mr. Speaker, have a philosophy that we will do what is necessary. We changed the taxes. We took the licks from the international business community. We took the licks from the Opposition, but we did what was right. And here is the fact, Mr. Speaker. Now, because of that, we realised that we had more money. We were able to balance the budget before corporate income tax was collected, making sure taxes were fairer inside of this country, Mr. Speaker. And delivering the lowest taxes in history for workers. And this particular tax cut builds on that once more.

I will repeat what the Shadow Minister said. Persons making \$48,000 a year pay 95 per cent less taxes now. Persons who make the median income are paying 50 per cent less tax, Mr. Speaker. That is the record of this particular Government, while those people at the top end, Mr. Speaker, are paying significantly more.

That is what happens when you have [a] Progressive Labour Party Government whose philosophy, whose philosophy —

Another Hon. Member: Tax cuts for all

Hon. E. David Burt: And I can speak to my own mindset, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Your own mindset.

Hon. E. David Burt: I can speak to my own. The mindset is to make sure that you demonstrate fairness in every single thing of which you do.

That, Mr. Speaker, is the record. It is difficult for them to get. But this country and the people of this country know that we have continued to cut taxes for workers, and we demonstrate it one more time.

Let me move on from workers, Mr. Speaker, because there are other points that are made.

Care homes, important. We know that we have an expanding senior population. Moving care homes from 10 per cent, Mr. Speaker, or the top tax bracket, which would be about 9.75 per cent or 9.5 per cent, down, Mr. Speaker, to be equivalent with the Bermuda Hospital Board at 3.0 per cent. A significant change that works.

The seniors inside of our workforce, the Minister of Economy and Labour has laid something in workforce retention, making sure that this is a part of our particular matter.

The validation extension of these prior tax cuts for musicians, which is particularly important because we want to support our Bermuda musicians. We do not want them in trouble from the tax codes. Those are things that are also being done inside of this particular piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker. And also remembering that no business in this country will pay higher taxes.

The thing is, Mr. Speaker, we must continue to reduce payroll taxes. Payroll taxes are [a] disincentive for employment. This is the reason why we have had a history of reducing these taxes. It is something that I have been on record as saying since the first time that I spoke in [the] Parliament in 2011. And [I] delivered a Budget Statement in another place, Mr. Speaker. And so, from this perspective, this is proof positive that this Government will continue to deliver tax reductions.

But history will show, Mr. Speaker, on the most fundamental change, when we put significant increases on higher earners putting the tax rate up to a full 13 per cent, it was that side that opposed and this side that supported to ensure that we were able to deliver these cuts for persons and were able to continue to press it through.

Mr. Speaker—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh, don't start. There is no question of changing approach. They are now trying really hard to find relevance, Mr. Speaker.

Oh, yes, Mr. Speaker. They are really trying to find relevance. But what they cannot get past, Mr. Speaker, is when it was time for them to stand up for the working Bermudians in this country to say, *I support the Government in increasing taxes on higher earners to reduce taxes on lower earners*. What did they do, Mr. Speaker? They opposed and voted no.

On this side, Mr. Speaker, we supported it. And that is the reason why we are [where we are], and this Bill today is continuing what we started.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

None?

Junior Minister?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that the Premier and the Minister of Finance has clearly laid out the closing remarks that we would like to say in regard to this particular Bill.

Because the time is late, we will move on to . . . I move that the Bill be committed.

The Speaker: Thank you.

House in Committee at 10:00 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

COMMITTEE ON BILL

PAYROLL TAX AMENDMENT AND VALIDATION ACT 2026

The Chairman: Members, we are in Committee of the Whole [House] on the Bill entitled [Payroll Tax Amendment and Validation Act 2026](#).

I call on the Junior Minister in charge.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Madam Chairman, if the OBA agrees, I will move all clauses.

The Chairman: It has been moved that we consider clauses 1 through 14, inclusive.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Plus the validation one.

The Chairman: Plus the validation. Are there any objections to that? There are none.

[Junior] Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

This Bill seeks to amend, as I said, the Payroll Tax Act 1995 ("the principal Act") and the Payroll Tax

Rates Act 1995 (“the Rates Act”) to give effect to changes announced in the 2026/27 Budget Statement, and to validate the application of expired 0 per cent payroll tax rates in relation to Bermudian musicians and entertainers.

Clause 1 provides the title of the Bill.

Clause 2 amends section 7 of the principal Act, by increasing from \$10,000 to \$20,000 the exemption per annum for dividends relating to shares in a company (other than an exempted or listed company) paid to an employee or deemed employee.

Clause 3 inserts new section 9AA into the principal Act which provides that an employer is not chargeable to tax at the standard rate for employers, or other rate prescribed under section 5 of the Rates Act, in respect of remuneration (other than bonus payments) up to and including the qualifying threshold of \$24,000 paid in any tax period to a Bermudian employee who is 65 years or over, but at the prescribed rate. A rate of 0 per cent is prescribed by new section 4AA inserted into the Rates Act by clause 8.

Clause 4 inserts new section 9CB into the principal Act (new hire relief for qualifying employers: 2026) which applies new hire relief in respect of qualifying employees of qualifying employers (as defined) for tax periods commencing on 1 April 2026 and ending on 31 March 2028. This provision mirrors section 9C (new hire relief for qualifying employers: 2024) which applies in relation to tax periods from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2026.

Clause 5 amends section 2 of the Rates Act to insert definitions of “licensed residential care home” and “caregiver” for the purposes of Class B(aa) and Class C(m) in section 5 (inserted by clause 9).

Clause 6 amends section 3 of the Rates Act to reduce from 10.25 per cent to 9.75 per cent the standard rate of payroll tax for employers and self-employed persons.

Clause 7 amends section 3A(1) of the Rates Act (standard rate bands for employees and deemed employees) by replacing the table with the following revised rates:

- a) the rate for remuneration up to \$48,000 is reduced from 0.50 per cent to 0.25 per cent;
- b) the rate for remuneration from \$48,001 to \$96,000 is reduced from 9.25 per cent to 7.75 per cent;
- c) the rate for remuneration from \$96,001 to \$200,000 is increased from 10.00 per cent to 10.75 per cent.

The rates in respect of remuneration from \$2,001 *[sic]* to \$1,000,000 are not changed.

The Chairman: It shows \$200,001.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes, \$200,001.

Clause 8 inserts new section 4AA into the Rates Act, which prescribes a rate of 0 per cent for remuneration (other than bonus payments) up to and

including the qualifying threshold for the purposes of new section 9AA of the principal Act (special provision where employee is a Bermudian aged 65 years or over) inserted by clause 3.

Clause 9 reduces some of the rates prescribed in section 5 of the Rates Act (rates for certain classes of employer). A new category is inserted as Class B(aa) prescribing a rate of 3.0 per cent for an employer operating a licensed residential care home with an annual payroll of more than \$350,000. Another new category is inserted in [Class] C(m) prescribing a rate of 0 per cent for a self-employed caregiver.

Clause 10 repeals, with retrospective effect, words in [Class] C(l) *[sic]* in section 5 of the Rates Act (0 per cent rate for employer of Bermudian musicians and entertainers ceases to have effect on 31 March 2022), so that Class C(l) *[sic]*—

The Chairman: C(1), Member.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: [Class C](1) is revived and the 0 per cent rate remains in effect without an expiry date.

Clause 11 repeals, with retrospective effect, section 9D(3) of the principal Act (special provision for Bermudian musicians and entertainers ceases to have effect on 31 March 2024), so that section 9D is revived and remains in effect without an expiry date. The special provision is a 0 per cent rate of payroll tax prescribed by section 4C of the Rates Act.

Clause 12 validates, further to clauses 10 and 11, the purported application during the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2026 of the 0 per cent payroll tax rate under Class C(1) in section 5 (employers) and section 4C (employees) of the Rates Act in relation to the remuneration of Bermudian musicians and entertainers.

Clause 13 makes consequential amendments to sections 9A(1), 9B(2) and 9BA(2) of the principal Act to align with new section 9AA(1) (inserted by clause 3) to clarify that the special provision for disabled employees, taxi drivers and minibus operators displaces the standard rate for employers or other rate that would be applicable under section 5 of the Rates Act.

Clause 14 provides for commencement on 1 April 2026, and [includes] a saving clarification in relation to outstanding payroll tax.

Payroll Tax Amendment and Validation Act 2026 as tabled in the House of Assembly.

The Chairman: Thank you, [Junior Minister].

I call on anyone else who wishes to speak to Clauses 1 through 14, inclusively.

I recognise the Member from constituency 25. Member, you have the floor.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you Madam Chairman.

I refer to clause 3 which adds clause 9AA to the [principal Act], and I note that the 65-plus employee rate is only for the portion below \$96,000 a year. I would like to understand why it is not for the whole amount of

the salary because that was my understanding from prior comments.

And then I also have a question with clause 4, which adds [section] 9CB to the [principal Act]. And, again, this is extending the new hire relief that, my understanding, was set to expire. But apparently, that was incorrect. Again, why does it only apply for employers who have over a half a million dollars a year of payroll? I would have thought we would like to encourage hiring for all businesses.

Those are my questions.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to clauses 1 through 14?

There being none, Junior Minister.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: And the party has mentioned that we should target individuals who have . . . who are making less. The majority of people within that age group probably fall within [\$]96[,000]. But the Honourable Member is saying that a person that makes over a million dollars should get 0 per cent payroll tax because he said *Why don't we include everyone?*

That's my point. He said we should include everyone. So, if a person is making \$500,000, a million dollars—

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Sorry, Madam Chairman. Point of order.

The Chairman: Your point of order.

POINT OF ORDER *[Misleading]*

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: With my comments . . . I don't know what comments he's referring to. Perhaps he's reflecting because my question was strictly about this \$96,000.

[Inaudible interjection]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: He's answered that. Fair enough. And then my second question was about—

An Hon. Member: What's your point of order?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: —was about, he's misleading . . . misleading the House. Thank you.

[Inaudible interjection]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you for that clarifying remark.

And then my second question was about the qualifying employer's payroll. And I said why does it only apply to employers with a payroll of over half a million? I would have thought targeted would in fact be the opposite. But hey, they are entitled to their philosophy.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you. Junior Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Madam Chairman, I thought I heard that the Honourable Member was talking about \$96,000. I could be corrected. Then you said why don't we include everyone, any amount over that. Because if a person is making a \$120,000, we should exempt it from \$120,000. That's what I thought.

Now if you're correcting yourself or you're correcting me, then I . . . because that's what I heard. That if a senior was making \$150,000, that we should include all of it. That's what I heard. Is that not what I heard?

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: You are asking him to clarify his question.

Member, would you please clarify the question for the Junior Minister?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: My question was that the Government would explain why they picked \$96,000 a year as a threshold, and it has now been answered.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you, Member.
Junior Minister.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes, thank you. All right. I won't touch that.

What was about the \$500,000 because I lost that part?

The Chairman: Member, would you like to clarify please?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

With clause 4, which adds the [section] 9CB to the [principal Act], the new higher relief, my reading is it is only applying for employers with a payroll of over one half million dollars per year. And again, I would welcome an explanation of the Government's philosophy behind that, Madam Chairman.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: Thank you.
Junior Minister, do you understand?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes, I do understand.
Madam Chairman, this particular process, or initiative, took place way back in 2018/19.

Hon. E. David Burt: On the first budget.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: On the first budget by the Premier.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: And it is something that we concentrated on. That if employers making over remunerations of a million dollars, then that's the focus. That's where we stood at the time and that's where we still stand.

To be honest with you, it stimulated the economy significantly for that period. And the Premier can clearly mention that even new companies came here and worked. They weren't paying payroll tax. They were not . . . for the employer at that time. But it encouraged employee hires, which they paid payroll tax, which stimulated a lot more within the economy. But that's the decision that we made within the Government as far as the million dollars.

The Chairman: Thank you.
Are there any other Members who wish to speak to clauses 1 through 14?
There being none, Junior Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I move that the . . . I believe we have moved all clauses 1 through 14. And I move also that the preamble—

The Chairman: Just a minute. You have moved that clauses 1 through 14 be approved.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Right, plus the validation Act.

The Chairman: Plus the validation . . . Act, you said?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Sorry.

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you, yes.
Are there any objections to that?
There are none.
Continue, Junior Minister.

[Motion carried: Clauses 1 through 14 passed.]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I move that the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: You move that the preamble be approved.
Are there any objections to that?
There are none.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I move that the Bill be reported to the House as printed.

The Chairman: It's been moved that the Bill be reported to the House as printed.
Are there any objections? There are none.
So approved.

[Gavel]

[Motion carried: The Payroll Tax Amendment and Validation Act 2026 was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed without amendment.]

House resumed at 10:14 pm

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

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

PAYROLL TAX AMENDMENT AND VALIDATION ACT 2026

The Speaker: Members, are there any objections to the Bill entitled the Payroll Tax Amendment and Validation Act 2026 being reported to the House as printed?
There are none.
The Bill has been reported as printed.
Premier, that's the end of the matters on the Order Paper for today.
Would you like to do the third readings?
Minister Darrell.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 21

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
Mr. Speaker, I move that Standing Order 21 be suspended to enable me to move the Bill entitled Motor Car (Licence Duties Reduction) Amendment Act 2026 be now read a third time by its title only.

The Speaker: Are there any objections?
There are none.
Continue, Minister.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 21 suspended.]

BILL**THIRD READING****MOTOR CAR (LICENCE DUTIES
REDUCTION) AMENDMENT ACT 2026**

Hon. Owen Darrell: I move that the Bill be now read a third time by its title only and passed.

The Speaker: The Bill has been read a third time by its title only and has now passed.

[Motion carried: The Motor Car (Licence Duties Reduction) Amendment Act 2026 was given a third reading and passed.]

The Speaker: Junior Minister.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 21

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

I move that Standing Order 21 be suspended to enable me to move the Bill entitled Payroll Tax Amendment and Validation Act 2026 be now read a third time by its title only.

The Speaker: Are there any objections?

There are none.

Continue, [Junior] Minister.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 21 suspended.]

BILL**THIRD READING****PAYROLL TAX AMENDMENT
AND VALIDATION ACT 2026**

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I move that the Bill be now read a third time by its title only and passed.

The Speaker: The Bill has been read a third time by its title only and has now passed.

[Motion carried: The Payroll Tax Amendment and Validation Act 2026 was given a third reading and passed.]

The Speaker: Mr. Premier.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that this Honourable House do now adjourn until Friday—

The Speaker: The 13th.

Hon. E. David Burt: March the 13th at 10:00 a.m.

The Speaker: Does anyone wish to speak today?
None?

Members, thank you for your participation today. It's been a fruitful day. I trust that you'll get rest tomorrow and be ready to come back on Friday and do it all over again.

With that, the House now stands adjourned.

[Gavel]

[At 10:16 pm, the House stood adjourned until 10:00 am, Friday, 13 March 2026.]

**BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
13 MARCH 2026
10:02 AM**

Sitting Number 31 of the 2025/2026 Session

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

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: Good morning, Members.
Once the Sergeant has us sealed off there, the Clerk will lead us in prayers.

The Speaker: The first one is going to be introduced by the Minister for the Cabinet Office.

PRAYERS

[Prayers read by Mr. Clark Somner, Clerk]

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

[Gavel]

The Speaker: Members, the House is now in session.

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

[Minutes of 6 March and 9 March 2026]

The Speaker: Members, the Minutes from the 6th and the 9th of March have been circulated.
Are any amendments required?
There are none.
The Minutes will be confirmed as printed.

[Minutes of 6 March and 9 March 2026 confirmed.]

MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR

The Speaker: There are none.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER
OR MEMBER PRESIDING**

APOLOGIES

The Speaker: I have an announcement regarding Member, MP Famous. He has indicated he will be absent again today.

MESSAGES FROM THE SENATE

The Speaker: There are none.

**PAPERS AND OTHER
COMMUNICATIONS TO THE HOUSE**

The Speaker: There are two papers this morning.

**GOVERNMENT FEES AMENDMENT
REGULATIONS 2026**

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, with the Governor's recommendation, and in accordance with section 36(3) of the Bermuda Constitution [Order 1968], I have the honour to attach and submit, for the consideration of the Honourable House of Assembly, the [Government Fees Amendment Regulations 2026](#), proposed to be made by the Minister of Finance, in exercise of the powers conferred by section 2 of the Government Fees Act 1965.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.
The second is in the name of the Minister of Economy and Labour.
Minister.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY
2023–2027**

**STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2:
BUSINESS RETENTION INVESTMENT
PROMOTION 2023–2027 UPDATE**

Hon. Jason Hayward: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.
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 2: Business Retention and Investment Promotion 2023–2027 Update.

The Speaker: Thank you. That's all the papers and communications for this morning.

PETITIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

**STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS AND
JUNIOR MINISTERS**

The Speaker: We have four 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: Good morning, colleagues and the listening public.

ROYAL BERMUDA REGIMENT DEPLOYMENT TO JAMAICA—HURRICANE MELISSA RECOVERY SUPPORT

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to update this Honourable House on Bermuda's continued commitment to [support the people of Jamaica](#) following the catastrophic devastation caused by Hurricane Melissa.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members will recall that when Hurricane Melissa made landfall on 28 October 2025 as a Category 5 storm, it caused widespread destruction across Jamaica. More than 700,000 people were affected. Mr. Speaker, 27 communities were cut off, and more than 200,000 homes were destroyed or severely damaged. Critical infrastructure, including roads, electricity, and water systems, remain degraded as national authorities continue the long process of recovery and rebuilding.

Mr. Speaker, in the immediate aftermath of the storm, the Bermuda Government made a clear commitment to the Government and people of Jamaica that we would provide humanitarian assistance. I am pleased to advise this Honourable House that Bermuda has fulfilled that commitment.

Following reconnaissance conducted by the Royal Bermuda Regiment in November, and further engagement with the Jamaica Defence Force, Cabinet approved the deployment of up to 27 Royal Bermuda Regiment soldiers to Jamaica from 15 to 28 February 2026.

Mr. Speaker, the Regiment was embedded with the Engineer Regiment of the Jamaica Defence Force and also worked alongside the Guyana Defence Force, and contingents from the Cayman Islands and Turks and Caicos Islands, as part of a coordinated recovery effort. Their primary task was to repair roofs damaged by Hurricane Melissa in the Parish of St. Elizabeth, one of the areas most severely impacted by the storm. This work provided immediate, tangible relief to affected families and helped create the conditions necessary for sustained recovery.

Mr. Speaker, this deployment was deliberately structured to ensure that Bermuda's contribution was practical, focused, and aligned with Jamaica's identified priorities. The Jamaica Defence Force is leading and coordinating all projects, ensuring that the skills

and manpower provided by Bermuda were directed where they were most needed.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to note that all soldiers deployed on this mission volunteered to do so. These men and women stepped forward willingly to serve in another country where there is a need for humanitarian aid. They operated in field conditions and met strict pre-deployment requirements, including medical clearance and fitness standards. The Regiment was accommodated at Forward Operating Base Luana in St. Elizabeth, with logistical and life support provided by the Jamaica Defence Force to ensure that Bermuda's presence did not place additional strain on local resources.

Mr. Speaker, whilst this was a physically demanding deployment for all involved, it provided the opportunity to undertake a focused overseas operational mission. All deployed personnel had the opportunity to apply their existing specialist skills and further develop them through practical experience. The deployment also reinforced the strong relationship that the Royal Bermuda Regiment maintains with the Jamaica Defence Force and, with the additional personnel joining from the Cayman Islands and the Turks and Caicos Islands, the relationship with fellow British Overseas Territories.

Mr. Speaker, the total cost of the two-week deployment, approved by Cabinet, was up to \$241,385.00. This included transportation, equipment, supplies, and an operational allowance that reflected the demanding conditions under which our soldiers are serving.

Mr. Speaker, along with our National Disaster Coordinator, I visited our soldiers in Jamaica to see their progress first-hand and to witness the impact they were having in Jamaica. His Excellency, the Governor, also joined me on this visit. What I saw, Mr. Speaker, was a Bermuda contingent of eager, professional and organised soldiers who were making an immense impact on the lives of people in [the] St Elizabeth Parish.

Mr. Speaker, remarkably, our troops were erecting a new roof at a rate of every two days and were doing so with the utmost expertise and palpable enthusiasm. I could see true Bermudian craftsmanship on full display with astounding results. Added to the skill and speed with which our soldiers were working, it was clear to me that their morale was very high and that they were enjoying the opportunity to be of service to their fellow man. All of Bermuda ought to be proud of the efforts of our soldiers on this deployment, as I am.

Mr. Speaker, this mission represented more than a deployment. It was a demonstration of solidarity between small island countries that understand the realities of vulnerability to extreme weather events. By working with the Jamaica Defence Force and the contingents from Guyana, the Cayman Islands and the Turks and Caicos Islands, Bermuda was making a huge statement on the international stage about cooperation and collaboration amongst regional partners in times of distress and need.

Mr. Speaker, I invite you to note that a contingent from Ghana and Rwanda was also in Jamaica to provide support in the recovery efforts. Their presence demonstrated a wide-ranging response to Jamaica's plight and brought an even greater international flavour to the recovery efforts.

Bermuda understands that disaster recovery does not end when the headlines fade. The transition from emergency response to long-term rebuilding is often the most difficult phase. By deploying skilled and disciplined personnel to Jamaica, Bermuda contributed where the need remains real and where our capabilities could make a measurable difference.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to commend the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Duncan Simons, and his team for their preparations and planning to make this deployment a reality. I hasten to especially thank all members of the Royal Bermuda Regiment who volunteered for this deployment. Their willingness to serve beyond our shores reflects the professionalism, discipline, and spirit of service that this Honourable House has come to expect from the Regiment.

I assure this Honourable House that the efforts of the Royal Bermuda Regiment are definitely having a lasting impact on St. Elizabeth in particular, and Jamaica in general, and I am proud that our Government facilitated the deployment. Mr. Speaker, not only did our soldiers leave an indelible mark on Jamaica, the same could be said in reverse. Our soldiers left Jamaica with an enormous sense of pride and accomplishment in the knowledge that by the sweat of their brows and the labour of their limbs, they made a real difference in the lives of Jamaican citizens, and having earned their immeasurable respect. I have no doubt that our soldiers will recall their time in Jamaica for years to come and will do so with fondness and pride.

Mr. Speaker, the Greek philosopher Ennius in the 3rd century BC coined the phrase, *A sure friend is known when in difficulty*. Otherwise well known as, *A friend in need is a friend indeed*. So, Mr. Speaker, Bermuda and Jamaica are indeed friends, and in Jamaica's hour of need we have honoured that friendship. Bermuda made a promise to support the people of Jamaica following Melissa's onslaught and this deployment was the fulfilment of that promise.

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.

UNLOCKING IMPORTS: ADDRESSING INDUSTRY'S CALL TO DIVERSIFY IMPORTS

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning to update this Honourable House and the people of Bermuda on the [continued progress being made](#) by the Ministry of Home Affairs to address affordability and the cost of living in Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, let me first remind my Honourable House and colleagues that in November 2025, I tabled in this Honourable House The Affordable Bermuda Agenda, [Building a Strategy to Address] the Cost of Living report. This was indeed a reflection of the Government's commitment to address the cost of living and present to the people of Bermuda the specific actions that the Ministry of Home Affairs would take to reduce the cost of living for Bermudian households.

Mr. Speaker, as a backdrop, in March 2025, the Ministry undertook the collection of data from over 2,200 residents, who provided accounts of their experiences purchasing groceries. Many residents reported that the elevated cost of staple food items was significantly eroding their financial resources, leaving minimal disposable income and, in some cases, insufficient funds for household savings. The Ministry also engaged with stakeholders across the industry, notably wholesalers and retailers, who conveyed that attracting new international suppliers to a market of Bermuda's scale presented considerable challenges.

Their challenge, as presented to the Ministry was rooted in the fact that that US companies often regard Bermuda's import volumes as insufficient to warrant the attention in contrast to other larger jurisdictions or that they remain unaware of the business opportunities that the Bermudian market offers.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry heard and sought to address the supply chain dynamics and the implications of import-related costs that impact the price of goods before they reach the [consumer]. We also heard the recommendations emanating from the Cost-of-Living Summit [2025] and resolved to brainstorm and find [cost]-effective ways to diversify food sources and to help lower prices at the till.

Mr. Speaker, acting directly on the imports pillar of the Affordable Bermuda Agenda, the Ministry built a pathway for US suppliers to deepen their engagement in the Bermuda market through partnership with the US Consul General. At the Bermuda's Cost of Living Summit, the US Consul General Antoinette Hurtado took note of our challenges and met with the Ministry to offer support. The result was a pledged to provide greater support to Bermudian businesses with expanded market opportunities and introductions.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry explored and found a way to connect these US suppliers directly with Bermuda's greatest areas of needs through imports, beginning first with our essential good items. In December 2025, the US Consul General confirmed that her colleagues at the US Department of Commerce and the US Department of Agriculture [USDA] were in support and would host a virtual trade event featuring the

Bermuda market, giving American companies a direct platform to learn further about the opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, subsequently, on March 3, 2026, the US Department of Agriculture hosted a virtual trade event with more than 60 US businesses registered to participate. These businesses offered a mix of services ranging from supply chain warehousing and distribution services for food and beverage and the export of US agricultural products to international markets.

Mr. Speaker, the virtual trade event was moderated by Mr. Adam Shanks, Director of the International Trade Administration, US Department of Commerce and presentations given by Ms. Katherine Woody, a representative of the US Department of Agriculture's Foreign Agricultural Service [FAS] and Caribbean Basin Agricultural Trade Office [CBATO] in Miami.

Mr. Speaker, CBATO is the international agency arm of the US Department of Agriculture. Ms. Woody shared three main focus areas that support US businesses exporting food and agricultural products. These were:

1. Providing market intelligence that includes data and analysis of the opportunities for doing business in markets around the world.
2. Trade policy advocacy to expand and maintain market access for US food and agricultural products.
3. Trade promotion activities, including foreign market development and export assistance for US companies.

Mr. Speaker, during the session the US Consul General highlighted the strong economic relationship between the US and Bermuda and acknowledged the US as one of our largest trading partners and underscored the desire to maintain such ties.

Mr. Speaker, businesses were further informed about the market opportunities in Bermuda through presentations by the Bermuda Business Development Agency [BDA] and my colleague the Minister of Economy and Labour.

Mr. Speaker, BDA Managing Director Kendaree Burgess and Head of Business Development David Parker presented Bermuda's market profile, admitted as one of the highest per capita income markets globally, with currency at parity with the US dollar, a dependable landed-goods supply chain, and established trade links across the US, Canada and the UK. They also outlined the Bermuda's role as the structured point of connection and the agency's capacity to identify and advance commercially viable opportunities across sectors.

The session concluded with a presentation from the Minister of Economy and Labour offering US businesses a comprehensive overview of Bermuda's economic landscape and opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, during the forum I was pleased to share the objectives of the Ministry and the Affordable Bermuda Agenda and my desire to act on what the

wholesalers and retailers had told us, that they needed new international supply partners to diversify the import market and bring down costs for Bermudian households. We outlined the logistics case for Bermuda including direct container shipping from the US East Coast and transit times of two to five days from New York, New Jersey and Florida.

Also underscored during the presentation that we were supported by reputable port agents, cold chain infrastructure for perishables, less-than-container-load options, and a well-defined customs clearance process. Mr. Speaker, together, the Bermuda team shared that Bermuda is open for business.

Mr. Speaker, but the Ministry did not stop at the virtual forum. Yesterday, representatives from the USDA and FAS who assisted in facilitating the virtual forum came and visited the Island to engage directly with the local businesses and regulators of the import sector. They heard first-hand the challenges that the Ministry shared with them and further committed to future engagements to remove barriers for suppliers. As a result of the facilitated engagement, invitations to upcoming trade events, free of charge, was offered to Bermuda's market participants.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry accepts its role in project managing and facilitating new relationships in aid of our mandate to address costs. We affirm the road to systematically address cost in Bermuda and we also accept that it will not happen overnight, but we are resourceful, and we are holding an unwavering focus to deliver.

We are modernising our import processes, seeking to strengthen local competition, and removing the barriers that have kept new suppliers away. In short, Mr. Speaker, we took the concerns raised by the public and the private sector identified the challenges, and this Government built a bridge.

Mr. Speaker, the response from the United States businesses participating in the virtual trade event was notably positive and constructive. The Ministry believes that change is possible and affordability can be a reality. The Affordable Bermuda Agenda evidences a roadmap of how the Government ministries actualise through collaboration alongside stakeholder partners to deliver meaningful engagements. The forum and recent visit anchored the value of the work the Ministry is doing on behalf of the people of Bermuda. We are affirmed in our direction and no longer will accept the narrative that tell us that our size makes us powerless and unable to evolve. Brick by brick, Mr. Speaker, we are building the Bermuda that future generations will thank us for re-building.

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.

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

The Speaker: Good morning.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2023–2027

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: BUSINESS RETENTION INVESTMENT PROMOTION 2023–2027 UPDATE

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to continue reporting on Bermuda's Economic Development Strategy 2023–2027, following my previous report on Strategic Priority 1: Local and International Business Retention and Expansion. Today, I will speak on [Strategic Priority 2](#): Business Attraction and Investment Promotion.

Mr. Speaker, Strategic Priority 2 focuses on consistent, credible investment promotion and a smoother investor journey, supported by modern tools and fit-for purpose policy. Over the period, the BDA has improved how Bermuda is presented internationally by updating sector-specific marketing materials, developing pitch decks specific to priority industries, and progressing a redesigned website to make information easier to access. Public and private partners have also aligned messaging across investor engagements, supported by additional public relations capacity to extend reach and improve consistency.

To improve [conversion] and retention, the BDA is strengthening investor aftercare and building a directory of specialist service providers to enhance engagement in key jurisdictions. Taken together, these steps help ensure that contacts made in missions and conferences remain active, and that Bermuda remains top of mind with decision-makers.

Alongside stronger promotion, the BDA has focused on the practical factors that investors weigh [when] choosing where to locate. The work undertaken so far includes identifying and, importantly, effecting regulatory and policy improvements, including amendments to legislation related to benefit entities and trusts, driven by opportunities identified through industry working groups. The BDA has also bolstered stakeholder engagement and advanced changes that support innovation and the ease of doing business. This includes launching the Leadership Exchange, a new forum that intends to enhance engagement between the agency and the business leaders that it works with.

Indeed, a practical part of Strategic Priority 2 is using the credibility of firms already operating in Bermuda by engaging them as ambassadors in priority markets. This includes partnering with established networks and having industry representatives join the BDA on missions and conferences overseas.

Mr. Speaker, because modern investment promotion requires better use of technology to identify and pursue prospects, the BDA is rolling out [lead-]sourcing

technology and sector analysis. This is done in order to identify high-value prospects in target jurisdictions and make outreach more data-driven over time.

Once an investor chooses Bermuda, the experience they have next can determine whether they stay [and] reinvest, expand, and advocate for Bermuda, or whether they disengage. That is why Strategic Priority 2 also includes supporting a stronger investor experience by improving customer relationship management and structured follow-up. This is also one reason why over the period, the BDA held engagement sessions with those holding an Economic Investment and Residential Certificate [EIRC] as it sought to sustain relationships and encourage reinvestment.

Another important growth area is high net worth services and the private client ecosystem. Work continues on targeted promotion and relationship building with the professional intermediaries who drive this business, supported by public relations, thought leadership, and direct engagement with certificate holders, alongside communications on recent legislative improvements affecting beneficial ownership and trusts.

We are also targeting the professional channels through which this business is won and grown. Examples of this are law firms, private client advisers, accounting firms, and investment management firms. These serve to deepen relationships between on Island firms and their international counterparts in key markets, and to advance private wealth roundtables to expand Bermuda's presence and influence. This [purposeful], targeted promotion is designed to grow relationships where [decision]-makers are concentrated and where Bermuda's strengths are most relevant.

Mr. Speaker, in summary, Strategic Priority 2 is strengthening how Bermuda promotes investment by improving messaging, tools, relationships, and investor experience, while keeping policy and legislation aligned with opportunity and reputation.

This concludes my update on Strategic Priority 2 of the Economic Development Strategy [2023–2027].

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, the next Statement this morning is from the Minister of the Cabinet Office.
Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.
Good morning, listening audience.

BUILDING PERMIT AND SAFE BUILT UPDATE

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to inform this Honourable House of the [proactive steps being taken](#) by the Department of Planning to address the current backlog of building permit applications, ensuring that construction in Bermuda meets the highest

safety standards and adheres to our building code is a vital function of the government.

Mr. Speaker, as detailed in the budget brief, the Building Permit team processed 640 building permits and 323 permit revisions last year. However, the department is currently receiving a significant volume of applications, exceeding 1,200 annually. This demand, coupled with increasingly inconsistent application submissions that often require multiple resubmissions, has contributed to delays that frustrate both industry professionals and individual applicants. While local consultants, contracted to aid the overburdened staff, have provided some temporary relief, the department must avoid potential conflicts of interest that arise when local firms review their competitors' work.

Mr. Speaker, to resolve this in an impartial and efficient manner, the department has engaged the services of SAFEbuilt, LLC, an experienced overseas professional services firm. Following [thorough] research, SAFEbuilt has been contracted for a short period at a cost not to exceed \$60,000, with an option to engage them on an ad hoc basis as needed. SAFEbuilt is uniquely qualified for this role because of their:

- **Technical Expertise:** Founded in 1992, they employ approximately 1,700 professionals across 40 states, including engineers and architects.
- **System Compatibility:** They are highly proficient in "EnerGov," the same file management system and Customer Self Service [CSS] portal used by the Department of Planning.
- **Impartiality:** As an overseas firm, they provide independent technical capacity without the risk of local competitive influence.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to reassure this Honourable House and the public regarding the parameters of this engagement:

- **Authority Remains Local:** The Department of Planning remains the sole statutory decision-making authority under the Building Act 1988. SAFEbuilt will provide technical reviews, but final approval or rejection of permits remains the responsibility of the building officials here in Bermuda.
- **Protecting Local Jobs:** This engagement is a supplemental measure to tackle a specific backlog; no current staff positions will be impacted.

Mr. Speaker, this initiative is a short-term, targeted solution designed to stimulate the construction activity essential to our economy. By leveraging advanced electronic workflows and additional technical resources, we aim to restore reasonable permit timelines and strengthen public confidence in the permitting process.

Mr. Speaker, SAFEbuilt began their work on February 17, and in those three weeks since, they have processed 41 applications. Their average processing time from the date assigned to the date of permit

issuance is 6.4 days overall, and that pace decreases steadily as they learn the specifics of the Bermuda context. In the past seven days, the pace has decreased to about five days per application, with some being processed in as little as two days.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to providing further updates as the work progresses and applaud the team at Planning for taking these bold and creative steps to make real progress on the challenges in the department. By investing in the professional services of SAFEbuilt, we are providing the department with the extra help needed to eliminate the current permit queue. This means shorter wait times for every resident and developer on the Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, that brings us to a close of the Statements for this morning.

We will move on.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The Speaker: There are none.

PREMIER'S QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: Members, as you know, the second Friday of any month that we are sitting, there are always Premier's questions ahead of the regular questions. And for the Premier's questions we have a 30-minute period. And we will begin now.

The first question is from the Opposition Leader.

Opposition Leader, you have the floor.

Hon. Ben Smith: Good morning. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And good morning to colleagues and to the listening public.

QUESTION 1: CASINO GAMING

Hon. Ben Smith: Honourable Premier, your Government promised that casino gaming would diversify Bermuda's economy and support tourism. Yet after nearly a decade there is still not a single casino operating in Bermuda. You recently stated there is no appetite from the private sector to move the industry forward.

Will the Premier now admit that the Government's gaming policy has failed, yes or no?

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: First, Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome the Honourable Opposition Leader clearly to his place. I see that he has now tried to improve the standard of questioning, and I'm pleased about that.

Let me answer the question.

The policy . . . he is, first of all, mischaracterising what I said. What I said is that the current casinos which are licensed, the volume of those are not enough for the private sector to provide banking services. That is the reality of the situation. That is what has been stated. The government cannot bank the proceeds of gaming. Banks must [bank] the proceeds of gaming. This has not been an issue that has been unknown. This has been an issue that has been since the inception of gaming in 2014, and the legislation passed [by] the former Government.

That much being said, we are at least in a positive place where banks are willing to bank the proceeds of gaming. The question is the volume which is required. And unfortunately, the only casino that is currently licensed for operation does not have the volume that the private sector is willing to support. So, when there is a future opportunity for more casinos to come online, then we are hopeful. But this is just a practical reality where we find ourselves.

The Speaker: Supplementary or new question?

Hon. Ben Smith: Supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Hon. Ben Smith: So, with the Premier's answer, considering that there have been multiple announcements that we would see major developments from hotels, can the Premier explain why those promises were repeatedly made if the industry was never actually viable?

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what promises the Honourable Member is referring to. Let me state this again for the record. In 2014 the gaming legislation was passed [by] the former Government.

The gaming issues and banking issues have long preceded the fact of what we have done. So, if we want to talk about the introduction of a Casino Gaming Act without having the requisite things in place, I got it. But what we have tried to do is to make sure that we remain focused on trying to advance these particular matters as it is important.

Now, I will [say] for the Honourable Member, and I hope that he would listen, we had casinos and pledges from banks that they would bank the proceeds of gaming. That was the reason why we made those particular announcements at that point in time.

As has been stated in this House, the particular bank who did say that they were going to bank the proceeds of gaming went back and said they were no longer willing to do this due to the actions which took place underneath the former US administration where

there was increased scrutiny on matters related to correspondent banking relationships. That was their decision.

We now have a new administration in Washington, DC, who has removed some of the challenges that were posed towards correspondent banking based on reputational damage on both the domestic side and also on the international side. So that has removed the impediment for banks doing it and risking their correspondent banking relationships. But that has not gone on the other side insofar as whether or not it makes business sense for them to be able to balance because if they are going to implement such particular items, they have to form entire departments inside of their bank to manage the compliance risk, et cetera, because gaming is a high-risk matter. So, as I said, it is the volume.

We continue to work for this. We cannot speak for what the private sector can and cannot do. But what we are doing is making sure that we provide the requisite support for it to happen.

So, with our communications, with the offices that control the currency in the United States and others, we know that there is not a correspondent banking risk anymore. Now we just need to make sure that we have the local demand so that those particular matters can get up and running.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Second supplementary or new question?

Hon. Ben Smith: Second supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Hon. Ben Smith: So, Mr. Speaker, with all of the legislation and the regulatory bodies that have been put in place and the millions that have been spent, can the Honourable Premier let us know who he thinks now should be held accountable for us not having an operating casino in Bermuda?

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, if the Government is held accountable, then the Government will open its own casino. But the private sector are the people who are doing this. This is the reality.

So, I'll try for the Honourable Member again. The one casino that has been licensed does not have sufficient demand for the private sector to provide banking services. I do not know how many more times I can say that for the Honourable Member to get [it]. It does not have sufficient demand for the private sector to provide services. Therefore, additional casinos which are required. It is for the private sector to decide how to advance those relationships.

Hamilton Princess, because the banking partner that did say that they were going to provide casino gaming, backed away from that. That is their choice

and their decision. The Fairmont Southampton has a designated site order. In the future they may get a casino licence and that may provide the sufficient volume for the private sector to bank the industry. This is a reality of the situation where we are currently. And I hope the Honourable Member would understand that.

The Speaker: Second question?

QUESTION 2: PUBLIC EDUCATION REFORM

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Premier, fixing public education has been one of the central promises of your Government. Yet the most recent public school exam results show students performing below international averages. After nine years in Government, does the Premier accept that the education system is not improving fast enough, or at all?

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the first thing that I would say is that I have students in the public education system. So, I can speak very clearly to what takes place there because I visit public schools every day. Now here is the reality when we come to this. It is very important that we look around these particular measures.

The Minister released these test results in December as a measure of transparency. They are complex and it is difficult to make comparisons from a Bermuda perspective to an international perspective. In Bermuda, for Cambridge Checkpoint sometimes we take the exams earlier than other cohorts do in other schools around the world. That's number one. In other schools that's number one.

Number two, in Bermuda we use the Cambridge Checkpoint as a diagnostic to understand where things are. Whereas in other school systems around the world, they are voluntary. People choose which, or school systems choose which students get them. So, I understand the desire to use that as a comparator, but it's important that these things are kept in context.

Number [three], the measures in regard of the additional funding of which we put in place in education, the additional programmes of which we put in place in education, the various targeted measures. If we look at the various things, for instance at Harrington Sound when they were challenged with mathematics, and they brought in a special math programme, we see math attainment.

If we look at the increase in reading attainment that has happened throughout our primary schools because we have had an increased focus on reading, I can state that there are, without question, positive things that are happening in education.

So, does anyone want to have the headlines that we'll see from these particular test scores? But it is important that those particular matters are kept in

context. There are good and positive things happening in the public education system.

Here's what I can say, Mr. Speaker. Do we have challenges? Absolutely. There is not a single school system across the world that deals in public education that [doesn't] have challenges. But I will remind the Honourable Member that our public education system is a comprehensive system. We take every single student. We take students who are high-flyers. We take students who [require] learning support. We take students who may have, you know, other types of challenges, you know, Down syndrome, et cetera. We have all. Autism. We have every single student in our system. And our job is to make sure we care and prepare for those persons who . . .

And if you look at the recent graduation results, if you look at the success of which we are having, the reality is there are positive things that are happening inside of our public education system. This Government will not use our students as props or political tools. We are going to continue to press forward on education reform strengthening education and making the investments that are required. And that is what we're doing. That is what we're seeing. And that is what we're delivering.

The Speaker: Supplementary or new question?

Hon. Ben Smith: Supplementary.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes.

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Hon. Ben Smith: So, Mr. Speaker, the Government repeatedly said that education reform would deliver better outcomes for our students. Can the Premier explain why, after years of reform and over a billion dollars spent on education, student performances are still below international standards?

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member cannot speak to years below international standards. I just answered that question, how the Government of Bermuda uses Cambridge Checkpoint examinations which are different [from] other systems around the world. I've stated that. I know the Honourable Member does not listen well, clearly—

The Speaker: Well, well, well—

Hon. E. David Burt: —but that is the statement.

Hon. Ben Smith: Point of order, point of order.

The Speaker: Ah! Ah! Ah! Sit down, sit down, sit down.

Premier, we are not going to start the morning with that one.

Hon. E. David Burt: No problem, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: That . . . just—

Hon. E. David Burt: I would hope the Honourable Member would listen to the answers that are given and, rather than reading his prepared questions, respond to what was stated. The point is, Mr. Speaker—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: The point is, Mr. Speaker, that our system uses Cambridge Checkpoint as a diagnostic exam, where other systems select who takes the test and use different formats. So, what the Honourable Member is trying to do is make that comparison, and it is not the correct comparison to make.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we are moving through continued matters related to education reform. We are taking the steps to make sure that we get it right. And we all know that reforming a national system is complex. But I have complete confidence in the Minister of Education, the work of which she's doing to continue to progress ahead, the significant investments of which we are continuing to make in education, the significant investments of which we are doing with our teachers to make sure that we provide them additional tools to reduce their burden, the works of which I have spoken about in this House during the Budget Debate. Speaking about the work of which we are doing in education is what is happening.

So, the Honourable Member should take heed and actually take advantage of the information that is shared because we do not use Cambridge Checkpoint in the exact same way as other jurisdictions do. I know it makes for convenient political headlines. But the reality is it is important that we focus on how these are used in this context rather than making an inaccurate comparison, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Second supplementary or third question?

Hon. Ben Smith: Second supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Hon. Ben Smith: So, Mr. Speaker, Honourable Premier, after almost a decade the results that have just come out, the majority of them are under the “C” level, the actual letter “C” level. Can the Honourable Premier let us know whether parents should have confidence that the reform, which at present is paused, is actually going to lead to the results that the Premier and his team have said parents should see?

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I can unequivocally answer that question as yes. Because transformation is not an end point. It is a journey. It is the work of which we continue to do.

Yes, we have challenges in our system just like anyone does. But here is the reality, Mr. Speaker. It is not just the parents, it is not . . . sorry. It is not just the teachers. It is not just the Government. It is also the responsibility of parents and others to ensure that the work that is being sent home [with] their students is being done. That is the reason why through our additional initiatives, through Bermuda Forward, that the Minister of Education is working on to provide additional homework assistance to parents who may not be able to provide that reinforcement at home. These are things of which we are doing because it is important.

But I can state this. I have unequivocal confidence in the public education system. As someone who would not benefit from public education, I have unequivocal confidence in the public education system because I see it every day.

I see the homework that is brought home from my daughter. I see the additional enrichment activities that she gets to do. I see the work that is being done for my son. I see the success that we see throughout the school system. I see the work that is happening in co-curricular activities and others. There is significant work that is happening.

Do we have challenges? Absolutely. There is no public education system that is comprehensive that does not have challenges, but that does not state that the Government does not either make the investments which are necessary and required or continue to provide the support which is necessary and required.

But the important point is, Mr. Speaker, rather than trying to battle here with political points, I think it would be helpful for the Opposition to join in the mission of making sure that we speak to parents as well, that they have a responsibility to help to support teachers and others in dealing with matters inside of our school system as well. And it is good to see that more parents are coming on board, and I think it would be helpful that we all speak with one voice on that particular issue.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Third question?

QUESTION 3: TOURISM NUMBERS BELOW PRE-PANDEMIC LEVELS

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Premier, many of your competitors . . . many of our competitors across the Caribbean are reporting record tourism numbers, yet Bermuda's air arrivals remain below pre-pandemic levels. New hotel developments have been limited or extremely slow. After nine years in Government, does the Premier accept that Bermuda is falling behind its competitors in revitalising tourism?

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I do not accept that, because here's the thing. Remember, we can talk about other jurisdictions being mass tourism destinations. That is not what Bermuda is. We all know that Bermuda is a niche tourism destination. To make comparisons between mass tourism destinations and niche tourism destinations is not correct.

Number two, Mr. Speaker, it is important . . . and I love when the Opposition brings this up. You know the reason why? Because . . . and I will remind us. This Opposition opposed the expansion of hotel concessions from 10 [years] to 15 years and criticised the expansion that was given to Fairmont Southampton when in their very own St. Regis deal, Mr. Speaker, they offered 20 years of concessions. Yet, when we come back to what we tried to do, Mr. Speaker, they, my opinion cynically, opposed the expansion. When we look at other jurisdictions inside the region who are offering 20-[year] and 25-year concessions, yet we do not get the support of the Opposition for the expansion of which we've given.

However, Mr. Speaker, that has not deterred us. And what have we seen? We have seen significant expansion in hotels in Bermuda. We recognise that the Fairmont Southampton is set to open this year, which is going to provide additional hotel airlift. But notwithstanding, Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the fact that our largest hotel is open, the work that has happened means that visitor spending is still higher without our largest hotel open than it was prior to the pandemic, Mr. Speaker. That is a true measure of investment. And when that hotel does open this year, then it will even be higher, Mr. Speaker.

So, we are confident in the future. And the work that the Government is preparing is to make sure that our workforce is ready, that we have adequate labour supply and we are able to meet our visitor demands and expectations, not only—*not only*, Mr. Speaker—at the hotel, but also throughout the country. And that is the reason why we have seen significant expansion in tourism investment orders for attractions and other things to make sure that when those new visitors come, the country is ready, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, the Government has repeatedly talked about the fact that they were going to introduce gaming and that the concessions that were being given were going to be drivers for new tourism growth. Can the Premier explain why all of those drivers have not led to an increase in tourism to pre-pandemic levels, which were already low numbers?

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member is again reading his prepared questions and not listening to the answer that I just gave. So, I'll try it again, because he just said *not prior to pre-pandemic levels*. Visitor spending has exceeded pre-pandemic levels even without—even without, Mr. Speaker, even without—the opening of our largest hotel, Mr. Speaker. And so, with the reopening of our largest hotel, those matters will increase.

Now, here's the thing, Mr. Speaker. They can make as much noise as they want. But the facts are the facts. Visitor spending is higher than before the pandemic without—*without*, without—the opening of our largest hotel. And when our largest hotel reopens this year, which, of course, we recognise, Mr. Speaker, the Opposition came from this side on the work that was required to get it done, we will see those numbers improve even more.

The Speaker: Second supplementary?

Hon. Ben Smith: Second supplementary. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, with all other island destinations expanding hotels, increasing flights and attracting record visitor numbers, what specific action will this Government take that will actually increase tourism so that we can reach record numbers?

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the fallacy that the Opposition is trying to put forward that this country, which is not a massive tourism and mass tourism economy, is going to reach the numbers of the 1980s,—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: —is foolish.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Members, Members.

Hon. E. David Burt: Let's just say this. It's foolish, Mr. Speaker. It is . . . it is a complete nonsense. Bermuda is different. I don't want to go through the history of tourism, but if the Honourable Member needs me to go through the history of tourism for him, I can.

The Speaker: Just answer the question . . . just answer the question.

Hon. E. David Burt: So, I get it, because the reality, Mr. Speaker, is that after World War II there were only two tourism destinations in the world, Hawaii and Bermuda, who had the infrastructure to attract. When other jurisdictions started moving into mass tourism, that is the reason why we have seen a shift inside of our

economy. But that does not deter us from doing the work to attract high-value tourists, Mr. Speaker.

And so, with the reopening of our largest hotel, with the work that is going to take place at Elbow Beach, with the investments that we see in other projects, that is what is going to continue to make sure that we have sufficient tourism demand in this country, Mr. Speaker.

But the proof is not whether or not we have record numbers. The proof is whether or not we have record spending. And that is what the Government is focused on, attracting high value tourists. Because it's far different having massive all-inclusive resorts at \$200 a night, than having niche resorts that you're charging \$1,200 a night, Mr. Speaker. They are two different things, and that is the difference of what Bermuda is trying to make sure we put forward.

That is the national tourism plan that had support from both sides, and that, Mr. Speaker, is what this Government is executing, despite the pause that was brought to us with a once-in-a-century pandemic.

The Speaker: All right.

The Opposition Leader has used his limit of questions.

The next MP who has questions this morning is MP Swan.

Would you like to put your question?

QUESTION 1: CAPITAL INVESTMENT DISBURSEMENT 2026/27

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good morning.

Mr. Speaker, the 2026/27 budget included \$182 million in capital investment, described as the largest since 2008/09. Can the Honourable Premier outline where this money is going and how it will benefit Bermudians?

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for his question.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: And here is what's important, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Members, Members. Members.

Hon. E. David Burt: I know they don't want to hear Mr. Speaker, but I'm going to speak it anyway.

The Speaker: Speak to the Chair . . . speak to the Chair.

Hon. E. David Burt: Because, Mr. Speaker, \$182 million of capital investment is a statement of confidence in this country's future. And the key allocations, of course, because I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, you want to know the answer—

The Speaker: I'm listening . . . I'm listening.

Hon. E. David Burt: —and the public wants to know the answer, even if the Opposition does not, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, \$26.9 million for the Bermuda Housing Corporation, a record investment on top of years of record investment.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Just curious, he's obviously reading the answer. So, did he write the question as well?

[Laughter]

The Speaker: The—

Mr. Jarion Richardson: I thought he wasn't allowed to read without your permission, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member has responses on his . . . knowledge of his—

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Especially if you write the question, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I assume he was speaking to the knowledge of his own heads, or the Ministry.

An Hon. Member: Well done.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Go on.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: I want to make sure they're finished, Mr. Speaker, because it's their time that they're wasting, not my own.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker

The Speaker: Talk to the Chair.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I've got it

Mr. Speaker, \$14 million of investment into the Ministry of Education to upgrade public school facilities and invest in new technology, in addition, at the Bermuda College.

The money to start the Swing Bridge project in the east, which I'm sure the Honourable Member is well aware of and is looking forward to.

Mr. Speaker, \$8.8 million for the expansion of the Tynes Bay Waste-to-Energy Facility. Starting that major reformation project, which is a redevelopment project, which is something that's important.

Mr. Speaker, \$6.5 million for roads and dangerous walls. And we see the work that the Minister of Public Works continues to do there. (Happy birthday, Minister of Public Works and Environment, by the way.)

Mr. Speaker, \$3.5 million for new electric buses. Complete the transformation of our bus fleet to fully electric. And of course, Mr. Speaker, \$3 million for community improvement projects for MPs inside of this House, before projects of which they may get approved.

So, the reality is, Mr. Speaker, that we are continuing our increase in capital investment. And this is just another example of which this Government is doing to rebuild this country's infrastructure.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

And I declare my interest. I am one of four MPs directly impacted by this question. The Premier mentioned Swing Bridge. I believe it's \$9.4 million for the Swing Bridge. Can the Honourable Premier advise on the current status of this important project for the East End?

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister of Public Works and Environment advised this Honourable House on March 6 that requests for proposals for replacement of Swing Bridge are expected to be released in the coming weeks. Preparatory roadworks are already being sequenced along detour routes in St. George's and St. David's areas to support construction, staging and traffic diversion once the project begins. And the \$9.4 million allocation to this budget continues the Government's commitment to delivering this critical piece of infrastructure for the people of the East End.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary?

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I declare my interest, again, being a member of Parliament for constituency 2. The Premier mentioned \$3 million for community improvement projects. I would like to thank him for that, Mr. Speaker.

But more specifically, I'm concerned about the need for a dock and the disrepair at Ferry Reach, a popular camping site out there, Mr. Speaker, and also a possible site for emergency evacuation should an unfortunate occurrence happen out at that now industrial and community-based area. With that type of funding, can the Honourable Premier advise how Members of this Honourable House can access this pool of funding for improvements in their communities, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for [his] question. And it is important to know that this allocation of the budget is a key step in ensuring that communities benefit, and who will know better than local MPs about what is needed for their particular areas? Unlike the Opposition, who, you know, branded this as a *slush fund*, I'm assuming that they will not be making applications then because they don't support it.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order.

Hon. E. David Burt: In April, the Minister of Public Works and Environment—

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Imputing improper motive]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The Premier is imputing improper motive by implying that the Members on this side are not aware of what is going on in their communities. We just have concerns about how the Government will administer these funds in a fair and impartial manner so all communities can be served, regardless of the political leanings.

The Speaker: I think what he said was not that you aren't aware. He said that you weren't going to avail of the fund because you're opposed to the fund. I think that's what he said.

But I think . . . I'd expect that you are aware of what's going on in your community there, like all good MPs.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

The Speaker: [INAUDIBLE]

[Crosstalk]

Hon. E. David Burt: I got it. They are clearly having a challenge listening, so they could probably talk less and listen more, and then they would actually hear, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Ooh!

Hon. E. David Burt: So that in April, the Minister of Public Works and Environment will be circulating a form for MPs to complete. Clearly, the funding is not unlimited, so I'm not entirely certain about the Honourable Member's specific request for docks, et cetera. But we want to ensure that local project upgrades, such as upgrades to parks, benches, playgrounds, minor beautification projects, clearing of areas to make room for more community spaces, whether or not upgrades of fitness equipment, adding fitness equipment to various public parks, all the things that can happen.

This budget is a transformational budget, and we are going further than we have to ensure that the budget that is passed by this Honourable House will have a meaningful impact on everyday Bermudians from all of the various relief measures of which we have implemented. But also Mr. Speaker, in these small things that can improve the quality of life in our communities throughout the Island

The Speaker: Thank you.

The next Member who has questions this morning is MP Linda Smith.

MP L. Smith.

Ms. Linda Smith: Good morning, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

QUESTION 1: QUARRY AND ASPHALT PLANT

Ms. Linda Smith: And good morning to the Honourable Premier and the Honourable House.

I'm addressing this question to the Honourable Premier as I believe it's a matter that would be at the centre of Cabinet discussions and hopefully a priority given it affects a large capital project and important resources.

In November last year it was announced that the installation of the new asphalt plant would be delayed for three months to allow for an independent assessment on whether to sell the land that presently houses the quarry and move the quarry elsewhere. Three months have passed and we have not heard anything more.

Can we expect to hear that a decision has been made? And next step is, when can we expect that? And if the decision is made to sell the property, where will the quarry be moved?

Hon. E. David Burt: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the Honourable Member to rephrase her question because there has never ever been a discussion [about] the sale of government land. And so, I would hope the Honourable Member would rephrase her question because that is not correct, the question of which she's asked.

The Speaker: The Premier is asking you to just rephrase it.

Ms. Linda Smith: The question is, there was . . . it was announced that the quarry that the . . . that the receipt of the asphalt plant was being delayed so that there could be an independent assessment [about] moving the quarry.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, let me answer the question. The honourable . . . I think the Honourable Member posed the same question to the Minister during the particular debate. What I can inform the Member is that that particular study is ongoing. But there has never been a proposal and/or consideration to sell government land. It is important to note that there has never been such a consideration, et cetera. There were proposals that were put forward insofar as the expansion of a project, and a possible leasing of portions of that. The Minister will go ahead and review these particular matters and will update the House in due course.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Ms. Linda Smith: Yes, I do.

The asphalt plant is in Chattanooga, Tennessee right now. And my question is, How much are we incurring in extra costs for its safekeeping there instead of taking possession of the plant as scheduled?

Thank you.

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I do not have the precise [information] to answer that question because that would be, of course, the specific nature insofar as expenses for something that is not done. I think [the Honourable Member] may have posed that particular question in the Budget Debate. But if the Honourable Member wishes to pose that question very specifically to Minister Public Works, I'm certain the Minister of Public Works will answer.

The Speaker: Second supplementary?

No? Okay.

The next Member who has questions for you, Premier, is MP DeCouto.

Would you like to put your question?

QUESTION 1: MIDDLE EAST ADVISOR CONTRACT TERMS

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Good morning.

We know that the Honourable Premier was in the Middle East and that the Middle East advisor accompanied him. What are the terms or arrangements with that advisor such as pay and period of current contract?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker: You have—

Hon. E. David Burt: Sorry.

The Speaker: You have six seconds, if you can be quick.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Timer chimes]

The Speaker: Members that expires the time for the Premier's Questions. So, thank you for your input on that. We will now move to the regular Question Period, which is 60 minutes. And the first . . . there's one . . .

Minister of Home Affairs. There's a question for you under the . . . on your Statement this morning MP Fahy.

QUESTION PERIOD

Hon. Michael Fahy: Good morning again, Mr. Speaker.

QUESTION 1: UNLOCKING IMPORTS: ADDRESSING INDUSTRY'S CALL TO DIVERSIFY IMPORTS

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you, first of all to the Minister for her update. Any discussions that we can have with overseas potential partners are always helpful.

My first question is, Were there any commitments given to the Government or wholesale entities within Bermuda for selling goods to Bermuda at a decreased rate as a result of those meetings and virtual conferences? Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

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

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question proposed by the Honourable Shadow Minister. Those matters are of a commercial nature, so it would not be

appropriate for the Government to be intimately involved in the cost and the arrangement that has been secured. But what I can say is that there has been an introduction amongst the private sector participants.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARY

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

I'm not asking for specifics. I'm asking if the Minister can confirm whether any commitments have been given to the Government or wholesalers given that they were invited. I think if we are going to be talking about reducing the cost of living, I would hope that the Ministry would at least ask questions of those individuals invited to see if commitments were made—

An Hon. Member: Can't hear you.

Hon. Michael Fahy: —to see if these introductions are in fact successful. So perhaps the Minister would reconsider it.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael Fahy: Sorry. Thank you. Thank you, Member.

So, the question again is, Will the Minister at least consider gathering data from those individuals in terms . . . who attended those conferences as to whether commitments have been made. Again, not looking for specifics of commercial arrangements.

The Speaker: Minister.

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

Maybe the . . . the Honourable Member seems to suggest that the Government would be able to have a commitment amongst private sector participants. The Government's role and the Ministry's role, in particular, was to facilitate an introduction, noting the concerns that the wholesalers and retailers, the private sector, expressed to the Government. We are managing the legislative framework, the policy. That's the Government role. As to private sector matters, I feel like I've been invited to learn more about. But the reality is that they were pleased to be able to have unlocked conversations and access that they ordinarily would not have had and shared to the Government that they did not have access to. And so, through those introductions and through facilitating new relationships lower cost is the result.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Hon. Michael Fahy: No, second question, please, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second question.

**QUESTION 2: UNLOCKING IMPORTS:
ADDRESSING INDUSTRY'S CALL TO
DIVERSIFY IMPORTS**

Hon. Michael Fahy: Can the Minister share whether or not any specific additional shipping routes were proposed at any of these conferences as a result of the introductions through the various US Government departments that she made reference to in her Statement? Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
The subject and specific details are included in my Ministerial Statement were to goods. So those who sell goods, those who sell goods based in the US and those who sell goods in Bermuda. Nothing to do with shipping.

The Speaker: Okay.
Supplementary or new question?

**QUESTION 3: UNLOCKING IMPORTS:
ADDRESSING INDUSTRY'S CALL TO
DIVERSIFY IMPORTS**

Hon. Michael Fahy: New question.
Mr. Speaker, reference was made in the Minister's Statement as to specific barriers to trade with Bermuda. Can the Minister share if there have been any tangible results or suggestions on how those specific barriers to trade can be removed and what are they?
Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
The content of the Ministerial Statement spoke to the concerns regarding the retailers and the wholesalers having access to relationships in the US. And so that was a barrier that was determined and shared with the Government. And the Statement sought to clarify a way that the Ministry has begun to unlock those barriers to introductions to US-based entities that they ordinarily . . . and have not . . . and shared with the Government that they did not have access to.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary?

Hon. Michael Fahy: No, that's all, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you. Okay.
Members, that brings us to the end of the Question Period for this morning. We now move on.

**CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY
SPEECHES**

The Speaker: Would any Member wish to make a contribution?
MP King.

Mr. Robert King: Yes, good morning, Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker: Good morning.

Mr. Robert King: —and Members of this Honourable House and the listening public.
I express condolences to the family of Shirley James, the wife of former Finance Minister, Dr. Clarence James—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Robert King: I'll associate the House.

The Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Robert King: [Mrs. James] passed earlier this week. So, thoughts and prayers from the House to the family. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Does any other Member . . . Okay.
You look like you are holding hands on the same microphone.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: You want to share the three minutes?
Minister, Minister of Works. You have your three minutes.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Happy birthday.

The Speaker: Seeing that it is your birthday . . . seeing that he is the birthday boy, he gets to go.

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you very much.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: Yes, yes. It's the birthday, exactly.
Mr. Speaker, I will be very quick. I just wanted to send congratulations . . . commendation—

The Speaker: Not to yourself?

Hon. Jache Adams: Not to myself, no.

[Laughter]

Hon. Jache Adams: Commendation to . . . I had the good fortune of attending the West Pembroke School—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: I am going to associate Minister Darrell and the Premier, and I think other colleagues did attend as well.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: Yes, the Premier's constituency, adjacent to mine.

[Laughter]

Hon. Jache Adams: But [I] just wanted to say that I did have the good fortune to attend the event and wanted to send a good congratulations to all of the students, all of the teachers, and all of the parents, and anyone who had any involvement in what I would consider a first-class event. I was certainly entertained and I appreciated the entire show. Thank you, and I shall associate the entire House. Thank you.

The Speaker: Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

MP Darrell, Minister Darrell, rather.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to rise this morning to congratulate a netball team. And I know in the last day of meeting we did have an extensive debate on sport. So, it is only appropriate that I congratulate the Tigers Netball Team and they are coached by long-time coach, Mr. Anthony Mouchette, who's a constituent of mine. And I read this morning with delight that they have won the league multiple times in a row. But also with sadness that they said that they will be breaking up after this season. And that has been a powerhouse. I have many former students and a few friends who actually played on that team. And I had the [good fortune] to be able to go down there a few times and watch those ladies in action.

So, I want to congratulate them on their league title. I think they are back-to-back champions and [won] multiple championships over the years. As well to a great coach, Mr. Anthony Mouchette. He says that he will be continuing in coaching but just not with that particular team.

Also, congratulations to one of the . . . I think she's the captain of the national team for netball, Ms. Debré Evans and her team, Storm, who finished second in the league. Anytime you go by Bernard Park, Mr. Speaker, on a Saturday, parking is difficult, but we allow it because, as we say, *sport matters*. And to see those young ladies from the peewee level all the way up to some very experienced netball players, it is good to see a couple of mates of mine. We had the fortune

of playing in the commercial summer league one time. And, you know, you thought it would be easy just running around and throwing a ball back and forth, but it takes a lot of athletic skill, a lot of ability. And, you know, kudos to what these ladies in the Bermuda Netball Association do.

And on another note, we know the national team has gotten back into international play, so we wish them well in their endeavours as they go forward. So, just a shout-out to female sport in this country and I'll call it the national female sport of netball.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Does any other Member . . .

MP Swan, would you like your three minutes?

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I certainly would like to be associated with the condolences expressed to the family of Ms. Shirley James, who I consider a mentor and a dear friend throughout my life at Port Royal. She was the longest-serving chairman of the Bermuda Government Port Royal Golf Course. For 20 years she was the chairman of that golf course. And she also was the deputy chairman of the St. George's Golf Club from 1985 until sometime in the 1990s, where I served as its general manager and golf professional.

Ms. James was a very celebrated lady in her own right as a nurse, also as an artist, but she was a trailblazer as a chairman of the board. She also served as president, I believe of Mid Ocean Club as well. And during her tenure when I used to run golf tournaments for the Bermuda Department of Tourism, she opened up her home. I used to always have cocktails in a Bermuda home. And she said, *Kim, I love entertaining you. Our home is your home whenever you have events.*

So, I used to get my caterer to have the events down there in her property in Verdmont and many a visitor coming to this Island had been made to feel welcome on our shores because of her. She represented Bermuda in the Kitty Michael [Golf Invitational] tournament, which still goes on. I think she was one of the early participants in that event which also takes Bermudian women golfers overseas to participate.

In all the events that I organised on behalf of the Bermuda Government I always had a Bermuda component where Bermudians participated alongside with visitors. As I mentioned, she used to host them in her house. But she and the late Terry Brennan were persons I could always count on to interact with these visitors from overseas, be part of the hospitality. That was the part of building relationships that helped make Bermuda a very strong jurisdiction and help build and cement long-term relationships. Many events that we cultivated in the early 1980s still continue today.

As was the case up at Pompano this weekend. I shift gears to thank the Pompano not only for their 70 years of operation, but also for being a leader in sports tourism. The Ladies [Pro-Am] Golf [Classic] has taken

place, a final day today, as an event that carried on from what I started in the 1980s, along with Ms. James who used to play then and other ladies. So, I just wanted to tie in that great event that the Pompano has carried forward along with other events that they do up there. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Timer chimes]

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

Minister, MP . . . the gentleman jumped behind you, MP.

MP Lister, you have your three minutes.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Couldn't get the name out there, Mr. Speaker?

[Laughter]

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

I stand this morning . . . first, on a sad note I would like to send condolences to the family of a constituent of mine, Mr. Elias Rigo, of Second Avenue Warwick. When I first was elected, or canvassing to be elected in 2017 election, Mr. Speaker, I came upon Mr. Rigo in his house and, you know, we had a chat. And he asked, *Is Eugene Lister from Somerset your grandpa?* And I said, Yes. So, he immediately made a connection, and he was able to recall some moments of knowing my grandfather. So, you know, that family connection was there. But it is sad to hear that he has passed away. And again, I would just like to send condolences to his family.

Mr. Speaker, on a lighter note, I would like to . . . last evening I had to privilege along with the Minister of Housing (who's not in at the moment) and also the Minister of Education, we attended the Science Fair at the Bermuda Institute. And, Mr. Speaker, first of all, it was a well-attended Science Fair. Some great projects. But it took me back to my time as an [alumnus] of the Bermuda Institute and remembering when I did a science [project] back then and seeing how far they have come along. Because what the theme was this year was "Inventions Over the Years." So, what they did was if you were doing a science [on] the telephone, from the original invention of telephone to what we have nowadays, or the computer or bikes and things like that. So, it showed how inventions had transformed and had gotten better over the years.

So, I thought it was very interesting. But what really stood out to me, Mr. Speaker, is that one exhibit which I had to ask one of the teachers [about], they had a gas mask that was used in one of the world wars. And then they had an old diving helmet that [was] used and a bed pan back in the old days [that] they used to heat up to put on the beds. So, I was inquisitive and I asked the teacher, *[Are] these the students' . . . The students did not make these exhibits, [did they]? She said, No, persons in the community, when they found out what*

was happening, they actually donated some of these exhibits to be on display. So, I was surprised to see that. There was even Mobylette from 60, 70 years ago that people donated to be on display. So, I want to give kudos to the teachers and the students of the Science Fair.

And lastly, Mr. Speaker, I will declare my interests, I would like to recognise my wife, Mrs. Alicia Lister, who earlier this week she was recognised as a Condé Nast top travel specialist for the second year in a row.

An Hon. Member: Hey!

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: She won it last year and . . . I will associate the whole House, Mr. Speaker. She was selected by the magazine—

An Hon. Member: You are going to get some brownie points.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: —as one of the world's most trusted experts for designing exceptional travel experiences. And at present, she is the only Bermudian to hold that title. So, I would like to get say congratulations to my wife on being acknowledged by Condé Nast as a top travel specialist.

[Timer chimes]

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

The Speaker: Thank you.

Minister Rabain, would you you're your three minutes?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go right ahead.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, I would like for the House to say congratulations to Reverend Dr. Wendell Christopher who retired from St. Philip AME Church as my pastor.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: And I associate the Premier. I associate the whole House with these comments, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Reverend Christopher left Bermuda shores in the 1960s and was known as, according to him as he told me, was known as the "Triple Threat" as he pastored in Maryland, Virginia and the

DC area. [He] known as a triple threat because he could preach, he could sing, and he could pray with conviction that could move a mountain.

And [at] 22, Mr. Speaker, Reverend Christopher did return to our shores and took up as the reverend at my church, that little church by the Sound, St. Philip AME Church down in Devil's Hole. He preached with conviction. Again, brought that double threat to our congregation. And I worked particularly close with him over these last few months as . . . we did his last Men's Day celebration at St. Philip. And so, we had some events put on and I was the chairman of those events. And so, I was honoured that he actually asked me to chair those. And so, we did have a good time and had a really, really excellent time working with him and the men of St. Philip. So, I just wanted to say congratulations to him and wish him well in his retirement and just thank him for showing up when he is needed. He is always known as compassionate. He is always known as someone who can, you know, really raise the spirit when things are not looking as good as you would like for them to look.

So, Mr. Speaker, I just want to congratulate him in his well-earned retirement as he takes off after some 60-odd years of pastoring in the AME faith, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member. . . MP Dill.

Rev. Dr. Emilygail A. Dill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And good morning to you and our listening audience.

I would like to take this opportunity this morning to stand and congratulate the Sandys Parish Council. And I associate MP Lister, [MP] Simmons and all of the House. They did an outstanding job last night as you can agree as you were present. They had what was called "Sandys Speaks," and it was a time of discussion, real talk, real storeys, real community. And I just want to congratulate them from beginning to end. They set the atmosphere. Invited the community in and they had two very powerful discussions on the cost of living and antisocial behaviour in the community.

I was especially impressed by the young men who were a part of the antisocial discussion. Their candidness as they shared their journey, a few of them who had been formerly incarcerated, and spoke about the things that it had taken to make them . . . to help them to make a change in their lives and the commitment that they have made to go out in the community and inspire others to make positive changes and make choices that will avail them of success.

So, I just want to thank once again the Sandys Parish Council for the work that they are doing and to the community, the Sandys community, for supporting them. Thank you.

The Speaker: Yes.

MP Simmons, you have your three minutes, sir.

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good morning colleagues—

The Speaker: Good morning.

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: —and good morning Bermuda.

I rise today to congratulate the new student principal of Dalton E Tucker Primary, Ms. Capree Smith, for the second year in a row Dalton E. Tucker Primary in an effort to help educate the children about the electoral process, have had student principal elections. Last year the Honourable Member from constituency 32 and I had the opportunity to be there for most of the day and enjoy the proceedings. And it was an exciting thing to watch because you have young people taking a big risk to get up in front of their colleagues and put their name out there to be considered. To have to speak in front of your colleagues and have to be considered, and that is something that is very, very brave, very bold and very, very important for all of us to see in our young people. I commend all of the participants. There were four other candidates. Ms. Smith got 61 per cent of the vote, almost Jamahl Simmons numbers. But they can work on it.

[Laughter]

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: But I am very honoured and pleased to be able to see this process and I wish Ms. Capree Smith all the best and all those who vied against her to keep persevering. The first time is not always the best time, but better days are ahead. Thank you. Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time? None?

Oh, Government Whip, are your rising to give a contribution?

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: Are you rising to give a contribution?

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Thank you. Thank you. A lady's help.

Good morning, Mr. Speaker, and colleagues and the radio listening audience.

Mr. Speaker, I rise with sadness to have to express condolences to three families. Two of them are from my constituency and another one is my friend, but I'll go through them individually. The first one is Mr. Philip Charles Smith, a constituent of mine of Khyber Heights in Warwick. He was commonly known as just "P." He was a very simple-minded sort of person. Not

so much simple-minded, but a simple living person, if I could use that. That term, that's what I meant.

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: That's what I meant. And he was he was from the earth, if I could also use that term. So, I certainly want to express condolences to his wife, Gina, a very lovely young lady herself. And I know P will be missed. And I want to associate MP Bean on that one as well because I believe he was actually from Bailey's Bay. So, I'm sure that's where you where you know him.

Mr. Speaker, the second one is another constituent of mine, Mr. Sheldon Darrell, a very [well] known, popular person in the Warwick area. And I certainly want to express condolences to his sister who I certainly know looked after him in his later years. And he also will be missed as well.

The third family that I wish to express condolences for is not a member of my constituency, but a friend of mine, a very close friend of mine, Mr. Dennis Burrows, who passed recently. Dennis was what I would describe as a real friend and a master craftsman. He knew how to do things. He's made a couple of things for me in my house. So, I know the quality of work that he does. And I certainly want to express condolences to his wife, Cheryl, and the rest of the family.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

None other.

Before we move on, I would just like to add my remarks to some that were expressed already. Government Whip, your last condolences to the Burrows family, I would like to be associated with that. I have known Mr. Burrows and his wife for many years. They do live in the West End these days. So, thank you for recognising them.

And I would also like to ask the House to send the rating and Government whip your last condolences to the Perinchief family on the loss of their mother, Ms. Gladys Perinchief, who is actually being funeralised right now as we sit here this morning. But she leaves her daughter, Delma, her daughters, Delma and Sherri-Lynn, who was a classmate of mine in primary school. So, I've known the family for a long, long time. And my condolences have already been expressed to them personally, but I would just like to acknowledge it here as I am not able to attend the funeral being I'm sitting here with you all this morning. Thank you.

We now move on the next item on the Order Paper this morning.

MATTERS OF PRIVILEGE

The Speaker: There are none.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

NOTICE OF MOTION 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: That now brings us to the reason we are here today and in the main is to deal with the resumption of the Committee of Supply for the consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27.

For the listening audience, again, whenever we are doing the Budget Debate it is done in Committee rather than the House. And there are eight hours allotted for that and those eight hours are split between whichever ministries are being debated. Today we have the first five of those eight hours [with] the Ministry of National Security and the remaining three will be for the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities.

Once we are in Committee the Speaker is out of the Chambers for that period of time and the House will be in the hands of a Panel of Chairs, [being] led by the Deputy Speaker. And this morning the first person in the Chair this morning will be the Deputy Speaker.

We now call on the Premier to move us into Committee.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker.

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

The Speaker: Are there any objections to that?

There are none.

Deputy [Speaker].

House in Committee at 11:29 am

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2026/27

The Chairman: Good morning, Members.

We are now in Committee of Supply to consider the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27. Currently, we will be considering the heads that fall under the Ministry of National Security, Heads 83, 67, 12, 45 and 88.

I call on their respective Minister to begin.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes, I'm here Madam Chairman.

MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, Good morning.

I move the following heads, Head 83; Ministry of National Security, Headquarters, Head 6, which is Defence; Head 7, which is the Police; Head 12, which is Customs; Head 45 is Fire Services; and [Head] 88 is National Drug Control.

The Chairman: Members, it has been moved that Heads 83, 6, 7, 12, 45 and 88 be considered.

Are there any objections to that?

There are none.

Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: As we get started, Madam Chairman, can you inform the public how long this debate will be?

The Chairman: I certainly can, Minister.

This debate has been scheduled for five hours. So, I'm expecting a very robust debate, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, thank you much.

HEAD 83—MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY HEADQUARTERS

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: It gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 83, the Ministry of National Security found on pages B-264 to B-267 of the Budget Book.

Mandate

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the mandate of the Ministry of National Security is, *Working together to keep you safe*.

An Hon. Member: We get it. Say it again.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Working together to keep you safe.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, a total of \$5,315,000 has been allocated for this head which represents an increase of \$349,173 from the previous year and constitutes 4 per cent of the original budget allocated for the Ministry as a whole. The increase reflects the funding required for various resources, projects and initiatives the department will be implementing such as the legal fees for the Police Complaints Authority, Cybersecurity Training, Software Management System, and further work on ITU [International Intercommunication Union] Operation Centre and the Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation Tabletop Exercises.

The department will also be filling three posts to provide critical resources in cybersecurity and Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation [DRRM]. Further details are provided in the business unit cost analysis.

Madam Chairman, on page B-265 of the General Summary you will note that there are four business units within the Ministry Headquarters. You will note that the Parole Board and the Treatment of Offenders Board are listed but this is for comparative reasons only as they both were transferred to the Ministry of Justice in 2024.

The estimate for business unit 93000 for Administration is \$3,090,000, an increase of \$293,000, or 10 per cent. This comprises an increase of \$155,534 towards salary increases, salary for the political aid, and the salary differential for staff transferring in from another post. Madam Chairman, \$80,000 is allocated towards the legal fees for the Police Complaints Authority and \$57,456 to cover training tabletop exercises.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the estimate for business unit 93004 for the Police Complaints Authority is \$32,000, an increase of \$1,000, or 3 per cent to cover website maintenance costs.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Straight?

The Chairman: Yes. Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The estimate for business unit 93007 for the Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation Team is \$756,000, Madam Chairman, \$334,000, or 79 per cent increase over the 2025/26 financial year. The increase is to fund the following:

- \$106,114 to cover one mitigation specialist post;

- \$12,152 to cover salary and salary grade increases;
- \$19,859 for conferences and tabletop exercises; and
- \$195,875 for software to enhance disaster tracking and an alert software.

Madam Chairman, business unit 93008 relates to the Gang Violence Reduction Programme with an estimate for the financial year 2026/27 of \$1,437,000. This represents a \$279,000, or 16 per cent decrease over the financial year 2025/26. The decrease is a result of the net effect of an increase of \$140,153 towards staffing. Dedicated funding towards grants of \$150,000, a decrease of \$30,000 towards safe house and relocation fees, and a decrease of \$539,153 from marketing education bursaries, redemption and summer placement programmes.

Subjective Analysis

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the subjective analysis of current account estimates of the Ministry of National Security is found on page B-266. I will highlight the material object code increases and decreases.

Salaries increased by \$3,000. This is attributable to the net effect of the salary increases and the decrease in funding for the relief administrator post.

Training increased by \$55,000 to accommodate increased cybersecurity training for tabletop exercises and anti-money laundering.

Travel expenses are decreased by \$3,000 as the Ministry aims to take strategic advantage of online events.

There is an uplift of \$20,000 for communications to increase the Ministry's anti-violence awareness messaging.

A decrease of \$267,000 for professional services is the net effect of an increase of \$67,368 towards cybersecurity assessments.

A decrease of \$25,000 in respect of part-time teachers for the Uniformed Services Programme who will no longer be required due to a restructure of the programme development.

And a decrease of \$173,332 in the Gang Violence Reduction Team reflecting a reprioritisation of resources to support the continued development and maturation of the National Violence Reduction Strategy.

Finally, Madam Chairman, other expenses increased by \$550,000. This is largely due to the increased funding as follows:

- \$230,000 for cybersecurity subscriptions and the ITU Operation Centre;
- \$200,000 for disaster tracking software and emergency alert system licence fees; and
- \$120,000 towards critical anti-money laundering training and additional resources required for the preparation for the Mutual Evaluation.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, as shown on page C-14, the Ministry received \$1,265,000 for capital acquisitions. Madam Chairman, \$15,000 will be used to purchase satellite phones for emergency situations. The Public Safety Radio Network project requires upgrades and repairs and a budget of \$177,782 has been allocated.

Madam Chairman, the Ministry continues to advance the Island-wide CCTV network as part of its public safety strategy. The initial project comprising of 130 camera sites was completed in May 2025, with work now progressing on network expansion of 31 camera sites. In the 2026/27 fiscal year, funding will support the completion of outstanding contractual items and the integration of supporting infrastructure to ensure the system operates as a fully integrated public safety asset.

Madam Chairman, the Ministry has commenced preparatory works for the implementation of the automated speed and licence plate recognition (or LPR, as it's commonly known), [a] camera enforcement system to strengthen road safety, including civil engineering works, the supply of poles, and installation of roadside infrastructure to support the speeding and LPR camera deployments. In the 2026/27 fiscal year, the Ministry will continue advancing the technical legislative and operational requirements necessary for the system's full deployment. Funding of \$1,072,218 has been allocated to CCTV and the automated speed and licence plate recognition camera enforcement system projects.

Madam Chairman, as shown on page B-266, the department's decrease in one full-time equivalent reflects the decreased need of a relief post due to a vacant administrative post being filled.

Performance Measures by Business Unit

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, I'm pleased to report the outcomes of the department's forecasted performance measures for fiscal year 2025/26. These are found on page B-267.

Business Unit 93000, Administration

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, this business unit is responsible for providing support to the departments in the form of policy development, project management, financial oversight, and cybersecurity governance. The Cybersecurity Team manages the development and implementation of critical safety policies. The Ministry will conduct recruitment for three posts to strengthen national defence efforts. The National Cybersecurity Unit is scheduled to complete several key strategic milestones during the current fiscal year. The critical national information infrastructure designation and the critical national information

infrastructure regulations are expected to be finalised and presented shortly.

The National Cybersecurity Unit website will reach full completion to enhance public accessibility and digital communication. The National Cybersecurity Unit will implement the first version of the threat intelligence platform to provide proactive defence against emerging risk.

The Ministry finalised the updated information systems risk management programme policy, which is now progressing through the established review and approval process including consideration by the Cabinet Cybersecurity Committee and approval by the head of the public service. The Ministry conducted monthly meetings both in a formal and informal setting with its heads of departments and DEOD [Department of Employee and Organizational Development] Manager. The formal meetings were held to provide heads of departments with pertinent information that included updates from the public service executive, updates on the status of Cabinet memoranda, DEOD updates primarily around recruitment and the status of the exercises, financial updates relating to budget year-end and procurement.

In addition, the department has provided updates on the major activities in their respective departments. The informal meetings were designed to encourage an exchange of ideas and brainstorming in a relaxed setting on any topic.

Business Unit 93007, Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation Team [DRRM] is responsible for the oversight of stakeholder disaster recovery plans and the coordination of our agencies before, during and after national emergencies.

To strengthen these efforts, the team is fully funded for the national disaster coordinator and the national events coordinator positions. Additionally, the department is filling a new mitigation specialist post to provide critical resources for national resilience.

Madam Chairman, the Disaster Risk and Reduction Mitigation Team is scheduled to complete several key milestones to enhance Bermuda's operational readiness and legislative framework. National Risk Register, Phase 2 of the National Risk Register is set to be completed in Q2 of the 2026/27 financial year, delivering a validated national risk profile to inform government-wide planning and budget prioritisation.

Legislative Modernisation

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The Ministry continues to advance legislative modernisation in collaboration with policy analysts and legislative drafters to clarify disaster declaration authority and align statutory frameworks with existing executive powers.

Public Safety Radio Network

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Software modernisation has been successfully completed improving system stability and operational resilience. The Ministry will now advance hardware replacement and redundancy enhancements to ensure full communications continuity especially during high-impact events.

Community Preparedness and Response

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, weather monitoring activities continue throughout the Atlantic hurricane season with the team maintaining active situational awareness and providing timely updates to leadership. The team also contributed to the updating and development of key operational documents including the EMO procedural guides. Shelter readiness assessments were completed in collaboration with key agencies further reinforcing Bermuda's emergency posture.

Madam Chairman, to strengthen operational readiness across government and community partners, the DRRM Team conducted extensive hurricane season preparedness activities. This included engagement with government agencies to verify hurricane response inventories, inspections of hardware store supply chains to confirm capacity under disaster scenarios, and consultations with telecommunications infrastructure managers to identify vulnerabilities and strengthen response plans. The team also worked directly with stakeholders responsible for road clearing and tree cutting operations ensuring these critical recovery resources were coordinated and prepared.

Madam Chairman, I need not remind my colleagues that Bermuda faced off against three unusually late storms in October 2025 as the active hurricane season had come to a close. Hurricane Humberto and Hurricane Emelda, both Category 2 storms, affected the Island at the start of the month within 12 hours of each other. Hurricane Melissa book-ended October when it hit Bermuda as a shadow of the storm that decimated the Caribbean, particularly Jamaica.

During all of these storms and the ones that did not reach hurricane strength, the DRRM Team played a vital role in organising and coordinating the various agencies in preparing for their arrival, and in the case of Humberto and Emelda, the restoration thereafter. The DRRM Team once again performed their role with expertise, discipline and thorough preparation and planning, all of which helped to mitigate the impact of the storms. These weather events reminded us of the value of having a well-trained, well-organised and knowledgeable DRRM Team. Their continued efforts bode well for our country in times of disaster, rather natural or man-made.

Madam Chairman, stakeholder engagement remained a cornerstone of our DRRM Team operations. The team participated actively in numerous

forums, including port security meetings focused on maritime and infrastructure vulnerabilities, supply chain meetings to ensure critical goods continuity during disasters, and public health preparedness meetings aimed at strengthening the health sector's resilience to emergencies.

Madam Chairman, the DRRM Team remains at the front line of national safety through active engagement and rapid response.

Inter-Agency Coordination

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The DRRM Unit will continue structured tabletop exercises alongside the facilitation of MAGIC (that stands for Multi-Agency Gold Incident Command) training to enhance readiness at both operational and executive levels. The tabletop exercises will test mass evacuation procedures for a cruise ship incident, a ferry reach evacuation scenario, a strategic level cyber incident, and an aircraft crash response. Each exercise will assess inter-agency coordination, decision-making, and emergency plan effectiveness producing formal after-action reports and improvement plans to enhance national resilience and ensure Bermuda's disaster response framework remains tested and robust.

Infrastructure Recovery

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The team coordinates stakeholders in the rapid repair and restoration of the public safety radio network following incidents such as hurricanes.

Hurricanes Resilience

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Ongoing activities include engagement with government agencies to verify response inventories, analysis of hardware store supply chains, and shelter readiness assessments.

Madam Chairman, in summary the Disaster Risk Reduction Mitigation Team demonstrated a commitment to national resilience, operational excellence, legislative modernisation, stakeholder collaboration, and international best practise alignment. Through disaster preparedness activities, legislative support, stakeholder engagement, operational support, infrastructure maintenance, and strategic research the team significantly advanced Bermuda's disaster risk reduction objectives and strengthened its national emergency management framework.

Business Unit 93008, Violence Reduction Team

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Violence Reduction Team continues to serve as a central pillar of Bermuda's violence prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation efforts under the National Violence Reduction Strategy. The team remains focused on

disrupting cycles of violence, strengthening protective factors for young people, and creating structured pathways towards stability, education and employment. Through early intervention programmes school engagement initiatives, workforce development opportunities, and crisis response services, the Violence Reduction Team continues to deliver measurable outcomes that contribute to community safety and long-term social stability.

Madam Chairman, early intervention remains a critical component of the team's work. The "I am" programme continues to support the emotional development and behavioural regulation of young boys by strengthening emotional awareness, improving decision-making, and reducing peer conflict within school environments. During fiscal year 2025/26, the programme engaged 122 boys across eight primary schools and one middle school. Madam Chairman, 98 structured sessions were delivered between May 2025 and February 2026. Additional supports included 25 crisis support sessions, 22 mediation sessions, and 165 individualised support sessions. Feedback from educators and parents indicate improvements in communication, attitude, and school engagement among participants.

The G.R.E.A.T. programme, which stands for Gang, Resistance, Education and Training, continues to engage primary and middle school boys through structured value-based education designed to strengthen resilience, reinforce positive identity development, and build resistance to gang influence. The programme remains an important component of Bermuda's early prevention strategy by reinforcing conflict resolution skills, supporting healthy decision-making, and helping young people navigate negative peer pressure.

Madam Chairman, the Ministry also expanded its community engagement initiatives through the Hype League programmes. These initiatives provide safe, structured environments for young people during higher risk evening hours while promoting teamwork, physical activity and positive social interaction. The Hype League summer programme operated through open play at CedarBridge Academy from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm over an eight-week period during the summer holiday.

The programme connected with over 200 youth with average participation ranging from 30 to 50 young people per session. Activities included indoor football, basketball, and outdoor cricket. School-based Hype League engagement programmes were also introduced to strengthen structured activity during the school day. Implemented in three schools and delivered three days per week, these sessions averaged 20 to 25 students per session and focused on organised sports and supervised engagement during lunch periods. Schools reported improved lunchtime engagement, reduced behavioural disruptions and increased participation in positive activities.

Madam Chairman, Workforce Development remains an important pathway for prevention and rehabilitation. The Work Placement and Mentoring Programme supported 15 youth participants with 13 completing eight-week work placements. A total of 120 job coaching sessions were delivered, and 90 per cent of participating business partners reported positive satisfaction with the programme. Outcomes included six youths receiving extended paid employment, four securing jobs following programme completion and 100 per cent of parents reporting positive personal growth among participants.

The Redemption Programme also continued to provide intensive mentorship and structured life development for young men seeking to redirect their lives. Madam Chairman, 20 trainees completed the 25-week programme supported by 125 one-on-one sessions and 56 career and personal development sessions. Programme outcomes included eight participants securing employment, one participant entering university, and eight crisis interventions successfully managed. These efforts contributed to improve life skills, behavioural stabilisation, and upgraded employability.

Madam Chairman, street level outreach and case management services supported 82 young adults between the ages of 18 and 35. Tailored interventions address housing instability, employment barriers, legal challenges, and mental health needs. Services included relocation assistance, prison visits court advocacy, and inter-agency collaboration. Community supervision support was also provided to 15 clients engaged in court-ordered community service placements between May 2025 and February 2026. These interventions contributed to improve client stabilisation, reduce retaliation risk, and strengthen reintegration pathways.

Madam Chairman, the Coordinated Crisis Response Team continues to provide immediate support following violent incidents, delivering stabilisation services for affected individuals and families. During the reporting period, the team was activated following 36 violent incidents and delivered 125 support sessions, including 48 family safety planning interventions. These efforts contribute to reducing retaliation risk, stabilised affected families, and building trust within communities.

The National Violence Reduction Strategy continues to operate through its established governance framework, including the National Violence Reduction Steering Committee, the Inter-Agency Gang Enforcement Team, and Inter-Agency Community Response Mechanism. This structure supports coordinated prevention enforcement and rehabilitation efforts across government agencies and community partners. Educational and vocational pathways remain a priority under the empowering Future Initiative. GED grants continue to be issued with partnership with C.A.R.E. Learning Centre, alongside expanded collaboration with the adult education school. Madam Chairman, 10 Violence Reduction Team's clients have been supported through

educational funding with eight currently enrolled and four expected to complete their GED during this academic year.

Additional initiatives such as the Computer Care Programme and Workforce Development partnerships have further expanded academic engagement and employment readiness opportunities for high-risk youth.

Opportunities for High-Risk Youth

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the "Stop the Violence" campaign continues to serve as a national public awareness initiative, designed to challenge harmful norms, promote emotional well-being, and encourage healthier decision-making among young men and boys. The campaign incorporates storytelling, youth engagement, and community dialogue to address the social and emotional drivers of violence. Key campaign initiatives included "Truth Be Told: Youth Rise Against Violence," "Voices of Young Men: Stories of Loss and Hope," and "Mental Awareness for Black Men and Boys."

Madam Chairman, campaign analytics demonstrate strong public visibility and engagement across multiple digital platforms. Instagram recorded over 211,900 views and approximately 7,800 interactions. Facebook generated nearly 78,800 views, while YouTube content reached over 47,600 views with an audience retention rate of 87.8 per cent. These results reflect growing public engagement with violence prevention messaging and continued normalisation of conversations around community safety and personal responsibility.

Madam Chairman, grants provided under the National Violence Reduction Strategy continue to support community-based organisations delivering services for at-risk youth, including trauma-informed care, education and therapeutic programmes, and targeted support for violence reduction team clients. These partnerships strengthen community capacity while reinforcing Bermuda's collective response to violence prevention.

Our Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, during the fiscal year 2026/27, the Violence Reduction Team will continue to build upon its prevention, intervention and rehabilitation efforts under the National Violence Reduction Strategy, while introducing several new and expanded initiatives designed to strengthen early intervention, youth engagement, and long-term opportunity pathways.

Madam Chairman, as we look at the year ahead, the Violence Reduction Team will remain a central pillar in the ongoing delivery of the National Violence Reduction Strategy. As both architects of the strategy and active agents of its delivery, the Violence

Reduction Team continues to be a driving force behind Bermuda's efforts to reduce violence and build a safer, more inclusive society. The Violence Reduction Team's work is not theoretical. It is practical, personal and profoundly impactful. Through education, mentorship, crisis response and real-life opportunities, the Violence Reduction Team is changing lives, restoring communities and guiding young people toward hope and purpose.

Our next steps reflect a commitment to deepening this impact and expanding the reach of our programmes in alignment with the eight strategic goals of the National Violence Reduction Strategy.

Madam Chairman, the Violence Reduction Team will:

- a) Continue leading and implementing core violence prevention initiatives in direct alignment with the National Violence Reduction Strategy, serving as key stakeholders across all three strategic tiers of the strategy.

Madam Chairman, the Steering Committee, Inter-agency Gang Enforcement and Inter-agency Community Response [will]:

- b) Support community-based prevention and early intervention through grants to sports clubs to provide after-school homework assistance, life skills development and violence prevention workshops for our young people.

Funding youth-centred organisations that offer trauma-informed wraparound support to vulnerable children and families. Expanded counselling services and therapeutic programmes to address mental health needs and support emotional healing for people affected by violence or violent incidents.

Madam Chairman, a key priority will be the continued expansion of structured youth engagement through the Hype League platform, building on the success of the summer and school-based initiatives, the programme will be extended to additional school environments and community spaces, providing increased access to safe recreation activities during high-risk periods.

These programmes will continue to emphasise teamwork, mentorship and positive behavioural development while strengthening relationships between youth participants and outreach workers. The Ministry will also expand its education and workforce development pathways under the Empowering Futures initiative. This includes strengthened collaboration with the adult education school and additional support for GED completion among violence reduction team clients.

In fiscal year 2026/27, the programme will further develop partnerships with Workforce Development agencies and training providers to increase access to certification programmes, technical training opportunities and structured employment pathways for young adults seeking to transition into stable employment.

In addition, Madam Chairman, the Ministry will advance new initiatives designed to support post-secondary educational opportunities. Work is underway to develop sponsorship pathways through Bermuda College that will allow eligible Violence Reduction Team participants to pursue associate degrees, professional certifications, and vocational training aligned with Bermuda's workforce needs.

The Ministry also intends to expand targeted public engagement initiatives under the "Stop the Violence" campaign. Building on the campaign's strong public response, future programming will place greater emphasis on youth-led dialogue, storytelling initiatives, and mental health awareness programmes focused on young men and boys. These efforts will continue to challenge harmful social norms while encouraging open conversations around trauma, emotional well-being and responsible decision-making.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

HOUSE VISITOR

The Chairman: Minister, before you continue, can I just take a second to recognise former Member Michael Scott, who is in the Gallery.

Member, welcome.

[Committee of Supply, continuing]

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Welcome, Mr. Scott.

Through these initiatives, the Violence Reduction Team will continue to strengthen Bermuda's violence prevention framework by expanding opportunity pathways, deepening community engagement and reinforcing early intervention strategies that support safer communities and more positive futures for Bermuda's young people.

Madam Chairman, that ends my presentation on Head 83, Ministry Headquarters.

I shall now present my budget brief for Head 6, Defence.

The Chairman: Thank you. The Minister will continue in Committee of Supply for Revenue and Expenditure. While he's pulling up his presentation for Head 6, I believe it is, I just wanted the listening public to recognise that we are in the Budget Debate for the Ministry of National Security.

So, I welcome the Minister when he is ready to continue with his next head.

Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

HEAD 6—DEFENCE

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, [Head 6, Defence,] is found on pages B-268 through B-272 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure.

Madam Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 6, the Department of Defence found on pages B-268 through B-272 of our Budget Book.

Mission/Mandate

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Our mandate or mission, Madam Chairman, *The Royal Bermuda Regiment will generate and sustain a disciplined force to operate in Bermuda waters and on land to ensure Bermuda's safety and security, protect Bermuda's interests and strengthen Bermuda society.*

Under the authority of the Defence Act 1965, the Royal Bermuda Regiment's mandate is to be a military force maintaining the necessary levels of personnel, training and equipment to enable it to protect Bermuda's interests. It conducts its training and operations whilst also acting as a centre of excellence for all Bermudians and residents to be able to personally and professionally develop while serving their country.

Department Objectives

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the department objectives which can be found on pages B-268 and B-269 are as follows.

- The effect: The Regiment provides an agile and flexible disciplined force to deliver the following effects, protect Bermuda's people and resources, support Bermuda's recovery after disaster, deter illegal activity wherever mobilised, strengthen supported government agencies and the Bermuda community, reassure the Bermuda public of the government's ability to respond in a time of need and engage with the Bermuda public to drive recruitment.

- Our Coast Guard: In accordance with the Defence (Coast Guard [Unit]) Amendment Act of 2018, the Regiment shall maintain a standing maritime force to protect and secure Bermuda's territorial waters by way of the provision of search and rescue, a 24-hour search and rescue capability in accordance with international obligations in partnership with other government agencies.

- Support: Operations in conjunction with and in support of government agencies with maritime responsibilities to include Bermuda Maritime Operations Centre, Marine and Ports, Environmental Protection, reference oil spill response and fisheries, Bermuda Police Service, Customs, and Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service.

- Diving: Maintaining underwater search and rescue recovery diving capability.

- Humanitarian Aid/Disaster Relief: The Regiment will provide an organised response to alleviate the results of a man-made or natural catastrophe, the consequences of which put lives and or livelihoods at risk and exceeds the responsible agency's ability to cope using its own resources.

- Force Protection: The Regiment shall maintain a reserve disciplined force to respond with or without arms during times of emergency to minimise the vulnerability of personnel, facilities, equipment, material, operations and activities from threats and hazards in order to preserve freedom of action and operational effectiveness. Roles shall include defence of high-value assets, protecting facilities or locations that are essential to Bermuda's operations, public order, management of and effective response to public disorder or rioting.

- Provost: The use of military police for the security of military estates and personnel.

- Explosive ordinance disposal: Disposal of unexploded ordnance, conventional munitions and limited capability for improvised explosive devices jointly with Bermuda Police Service.

- Fire: In support to the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service to assist in firefighting.

- Enhancing Bermudian Society: The Regiment has played a central role developing Bermuda society and shaping Bermudian identity through military service and shall continue to do so through

- a) The provision of youth engagement and development through the delivery of military and adventurous training by way of the Junior Leaders programme including a school-based Cadet programme and Junior Band and facilitation of Outward Bound Bermuda.

- b) The provision of a common military experience for volunteers joined from across Bermuda's community providing the opportunity to enhance life and vocational skills and an appreciation of discipline, leadership, followership and the need to support civil authorities thereby becoming better citizens.

- Ceremonial: The Regiment will provide a professional standard military band and corps of drums and accompanying marching troops to conduct national ceremonial and civic events.

International Assistance

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The Regiment will engage in training and support with regional partners with a focus on British Overseas Territories to build joint capacity. The Regiment shall be prepared to support overseas operations on a voluntary basis if deployed, sustained and funded by third parties and where the Regiment operates as a component in a larger operational framework.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, I now invite your attention to page B-270 of our Budget Book. A total of \$11,249,000 has been allocated for this head which represents an increase of \$1,439,000, or 15 per cent from the previous year and constitutes 8 per cent of the budget allocated for the Ministry as a whole.

Madam Chairman, the total current expenditure is estimated to be \$11,249,000 for 2026/27 and represents an increase of \$1,439,000, or approximately 15 per cent higher than the budget of 2025/26. This change is due primarily to an increase in full-time staff salaries in line with government-wide salary uplifts, part-time wages, transport, travel and operational expenses with additional expenditure focused on the Coast Guard St. David's substation. This increase will allow the Royal Bermuda Regiment to return to its original full-time equivalent and allow the Royal Bermuda Regiment to support training and operations in accordance with the commanding officer's directives and throwing speech initiatives.

Business Unit 16000, Defence Department, \$509,901

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Finance cost centre covers the Defence Department which holds three civilian full-time staff and one Regiment full-time staff and serves as the accounting function for the Royal Bermuda Regiment. The 2026/27 budget estimate is \$509,901 which represents an increase of \$152,000, or 42 per cent when compared to the last fiscal year.

This is due to the salary uplift and the incorporation of a new post of full-time Outward-Bound instructors in a civilian role.

Business unit 16005, Recruitment, \$167,760

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Recruitment cost centre covers the advertising, promotion and related recruiting expenses. The 2026/27 budget estimate is \$168,000 which is an increase of \$74,000, or 79 per cent from the 2025/26 financial year

Contributions to this increase include the introduction of an HR Management Programme to streamline line recruitment, costs affiliated with the government Career Fair and recruitment costs increasing to account for inflation.

Business Unit 16010, Regimental Headquarters
\$6,032,000

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Regimental Headquarters cost centre covers all other Regiment's full-time equivalents for Defence and Head 6, liabilities such as employee-related expenses and liability insurance for the marine fleet, vehicle fleet and public liability. The 2026/27 budget estimate is

\$6,032,000 which is an increase of \$937,000, or 18 per cent over the 2025/26 financial year. This increase is to account for an uplift in full-time equivalent salaries, rising insurance costs and increases to medical costs for our full-time equivalent staff.

We have also anticipated the cost for additional housing allowance changes for all full-time equivalents.

Business Unit 16020, Quartermaster \$1,750,048.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Quartermaster cost centre covers all the operational and logistical services for the Royal Bermuda Regiment in relation to facilities for land and maritime capabilities. This capability is organised under the Logistics Company. The 2026/27 budget estimate is \$1,750,000 which is an increase of \$233,000, or 15 per cent over the 2025/26 financial year. This is due in large part to the increases in part-time pay and the increases to the cost of purchasing goods and materials including electricity, gasoline and rental costs.

Business Unit 16030, Ceremonial \$489,044

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Ceremonial cost centre covers the ceremonial and the humanitarian and disaster relief training expenses. These are now organised under Headquarters Company after the ORBAT changes of February 2025. Headquarters Company now includes the Regiment's training and engagement functions but excludes costs captured by cost centres 16060 and 16080.

The 2026/27 budget estimate is \$489,000 which is an increase of \$137,000, or 39 per cent increase over the 2025/26 financial year. This is due to an increase in the part-time soldiers' wages and increase in soldier numbers with the new ORBAT. We have also moved bounty pay from the cost centre 16080 business unit as Training wing is now under Headquarters Company.

Business Unit 16040, Internal Security, \$245,276

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Internal Security is \$245,276. Madam Chairman, the Internal Security cost centre covers the training expenses related to internal security and military aid to civil authority.

These functions are organised and delivered by a company. The 2026/27 budget estimate is \$245,000 which is an increase of \$10,000, or 4 per cent increase over the 2025/26 financial year. This increase is exclusively due to the wage increase.

Business Unit 16060, Bermuda Cadet Corps
Junior Leaders \$42,869

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Bermuda Cadet Corps cost centre covers the training and youth engagement of the Junior Leaders Programme.

As part of the curriculum, staff of the Royal Bermuda Regiment facilitate adventure training, drill, camp craft, and similar military activities to young Bermudians below the age of military enlistment. The main aim is to enhance the leadership and decision-making skills of school-age cadets in order to make them better citizens. The programme runs weekly throughout the school year and incorporates meetings, weekend camps, and an annual exercise.

The 2026/27 budget estimate is \$43,000 which is the same allocation as the 2025/26 fiscal year.

Business unit—

The Chairman: Minister, just so that you know, we're about five minutes before lunch and you can probably finish those next three business units within five minutes, you think, or no?

[No audible response]

The Chairman: You can do the next business unit, of course. You can take us up to 12:30.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Let me do the next business unit.

The Chairman: Yes, please.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: And I can finish there.

Business Unit 16075, Overseas Camp \$841,098

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, this year the Overseas Camp will take place in the United Kingdom in May 2026. Since the formation of the unit, the two-week Overseas Camp has been the culmination of the annual training cycle and remains a mandated requirement by the Governor.

The exercise provides tangible evidence that the Royal Bermuda Regiment is fit for role and able to operate at the scale and intensity required to complete their missions and tasks. The complexity and range of activities conducted on land and at sea are not possible to achieve within the confines of Bermuda. Therefore, it is essential that the camp is conducted abroad.

It is also a primary component in the retention of Royal Bermuda Regiment personnel as it is engaging and an exciting and impactful opportunity for Bermudians to travel abroad.

The 2026/27 budget estimate is \$841,000, a decrease of \$63,000, or 7 per cent when compared to the 2025/26 financial year. This decrease is due to a slightly shorter Overseas Camp, which results in less pay and other expenses.

That's it, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: You want to finish there?

Okay, so we have approximately three minutes before lunch. Did you . . . you didn't want to try the next one? Okay. Go ahead.

Business Unit 16080, Training and Validation,
\$465,000

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Training and Validation cost centre covers the expenses related to the training of recruits and promotion courses. To ensure our military personnel are current, qualified, and competent, it is essential that the selection and training system provides development and assessment opportunities at all levels for all specialisms.

The Training and Validation budget ensures these courses and qualifications are delivered in a most appropriate and cost-effective way possible, only seeking external instruction when it is not possible through local resources. All routine training exercises subscribe to the UK Armed Forces recognised assurance system, the defence system approach to training to ensure safety and consistency.

The 2026/27 budget estimate is \$465,000, which is a decrease of \$90,000, or 16 percent, from the 2025/26 fiscal year. This is a result of there being no JNCO [Junior Non-Commissioned Officer] Cadre leadership course being run this fiscal year.

The Chairman: And I do believe that this would be a good time to move us to lunch.

So, Minister, if you can, could you move us to lunch?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I move that the House adjourn until 2:00 pm.

The Chairman: Thank you.

It has been moved that the House adjourn until 2:00 pm.

Are there any objections?

There are none.

So moved.

[Gavel]

Proceedings in Committee suspended at 12:27 pm

Proceedings in Committee resumed at 2:01 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

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

MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY

HEAD 6—DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE

[Continuation of debate thereon]

The Chairman: Members, we are in the resumption of Committee of Supply for the Estimates and Revenue of the year 2026—sorry, yes, for the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27.

We are currently debating the Ministry of National Security, and I call on the respective Minister to resume.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and good afternoon to you.

Can you give us a time as to how much time I got left?

The Chairman: Certainly, we have approximately four hours remaining.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Business Unit 16085, Marine Operations

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: So, Madam Chairman, moving right along, we are still in Head 6, which is Defence, so I am on business unit 16085, Marine Operations, \$706,483.

Madam Chairman, the Marine Operations cost centre covers the costs associated with the Royal Bermuda Regiment Coast Guard's operating expenses and part-time wages. The unit has 16 full-time staff, consisting of 14 soldiers and two officers. They are supported by part-time staff who train and operate on weekends and public holidays in order to provide safety and security on and in Bermuda's waters 24 hours a day throughout the year. The Regiment's Coast Guard Unit is organised under C Company.

The 2026/27 budget estimate is \$706,000, which is an increase of \$49,000, or 7 per cent, from the 2025/26 financial year. This is due to increases to part-time wages, the cost of goods, including anticipated electricity and gasoline costs of running St. David's Coast Guard substation.

Subjective Analysis

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates of the department is found on page B-271. I will highlight the material object code increases and decreases.

Salaries have increased by \$353,000, or 7 per cent for the 2025/26 financial year. This is largely in part due to salary uplifts of 4.3 per cent awarded by government.

Professional services have increased by \$828,000, to account for the anticipated funding of additional expenses for the Coast Guard Unit as it

expands its operations when the new Coast Guard station opens, and the move of a post supporting Outward Bound Bermuda to the Regiment. This cost centre also supports professional services associated with recruitment.

Energy has increased by \$52,000, or 12 per cent. This is due to the increased costs of gasoline and electricity, and the projected costs for the expansion of the Coast Guard St. David's facility.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The Regiment is due to purchase a pair of advanced vessels for the Coast Guard. These vessels are designed to provide a standardised, high-performance capability to support 24/7 operations, interoperability with partner agencies, and resilience across a wide range of missions, including national security and environmental response.

On page C-15 of the Budget Book, you will see the capital funds allocated for these new vessels. The total allocation for the two vessels is \$2,200,000. Additionally, on page C-7, it shows that \$900,000 has been allocated for the first phase of construction of a boatshed at the Coast Guard Unit headquarters at Watford Island.

This will provide shelter for boat maintenance and the secure storage of equipment currently stored in shipping containers.

Active Strength

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Regiment currently employs 43 full-time staff and 4 civilians. This brings the total of full-time equivalents for 2025/26 to 47, which is reflected on budget page B-271.

In addition to the full-time staff, the Royal Bermuda Regiment part-time strength is 231. This brings our total strength to 275.

Performance Measures by Business Units

16000, 16005, 16010, 16020,
16030, 16040, 16075, 16080

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, in May of last year, the Royal Bermuda Regiment successfully completed its annual camp with 121 soldiers deploying to Jamaica with soldiers from the Falkland Islands, Turks and Caicos Islands, and Cayman Islands joining, affording the opportunity to hone soldiering skills and practice command and leadership.

Separately, four soldiers deployed to Trinidad and Tobago to deliver public order training as part of the US Southern Command-sponsored exercise Tradewinds. In June 2025, soldiers participated in the Junior [Non-Commissioned Officers] (NCO) Cadre tactics camp in North Carolina. Joined by eight students from Turks and Caicos Islands, with 19 promoted in January 2026. The Regiment completed two recruit

camps in July and February with intakes of 12 and 22. These intakes have been supplemented by re-enlistment of soldiers throughout the year. At the end of September and October, the Regiment embodied in support of the recoveries from Hurricanes Imelda and Melissa.

In mid-October, the Royal Bermuda Regiment mobilised again for a Trooping of the Colours during a visit of its Colonel-in-Chief, the Duchess of Gloucester. In February 2026, the Regiment deployed 26 personnel to Jamaica to aid reconstruction efforts as Jamaica recovers from Hurricane Melissa. The Bermuda-led contingent, joined by eight soldiers from the Cayman Islands Regiment and five from the Turks and Caicos Islands Regiment, were able to replace 14 roofs over a two-week period, working alongside the Jamaica Defence Force Engineer Regiment and the Ghana Armed Forces.

16085—Marine Operations

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I am pleased to report that the Royal Bermuda Regiment Coast Guard has completed another successful year of operations, due in large part to the small but dedicated staff that watch over our waters 24 hours a day. The unit represents a continued commitment by the government to provide safety and security on and in Bermuda's waters for recreational users and those who are part of our Blue Economy.

During the 12 months of January 2025 to December 2025, the Coast Guard conducted 1,127 patrols, observed 14,560 vessels, conducted 98 search and rescue missions, and enforced environmental protection laws such as fishing and lobster licence checks. These remain significant achievements from a relatively small resource. The Reserve or part-time component of the Coast Guard Unit mobilised during weekends and holidays from Bermuda Day in May to mid-September, providing a significant uplift during the boating season after completing their October to May training cycle.

Madam Chairman, the Royal Bermuda Regiment conducts many of these tasks in partnership with or in support of other government departments, specifically the Emergency Measures Organisation (EMO), Maritime Operations Centre, Department of Environmental Protection, HM Customs in Bermuda, Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation Team, Bermuda Police Service, Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service, and the Bermuda Hospitals Board.

Major Achievements for 2025/26

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, in addition to its public roles, including the continued development of the Coast Guard, the Royal Bermuda Regiment has

- Fulfilled its mandate through Hurricanes Imelda and Melissa in September and October 2025.
- Celebrated 60 years of service starting on the 1st of September 2025, punctuated by hosting a Trooping of the Colours in October, under the patronage of Colonel-in-Chief, the Duchess of Gloucester. This coincided with the first All Ranks Ball in a decade, allowing all members of the unit and her families to celebrate the occasion.
- Assisted in the training of fellow Overseas Territories Regiment, the Turks and Caicos Islands Regiment.
- In July 2025 and February 2026, the Royal Bermuda Regiment trained over 40 Turks and Caicos Regiment recruits who joined our recruit camps and 12 Junior NCOs who joined the Junior NCO Cadre Camp.
- Actively pursued the government's commitment to Blue Shield.
- Deployed to Jamaica in February 2026 to support Jamaica's reconstruction efforts after Hurricane Melissa.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the coming financial year will see the Regiment Coast Guard Unit's continued growth.

It will see the full integration of its unmanned systems into operations both in the air and underwater in the execution of its search and rescue duties. The two-year procurement of a new fleet of vessels will commence, which will expand its unit's operational capabilities significantly and allow for the retirement of its current fleet which is operating years beyond its designed life. The St. David's Coast Guard Station will open and be integrated into operations, allowing for a sustained presence in the East End.

Finally, work will progress to increase the staffing level of the Coast Guard to allow for the sustainable staffing of two stations, allow for training and the coverage of vacation and sick leave without compromising operational effectiveness. Ceremonially, we continue to prepare for multiple parades throughout the year. The Royal Bermuda Regiment Band has a rich history of representing the Island overseas and is working towards doing so again in 2027. And also introducing the joys of music to the youth as the band continues to enhance school-age musicians. To that end, Youth Band Camp and Junior Leader Summer Camp is also planned again this year and both camps will run concurrently. Work continues to introduce the Junior Leader Programme into Bermuda schools.

The Regiment will conduct recruit camps in July 2026 and February 2027. The annual camp in May 2026 will be held in the UK with a focus on public order and leadership. As we look forward to the coming year,

the Regiment remains poised to mobilise, be it during the 2026 hurricane season or in support of the operations of other agencies as the need arises.

Madam Chairman, this past year has showcased our Regiment as a force of professionalism, reliability and adaptability, both ashore and afloat, within Bermuda and alongside Caribbean allies. They have notably enhanced the Coast Guard Unit's operational capabilities while offering substantial personal and professional growth opportunities for our soldiers. The year has reaffirmed the Royal Bermuda Regiment's stature as a steadfast, honourable and skilled entity, efficiently delivering critical services to Bermuda in regular periods and emergencies as it did after Hurricanes Imelda and Melissa on both land and sea. Our Island's Regiment stands as a key pillar within our community and a source of collective pride for all of us.

Madam Chairman, in closing, I wish to commend Lieutenant Colonel Duncan Simons and his outstanding team for their continued dedication and service to Bermuda.

Madam Chairman, that ends my presentation on Head 6, which is Defence.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

We are continuing in Committee of Supply for the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27, currently debating the Ministry of National Security and its attendant heads.

When the Minister is ready, he will take us into his next Head for debate.

HEAD 7—BERMUDA POLICE SERVICE

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Found on pages B-273 through B-276 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure.

It gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 7, the Bermuda Police Service, which can be found on pages B-273 through B-277 of the Budget Book.

The mission of the Bermuda Police Service is *Making Bermuda safer*. To make Bermuda safer, the Bermuda Police Service strives to

- maintain the confidence of the community;
- treat all persons fairly with dignity and respect;
- protect vulnerable victims;
- reduce crime, particularly focusing on serious crimes and gang-related criminality;
- reduce antisocial behaviour; and
- enhance road safety.

Madam Chairman, the Bermuda Police Service (BPS) carries out its objectives by aligning its organisational structure to maintain its community safety agenda and the prevention of criminal risk, locally and internationally, through a funded establishment of 473 employees as shown on page B-276. This funding supports 400 police officers and 73 civilian staff.

The BPS remains committed to expanding the officer establishment to 420 officers, reflecting our confidence in ongoing recruitment efforts and our commitment to enhancing operational capacity.

Madam Chairman, the BPS is developing a strategic and operational plan for 2027 through to 2031. This forward-looking strategic framework, which will involve comprehensive internal and external consultation with officers, staff, community members, and partner agencies, will set our direction across the next five years. The plan will reflect our response to evolving security needs and emerging challenges facing our Island.

Key initiatives will progress across multiple strategic pillars.

- The BPS gang-targeting team continues to work with the Ministry of National Security's Gang Violence Reduction Team (GVRT) to reduce the threat in this area and seeks to divert persons from gang-related criminality. However, significant risk to the community remains from gun and gang-related violence and the BPS continues to strive to deter such acts through effective use of intelligence and specialist policing.
- The BPS continues to work in support of the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee (NAMLC as it is known) to prevent financial crime, money laundering, and terrorist financing with a strategic focus to maintain its excellent Caribbean Financial Action Task Force grading.
- The Bermuda Police Service further continues its work to prevent and respond to cybercrime and security matters and help maintain Bermuda's reputation as a premier international financial jurisdiction.
- The BPS is working to implement a framework for greater multi-agency collaboration on the problem of domestic abuse. We seek to enhance communication and improve training with a view to elevating service and reducing victimisation.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, I would now invite your attention to the current account estimates for Head 7 which can be found on page B-274.

Total current expenditure for the 2026/27 financial year is estimated to be \$74,395,000.

The Chairman: Minister, that's located on page B-275.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes, Ma'am.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you.

And represents an increase of \$4,626,000, or 7 per cent, from the 2025/26 financial year. This increase reflects salary adjustments from recent union negotiations and necessary investments in operational support and infrastructure maintenance.

Proposed salaries of \$57,991,000, which can be found on page B-275, represents an increase of \$3,131,000, or 6 per cent, year over year.

Programme 0701, Commissioner's Office

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Commissioner's Office is the operational core of the Bermuda Police Service. The BPS is focused on the protection of the Island's property and its people. To ensure such protection, we require boots on the ground, that is, sufficient officers who form a capable and committed police service. Officer salaries represent the primary expense in programme 0701. Total funding for programme 0701, as shown on page B-274, is \$56,301,000.

The Chairman: And Minister, you were correct, it is on page [B-]274.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The Commissioner's Office represents 76 per cent of the BPS total budget and covers proposed costs for 400 officers and five civilian staff. I refer you to first line of page B-276 for that number.

Back to page B-274. Funding for this programme increased by \$1,709,000, or 3 per cent. The budget also includes funding of \$5,000,000 for police overtime costs and other benefits for officers as mandated by the Police (Conditions of Service) Orders 2024. This provision is essential to support round-the-clock policing operations throughout the year, including coverage during public holidays and special events, ensuring consistent service delivery to our community.

Programme 0702, Corporate Services Division

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Corporate Services Division includes the following departments:

- 17010 Human Resources
- 17020 Finance and Administration
- 17025 Information and Management Services
- 17190 Training and Development Department
- 17300 Vehicle Stores
- 17310 Uniformed Stores

Funding for programme 0702 for the 2026/27 financial year is \$10,629,000, an increase of \$3,933,000, or 59 per cent year over year.

Madam Chairman, the department under the Corporate Services Division that requires the most funding is Information and Management Services, with total funding of \$4,753,000, which represents 45 per cent of the budget for the programme. This line item has been increased by \$2,061,000 for the fiscal year 2026/27, or 77 per cent.

Madam Chairman, as the world becomes more reliant on technology, so does modern policing. The cost of technology continues to increase as organisations transition from vendor-owned software applications to subscription-based licensing models. Additionally, computer hardware is typically obsolete within five years and requires replacement to maintain operational security and performance. Significant investment in computer hardware maintenance, support, and software licensing reflects the reality that digital infrastructure is now essential to effective policing. This allocation ensures that the BPS maintains the technological capability necessary to support criminal investigations, intelligence operations, and community service delivery.

Madam Chairman, the BPS cannot accomplish its mission for making Bermuda safer without competent officers safeguarding people and property on the Island. To build and maintain a professional police establishment, we must continuously recruit to address attrition and support growth in officer numbers. This requires investment in human resources management, recruit training, and compliance with the Police (Conditions of Service) Order (COSO).

Funding under cost centre 17010, Human Resources, has been allocated at \$3,525,000 for 2026/27, an increase of \$2,271,000, or 181 per cent year over year. This substantial increase addresses two critical needs.

First, the COSO, that's the Police (Conditions of Service) Order, mandates comprehensive medical benefits for all police officers. Medical costs have escalated significantly in recent years and the budget in prior years did not adequately reflect these growing expenses. The 2026/27 allocation corrects this long-standing shortfall and ensures that BPS meets its statutory obligations to officers under COSO.

Second, this funding supports our overseas recruitment strategy. Building a sustainable police establishment requires attracting experienced officers from the international market. Investment in overseas recruiting initiatives enables the Bermuda Police Service to secure skilled professionals with the capabilities needed to address complex policing challenges and strengthen our operational capacity.

Madam Chairman, the 2026/27 budget for finance and administration has been set at \$1,409,000 as shown on page B-274, which is a decrease of \$113,000, or 7 per cent. This represents a modest adjustment year over year. The finance and administration cost centre provides funding for the maintenance of the numerous properties of the Bermuda Police

Service, including the police barracks located in Prospect, Somerset Police Station, Southside Police Station, and various offices at our Prospect site.

Staff under this budget manage BPS payroll, vendor and other payments, stores and facilities operations. The budget also includes provision for securing overseas witnesses for critical criminal prosecutions supporting the administration of justice.

Programme 0703, Operational Policing Division

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the operational policing division includes 17040 Community Policing Unit.

Programme 0703 was restructured in the 2024/25 financial year to consolidate operations under the Community Policing Unit, a cohesive operational structure. Funding for this unit is set at \$1,964,000 as shown on page B-274, which is a decrease of \$252,000, or 11 per cent. This decrease is due to a staffing reduction of four persons. The unit is staffed by civilians who provide critical support to the Bermuda Police Service officers in their policing duties. Station duty officers, whilst civilian personnel, provide essential operational support that enables efficient police response.

The budget also funds rent and associated costs for the Southside Police Station and covers cleaning services and operational costs for running the department's facilities.

Programme 0704, Operational Support Division

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, Operational Support Division provides funding for the following departments:

- 17090—Court Liaison Unit;
- 17120—Tactical Operations;
- 17130—Garage and Workshop;
- 17160—Forensic Support.

The total budget for this programme is \$3,503,000, representing overall stability year over year. The most significant funding difference in the Operational Support Division is the increase of \$501,000, or 61 per cent, for Forensic Support.

Madam Chairman, a significant development in the 2026/27 budget reflects Cabinet approval during the prior year for seven new posts within the Forensic Support Unit. These positions include one forensic support unit supervisor, five forensic support unit officers, and one junior forensic support unit officer. For several years, this critical department operated with insufficient staffing levels and relied heavily on overseas consultants to meet operational demands, creating both cost pressures and service vulnerabilities.

The creation of these permanent positions represents a strategic investment in the Bermuda Police Service's investigative capacity and organisational sustainability. By developing a fully staffed forensic civilian

capability, the Bermuda Police Service is moving to reduce dependence on external consultants by creating a clear and attractive career pathway for Bermudians who aspire to professional forensic science roles. This approach builds institutional knowledge, strengthens continuity of investigations, and ensures forensic services can be locally sourced and expertise remains within the service.

Beyond these direct benefits, civilianising these specialised forensic positions generates a significant operational advantage. It frees up police officer posts that would otherwise be absorbed by forensic duties, allowing these officers to be deployed to frontline policing services. This strategic reallocation directly strengthens community safety and emergency response capacity. Officers currently performing or supporting forensic work will be able to focus entirely on community engagement, crime prevention, investigation of priority offences, and response to public calls for service. In an environment where staffing levels remain constrained, this represents a disciplined approach to maximising the impact of every officer position.

Madam Chairman, this investment strengthens the Bermuda Police Service's capacity to deliver sophisticated crime scene analysis and evidence processing. This supports crime investigations while at the same time optimising our establishment for frontline operations where the community most directly experiences police service. The result is a win for operational efficiency, community safety, and fiscal responsibility.

Cost centre 17130, Garage and Workshop, includes wages and salaries for garage mechanics and the fleet manager, as well as funding for inventory, spare parts, fuel, and insurance for the BPS fleet. The budget for Garage and Workshop represents 40 per cent of the total budget under the Operational Support Division.

Operational vehicles are essential to policing operations and operate continuously throughout each day and night. As a 24/7 service, Bermuda Police Service vehicles endure significant wear and tear and require consistent maintenance and periodic replacement for safety and reliability.

To ensure vehicles are kept at a proper service standard, maintenance and parts replacement form a regular and constant occurrence for the fleet. The allocation of \$1,392,000 to this cost centre ensures that the BPS sustains a modern, well-maintained fleet capable of meeting the demands of contemporary policing and supporting the BPS commitment to road safety initiatives.

Programme 0708, Serious Crime Divisions

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Serious Crime Divisions includes the following departments:

- 17140—Serious Crime Unit;

- 17150—Drugs and Financial Crime Department;
- 17170—Intelligence Division.

The budget for programme 0708 is \$1,916,000, a decrease of \$544,000, or 22 per cent year over year. This adjustment reflects a strategic reallocation of resources. Specifically, the creation of permanent full-time positions in the Forensic Support Unit, as noted under programme 0704, has reduced the need for overseas forensic consultants. The BPS has strategically redeployed consultant budget lines from the Serious Crime Divisions, resulting in savings of approximately \$400,000 from the Serious Crime Unit consultant account, \$50,000 from forensic account reallocations, and \$150,000 from forensic laboratory services. These adjustments reflect improved operational efficiency through the hiring of permanent skilled Bermudian staff while maintaining investigative effectiveness.

Madam Chairman, within the Serious Crime Divisions lies the Serious Crime Unit with a budget of \$649,000, representing 34 per cent of the total Serious Crime budget. The Serious Crime Unit investigates the most serious criminal offences, including murder, attempted murder and offences involving firearms and ammunition.

Where overseas consultants continue to be engaged, they provide skilled and experienced investigative support, assisting with complex cases and bringing specialised expertise, not currently available locally. These professionals enhance the Bermuda Police Service's capacity to conduct rigorous investigations while maintaining international standards of evidence collection and analysis, ultimately supporting successful prosecutions and justice outcomes for serious crime victims.

Programme 0710, Bermuda Reserve Police

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, programme 0710, Bermuda Reserve Police is allocated \$82,000. The Bermuda Reserve Police provide supplemental policing capacity, and the budget primarily funds bounty payments and associated costs.

Reserve officers contribute meaningfully to public safety by supplementing the regular establishment during periods of high demand and special events. Continued support for this programme reflects our commitment to utilising all available resources to enhance community safety.

The budget was decreased from \$281,555 to \$82,000 to reflect the actual costs for 2025/26. There was a reduced deployment of the Bermuda Reserve Police for 2025/26 due to a decrease in high demand and special events that required the Bermuda Reserve Police.

Revenue Overview

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Revenue shown on page B-275 for the Bermuda Police Service consists of income from

- 8457, general licences;
- 8521, firearms licences;
- 8523, licences for the use of explosives;
- 8525, security guard fees;
- 8617, publications;
- 8801, facilities; and
- 8889, sundry receipts.

The BPS is responsible for the provision of fire-arm and explosive licences on Island. In addition, the BPS reviews and approves licences to the various security guard services. The BPS also provides barrack housing facilities at a nominal cost at its prospect location. With our active recruiting efforts in recent years, the availability of such housing is critical as a benefit and incentive for new officers. The BPS provides additional services including fingerprinting, police reports, and traffic reports for the public. Because the BPS is not considered, nor should it be, a revenue generator, income earned from these sources remains nominal. The BPS estimates total revenue of \$693,000 for 2026/27, a negligible decrease of \$5,000.

Subjective Analysis

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The subjective analysis of current account estimates of [Head] 7 is found on page B-275. The following highlights material changes year over year.

Madam Chairman, with a projected budget of \$74,395,000, salaries and wages represent 78 per cent of the BPS budget. The budget for salaries is \$57,991,000, an increase of \$3,131,000, or 6 per cent. The budget for wages is \$685,000, an increase of 6 per cent. The funding supports 473 full-time equivalents comprised of 400 officers and 73 civilian staff, as shown on page B-276. These salary and wage increases reflect recent union negotiations and reflect the commitment of the government to fill vacant officer posts and is a tangible sign of the value it places on police officers and staff.

I would like to read that again for the listening public: *These salary and wage increases reflect recent union negotiations and reflect the commitment of the government to fill vacant officer posts and is a tangible sign of the value it places on police officers and staff.*

Madam Chairman, repair and maintenance is budgeted at \$4,746,000, an increase of \$2,356,000. This significant increase addresses deferred maintenance needs across BPS facilities throughout the Island. The BPS operates ageing buildings that require escalating repair and maintenance investment. Additionally, this budget allocation now comprehensively includes software licence renewals and IT equipment maintenance, which were previously under-budgeted in separate cost centres. The allocation reflects realistic funding requirements for maintaining operational

facilities and digital infrastructure essential to contemporary policing.

Madam Chairman, materials and supplies are budgeted at \$1,386,000, adjusted from the prior year allocation of \$2,057,000. This decrease is to account for the anticipated reduced cost of maintenance and parts of vehicles owing to the purchase of new vehicles.

Professional services are budgeted at \$1,433,000, a decrease of \$1,302,000. These adjustments reflect a rebalancing of operational spending priorities, as well as the acquisition of additional staff to perform these services.

Capital Expenditure— Capital Development Costs

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, as shown on page C-7, the Bermuda Government is funding important capital projects for the Bermuda Police Service in the 2026/27 financial year. The renovations to the old headquarters building in Prospect commenced in the prior year and will continue in 2026/27. It is the strategic objective of the Bermuda Police Service to relocate senior command and the Serious Crime Unit back to their operational base in Prospect.

By consolidating these functions at Prospect, the BPS can eliminate rental and associated costs at its Front Street location, allow the Court's expanded use of the Hamilton Police Station, and bring staff back to a unified headquarters. This capital project represents an important long-term investment in facilities and operational efficiency.

Madam Chairman, as shown on page C-7, in the 2026/27 financial year, Government has allocated an additional \$1 million for capital development. These funds will enhance other buildings within the Bermuda Police Service Prospect location. Specifically, funding will address the removal of asbestos roofing from the building currently housing HR personnel, a necessary health and safety measure. Additional funds will support completion of renovations to two buildings within the Prospect complex that will enable future reductions in rental expenditure and allow consolidation of more staff at the Prospect location, further enhancing operational efficiency and reducing ongoing operational costs.

Capital Acquisition Costs

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Bermuda Police Service has been provided with \$1,910,000 for capital acquisitions, as shown on page C-15. Madam Chairman, \$710,000 has been provided to purchase new vehicles. As a 24/7 operation, the Bermuda Police Service vehicles endure severe wear and tear, and some must be replaced each year for safety and operational reliability.

Additionally, as the BPS seeks to expand the officer establishment to 420 officers, there is a

corresponding need to expand the vehicle fleet to support increased field operations. The acquisition of new operational vehicles in the 2026/27 financial year will support both fleet renewal and operational expansion.

Madam Chairman, the BPS has also been allocated \$200,000 for computer hardware and body-worn camera equipment. Body-worn cameras represent an important tool for accountability and evidence gathering, and continued investment in this technology supports both officer safety and transparency.

Madam Chairman, \$1,000,000 will be used to procure a records management system replacement. This investment is critical for long-term digital policing capabilities and will enhance the BPS's ability to manage criminal records, investigations, and operational intelligence in a modern, secure, and efficient digital environment.

Staffing

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Bermuda Police Service has budgeted for 473 officers and staff for the 2026/27 financial year, as shown on page B-276. This represents a significant increase of 41 funded posts compared to the 2025/26 revised budget, reflecting government's commitment to increasing police service capacity.

Madam Chairman, this represents a significant increase of 41 funded posts compared to the 2025/26 revised budget, reflecting government's commitment to increasing police service capacity. The 2026/27 budgeted establishment comprises 400 police officers and 73 civilian staff members. While the budget provides for 400 officers, the Bermuda Police Service remains committed to expanding the officer establishment to 420 through active and sustained recruitment initiatives.

This measured approach balances prudent fiscal management with our strategic objective of building a fully staffed, operationally capable police service. The eventual expansion to 420 officers will significantly enhance our capacity to deliver frontline policing services, support community safety initiatives, and meet the operational demands facing Bermuda.

Service Initiatives

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Bermuda Police Service is advancing its Strategic and Operational Plan for 2027–2031, a comprehensive five-year roadmap that will reflect our commitment to involving security needs and emerging challenges.

This plan will be developed through extensive internal and external consultation with officers, staff, community members, and partner agencies and guides our work across five key priority areas:

1. Reducing serious crime
2. Protecting vulnerable persons
3. Raising confidence in the police
4. Reducing harm on our roads

5. Developing digital policing

Implementation of this plan will be guided by our unwavering commitment to community satisfaction and confidence. We remain focused on ensuring that public input and community partnerships shape our strategic direction and operational approach. By combining professional expertise with community voice, we maintain focus on priorities that build on our achievements while adapting to evolving security threats and community expectations.

Performance Measures

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, I am pleased to report on some of the department's performance measures for the 2025/26 financial year.

Public satisfaction with the Bermuda Police Service represents the cornerstone of our performance framework. This measure, independently assessed each quarter through comprehensive surveys, transcends all other measures for a fundamental reason: policing exists only through the consent and support of our community. When citizens express satisfaction with our service, it signals their trust in our approach, their confidence in our abilities, and their willingness to partner with us in *Making Bermuda Safer*.

A police service can achieve technical objectives yet fail in its primary mission if the public feels unheard, unfairly treated, or unsafe. These independent quarterly measurements capture the people element of policing that no procedural measure can quantify. Simply put, if the community is not satisfied with their service, the Bermuda Police Service is failing, no matter what the other numbers suggest. Our performance framework is built on independent quarterly surveys that measure public perception across five key dimensions of policing service.

Madam Chairman, overall satisfaction with the Bermuda Police Service remains steady with an average response of 6.2 on a zero to 10 scale, consistent with the prior year. This stability in satisfaction scores reflects the BPS's sustained commitment to service delivery despite operational pressures. Importantly, 49 per cent of the population reported satisfaction levels of 7 or higher, indicating that nearly half of Bermudians hold positive views of our police service.

The public's perception of fair treatment by the BPS remains very strong this year, with an average score of 6.7 and 60 per cent of respondents rating the service 7 or higher for treating all citizens fairly. This reflects our commitment to dignity, respect, and equitable policing.

Public perception of the Bermuda Police Service's response to serious crime shows modest improvement, with an average rating rising from 5.7 to 5.8, with 44 per cent of respondents expressing satisfaction with how the service investigates crimes of note. This measure, while lower than other dimensions, reflects the serious and complex nature of major crime

investigations and the community's understandable expectation for swift resolution. We recognise this is an area where continued focus on communication, transparency, and investigative outcomes will build greater public confidence.

Madam Chairman, road safety perception declined slightly from 6.2 to 6.0, with 44 per cent of the population feeling safe on Bermuda's roads. This measure reflects broader road safety challenges including impaired driving and speeding issues requiring continued enforcement and community partnership. The BPS will intensify focus on road safety initiatives in the coming year with speed cameras expected to come online and have a notable impact on driver behaviour.

Public perception of the Bermuda Police Service's response to antisocial behaviour improved marginally from 6.0 to 6.1, with 45 per cent expressing satisfaction. This measure reflects growing community concern about vagrancy and quality of life issues in urban areas, particularly in the City of Hamilton. These concerns require sustained multi-agency partnership as well as the presence of capable guardians working alongside the police and intelligence-led enforcement.

Across all measures, the Bermuda Police Service recognises both achievements and opportunities. The breadth of independent measurements that capture fairness, crime response, road safety, and antisocial behaviour alongside overall satisfaction provides us with a comprehensive understanding of where we are meeting public expectations and where we must improve. These quarterly surveys reflect the voice of the community, and we are committed to using this feedback to guide operational priorities and service delivery.

Madam Chairman, please note that there is an error on page B-277 and that it shows zero as the measures when it should read 6.0.

The Chairman: And, Minister, you would know, or hopefully you know, that the office for the Chambers did provide all Members with an errata for performance measures from your Ministry and gave us the corrected version, so just so that you know, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and I do have that in front of me, so thank you.

Policing Issues for 2026/27

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Like many police services globally, the Bermuda Police Service faces ongoing operational demands that require careful management. The service continues to make progress in increasing officer numbers through active recruitment. While staffing challenges exist, we are confident that our strategic approach to recruitment and the government's commitment to supporting growth will continue to strengthen our establishment. Funding is in place, and we will

vigorously endeavour to meet our recruitment targets for 2026/27.

Madam Chairman, the Bermuda Police Service continues to benefit from strong government support and recruitment efforts, including expanded opportunities for resident non-Bermudians. This approach enhances diversity and brings new talent into the service. There is a firm commitment by government to ensure that the Bermuda Police Service is sufficiently staffed to meet the Island's security needs.

Madam Chairman, despite staffing investments, we face several significant public safety challenges that require targeted action this fiscal year. The scourge of gang and gun violence continues to affect our community. We are witnessing concerning dynamics, including involvement of younger persons in gang-related activity, sometimes extending destructive patterns across generations. This intergenerational cycle of violence demands renewed intervention strategies focused on at-risk youth, supporting diversion from gang involvement and violence. Knife crime remains a concern, and the Bermuda Police Service will continue to prioritise enforcement action and intelligent-led operations to address this threat.

Domestic abuse remains a concern, requiring sensitive handling and coordinated response. We will continue our partnership work with other agencies to ensure community members feel confident to report these sensitive matters. Our objective is to build greater community confidence in the police while providing specialised response and support to our victims.

Madam Chairman, the summer months will bring increased demand as residents and visitors congregate on beaches, on the water, and within entertainment venues. These periods present public safety challenges, including increased gang tensions, antisocial behaviour, and impaired driving. The Bermuda Police Service will maintain an intelligence-led approach to target the most violent offenders and those causing the greatest harm to our community.

Vagrancy and associated crime continue to present challenges to the look and feel of Bermuda, particularly in the City of Hamilton. Business owners report lost revenue and concerns about safety. While the roots of this complex social problem extend beyond policing, the BPS remains committed to addressing reported crimes while working with partners to develop longer-term solutions.

Each of these challenges requires not just enforcement action, but genuine community partnership and trust, the foundation upon which effective policing is built. We recognise there is always room for improvement. We will continue to ensure our responses are visible, effective, and build public trust across all communities as we work to address ongoing operational needs.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, I am pleased to report on the Bermuda Police Service's significant enforcement and operational achievements throughout calendar year 2025. These accomplishments reflect the dedication and professional commitment of our officers and staff to *Making Bermuda Safer* across all communities.

The Bermuda Police Service conducted sustained, intelligence-led enforcement operations that produced measurable results across serious crime, drug interdiction, and community safety. Between September and December 2025, Operation Sentinel, a service-wide initiative to reduce gang-related violent crime, delivered substantial outcomes: 173 arrests across high-harm categories including investigations that resulted in the recovery of four firearms and ammunition, 26 charges of possession with intent to supply, and 23 bladed article offences. The operation recovered 50 stolen motorcycles and removed them from criminal use and issued over 600 moving traffic violations directly disrupting offender mobility and preventing violent crime.

Madam Chairman, drug enforcement remained a priority. The Bermuda Police Service executed sustained, intelligence-led interdiction operations resulting in the seizure of 246 kilogrammes of illegal drugs valued at more than \$29,500,000. This included cannabis, cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, MDMA, THC concentrates, and carfentanil. The service enhanced boarder security efforts across courier services, air travel, maritime routes, and cruise ship arrivals, resulting in 110 drug seizure events. Targeted investigations into drug trafficking networks resulted in 29 arrests, with 11 individuals formally charged and 5 convictions for serious drug importation offences.

Serious crime investigations advanced substantially: 21 persons were arrested for serious offences, including murder and attempted murder. Investigators recovered eight firearms and 48 rounds of ammunition, disrupting the ability of offenders to commit violent acts. This sustained and coordinated investigative approach reflects our commitment to tackling serious violence and progressing complex cases through the criminal justice system.

The Bermuda Police Service also prioritised protection of vulnerable persons. The Vulnerable Persons Unit commenced investigation on 108 cases involving children and seniors, identifying suspects in 83 cases. The unit received and managed over 200 Department of Child and Family Services referrals and over 100 Ageing and Disability Services referrals. The Domestic Abuse Liaison Officer received and managed over 300 domestic abuse referrals.

Most notably, officers conducted a 33-day search operation that successfully located a missing 15-year-old alive and well, exemplifying our commitment to safeguarding the vulnerable.

Madam Chairman, asset recovery and financial crime enforcement strengthen community safety.

The Bermuda Police Service seized criminal property valued at \$1,047,900 under the Proceeds of Crime Act, including jewellery, marine vessels, and assets linked to organised crime, with cash seized totalling \$230,435. The Criminal Investigation Unit recovered stolen property valued at \$92,000 and approximately \$20,000 to \$25,000 linked to ATM fraud investigations, directly returning value to crime victims.

The Chairman: Minister, we are going to change Chairs at this moment, and I just want you to know that there are approximately 2 hours and 55 minutes remaining in this debate. So, you're moving along quite nicely. Thank you, Minister.

And hopefully you can get a little glass of water while you're . . .

[Mr. Scott Pearman, Chairman]

The Chairman: Good afternoon, Members. Good afternoon, members of the listening public.

As the Honourable Minister for National Security, Michael Weeks, is grabbing a quick glass of water to [quench] the thirst, let me just remind listeners that this is a five-hour debate on the budget for the Ministry of National Security. And it is due to conclude at . . . it started at—three hours left. Three hours left. Excellent. Thank you very much.

Okay, until . . . three—perfect.

So, Minister, if you are ready to get back up, and if so, you have the floor.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, sir. Mr. Chairman, if I had a higher podium, it would be so much . . . for us tall guys.

The Chairman: You could double up. You could get the other one and double up.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I will take that under consideration.

Mr. Chairman, community engagement remains central to policing strategy. Throughout 2025, the Bermuda Police Service maintained strong partnerships with community organisations supporting at-risk and vulnerable individuals, including the Youth Leadership Academy, Beyond Rugby, and the Mirrors Programme. Officers participated in senior's events and engaged with underrepresented groups. The service conducted three community-wide town halls addressing community violence, providing residents direct updates and insights into this critical issue.

The Bermuda Police Service also conducted a weapon amnesty that provided the public an opportunity to surrender prohibited items and resulted in the recovery of firearms. These achievements, from firearms and drug seizures to serious crime arrests,

vulnerable person protection, and community partnership, demonstrate the Bermuda Police Service's unwavering commitment to enforcement, disruption of criminality, and community safety. Our officers remain focused on preventing harm, holding offenders accountable, and ensuring that violent and predatory behaviour is met with decisive action.

Mr. Chairman, despite these challenges, we should remain optimistic about the future of policing in Bermuda. Our women and men work with dedication and integrity every day to serve this community. The trust placed in them is something we value and strive to strengthen with every interaction. We know that public confidence is not just a metric, it is the foundation that enables everything they do.

As they move forward with the plans and initiatives outlined today, they do so with a firm commitment to transparency, accountability, and genuine partnership with the people of Bermuda. When the community and police stand together, we create not just a safer Bermuda, but a stronger one.

So, Mr. Chairman, I extend my commendation to Commissioner Darrin Simons and his entire team for their sterling efforts in ensuring a safe Bermuda for all of us.

Mr. Chairman, that ends my presentation on Head 7, Bermuda Police Service.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

I suspect that means you are taking us on to Head 12, does it?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I shall now turn my next brief to Head 12.

The Chairman: Excellent, and for those following along in the Budget Book, that was page B-278, Head 12, Customs.

Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

HEAD 12—CUSTOMS DEPARTMENT

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to present the current account estimate for the Customs Department, Head 12, which can be found on pages B-278 through B-281 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure Book.

Mr. Chairman, the Customs Department's mission is *Protecting Bermuda's border and promoting economic development*.

The objectives of the department are to

- assess and collect customs duty and fees on imported goods;
- enforce customs laws and administer other statutes controlling the international movement of goods and people;

- prevent the smuggling of drugs and other illegal commodities, enforcing international conventions for environmental protection and money laundering, and agency work for Immigration, Health, Transport Control, and Environment; and
- provide information and assistance to the public regarding customs laws and regulations.

Mr. Chairman, the Customs Department's vision is to be a modern, effective, and efficient Customs administration offering professional service to all stakeholders, using international best practices, maximising revenue collection, and protecting the borders of Bermuda.

To make this vision a reality, strategic goals have been set for customs:

Strategic Goal 1: Staffing, Stability, and Training

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, in order for the Customs Department to carry out its mission, the department will continue to provide an environment that supports the highest level of integrity. Enhancing the department's integrity as a respected law enforcement arm of the government is vital to performing our enforcement functions and will continue to be improved by ongoing training and officer development.

Strategic Goal 2: Legislation and Operational

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, to advance customs' mandate of facilitating legitimate trade, assessing and collecting the government's revenue and interdicting drugs and other contraband, the department will continue to review existing legislation and propose enhancements that will progress customs' capability to fulfil its mandate in a rapidly changing environment.

Strategic Goal 3: Policy, Procedures, and Future

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the department's policies and procedures are a vital portion of its foundation, and the ongoing programme of updating these policies and procedures enables continuous improvement and further enhances the department's already positive work culture and continues its responsiveness to an ever-evolving environment.

Revision of the memorandums of understanding with the department's law enforcement counterparts will build upon the shared understanding of the department's comparable duties, aims, and objectives.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I will now draw your attention to the current account estimates for Head 12, which can be found on page B-278. A total of \$20,864,000 has been allocated for Head 12 for the

financial year 2026/27. This represents an increase of \$1,371,000, or 7 per cent, on the original budget for the financial year 2025/26. The most significant driver of this increase is the 4.3 per cent pay rise given to staff.

Mr. Chairman, the Customs Department operates one programme listed as 1201, General, with eight business units.

I will now address the business units as set out on page B-278.

Business Unit 22000, Yacht Reporting Centre

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The operations of the Yacht Reporting Centre (YRC) constitute an important part of the vessel clearance section and consequently, the budget for YRC is provided for under business unit 22090, Vessel Clearance. The 2024/25 actual expenses of \$7,000 are an allocation of the Customs Department portion of the government-wide vehicle insurance cost.

Business Unit 22030, Airport Arrivals—Travellers

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, Airport Arrivals—Travellers has an estimate of \$5,559,000. This represents a decrease of \$73,000, or 1 per cent. This decrease pertains entirely to staff costs. Although the amount provided for base salaries has increased by \$279,000, the amount provided for other staff costs, such as overtime and other contractually agreed allowances, has decreased by \$352,000.

A contributing factor in this reduction is the Customs Department's increased use of external vendors to fulfil the immigration and cashiering functions at the airport. The external vendors are a number of retired customs officers and police officers who are utilised to free up customs officers to focus on their core responsibilities. The vendors represent an efficiency because their pay is lower than a customs officer's pay since their role is much more limited. This is especially useful to the department as they currently have unfilled vacancies, and the vendors provide coverage of essential duties while the department actively works to recruit for the substantive roles. You will note on page B-279 that the full-time equivalent is planned to increase from 61 by two to 63.

Business Unit 22050, Investigations/Audit

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, Investigations/Audit has an estimate of \$1,157,000. This represents an increase of \$77,000, or 7 per cent. This increase pertains entirely to staff costs. On page B-279, the full-time equivalent will be maintained at 13.

Business Unit 22070, Hamilton Commercial Operations

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, Hamilton Commercial Ops has an estimate of \$1,512,000. This represents an increase of \$203,000, or 16 per cent. This anticipated increase is largely due to the demands posed by NAMLC compliance as we prepare for the mutual evaluation starting later this year. An enormous amount of work is being done and needs to be done to prepare for the evaluation and this increase is needed to cover the extra costs generated by work associated with NAMLC.

You will note from the employee numbers on page B-279 that this section is planned to maintain a staffing level of 15 full-time equivalents.

Business Unit 22080, Administration

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, Administration has an estimate of \$5,992,000. This represents an increase of \$810,000, or 16 per cent. The Administration business unit is deemed the headquarters of the department, and a majority of the operational budget is allocated to this unit. For brevity and to avoid repetition, I will elaborate upon all the notable budget changes during my presentation of page B-279; however, I will briefly comment on the movement in staff costs in this section which have increased by \$168,000, or 7 per cent. You will note from the employee numbers on page B-279 that this section is planned to maintain a staffing level of 22 full-time equivalents.

Business Unit 22090, Vessel Clearance

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, Vessel Clearance has an estimate of \$2,068,000. This represents an increase of \$117,000, or 6 per cent. You will note from the employee numbers on page B-279 that this section is planned to maintain a staffing level of 22 full-time equivalents.

Business Unit 22100, Interdiction

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, Interdiction has an estimate of \$3,300,000. This represents an increase of \$200,000, or 6 per cent. You will note from the employee numbers on page B-279 that this section is planned to increase its staffing level by three to become 35 full-time equivalents. The increase of the actual full-time equivalents is planned to be used to bolster the effectiveness and operational capacity of the Intelligence Unit.

Business Unit 22110, Seaport Enforcement Team

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, Seaport Enforcement Team has an estimate of \$1,276,000. This represents an increase of \$37,000, or 3 per cent. You will note from the employee numbers on page B-279 that this section is planned to maintain a staffing level of 14 full-time equivalents.

Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, turning to page B-279, the table headed Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates shows how the allocated funds are intended to be spent. Just over 82 per cent of the budget, \$17,212,000, has been allocated to pay for salaries. The allocation for the salary expense line has increased by \$748,000, or 5 per cent.

If we momentarily turn our attention to the table headed Employee Numbers (Full-Time Equivalents), we observe an increase in the number of estimated Customs staff from the 2025/26 original of 181 to the 2026/27 estimate of 184.

The additional positions are planned to be used at the airport and the interdiction section. The total approved establishment of the Customs Department is 228 positions.

Mr. Chairman, of the remaining expense lines, the most significant changes are as follows.

- Other personnel costs are estimated to be \$188,000, a decrease of \$12,000, or 6 per cent. The other personnel costs in question are, primarily, allowances provided for Customs Officers being on call and called out. As you will be aware, the Customs Department has to be prepared to respond around the clock to provide its border control service. From time to time, unscheduled flights and vessels arrive into Bermuda and, therefore, the Customs Department pays an on-call allowance to retain a skeleton crew to respond to emergency out-of-hours calls. The reduction of \$12,000 pertains to a reduction in the allowances provided to canine officers as one canine has retired.

- Training costs are estimated to be \$21,000, an increase of \$11,000, or 110 per cent.

- Travel costs are estimated to be \$43,000, a decrease of \$1,000, or 2 per cent. The planned travel comprises of Bermuda Customs participating in the World Customs Organization and Caribbean Customs Law Enforcement Council conferences, as well as attending overseas ACAMS training. The planned increase is primarily due to an additional expected trip for ACAMS training. ACAMS is the Association of Certified Anti-Money Laundering Specialists, and this training is beneficial to Customs in several ways. For example, expertise in money laundering techniques, trends, and detection methods allows the Customs Department to provide up-to-date training to officers on the ground with respect to conducting investigations. This expertise is also useful in developing intelligence on the financial side of smuggling, which makes the identification of suspicious activities easier. Further, it aids in the development of policies that satisfy the requirements of the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force. This in turn benefits the economy of Bermuda as it increases the likelihood of receiving a favourable rating as part of the National Money Laundering Risk Assessment, which will be conducted within the next year.

- Communication costs are estimated to be \$116,000, a decrease of \$17,000, or 13 per cent. These costs represent telephone and internet costs and are reflective of the preceding financial year's actual expenses. The reduction in costs follows a project where the department reviewed its current needs for paid telephone lines and found that cuts could be made in this cost centre.

- Professional services are estimated to be \$832,000, an increase of \$474,000, or 132 per cent. The main drive of this expense type is the expanded use of retired Customs Officers to perform immigration primary functions and to cover two cashier posts until those posts are substantively filled. These support officers have the training and years of experience but are employed at a reduced cost and on a part-time basis. As a result, this allows the department to work more efficiently as it frees full-time customs officers from performing some immigration functions and allows them to focus on the core aspects of the Customs Officer role. Additionally, the department is increasingly being called upon to respond to recommendations from the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee and, therefore, has provided an additional \$167,000 on legislation and policy consultants to assist with this workload. Additionally, the department has provided a further \$150,000 to engage contractors to further develop export control functions for Bermuda.

- Rentals are estimated to be \$684,000, an increase of \$77,000. This expense line covers rent for buildings in the amount of \$597,000 and equipment for \$10,000. The Customs Department occupies two buildings for which it pays rent:

- Customs House at 131 Front Street, which houses its headquarters, administration, commercial operations, investigations, and audit sections. The facility service charge for Customs House has increased by \$13,000 to \$508,000.
- Building 110 at Southside, which is a replacement for the training and administration space that Customs formerly occupied within the old airport buildings. The rent for this facility has not increased. The remaining \$64,000 of the increase in rent pertains to a provision to rent facilities to host the Caribbean Customs Law Enforcement Council Conference in May 2026.

- Repair and maintenance are estimated to be \$1,272,000, an increase of \$38,000, or 3 per cent. This heading includes software costs and the increases due to a rise in the software maintenance fee. The software in question pertains to a maintenance contract associated with CAPS, the Customs Automated Processing System. In December 2025, an existing five-year software maintenance contract with IBM expired and the fees were increased in the new maintenance contract.

- Energy is estimated to be \$162,000, an increase of \$19,000 or 13 per cent. The increase is

reflective of actual costs during the preceding financial year.

- Clothing, uniforms, and laundry are estimated at \$68,000, an increase of \$1,000, or 1 per cent.

- Materials and supplies are estimated at \$268,000, an increase of \$33,000, or 14 per cent. This category of expense is broad and diverse and includes office supplies, cleaning supplies, personal protective equipment, food and supplies for canines, computer supplies, consumables for detection equipment, and other miscellaneous items. The estimate is reflective of the actual expenditure in the preceding financial period.

Performance Measures

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, turning to pages B-280 and B-281, I would like to offer some comments on the performance measures for the Customs Department.

Firstly, on page B-280, you will note that no performance measures have been provided and no budget allocation has been allocated to business units 22020, Airport Commercial, and 22040, Airport Shift "B." These business units were floated into 22070, Hamilton Commercial Ops, and 22030, Airport Arrivals—Travellers, respectively, some years ago.

For the 2024/25 year, business unit 22030, Airport Arrivals—Travellers, collected forced duty in the amount of \$13,831. It is forecasted that during 2025/26, that forced duty in the amount of \$25,000 will be collected. The target for 2026/27 is \$35,000.

Mr. Chairman, for the 2024/25 year, business unit 22030, Airport Arrivals—Travellers seized illicit items on 66 occasions. It is forecasted that during 2025/26, that this unit shall seize illicit items on 25 occasions. The target for 2026/27 is 25.

For the 2024/25 year, business unit 22050, Investigations/Audit, completed 95 cases and collected additional duty of \$9,361. It is forecasted that during 2025/26, that this unit shall complete 50 cases and expects to collect additional duty of \$16,300. The target for 2026/27 is 100 cases dealt with and additional duty collected of \$20,000.

Mr. Chairman, for the 2024/25 year, business unit 22070, Hamilton Commercial Ops met its prescribed quality service levels [QSL] with respect to the time frame of releasing imported goods 72 per cent of the time on 533,481 processed declarations. It is forecasted that during 2025/26, that this unit will achieve 70 per cent on 588,036 process declarations. The targets for 2026/27 are 70 per cent achievement of QSL time frames and 570,000 processed declarations.

Mr. Chairman, turning to page B-281, for the 2024/25 year, Business Unit 22090, Vessel Clearance, prepared invoices to collect revenue from arriving vessels in the amount of \$1,531,157. The forecast for 2025/26 and the target for 2026/27 is \$1.3 million.

For the 2024/25 year, Business Unit 22100, Interdiction seized 411 illicit items and achieved a 92 per

cent of positive results from search and detentions undertaken. It is forecast that during 2025/26, 350 items will be seized and the target for 2026/27 is therefore also 350 seizures.

For the 2024/25 year, Business Unit 22110, Seaport Enforcement Team reviewed 80 per cent of import cargo manifests and scanned 93 per cent of imported containers. It is forecast that during 2025/26, those percentages will be 98 per cent and 94 per cent respectively. The target of 98 per cent for both categories has been set for 2026/27.

Capital Expenditure. Mr. Chairman—excuse me.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister. While you are just taking a quick gulp of water, we are currently in the five-hour debate concerning the Ministry of National Security. We are currently on head, or just wrapping up Head 12, Customs, which I believe is the fourth of your six heads, Minister.

And for those following along, the Honourable Minister Michael Weeks has us at [page] B-281 and this is a five-hour debate concluding at 6:03 in the afternoon.

Minister, if you are ready, with that replenished throat . . . go ahead.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

So, Mr. Chairman, I am now at Capital Expenditure.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Customs Department has two planned capital projects. Firstly, as shown on page C-8, a capital development project for Business Unit 75372 has been allocated \$600,000 to replace the Hamilton Dock Scanner Hall Building. The existing building has been in place since 2012 and has fallen into disrepair and is in urgent need of replacement for the safety of those working in and around the building and for the preservation of the equipment contained therein. Work on replacing the building has already started and the project is expected to be completed by May 2026.

Initiatives for 2026/27

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, in harmony with the Customs Department's strategic goals, the following initiatives are planned.

With respect to Strategic Goal 1—Staffing, Stability, and Training (as mentioned earlier):

- The Customs Department intends to complete promotions and a recruitment exercise during 2026/27. This will bolster the activities across the department, but with particular focus being placed on enhancing marine and airport operations.

- The department will continue to utilise the excellent training modules developed by the World Customs Organization, which are provided as part of Bermuda's membership.
- Additionally, Customs will engage with the UK Home Office for strategic planning and training opportunities.
- Customs will work on updating staff job descriptions to ensure that they are in harmony with current operational realities.
- With the export control scoping study well underway, it is the intention of the department to commence staff training to undertake this new role, which plays an important role in the combating of international terrorism and organised crime.

Mr. Chairman, with respect to Strategic Goal 2—Legislation and Operational:

- The Customs Department has begun consulting with an international expert in the field of export control and expects to have substantial proposed amendments to the Revenue Act [1898] during 2026/27.

Mr. Chairman, with respect to Strategic Goal 3—Policy, Procedures, and Future:

- During 2026/27, it is our intention to continue to work to provide support to the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee in its important work of preventing money laundering and terrorist financing. Customs plays a very critical role in this area as the enforcement body responsible for the cross-border movement of cash and goods.
- As mentioned earlier, it is also our intention to develop an export control process which will further mitigate the risk to our reputation and society arising from money laundering.
- The department continues to work with software developers to create an API which will allow the submission of Customs Traveller Declarations using a smartphone application and expects to have this available to be published in the early part of the 2026/27 financial year.

Mr. Chairman, I wish to thank the Collector of Customs, Ms. Lucinda Pearman, and her entire team for their continued, dedicated, and professional service to Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes the current and capital estimates for Head 12.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Minister.

And we will now move on, I believe, to Head 45 regarding the Fire Services, which again for those listening, we are in Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27. This is a five-hour debate on the budget for the Ministry of National Security. The debate is due to go until 6:30 pm and Minister Michael Weeks is now taking us onto his

fifth head of six, and this is Head 45—[Bermuda] Fire [and Rescue] Service which is found at [page] B-282.

Minister, you have the floor.

HEAD 45—BERMUDA FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 45, Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service, found on pages B-282 through B-284 of the Budget Book.

Mission Statement

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The mission of the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service is, *To provide fire protection to life and property through the delivery of fire prevention, airport fire rescue, and emergency medical services to the community.* We will deliver this through the dedicated and professional service of our uniformed and civilian staff in collaboration with our community partners.

Department Objectives

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the department objectives, which can be found on page B-282, are to

- continue procurement of modern, fit-for-purpose emergency response vehicles;
- implement a modernised, comprehensive training programme for all operational personnel including advancing the development of a firefighter training facility;
- continue skills for justice officer qualifications and incident command with our key UK training partner;
- advance our work towards UK National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) National Operational Guidance Compliance by collaborating with a leading UK training provider; and
- modernise our estate and buildings to make them fit-for-purpose.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, a total of \$19,176,153 has been allocated for this head which represents an increase of \$1,260,000, or 7 per cent, from the previous year and constitutes 14 per cent of the budget allocated for the Ministry as a whole. The majority of this increase is due to the costs associated with recent negotiated salary and benefits awards.

General Summary

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the general summary of business units for the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service is found on page B-282.

I will highlight the material, object code increases and decreases per Business Unit.

Business Unit 55030, Fire Prevention: \$60,000

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The Fire Prevention Division plays a critical role in ensuring public safety through comprehensive fire risk management. Staffed by a dedicated team of five full-time professionals, the Fire Prevention Division conducts risk assessments of commercial buildings and issues fire certificates in accordance with the Fire Safety Act 2014.

Additional functional tasks include the investigation and determination of causes of fire and where appropriate prevention officers issue safety guidance. Additionally, the prevention team reviews and examines architectural and engineering planning submissions for new construction and remodelling projects, ensuring compliance with the relevant building and life safety codes.

During the 2025/26 fiscal year, several building projects continue either via major renovations or via new builds. For example, the Bermudiana condominiums, the Fairmont Hamilton, Fairmont Southampton, Grotto Bay Beach Resort, the HSBC building on Church Street, 91 Front Street, Luxor House and 33 Church Street, to name a few. The Fire Prevention Division has been consulted about potential residential buildings and other change of use projects in the City of Hamilton.

Mr. Chairman, these projects and many others help stimulate economic growth in our community and provide jobs for Bermudians. In addition, they provide regular inspections of licensed properties to ensure maintenance of fire protection standards. To help streamline the review process, the Fire Prevention Division recently launched an online permit platform with interoperability with the Department of Planning's energy platform.

With a growing population of seniors in our community, the Fire Prevention Division focused their efforts and attention on this demographic this fiscal year. Partnering with Age Concern and Bermuda Housing Trust, the division distributed and installed smoke alarms for residents at Elizabeth Hills and Haydon Park. They will continue this initiative at Purvis Park in March.

The Fire Prevention Division once again facilitated the annual Fire Safety Awareness Week in October of 2025, receiving children from across the Island for a station tour of Hamilton Fire Station and interacting with firefighters through fun activities. At the end of the visit, each child received gift bags with fire safety promotional material. Additionally, the division collaborated with Mr. Bruce Barritt for his Welch's Wednesday giveaway and distributed to the motoring public fire safety promotional material with emphasis on lithium-ion batteries, which was this year's theme. To further heighten Fire Safety Awareness Week, the department

mobilised their fleet of apparatus through the City of Hamilton as a new feature for the campaign.

Mr. Chairman, funding for this Business Unit for the 2026/27 financial year is \$60,000. This represents an increase of \$31,150, or 107 per cent, over the 2025/26 financial year. This increase can be attributed to the need to purchase fire safety education publications, brochures and promotional equipment to support community fire safety education.

[Pause]

The Chairman: The Honourable Minister is just taking another sip of water. Honourable Minister, are you ready to press on?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Ready to press on, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Okay, we are still at Head 45—

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes.

The Chairman: And I think you were now over on to [page] B-283.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes, just about getting there.

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: During the 2025/26 financial year, the Fire Prevention Division achievements included: 178 fire certificates issued; 200 plan reviews completed; 19 senior care homes inspected; 18 hotel initial inspections and subsequent follow-up inspections were completed; 26 child day care inspections were completed; and 355 risk assessments were conducted.

Business Unit 55060, Central Emergency
Fire Service: \$7,423,275

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Central Emergency Fire Service business unit covers the provision of fire and emergency services from Hamilton, Eastern and Western Fire Stations. These stations respond to fires, road traffic collisions, emergency medical incidents and hazardous material incidents when required. This business unit has a budget estimate of \$7,423,275, which is an increase of \$927,275, or 14 per cent, over the financial year 2025/26. This increase can be attributed to funding for 16 new firefighters and an increase in salary benefits associated with the collective bargaining agreement between the Fire Service Association and the Bermuda Government.

Business Unit 55080, Other Services Central:
\$753,110

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, Other Services Central contains the Vehicle Repair Services and Engineering personnel. This business unit has a budget estimate of \$753,110, which represents a decrease of \$85,890, or 10 per cent, from the 2025/26 financial year. The decrease reflects the anticipated reduction of maintenance costs, which is attributed to the delivery of four major foam vehicles that provide fire protection at the L. F. Wade International Airport. This business unit also supports the procurement of essential vehicle parts to maintain the remaining fleet of emergency vehicles.

Business Unit 55090, St. George's Emergency Fire
Service: \$115,163

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the St. George's Emergency Fire Service business unit supports the provision of fire and emergency services to the eastern end of the Island from the Clearwater Fire Station. This station responds to fires, road traffic collisions, and hazardous material incidents when required. We are pleased to report that this business unit also supports the allocation of a dedicated ambulance to provide emergency medical response to the community at the east end of the Island. The funding for this business unit is \$115,163 for the 2026/27 financial year and represents an increase of 10 per cent, or \$10,750 from the 2025/26 financial year.

Business Unit 55100, Emergency Medical
Services: \$50,000

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Emergency Medical Services business unit is responsible for facilitating emergency medical technician certification, in addition to the procurement of personal protection equipment and supplies associated with the department's emergency medical response throughout the Island. The funding for this business unit is \$50,000 for the 2026/27 financial year. This represents a decrease of \$20,000, or 29 per cent, from the 2025/26 financial year.

Business Unit 55120, West End Emergency
Service: \$72,100

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the West End Emergency [Fire] Service provides provision of emergency services from the Port Royal Fire Station. This station responds to fires, road traffic collisions, hazardous material, and provides support to the Hamilton and Clearwater stations for emergencies when required. The funding for this business unit is \$72,100 for the 2026/27 financial year and represents an increase of \$11,100 from the original 2025/26 budget allocation.

Business Unit 55150, Training: \$727,000

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Training section is tasked with developing a comprehensive educational schedule to ensure that all training and certification programmes meet both local and international standards. This includes recruitment and foundation training and certification. The Training section leads the recruitment process, facilitates local and overseas recruit foundation courses for new firefighters designated for airport and structural operations.

Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) Training and Certification. This section designs and implements training programmes for EMTs, ensuring firefighters are equipped with the requisite skills and knowledge to provide high-quality medical care during emergencies.

Firefighting Competency Maintenance. This section organises local and overseas training for firefighters, focusing on techniques and strategies to effectively respond to aircraft, structural fires, hazardous material, and medical emergencies in alignment with local and international standards. This ensures that firefighters are equipped to manage various emergency scenarios safely and professionally.

Leadership Training Courses. This section facilitates leadership and professional development and international certification of personnel in supervisory and management roles. Leadership training concentrates on developing skills to ensure that leaders can proficiently direct their teams during emergency incidents.

This unit has a budget estimate of \$727,000, which represents a decrease of \$109,550, or 13 per cent, from the 2025/26 financial year. The decrease is due to achieving most of our required training certification in 2025/26, which means the need for revalidation of firefighters is lessened for 2026/27.

Mr. Chairman, training achievements during the 2025/26 financial year include:

- nine firefighters obtained their aircraft rescue firefighter certification in the United Kingdom;
- forty-eight airport firefighters revalidated their certifications in Toronto, Canada;
- firefighters completed several Skills for Justice award in Incident Command courses;
- twelve completed the Level 3 Initial [Incident] Command award, and four completed the Level 4 Intermediate [Incident] Command award; six completed the Level 6 Advanced [Incident] Command award, and four completed the Level 7 Strategic [Incident] Command award. The courses were conducted in Bermuda and the United Kingdom;
- one firefighter obtained the aircraft crew commander certification in the United Kingdom;
- one firefighter obtained the aircraft watch commander certification in the United Kingdom;
- nine firefighters completed the foundation aircraft rescue firefighter certification in the United Kingdom;

- two completed various emergency driving courses;
- fifteen firefighters completed the emergency medical technician certification course in Bermuda;
- six firefighters obtained the national registered emergency medical technician certification;
- seventy firefighters maintained their registration as emergency medical technicians with the Allied Health Council;
- forty firefighters completed CPR recertification;
- eight recruit firefighters received the Skills for Justice award Level 3 certification in operational firefighting;
- two firefighters completed the UK Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Module 3 Water Rescue Technician course in Wales;
- two firefighters completed the trained aid assessor qualification course;
- two firefighters obtained breathing apparatus instructor qualifications at Red One Limited, in the UK;
- two firefighters obtained their breathing apparatus repair technician certification; and
- two mechanics completed vehicle factory training at Spartan and Rosenbauer.

Business Unit 55170, General Administration:
\$4,220,095

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the General Administration cost centre is responsible for the funding and support services of the Administration section of the department. The budget estimate for this unit is \$4,220,095, which is a decrease of \$10,905, or less than 1 per cent from the financial year 2025/26.

Business Unit 55190, Emergency Dispatch:
\$1,000,008

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The Emergency Dispatch Corps Centre is responsible for answering both fire and medical 911 calls from the community and dispatch the appropriate fire and medical resources. The budget estimate for this business unit is \$1,000,008. This represents an increase of \$56,008, or 6 per cent.

Business Unit 55200, Airport Fire [Rescue]:
\$4,755,402

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, this business unit provides aircraft, emergency rescue, and firefighting services at the L. F. Wade International Airport, as prescribed by the Overseas Territories Aviation Requirements (OTAR) Part 140. Aerodromes are categorised between a range of 1 to 10. A Category 10 aerodrome can accommodate the world's largest passenger aircraft. By comparison, the L. F. Wade International

Airport is registered as a Category 9 aerodrome. This category must be maintained to facilitate the direct flights between Heathrow International Airport and Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, an aerodrome's registered category predicates the level of fire protection that must be provided for rescue and firefighting, including the manpower, training, and certifications equipment, the number of vehicles, extinguishing medium, and response guidelines. Firefighters assigned at the airport fire station are required to expertly navigate an 80,000-pound vehicle to any point on the runway within two minutes of an accident.

Mr. Chairman, the budget estimate for this unit is \$4,755,402, an increase of \$450,402, or 10 per cent. This is largely attributed to an increase in the salary and benefits negotiated between the government and the Fire Service Association.

Revenue Overview: Fire Protection and Airport Operation

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the revenue estimates for the service can be found on page B-283. The revenue for the 2026/27 financial year is estimated at \$170,000, which is identical to the fiscal year 2025/26.

Mr. Chairman, you will note the variances in the three line items from year to year. However, the net change from year to year is zero. Please note that for 2026/27, we have reallocated the revenue codes to better reflect actual operations and revenue collection.

Mr. Chairman, all commercial buildings and large residential properties undergo fire and life safety risk assessment and apply for a fire certificate. Fire certificates are valid for one to five years based on the risk level. Relicensing occurs over the lifespan of a building.

Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The subjective analysis of current account estimates of the department, Head 45, is found on page B-283. I will highlight the material object curve increases and decreases.

Salaries

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, funding allocation for salaries for the financial year 2026/27 is \$16,151,142. This is an increase of \$1,612,141, or 11 per cent, from the financial year 2025/26. This increase is attributed to an increase in salaries and benefits resulting from recently concluded collective bargaining agreements and a filling of 19 funded vacant full-time equivalents.

Other Personnel Costs

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, funding allocation for other personnel costs is associated with the collective bargaining agreement between the Fire Service Association and the Bermuda Government. The collective bargaining agreement includes benefits related to emergency off duty pay, telephone allowances, specialist skills pay, standby pay, and shift premiums. Funding allocation is \$60,000 for the 2026/27 financial year. This represents a decrease of \$16,000, or 21 per cent, from the financial year 2025/26. This decrease is attributed to the consolidation of funding into another business unit to improve accounting efficiency.

Communications

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the funding allocation for communications is \$341,440 for the 2026/27 financial year. This represents an increase of \$13,000, or 4 per cent, from the financial year 2025/26. The increase is due to a rise in fees charged by telecommunication vendors.

Professional Services

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the funding allocated for professional services is \$111,000 for the 2026/27 financial year. This represents a decrease of \$39,000, or 26 per cent, from the financial year 2025/26. The decrease represents more prudent management of resources for the year.

Repair and Maintenance

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the funding allocation for repair and maintenance is \$536,000 for the 2026/27 financial year. This represents a decrease of \$131,000, or 20 per cent, from the financial year 2025/26. This business unit supports the maintenance of air conditioning, cleaning services, and building infrastructure. This change reflects measures taken to maximise allocated funding.

Insurance

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the funding allocation for insurance is \$354,000 for the 2026/27 financial year. This is the same as for fiscal year 2025/26.

Energy

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the funding allocation for energy is \$494,000 for the 2026/27 financial year. This represents an increase of \$106,000 from the financial year 2025/26. This increase reflects the rising cost of fuel and energy costs.

Materials and Supplies

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, funding allocation for materials and office supplies for the department's three locations is \$302,000, a decrease of \$31,000, or 9 per cent, from the financial year 2025/26. This decrease reflects measures taken to maximise funding allocated for the 2026/27 financial year.

Capital Expenditure
Capital Acquisition Funding, Page C-15

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, a total of \$1,489,678 has been allocated for capital acquisitions for the 2026/27 financial year. Capital acquisitions can be found on page C-15 of the Budget Book.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

HOUSE VISITOR

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister. And while you're just getting a glass of water, let me recognise in the Gallery, Senator Simmons, I think, is in the Gallery.

[Desk thumping]

[Committee of Supply, continuing]

The Chairman: And you were just taking us to grants and allocations at [page] C-7, I think.
Is that what you said? [Page] C-7, Minister?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes. [Page] C-15.

The Chairman: Oh, I'm sorry, [page] C-15.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Capital expenditure.

The Chairman: Yes, I have it.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Okay.

The Chairman: Yes, thank you.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: A total of \$1,489,678 has been allocated for capital acquisitions for the 2026/27 financial year. Capital acquisitions can be found on page C-15 of the Budget Book.

A total of \$1,403,917 has been allocated for the procurement of two domestic emergency response vehicles to provide fire protection and emergency response to the community. A further \$84,761 has been allocated for the procurement of operational rescue equipment firefighters use to enter hot and hazardous environments and equipment used to extricate persons trapped as a result of road traffic collisions.

Manpower

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the employee numbers of full-time equivalents can be found on page

B-283. The total number of full-time employees is 164 for the financial year 2026/27. This is unchanged from the financial year 2025/26.

Performance Measures by Business Unit

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to report that the department's forecast performance measures for fiscal year 2025/26 were achieved. These can be found on page B-284.

Business Unit 55060, Central Emergency Fire Service

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Central Emergency Fire Service delivers comprehensive fire and emergency services from its base in Hamilton to all regions of the Island. The unit provides an all-hazard response, including fires, road traffic collisions, medical emergencies, and hazardous material incidents. During the 2025/26 financial year, the department responded to approximately 4,200 fire incidents calls for service. I am pleased to report that we successfully achieved an average response time of eight minutes for the arrival of the first emergency vehicle at incident scenes. Excellent.

Business Unit 55090, St. George's Emergency Fire Services: \$104,413

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the St. George's Emergency Fire Service business unit provides fire and emergency services to the eastern end of the Island from the Clearwater Fire Station. We are pleased to report that the community at the east end of the Island are serviced by a dedicated ambulance that responds from the Clearwater Fire Station. The dual response of a fire vehicle and an ambulance have ensured that response times are within the target time of eight minutes during the 20[2]5/26 financial year.

Business Unit 55120, West End Emergency [Fire] Service

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The Central Emergency Fire Service provides fire and emergency services primarily to the west end of the Island from the Port Royal Station, mandated to provide emergency response to all hazard response. Activities are coordinated by the department's emergency dispatch. We are delighted to report that the target average of an eight-minute response time for the first vehicle arrival to incidents was achieved for the financial year 2025/26.

Business Unit 55190, Emergency Dispatch

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, emergency dispatch is a critical first point of contact for the community in times of crisis. Receiving and managing all

911 calls relating to fire and medical emergencies. Upon receipt of a call, highly specialised trained dispatchers rapidly evaluate the nature and severity of the incident and immediately mobilise the appropriate fire and emergency medical resources.

This coordinated response framework ensures that personnel and equipment are deployed without delay, enabling timely intervention and improving outcomes for those in need. The effectiveness, speed and precision of the dispatch function are fundamental to the service's operational readiness and the safeguarding of public safety. During the 2025/26 financial year, the emergency dispatch answered approximately 11,457 calls for service, which included 6,896 medical incidents and 4,561 fire incidents.

Business Unit 55200, Airport Fire Rescue

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, this business unit is tasked with delivering aircraft emergency rescue and firefighting services at L. F. Wade International Airport. These services are mandated under the Overseas Territories Aviation Requirements (OTAR) Part 140, ensuring alignment with international aviation safety standards. Fifty-one of the most notable emergencies the Airport Fire Rescue responded to during the 2025/26 financial year includes 12 aircraft related emergencies, 33 medical emergencies, five hot fuel requests (these are instances when all aircraft receives fuel while the passengers remain on board), and one special services. All responses were within the stated performance measures for the 2025/26 financial year.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: During the 2026/27 financial year, fire officers will complete various local and international certified courses. These include expanding the maintenance of competency scheme to ensure all firefighters are fit for role. We also intend to expand the Skills for Justice award Level 3 and 4 Operational and Technical Incident Command Certification and Revalidation for all managing fire officers.

Fire officers will attend highly specialised tactical training programmes that will develop designated lead officers within the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service. These officers will be equipped with specialist competencies including qualifications such as hazardous materials, technical advisor and road traffic collision instructor certification, thereby strengthening the service's internal expertise and operational capability. A firefighter recruit foundation course for vacant funded posts will commence in quarter one of the 2026/27 financial year.

Mr. Chairman, that ends my presentation on Head 45, [Bermuda] Fire [and Rescue] Service.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Minister.

For the benefit of the listening public, we are in the Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year ended *[sic]* 2026/27, or the year coming, I should say, rather. And we are hearing a five-hour debate on the Ministry of National Security budget.

And we have just been hearing from the Honourable Minister Weeks, who has just finished Head 45 and is now moving on to the sixth and final head, namely Head 88, National Drug Control. This is a five-hour debate, and it is due to conclude at 6.03 pm.

Honourable Minister, when you are ready, you have the floor.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Before I move on, I would also like to thank Chief Fire Officer Mr. Dana Lovell and his team for their unwavering commitment and service to the community. They continue to remain on the front line providing exemplary service protecting Bermuda.

I shall now move on to Head 88, Bermuda National Drug Control.

HEAD 88—BERMUDA NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 88, the Department for National Drug Control, found on pages B-285 through B-288 of the Budget Book.

Mandate or Mission

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the mandate of the Department of National Drug Control is, *To reduce the harmful effects of substance misuse and abuse on the community.*

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, as shown on page B-265 of the Budget Book, a total of \$5,989,374 has been allocated for this head, which represents 4 per cent of the budget allocated for the Ministry as a whole.

Mr. Chairman, the total current expenditure is estimated to be \$5,989,000 for 2026/27 and represents an increase of \$954,059, or approximately 19 per cent higher than the budget of 2025/26.

This increase is due primarily to increases in salary uplifts, funding for the adolescent substance abuse treatment programme, increased grant allocations and an increase in the general cost of living for operating costs.

Subjective Analysis

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the subjective analysis of current account estimates of the

Department of National Drug Control is found on page B-286. I will highlight the material object-related increases and decreases as per business unit.

Business Unit 98000, Administration, page B-285:

2025/26 Original Estimate: \$1,317,000

2026/27 Estimate: \$1,396,000

Increase of \$79,000, or 6 per cent

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Administration allocation of \$1,396,000 is a \$79,000, or 6 per cent, increase from the 2025/26 allocation. The increase is due mainly to an increase in grant allocations by \$200,000, offset by funding from the SHIFT (PRIDE) grant of \$169,000, being moved to 98020 Prevention, line 3 on page [B-]285, along with various increases in operating costs totalling \$79,000, including the negotiated salary uplifts.

The administration budget covers employee salaries for two staff and other operational expenses, facilities, utilities, maintenance costs, supplies, and training, and the following grants of \$150,000 for Salvation Army Harbour Light and Community Life Skills Programme; \$150,000 for Dignity House (which is new); \$330,000 for Focus Counselling Services; and \$150,000 for Pathways Bermuda. These are listed on page C-21, Grants and Contributions.

The Chairman: Yes.

Business Unit 98010, Community Development

Page B-285

2025/26 Original Estimate: \$233,000

2026/27 Estimate: \$217,000

Decrease of \$16,000, or 7 per cent

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the allocation to Community Development, business unit 98010, is \$217,000, which is a \$16,000, or 7 per cent, decrease from the 2025/26 allocation. The decrease is related to a decrease in funds for advertising and promotions. Funding is allocated to facilitate activities that are primarily targeted towards public education, community development, information dissemination, and to support a grant of \$60,000 to the Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse (CADA) to support alcohol awareness and to provide TIPS training. (Please see page C-21, Grants and Contributions.)

Business Unit 98020, Prevention, page B-285:

2025/26 Original Estimate: \$247,000

2026/27 Estimate: \$373,000

Increase of \$126,000, or 51 per cent

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, an allocation of \$373,000 is provided to support the Prevention Unit efforts in business unit 98020. This is a \$126,000, or 51 per cent, increase in the allocation from 2025/26 due to the negotiated salary uplift for one staff and the

move of SHIFT programming funds under the DNDC due to the charity closing.

The funding will ensure that the programming previously provided by SHIFT continues. Funding was previously budgeted under 98000. Funds in this business unit are utilised to improve coverage of drug prevention measures within the community, to improve opportunities for school-based prevention interventions, and to increase access for young people to targeted prevention programmes. Funding is also utilised to support training of prevention professionals and community members to support drug prevention efforts.

Business Unit 98030, Treatment, page B-285

2025/26 Original Estimate: \$419,000

2026/27 Estimate: \$890,000

Increase of \$471,000, or 112 per cent

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Treatment Unit, business unit 98030, is allocated \$890,000 in fiscal year 2026/27. This is an increase of \$471,000, or 112 per cent. The increase is related to funding allocated to implement the Throne Speech Initiative, adolescent substance abuse treatment programme, in fiscal year 2026/27 in the amount of \$450,000, along with salary uplifts for two staff.

Mr. Chairman, the Treatment Unit funding allocation is used to facilitate the implementation of key activities geared towards achieving the goals of the National Treatment Strategy, including Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), accreditation fees and resources, addiction-specific training, Recovery Month (which is in September), activities; and the AccuCare, web-based client management system licences and training. Funds are also allocated to support the grant for the Bermuda Addiction Certification Board [BACB] at the cost of \$80,000 (see page C-21, Grants and Contributions) as well as the implementation of an adolescent substance abuse treatment programme, as previously mentioned.

Business Unit 98050, Research and Policy

Development Unit, page B-285

2025/26 Original Estimate: \$326,000

2026/27 Estimate: \$314,000

Decrease of \$12,000, or 4 per cent

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Research and Policy Development Unit, business unit 98050, has an allocation of \$314,000, which is a \$12,000, or 4 per cent decrease from the previous fiscal year. The decrease is due to no scheduled national surveys in fiscal year 2026/27 and the completion of the evaluation phase related to the National Drug Control Master Plan. However, the needs assessments will be conducted during fiscal year 2026/27.

Mr. Chairman, funding in this cost code is used to facilitate information gathering and analysis through local research and surveys, monitoring and evaluation

of the National Drug Control Master Plan objectives, maintenance of the BerDIN network, as well as the research and development of any relevant legislation and policy development initiatives prioritised within the department and/or Ministry. Funding also supports salaries for the senior research officer and research officer, including their salary uplifts.

Business Unit 98060, Nelson Bascome
Treatment Facility, page B-285
2025/26 Original Estimate: \$1,138,000
2026/27 Estimate: \$2,732,000
Increase of \$1,594,000, or 140 per cent

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the DNDC has now combined the cost to operate both the Men's Treatment Programme and the Women's Treatment Programme under one cost code (98060) and has renamed this cost code Nelson Bascome Substance Abuse Treatment Facility. You will note that the funding reflects the combined operational costs of the two programmes plus the Women's Transitional Housing Programme.

The Nelson Bascome Substance Abuse Treatment Facility, business unit 98060, is allocated \$2,732,000, an increase of \$1,594,000, or 140 per cent, from the previous fiscal year due to the inclusion of cost code 98070. The overall combined increase of \$139,000 is related to salary uplifts for 16 clinical and three support staff, administrative assistant, residential cook, and maintenance person servicing both the Women's and Men's programmes and overall cost of living operating costs for food, electricity, et cetera, for both programmes under the Nelson Bascome Substance Abuse Treatment Facility.

Mr. Chairman, the allocation for the Nelson Bascome Substance Abuse Treatment Facility will provide the operational and staffing funding required to provide services to meet the treatment rehabilitative needs and goals of adult males and females needing residential treatment at the Nelson Bascome Substance Abuse Treatment Facility as well as the Women's Transitional Supportive Residence.

Rent is paid by the DNDC to the Department of Public Works in the amount of \$60,000 per annum for the housing unit that facilitates the operation of the Transitional Supportive Housing Programme. Staff from the Residential Women's Programme supervises this unit. The Women's Treatment Programme and Supportive Housing Unit remains the only residential treatment and transitional supportive housing programme for women in Bermuda.

Business Unit 98080, National Drug Control
Master Plan, page B-285
2025/26 Original Estimate: \$0
2026/27 Estimate: \$67,000
Increase of \$67,000, or 100 per cent

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, business unit 98080 is in place to provide for the effective implementation of the National Drug Control Master Plan. Cross-Ministry initiatives with the Police, Customs and Corrections, evaluation of the master plan and to encourage cooperation and involvement of other government departments and civil society in the implementation of the master plan initiatives.

This business unit has been allocated \$67,000 in fiscal year 2026/27. The Department of National Drug Control is required by the [National Drug Control] Act 2013 to oversee the implementation of the action plans and to monitor and evaluate the performance of the plan. Funding will be utilised to complete the needs assessments for the renewal of the National Drug Control Master Plan, to support media campaigns to highlight the outcomes of the previous national plan and its evaluation, and to support required equipment and or training for the implementation of priority initiatives highlighted in the plan.

Capital Expenditure, Page C-15

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, in fiscal year 2025/26, the DNDC was provided with \$10,000 to upgrade the computer software used by the Research Unit to manage and analyse data gathered via national surveys and the Bermuda Drug Information Network (BerDIN). This was purchased and installed. In fiscal year 2026/27, the DNDC has been provided with \$2,000 to purchase replacement furniture for the Nelson Bascome Substance Abuse Treatment Facility.

Manpower

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the department employs 27 staff. The department headquarters is presently staffed by a director, five technical officers, and one full-time administrative staff.

Direct staffing support to the Nelson Bascome Substance Abuse Treatment Facility is provided by one treatment coordinator that oversees both the Male and Female Residential Treatment Programmes, along with 16 clinical staff (clinical coordinators, addiction counsellors, junior addiction counsellors, and treatment support workers) and three support staff (administrative assistant, cook, and maintenance) currently assigned to the Women's Treatment Centre and Men's Treatment Programme.

There are currently nine vacancies within the Nelson Bascome Substance Abuse Treatment Facility (two clinical coordinators, three addiction counsellors, three treatment support workers, and one junior addiction counsellor) due to be filled in early 2026/27 fiscal year. One vacancy in Head Office (treatment coordinator) is also due to be filled in early 2026/27 as they are all being actively recruited.

Performance Measures by Business Unit

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to report that the department's forecast performance measures for fiscal year 2025/26 were achieved in the majority of funded cost codes. Some initiatives were unable to be completed due to staff vacancies.

The performance measures for the Department for National Drug Control are listed on pages B-287 and B-288.

The Chairman: Yes.

Business Unit 98000, Administration

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Administration provides the organisational framework in support of the mission and mandate of the Department of National Drug Control. Its resources are aimed primarily at recruitment expenditures, and grants and contributions to the treatment and prevention partners that provide services for and on behalf of the department. Mr. Chairman, 100 per cent of financial transactions were completed in E1 within Financial Instructions for the year 2025/26 and 100 per cent of performance appraisals were completed for the 2025/26 period.

Mr. Chairman, as a result of supplemental funding in 2024/25, six grants were disbursed in 2025/26. The Department for National Drug Control is established in part as a service delivery unit but cannot provide all of the needed services required within the community and depends heavily on acquiring services in the treatment and prevention areas through grant allocations to realise its mandate. CADA, Salvation Army, Harbour Light and Community Life Skills [Training] Programme, Focus Counselling Services, Pathways Bermuda, the Bermuda Addiction Certification Board [BACB], all received grants and provided required services as per their grant agreements during the 2025/26 fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman, SHIFT (formerly known as PRIDE) was closed and its funding was reallocated to the Prevention Unit at 98020 to ensure that the programming previously provided by SHIFT will continue under the Department of National Drug Control.

The Salvation Army received \$100,000 for the Harbour Light and Life Skills programmes in fiscal year 2025/26. This funding level challenged their ability to hire needed staff and their ability to provide their programmes effectively. Harbour Light and the Life Skills [programmes] will receive a grant in the amount of \$150,000 in fiscal year 2026/27, a 50 per cent increase to continue to provide residential drug treatment and community life skills programming for 10 males and hire needed staff.

Mr. Chairman, Focus Counselling [Services] provides transitional supportive housing for up to 28 recovering males. These adult males have participated in primary drug treatment at other treatment facilities

(prison, hospital, inpatient or outpatient services) and require assistance in reintegrating back into the community. The goal is to return participants back to the community as productive citizens, thus improving the number of individuals maintaining a drug-free lifestyle. Focus Counselling Services received \$330,000 in fiscal year 2025/26. Focus Counselling Services will receive the same level grant of \$330,000 in fiscal year 2026/27.

Pathways Bermuda provides outpatient substance abuse treatment and aftercare services within the community, servicing approximately 81 individuals. Pathways received \$150,000 in fiscal year 2025/26, and will receive a grant of the same level, \$150,000 in fiscal year 2026/27 to continue to enhance their services. They have hired a clinical supervisor as specified for the 2025/26 fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman, CADA works in collaboration with the Department for National Drug Control to provide community education on alcohol misuse, as well as to provide the server training programme (TIPS) which is mandated within the Liquor Licence Act 1974, as amended in 2011. A grant of \$60,000 was provided to CADA in fiscal year 2025/26, which mainly supports the implementation of the TIPS programme.

CADA will receive the same level of funding of \$60,000 in fiscal year 2026/27, to support these activities. Grant funding of \$80,000 was provided to the Bermuda Addiction Certification Board [BACB] in fiscal year 2025/26. The Bermuda Addiction Certification Board provides international certification testing for both prevention and treatment professionals locally. Funding also supports addiction-specific training to enhance workforce development in this speciality area on the Island [and] supports recertification of professionals and helps to maintain membership in the International Certification and Reciprocity Consortium (IC&RC). Certification is required for registration of addiction counsellors to practice under the Allied Health Professions Act 1973.

There are currently 49 certified and registered addiction counsellors, an increase of three from the previous year. Fourteen of the addiction counsellors are also certified clinical supervisors, an increase of two from the previous year. There are three prevention specialists, which is a total of 52 certified addiction professionals working in Bermuda. There are also three associate alcohol and drug counsellors holding that designation under the board. BACB will receive the same level grant of \$80,000 for fiscal year 2026/27 to continue their work.

The highlighted agencies have provided an integral part of the drug prevention and drug treatment continuum of services for Bermuda for many decades in collaboration with the Department for National Drug Control.

Dignity House will be receiving a grant of \$150,000 for the first time in fiscal year 2026/27. Dignity House is a residential mental health rehabilitation facility with a focus on reaching and restoring lives, adding

value and dignity to clients with complex mental health needs, including drug and alcohol use and mental health issues combined.

The programme uses the recovery model and detailed interventions to meet client psychosocial needs. The need for a programme of this nature has been prioritised in the National Drug Control Master Plan since its inception in 2010. Dignity House was accredited by CARF in 2025 and fills a long-time gap in service within our community. (See page C-21 Grants and Contributions.)

Business Unit 98010, Community Development

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the goal of this unit is to educate the public about the harms of alcohol and drug use, to ensure the provision of clear and sustained messages to our young people that *no use of alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, or other drugs is acceptable*, and to involve families, schools, and community organisations in alcohol and drug prevention efforts.

Other initiatives for the Community Development Unit are to assist in highlighting drunk/drug driving and road safety initiatives through public education and to continue awareness campaigns directed at underage drinking, adolescent drug use (alcohol and cannabis) and emerging drugs such as fentanyl and synthetic drugs, edibles, and vaping.

Throughout the 2025/26 fiscal year, the DNDC prevention team collaborated with the Department of Education to bring awareness and education on the harms of vaping, drugs, alcohol, and synthetic drugs to both middle and high schools in the public and private sectors. This was done through lunchtime information sessions and multimedia campaigns focusing on vaping and cannabis with ads occurring on radio, television, and on the internet targeting the adolescent population.

A training event for Bermuda School Guidance Professionals on emerging drug trends was also held at BUEI featuring international presenter, Officer Jermaine Galloway, also known as “Tall Cop.” Approximately 50 professionals participated. Grassroots activities included work with the Court Street Market Community group, participation in health booths at both senior schools and the City of Hamilton.

Business Unit 98020, Prevention

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Prevention Unit is responsible for providing drug prevention programmes for schools and the wider community with the goal of stopping use before it starts.

The Prevention Unit facilitates the implementation and integration of the AI's Pals programme at the preschool level at all public schools and one private school. AI's Pals is an early childhood curriculum and teacher programme that promotes resiliency at the early childhood stage with explicit instruction to develop

social competence, autonomy, and problem solving. The DNDC supports the AI's Pals programme within schools by funding initial teacher training, refresher courses, and by providing resources supplies for all educators implementing the programme at a cost of approximately \$15,000 per year. Approximately 296 students have participated in the programme from the pre-school level in the public schools, similar to last year, and 48 in the private schools, a total of 344 students. Currently, there are 42 teachers trained and providing the AI's Pals programme.

Mr. Chairman, the Prevention Unit also provides the Teen Peace programme that supports three public schools for P7 and M1 school-age children as an after-school programme. Currently, there are 50 students participating in the Teen Peace programmes, similar to the previous fiscal year. The programme allows students to be interactive with positive pro-social adults and affords them the opportunity to further develop, operationalise, and practice social-emotional learning skills at a vital stage when children are transitioning developmentally, cognitively, and emotionally.

The DNDC hires and trains facilitators for this programme as well as provides all supplies and resources. Teachers facilitating have received a Botvin LifeSkills Training, which is a research-validated substance abuse prevention programme proven to reduce the risk of alcohol, tobacco, drug use, and violence. The programme targets the major social and psychological factors that promote the initiation of substance use and other risky antisocial behaviours. There are six trained facilitators implementing the Teen Peace after-school programmes.

Mr. Chairman, the Adventure Education programme that utilises an experiential approach to learning is used as part of the annual summer camp for emerging M1 students. The Adventure Education programme engages young people physically, emotionally, and mentally while encouraging them to explore appropriate risk-taking behaviours and play that predicts outcomes through adventure, fun, and learning.

Adventure educators use a specific framework to facilitate learning which includes the “Adventure Wave” which surges between three basic [phases]: Brief, Activity, and Debrief, helping to develop anti-bullying, anti-drug communication, compassion, critical thinking, health, leadership, respect, responsibility, self-esteem, and team-building, tolerance, and trust, to name a few. Four facilitators have been trained to provide the programme during the summer. Thirty students participated in the summer camp during fiscal year 2025/26, which ran for a two-week period.

Mr. Chairman, the Parenting 101 programme for at-risk parents is led by a certified Parenting facilitator and the Department of National Drug Control Prevention officer. The programme provides a step-by-step guide to building positive parenting skills and family relationships to prevent problem behaviours. Parents learn how to prevent problem behaviours from

starting, how to communicate, and how to help their child to solve problems and make good choices as they grow. Stress management and positive discipline are also included. Effective strategies that have been proven to work are learned and can be used immediately by the parent. All the tips and tools are based on research.

The Prevention officer and a senior educator are the only facilitators of this programme at an approximate cost of \$5,000 annually. Unfortunately, the programme did not take place in 2025/26 but is scheduled to occur [in] early 2026/27.

Mr. Chairman, all the drug prevention programmes are evaluated throughout the year by observation by the Department of National Drug Control staff, (drug prevention officer and the community development coordinator) to ensure fidelity and appropriate implementation by the facilitators.

Business Unit 98030, Treatment

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Treatment Unit is responsible for overseeing substance abuse treatment Island-wide by ensuring quality care through accreditation of programmes, workforce development and training, and public awareness of available services. The unit is also responsible for maintaining a continuum of care and advocating for gaps in services.

In fiscal year 2025/26, the focus was on maintaining the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (or CARF accreditation) for the Men's Treatment Programme, the Women's Treatment Centre and Turning Point [Substance Abuse Programme], operated by BHB [Bermuda Hospitals Board], as required by the National Drug Control Act 2013.

All these programmes have maintained a Gold Star CARF accreditation status throughout fiscal year 2025/26. CARF accreditation is spearheaded and funded by the Department for National Drug Control Island-wide at an approximate cost of \$20,000 per programme. Compliance surveys are completed every three years. Quality improvement reports are submitted annually.

CARF accreditation is scheduled for the Nelson Bascome Substance Abuse Facility and supportive residency unit in March 2026, along with the Turning Point Substance Abuse treatment programmes operated by the BHB.

Mr. Chairman, efforts have continued to consolidate the use of the AccuCare web-based client management system and all drug treatment programmes across the Island to assist in standardised best-practice care. Five treatment facilities out of the six on Island utilise the system at a cost of approximately \$21,000 annually. Required treatment-specific training, such as CPR, first aid, and safety care prevention techniques, also took place during 2025/26.

Recovery Month, which is September, was celebrated this year, led by the treatment officer. Several

programmes were highlighted through open houses attended by Cabinet Ministers, the Premier, along with the general public. Fun events for recovering persons, such as bowling, family picnics, and barbecues were also held and enjoyed by many.

The Chairman: The Minister is just taking a quick brief break in his presentation.

For the benefit of the Honourable Members and the listening public, we are in the Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27.

This is the Budget Debate on the Ministry of National Security, Heads 83, 6, 7, 12, 45, and 88. The Minister is currently on his final Head, 88. And there is approximately one hour left in this five-hour debate.

I believe that we will be changing the Chairs in a minute if anyone knows where MP Simmons is. He can . . . okay, great, fabulous. Yes, no rush, no rush.

So please continue, Minister. You have the floor.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: So, Mr. Chairman, the primary activities of the Research Unit are geared towards the collection and dissemination of reliable data through the Bermuda Drug Information Network (commonly known as BerDin) identifying emerging trends and patterns of drug use, evaluation of the current drug control efforts, and providing coordination, implementation, and evaluation of the National Drug Control Master Plan and Action Plan. The unit is also responsible for developing alcohol- and drug-related policies as required.

Mr. Chairman, during fiscal year 2025/26, the 15th Annual Bermuda Drug Information Network (BerDIN) meeting was held with all network members at BUEI [Bermuda Underwater Exploration Institute] on 28 November 2025. This annual event continues to greatly increase collaboration, understanding, and information sharing among all agencies involved in demand and supply-reduction activities. The 2024 Annual Report of the Bermuda Drug Information Network (or BerDIN), was released to the public in November 2024 following the meeting. The report can be found on the government website.

Mr. Chairman, the treatment demand indicators, consumer satisfaction surveys, stakeholder feedback surveys, employee climate survey, and quality records reviews were completed within the Department for National Drug Control. The Women's Treatment Programme, Men's Treatment Programme, and The Right Living House [RHL] operated under the Department of Corrections during the 2025/26 fiscal year.

The study examining the correlation between drug and alcohol consumption and traffic accidents, as well as fatalities, began at KEMH [King Edward VII Memorial Hospital] in May 2023. This initiative is a joint effort with the Department of National Drug Control Research Unit and the Emergency Department at the King

Edward VII Memorial Hospital and continued through the 2025/26 fiscal year.

The 2025 Substance Use and Pregnant Women Survey was completed during the three weeks from the 8th of September to the 30th of September 2025. The report will be made available on the government website.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister, if that is convenient, a moment to pause. We will now be in the capable charge of MP Scott Simmons in the Chair.

Thank you, Honourable Minister Weeks. About an hour to go in the last Head.

[Mr. Scott Simmons, Chairman]

The Chairman: Honourable Minister, now that I have been sufficiently outed, I would ask you to just go ahead and continue, Minister, while I sort matters here.

I recognise the Honourable Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Good afternoon, sir.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, 75 per cent of BerDin members submitted their information on time. However, numerous agencies faced difficulties in submitting their datasets last year. The postponement of data entry adversely affects the annual report by creating gaps in previously supplied information, leading to an inaccurate representation of Bermuda's drug situation. Steps are being taken to address this issue moving forward.

Head 88, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Page B-285.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, page B-285, Mr. Minister. Go right ahead.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes. Mr. Chairman. I feel good.

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister. Okay. I am all together now. That has been sufficiently sorted.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Would you like some water?

The Chairman: No, I had lunch.

And so, Mr. Minister, I take it you are at Head 88, National Drug Control. Carry on, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes, sir.

Mr. Chairman, the Men's Treatment Programme and the Women's Treatment Programme are

now merged under 98060 as the Nelson Bascome Substance Abuse Treatment Facility. Moving forward, the performance measures for 98070 will be merged under 98060.

The Men's Treatment Programme is a residential substance abuse treatment programme for men 18 years and above in Bermuda. It provides long-term comprehensive primary treatment for addiction disorders. The programme's primary treatment is delivered over a 12-month period using a phased approach. During the last phase, a transition plan was developed, which includes participating in volunteer services, job shadowing, and referral to a transitional supportive residency programme and/or aftercare services. The Men's Treatment Programme had 12 admissions and five discharges to the community during the 2025/26 fiscal year, with two completing the 12-month programme.

Mr. Chairman, life skills training remains a key component of the programme, especially in the transition phase. Mr. Chairman, 100 per cent of clients received life skills training, and six received aftercare services.

Family counselling is also a key part of treatment with six family members receiving support in 2024/25.

The Men's Treatment Programme has been accredited by CARF since 2015 and has received a three-year CARF Gold Star award.

The Chairman: Excellent.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Women's Treatment Programme provides long-term comprehensive treatment for addiction and related disorders. The programme is delivered over a 12- to 15-month period using a phased approach. The phased approach to treatment delivery enables the client to reach short-term goals and celebrate accomplishments, thus motivating them to continue in the treatment. Community involvement and re-entry are gradual and involve partnering with local businesses and organisations to facilitate volunteerism among our clients. The programme had seven admissions during the 2025/26 fiscal year, an increase of six from the previous year.

Life skills training remains a key component of the programme, especially in the transition phase. All clients receive life skills training.

There are three women receiving aftercare services, and there were three who received respite care. Although numbers have improved, efforts will continue towards improving the admission rate by including a campaign to assist in increasing participation in the women's programmes through focus groups, public awareness, and by partnering with community programmes that women access.

Mr. Chairman, the supportive residency facility and programme provide a safe environment for the re-integration of women back into the community who

have completed a programme of substance abuse treatment at the Women's Treatment Centre, or who are accepted by the Women's Treatment Centre. All transitional clients are females who have been drug-free for at least one year.

The programme is managed by the Women's Treatment Centre and is located within the general community. There are three clients occupying the transitional home, all of whom are working in the community and actively engaged in life skills training to facilitate their move back into the community as productive citizens.

The Women's Treatment Centre programme and supportive residences have been accredited by CARF since 2009, and have maintained a three-year [CARF] Gold Star award since then. Both programmes will be surveyed by CARF in late March 2026.

Business Unit 98080, Master Plan

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, business unit 98080 is in place to provide for the effective implementation of the National Drug Control Master Plan; cross-ministry initiatives with the police, customs, and corrections; evaluation of the Master Plan, and to encourage cooperation and involvement of other government departments and civil society in its implementation. This business unit was not allocated any funding in fiscal year 2025/26, but will receive funding in 2026/27.

The Department of National Drug Control is required by the NDC [National Drug Control] Act 2013 to oversee the implementation of the action plan, and to monitor and evaluate the performance of the plan. The required evaluation of the 2019–2024 Master Plan was completed in fiscal year 2025/26. The needs assessments and the drafting of the new plan will occur in fiscal year 2026/27.

The Steering Committee will oversee the implementation of the Master Plan's actions were approved by the Cabinet and needs to be convened in fiscal year 2026/27 to ensure priority actions are addressed.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, we shall

- continue critical recruitment efforts with the goal of filling all vacancies by the end of the first quarter of fiscal year 2026/27;
- continue providing and monitoring grants to drug treatment and prevention partners within the community to enhance national demand for reduction efforts;
- establish the Steering Committee to oversee the National Drug Control Master Plan actions;
- commence the needs assessment processes to create the next five-year plan as required by

the NDC Act 2013, and draft a new National Drug Control Master Plan;

- release the Pregnancy Alcohol and Drug Survey that took place in September 2025;
- release the National Household Survey on Alcohol and Drugs that took place in October and November 2025;
- continue to provide residential substance abuse treatment for both adult males and females at the Nelson Bascome Substance Abuse Treatment Facility;
- implement the Adolescent Substance Abuse Treatment Programme as per the November 2024 Throne Speech;
- continue to expand and enhance drug prevention efforts within schools through collaboration with the Department of Education training teachers and providing drug prevention materials and support;
- continue to educate the public and bring awareness about the harms of drug and alcohol misuse and abuse;
- hold a community engagement event to enhance community-based efforts addressing substance abuse and other antisocial issues within the community;
- support the development of regulations to protect young people under the Misuse of Drugs (Decriminalisation of Cannabis) Amendment Act 2017;
- support the development of social hosting liability legislation where required.

Mr. Chairman, the Department for National Drug Control will continue to work collaboratively with other key ministries such as Health and Education as well as with various departments, such as Corrections, Court Services, the Bermuda Police Service, Customs, the Royal Bermuda Regiment Coast Guard and international partners to ensure the implementation of a balanced approach to the efforts made in achieving a healthier and a drug-free Bermuda.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I would like to commend Ms. Joanne Dean and her hard-working team for their sterling work throughout the year.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, that finally ends my presentation of Head 88, Department for National Drug Control.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Honourable Minister.

Members, we remain in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the [fiscal] year 2026/27. We are considering Heads 83, 6, 7, 12, 45, and 88.

And now that the Minister has concluded his presentation, I would just like to remind Members that,

to my recollection, 6:03 [pm] is the end of the debate as it relates to the end of our consideration. And so, it looks to me to be about maybe 50 minutes or so that the Minister has left for the Honourable Shadow [Minister] to speak on these important matters.

Does anybody else wish to speak as it relates to this matter?

I recognise the Honourable Shadow Minister. Mr. Robert King, you have the floor.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Members of this Honourable House, and the listening public.

In the interest of time, I am going to start at Head 12, Customs and Immigration.

The Chairman: Head 12, yes.

Mr. Robert King: And I will be beginning on page B-278.

The Chairman: Page B-278.

Mr. Robert King: Mission statement: Protecting Bermuda's border and promoting economic development.

The Chairman: Carry on, Shadow [Minister].

Mr. Robert King: But I would be remiss if I did not thank the uniformed services—

The Chairman: It would be appropriate.

Mr. Robert King: —who have committed to doing the difficult work, making sure that we are safe and secure on this Island. Which means they have to work when we are sleeping. Whenever we hear an ambulance or a police car, they are the ones who respond to traumatic incidents on our behalf.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Robert King: So, I thank them, their families, for the very important work that they do and the sacrifice they make for us.

The Chairman: Thank you, Shadow Minister. So noted.

Mr. Robert King: I am looking at page B-7912 [sic], the Training budget. What accounted for the additional \$11,000? Regarding training and equipment, our officers are faced with increased risks to their personal safety when processing yachts that have prohibited weapons, including firearms and tasers. Will the Minister make additional funds available to ensure that officers receive the necessary defensive tactics training, including weapons and self-defence?

Would the Minister also make available funds for handheld devices that can detect drugs, explosives, and firearms?

Would the Minister ensure that training and resources are provided and coordinated with the Department of Corrections, the Police [Service], the Royal Bermuda Regiment, and the Fire [and Rescue] Service, and report back on progress in three months?

Page B-7912 [sic], Travel budget. What was the purpose of the travel? What material benefits were realised? For example, programmes, staffing, and equipment.

Page B-279, Employee numbers. What is the strategic plan to ensure a full roster by the 26th of November, for example, understanding the critical importance of this department to national security? We know that people are going to be retiring, people will be on vacation leave or might be on medical leave. And that it is a normal part of succession planning to ensure that staff are trained and recruitment happens on an ongoing basis to make sure there are no gaps in services, especially since their positions are of critical importance.

Performance Measures, business unit 22020, Airport Commercial. *Maintenance of prescribed service levels to the client base 90 per cent time, measured by percentage adherence to published Quality of Service Levels* is zero. Can the Minister provide some clarification on what this actually means? I am not sure if this is good or bad. And I am sure the listeners are wondering as well.

Business unit 22030, Air[port] Arrivals Travelers. *[Collect] forced duty . . . incorrect duty declarations, imports not declared in excess of [\$]15,000, and seizures of illicit items to exceed 40 per cent*. What accounts for the high seizure rate in 2025/26? Was it equipment, scanners, training, et cetera? What accounts for the reduced original 2025/26 and revised, and the new target of 2025? Why is the target being reduced as opposed to [being] raised? What is informing this target?

Business unit 22030, *Authorising release of imported goods measured by volumes of declarations processed*, is zero. Again, can the Minister provide clarification on what that measure actually means?

Business unit 22040, Airport Shift B. *Incorrect duty declarations, imports not declared in excess of [\$]15,000, items exceeding 40 per cent*.

Again, business unit 2205 [sic], Investigations/Audit. *Number of cases dealt with to be greater than 100*. What accounts for the significant fluctuation and projections? *Additional duty collected to be greater than [\$]20,000*. How are these targets determined?

The Chairman: Shadow Minister, correct me if I am wrong. [Business unit] 22050 is where you are, Investigations/Audit. Am I correct?

Mr. Robert King: Yes.

The Chairman: Carry on. Thank you.

Mr. Robert King: Business unit 22070, Hamilton Commercial Ops. *Maintenance of prescribed service levels to client base is 90 per cent of the time, measured by percentage adherence to Quality Service Levels. Authorising the release of imported goods measured by volumes of declarations processed.*

Why are the forecast and target frozen at 70 per cent if we are always seeking to improve performance? Ensuring that the Government receives its taxes and that the Island is safeguarded from dangerous goods, weapons, and drugs, why was the target reduced? Why has the target been reduced if we are seeking to improve performance? What data is being relied on to make these projections?

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Robert King: Regarding the dog that is being retired, when we are looking at staffing levels, the dog is an integral part of staffing. So, understanding the increased risks and that the scanner hall has yet to be built, I am trying to understand why another dog has not been hired to fulfil the duties that are required, understanding the increased risks, both external and internal to the Island.

The Chairman: So that is the increase of canines, am I correct?

Mr. Robert King: Yes, increased to the original number of two.

The Chairman: Appreciate it. Thank you very much.

Mr. Robert King: [Pages] B-280 through B-281 performance measures. Business unit 28080 Administration. *Processes all entry declarations in accordance with our prescribed Quality Service Levels. Average time between receipt of the purchase invoice and the authorisation rejection of payment should not exceed 10 working days.*

Question: How many entry declarations were processed? What accounts for the lower quality outcome target that is 100 per cent worse than 2025? What is the rationale for aiming for a target outcome that is worse than what we achieved previously if we are seeking to provide quality service?

Page B-281, business unit 28090, Vessel Clearance. *Process 100 per cent of cruise ship passengers. It is expected that the number of arriving passengers will exceed 350,000.* Question: Has this ever been an area of need? If not, why are we measuring this? You cannot improve on 100 per cent, so obviously, this is not an area of need.

Prepare and issue the invoices to collect revenue from arriving vessels in excess of \$900,000. How

are the targets arrived at? What is the basis for the adjustments up or down?

Page B-281, business unit 22100. *Percentage of positive search and detentions from total search and detentions undertaken to exceed 50 per cent.* It would be helpful in the performance measures to see both quantitatively and qualitatively what was seized. The quantity of the items, and by what means. This would allow us to see what works, what is not working well, and where resources should be allocated.

Page B-281, Seaport Enforcement Team. *The number of imported containers were scanned by the Hamilton Docks.* Can the Minister inform this House what the status is of the scanning hall? I understand that it is not operational, but does he have a start date for when it will begin operations?

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Robert King: Page B-280, Customs Immigration performance measures. Building a dock, scanner hall. Okay, I have already asked that question.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Robert King: Page B-278, business unit 2200[0], Yacht Reporting Centre. HM Customs and Immigration dock located at number three Ordnance Island. The Yacht Reporting Centre was not included in the performance measures. Can the Minister explain why this is so, understanding its key role in protecting our borders?

Can the Minister inform this Honourable House the number of seizures for the HM Customs and Immigration Dock, which has been unsafe for use since October 2024? How many vessels were inspected to ensure that they did not bring drugs, guns and ammunition, and other dangerous goods to this Island? How does this number compare to 2021, for example, or when was the dock last fully operational?

Can the Minister please show in the schedule B Capital Development where the budget allocation is found for the repair of the HM Customs and Immigration Dock located on Ordnance Island?

What we do know is that on 7 November 2025, the Honourable Minister advised the House that the Government had an engineering consultation regarding the repair of the HM Customs and Immigration Dock on Ordnance Island. On 12 December 2025, I asked the Honourable Minister about the status and progress of the HM Customs and Immigration Dock repairs, understanding its critical importance to our border security. At that time, the Minister reported that the planning number was PCON004025, and that the estimated cost of the repair works was projected to be \$350,000. When asked about budget allocation, the Minister stated [as reported] in Hansard that the repair works will be done by the Department of Works and Engineering.

The Chairman: Honourable Shadow [Minister], one must be careful not to refer to another debate. I confess and understand that you are forming your view. However, questions should be asked as they relate to the different heads, and so you should steer away from a debate that has already been here.

Thank you so much. Stick to the [Budget] Book.

Mr. Robert King: Sure.

Can the Minister explain to this Honourable House why no application has been submitted?

The Chairman: That's fine.

Mr. Robert King: Can the Minister also explain why he informed this Honourable House that the dock works will be done by the Department of Works and Engineering and be due to start on or about April when the Minister of Public Works confirmed on the 10th of March, during the Committee of Supply, that the Department of Works and Engineering will *not* be repairing the HM Customs and Immigration Dock?

The Chairman: Mm-hmm. Carry on, Shadow Minister.

Mr. Robert King: I would like, given the time, for the Minister to answer those questions, and then I can come back.

The Chairman: And if you have something else to answer—I mean to ask. Very well. Thank you, Shadow Minister.

The Honourable Minister in charge, Mr. Michael Weeks, are you prepared to answer the beginning questions that he asked? Or is . . . Are you prepared, Minister?

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: Oh, you are not ready at this precise second.

Honourable Shadow Minister, would you continue with any further questions? Or, if you do not mind my asking, are there any other Members, other than yourself (if you are prepared to hold), who wish to present some questions to these heads?

I recognise the Honourable Member, Linda Smith.

Linda Smith, you have the floor.

Ms. Linda Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My questions come under National Drug Control, Head 88. The Minister spoke about a couple of things, and I just wanted to get some clarification. I was not really clear why the men's and women's drug treatment programmes merged, and what the benefits are of that.

The Chairman: We are under Head 88. I am struggling to see where we are on that page. Where are we on that page?

Ms. Linda Smith: I actually do not have the page. These are comments that he made in reference to, I think, performance metrics, and so . . . He made these comments, and I just was not clear.

The Chairman: That is fine.

Ms. Linda Smith: There is no association with the page in this.

The Chairman: And I appreciate you, Honourable Member, but it is standard procedure that if there are questions that are being posed, they must at least come from the pages—

Ms. Linda Smith: —Okay. Okay, B—

The Chairman: —so that we can refer to, with the greatest of respect—

Ms. Linda Smith: —Yes, B—

The Chairman: Let me finish. With the greatest of respect to you, by just making sure that we can . . . and that is how we actually do our work here.

Ms. Linda Smith: Okay. Thank you very much.

The Chairman: I recognise the Honourable Member and thank you.

Ms. Linda Smith: Okay. I believe it is page B-288.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Ms. Linda Smith: Thank you.

So, the question is, why are the men's and women's programmes being merged? And what are the anticipated benefits of that?

The Chairman: That is fine.

Ms. Linda Smith: On page B-284, the subjective analysis of current account estimates shows Professional Services up by \$1.5 million. That is an increase of \$628,000, or 120 per cent, and I was just wondering what was driving that as well.

I think that should do it. Thank you.

The Chairman: Very well. Thank you very much.

Does any other Member wish to speak to these heads? I recognise the Shadow Minister.

Shadow Minister King, you have the floor.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am now going to page B-288, Head 88, National Drug Control Performance Measures—

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Robert King: —Action Plan. Business unit 98080. *Number of community activities held to disseminate highlights of the Master Plan.* [The] target [is] two.

How is this target arrived at? What is the purpose of providing highlights of a comprehensive programme, given the complexities of substance abuse disorders, mental health, and the criminal justice system, for example? The public requires accurate and detailed information so they can make informed decisions for themselves, their families, friends, and others.

Page B-288, business unit 98080, NDC Master Plan and Action Plan. *Identification of critical leadership to ensure implementation of the actions of the Master Plan.* Outcome 2025/26, “No.” The target for 2026/27, “Yes.” If I understand this measurement correctly, we are deciding to hire a critical leadership person, or persons, based on a performance measure, “yes” or “no.”

Critical leadership is required for the Master Plan, but the person is not being hired to lead the Master Plan. So, the NDC is basically informing this Honourable House that we need to hire a leader because, according to the revised 2025/26 forecast, they do not have a critical leadership person. Please explain; I will settle for the highlights.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Honourable Shadow Minister.

And Members, I am obliged to just make mention of the fact that this is a question-and-answer period. And while I recognise that Honourable Members are willing to make the stretch of attempting to try to explain or trying to lead into the questions for which they have, I would recommend that Members refrain from moving too much into the debate stage, as we have already done that.

And now is the time to ask critical questions, for the Minister to assess them, and for us to get to the questions as quickly as possible.

The reason why we run out of time is not because I am talking. It is because we—we—sometimes elaborate on the questions that we are [asking]. If we give quick, brief [questions] then we can move forward as we go.

I take it, Shadow Minister, you have a few more questions just before, or you are good?

Mr. Robert King: I do, sir, unless the Minister is—

The Chairman: The Minister has not indicated that he is ready to answer any questions at the moment. I see there are about 23 minutes left. If you can get your questions in, and then I will keep my eye on the Minister should he wish to rise.

Mr. Robert King: I will go until a quarter to two, and then I will sit down and get—

The Chairman: Carry on, Shadow Minister. Thank you.

Mr. Robert King: B27707 [sic], Police Performance Measures.

Business unit 1700[0], Bermuda Police Service. *Public satisfaction, perception, response time, feeling safe, investigation, antisocial behaviour.*

What is the actual number of the survey group? How many surveys were completed? What was the breakdown of the survey participants by age? Did the survey include responses from the Gang Violence Reduction Team?

Is the data from these services used to consider promotion and pay rises for officers? How is this data used to improve service towards achieving departmental objectives, reducing crime, serious crime, gang-related criminality, and reducing antisocial behaviour? The performance measures do not appear to have any correlation to the actual performance of the police.

One of the performance measures was speaking to road safety, reducing crime, and serious crime, as I said before.

The Chairman: Do you have any idea where that is located? What are you speaking—

Mr. Robert King: I will get it for you.

The Chairman: If you do not mind, obliging the Minister.

Mr. Robert King: Sure. [Page] B-277.

Mr. Robert King: Yes, sir. Thank you.

The Chairman: Performance measures. Carry on, Shadow Minister.

Mr. Robert King: Yes, when we are looking at the performance measures, as I said, it was based on [what] people thought, felt, and believed the police service was doing.

When we look at the actual numbers from the police statistics themselves, in 2022, we see that road traffic accidents were 1,482. [In] 2023, they were 1,401. In 2024, they were 1,461. The 2025 statistics are not out yet.

Gun murders, we had 5. Serious injuries, 5. Incidents, 5 in 2022. Knife murders, 3. Serious injuries were 16. And 17 incidents in 2022.

In 2023, road traffic caused 130 serious injuries. Gun murders, 3. Serious injuries were 3. Incidents were 8.

And then we go down to 2024. Road traffic, serious injuries, 128. And then you have 19 incidents of

gun shootings. And then you have 36 incidents of knife crimes, with 34 receiving serious injuries.

So, when we look at people's perceptions, it is not actually based on what is happening. So, the question I have is: Why aren't the performance measures related to the police statistics as directly related to the department's mission and objectives? Because what's being measured does not inform best practice.

The Chairman: Very well. Shadow Minister, I have allowed you some latitude for a moment. Let's keep it neat and tidy. You have done well thus far; but let's keep it neat and tidy.

Mr. Robert King: Business unit 93008, Gang Violence Reduction Team, [page] B-267.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Robert King: And the question is: How does the Gang Violence Reduction Team's programme operation impact the number of gun and knife incidents and deaths? From available data, can we say that the programme has prevented "X" number of deaths? And also led to the confiscation of "X" number of weapons? Have the people who have completed the programme remained crime-free and employed for "X" number of months or years?

What accredited programmes are currently being offered at Westgate and DCFS, in primary, middle school, and high school? How many programmes were delivered? How is success measured?

Have violent altercations in schools been reduced? By what number and what percentage?

The Chairman: You are on page B-267, am I correct with that particular question?

Mr. Robert King: Yes. Business unit 93008, Gang Violence Reduction Team.

The Chairman: Carry on.

Mr. Robert King: How many students completed the programme? How many were crime-free after one year or two years? Are clients being tracked? How many? How many were supported in aftercare? How many were arrested?

[Pause]

Mr. Robert King: Actually, I will leave it there for now.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Honourable Shadow Minister.

Does any other Member wish to speak to these heads?

No other Members wish to speak to these heads. I recognise the Minister in charge, the Honourable Michael Weeks.

Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I would like to thank my Shadow Minister, and MP Smith for the questions they had.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I would like to start by answering questions concerning the Department of National Drug Control.

The Department of National Drug Control is one of those agencies that does yeoman work in our community, Mr. Chairman. But one question was: Why merge the men's treatment with the women's treatment?

The Chairman: Right.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Simply put, both are located on the same site. And they both utilise much of the same services and are managed by one treatment coordinator. Since they already share support staff and are overseen by one treatment coordinator, it makes sense to merge the two programmes. And they will begin to share all staff to improve coverage of the 24-hour programmes.

While we are still on the Head 88 National Drug Control, there is a question that was asked about the Master Plan Leadership. As I said in my brief, the Cabinet had approved the formulation of a Steering Committee, which will include leaders from all related areas to provide the lead actions of the Master Plans. So, no; there is no need for us to hire anybody.

And in relation to providing too many highlights of the Master Plan, the National Drug Control is the country's plan, and therefore, highlights of the achievement of the Action Plan should be shared with the public. Hence, that is why the Department of National Drug Control is updating the National Master Plan, which they will release for public consumption.

I was a little less clear on the Customs.

The Chairman: Right.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Customs, which is—

The Chairman: Customs, which is Head 12.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Head 12. Right.

The Chairman: Did you ask him to clarify, Minister? Did you need him to clarify anything for you, or are you all right?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Let me try—

The Chairman: Go right ahead.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: —to do what—

The Chairman: Shadow Minister, let him move with it and see how we go.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes. Okay.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: You are going to let me answer, and then you come back to me.

The Chairman: Yes, he is satisfied.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: So, for Customs, Mr. Chairman, why are the performance measures getting worse? They do not appear to be getting worse. They are consistently 100 per cent and are meeting the target of processing all entry declarations.

The second measure is also not worse. The average time between the receipt of the purchase invoice and authorisation consistently exceeds our target of five days, which is obviously better than 10 days.

So also in Head 12, Customs. Where is the budget for the dock in St. George's? It is not with Customs because the dock is not a Customs dock. It is a dock that is *used* by Customs and others. It is no more the Customs Department's responsibility to fix the dock than it is to fix the roads upon which they drive to fulfil their job responsibilities.

I have made it clear in the House on a few occasions that the dock is under the remit of the Department of Public Works and Works Engineering. I do not want to—

Mr. Robert King: Point of order.

The Chairman: I think the Minister is reluctant to turn it into a debate matter, but I will recognise . . . Minister, give him 60 seconds. I will listen.

Carry on.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Mr. Robert King: He is misleading the House because I confirmed with Minister Adams yesterday that it has nothing to do with Public Works. So, for the Minister to suggest that, is patently false.

The Chairman: Shadow Minister, thank you.
I recognise the Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I do not want to turn this into a debate.

The Chairman: I didn't wish to either.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: My understanding was that it was a matter for the Public Works. But what I will do, I will endeavour to clarify.

The Chairman: Please, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Not only for this Honourable House, but for the public. Because once and for all, the dock has to be repaired. That is a part of the safety and security of our border protection.

The Chairman: And a particular department will take responsibility.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: And a particular department will take responsibility.

The Chairman: That's fine.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: And I will make sure that I get that information clarified, and I will bring it to the House.

The Chairman: Shadow Minister he has an undertaking. We're good.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Honourable Member.

I am not sure I need clarification on the fact that the Minister is going to get back to us on that matter.

Mr. Robert King: I have a question, though.

The Chairman: Not yet. Let the Minister continue with his . . . and then . . . on this matter?

Mr. Robert King: It's a brief question.

The Chairman: Okay, give a brief question, and then he will undertake it.

Mr. Robert King: So, regarding the repairs, we know that the dock has been—

The Chairman: Oh, good. Right.

Mr. Robert King: —inoperable since April 2024. And we understand that it is part of the critical infrastructure necessary to protect our borders, understanding the scourge that drugs and guns have in this community.

So, the question I have for the Honourable Minister is: Why is it taking more than two years to talk to the right people to ensure that the dock is fixed by whoever has responsibility for it? Why do we keep coming back here, having the same conversation about the same matter of critical importance?

The Chairman: Thank you, Shadow Minister.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you.

The Chairman: I recognise the Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Some things I am going to have to wait on my team to give me.

As it concerns the security of our country—

The Chairman: Right.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Right? Customs is doing its job at the dock in question on Ordnance Island. I visited that dock myself, and I observed the officers in question inspecting yachts as they came in. So even though the dock is not being repaired at this point, it is an inconvenience.

The Chairman: Right.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I think it is unfair to suggest that the security of the country is not being handled by the Customs Officers who are stationed in Ordnance Island. This is not something that somebody has told me. I have —

Mr. Robert King: Point of order, Mr. Chairman. Sorry.

The Chairman: I am going to take a point of order. Minister, Shadow Minister.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Mr. Robert King: The Minister is unintentionally misleading the House. The information—

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: He saw the dock himself.

Mr. Robert King: And so have I.

The Chairman: Bear in mind, we are about 13 minutes. Let's be careful.

Mr. Robert King: Yes, no problem.

The fact is, that less than 10 per cent of boats coming in, whether I say it here or not, the people on the outside already know how things are. There is a major gap and vulnerability in our border security.

When we suggest . . . when it is being suggested that they are doing their best, absolutely, they are doing their best. But they should not have to operate under those conditions because of the crumbling infrastructure that ought to have been given priority for repair.

The Chairman: Good.

Mr. Robert King: Instead of a public dock.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Shadow Minister. I recognise the Minister in charge. Minister Weeks.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: And I note your reluctance, Minister, to turn that into a debate, but carry on.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes. There were other questions asked. I would like to get to them. But let me deal with the dock issue hopefully again.

The Chairman: Sure. Very well, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The vessels . . . the dock issue. Customs has used other measures to board and inspect vessels as they come in. Are we going to spend the last 10 minutes going back and forth over whether it's 10 per cent, 20 per cent, or 50 per cent? I have personally seen Customs officers board and inspect vessels. So, their job is still being performed. They are still doing the job in the performance of their duties. They are protecting our borders at this point in time until the dock is repaired.

Okay?

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: There is another question. Will we be replacing a canine? The department is actively working to recruit a new canine handler. The department is working with the FCDO in the UK to provide new canines once that requirement is complete.

A question for the police. This is in response to the police survey questions. This data from the omnibus survey—

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: This is a response to the police survey questions.

The data from the omnibus survey, 400 people surveyed, which occurs 4 times a year, Mr. Chairman. The breakdown of the survey participants of age, sex, and other demographics is contained in the omnibus survey.

The survey did not exclude responses from the Gang Violence and Reduction Team [GVRT]. It is a public survey. Data from the survey is about overall service performance and cannot be disaggregated to make performance or pay differentiations.

The survey data is used to measure the impact of our actions on the community, particularly the levels of confidence they have in the police. It also helps to drive policing plans and deployment. In essence, the performance measure indicates the community's confidence and trust in the police. This is as a result of the activity of the police.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: There was another question about how many declarations were processed.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, 533,481 declarations have been processed.

The Chairman: It looks as though you are being attacked by a Fox's Glacier Mint. Carry one, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes.

The Chairman: I will allow you just a few minutes, Minister.

Members, we are in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27. And they are Heads 83, 6, 7, 12, 45, and 88.

I recognise the Honourable Minister, who is finishing up with the questions that have been given to him. And I will then ask if any other Members have any further questions.

Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you.

And in addition to where they are talking about the survey question, I am just made to understand that the survey did *not* include the GVRT.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I had another question about how the Gang Violence Reduction Team measure whether individuals have successfully completed the programmes it delivers.

Our response is that the Gang Violence Reduction Team delivers a range of prevention programmes and services across Bermuda's primary, middle, and high schools. Each programme collects data using specific metrics to track participation, engagement, and outcomes.

So, Mr. Chairman, data that is gathered from initiatives such as the I AM programme, the Work Placement and Mentoring programme, and the G.R.E.A.T. programme indicate positive outcomes among participating students. Feedback from parents, teachers, and schools highlight improvements in student behaviour, including fewer behavioural challenges and suspensions.

In addition, [Mr. Chairman], the Violence Reduction Programmes, we are trying to move away from the Gang Violence Reduction Programmes, as they are more comprehensive. So, we are trying to move to just "Violence Reduction" programme. This team provides case-by-case support and intervention for incidents involving students, both in school and in the wider

community, working closely with schools and partner agencies to support young people.

That is the answer in a nutshell, but I must add, while I am talking about the Violence Reduction Team—

The Chairman: Yes, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: This particular team is looked at as being a nine-to-five team. But, trust me, Mr. Chairman and Members listening, they operate on a 24/7 basis. They are on call like other departments that are on a 24/7 basis. So, at this point, I just want to take my hat off to them, while I am talking about the Violence Reduction Team, for an yeoman's job. I am also asking them to keep up the work they have done. And by my colleague MP, Bishop Leroy Bean, who is now a colleague, MP, and is the coordinator of the Violence Reduction [Team]. So, he and his team do a yeoman's job. So, every chance I get, I like to take my hat off to the work that they do behind the scenes.

The Chairman: It is so noted, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. [Chairman], as I was waiting for other questions and answers, I noticed that I have a guest in the back there. And I have to—

The Chairman: You may continue, Minister. Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes, the guest is my son.

The Chairman: Yes.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: And he has come to support me and to see how we operate, doing the business of the country.

The Chairman: And following your presentation, Minister, we will ask him to share his assessment.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: We have to be mindful—

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: —of the messages that we send to our young men and how we work together for the betterment of our country.

The Chairman: Yes, sir. Well done, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes. Thanks for being here, son.

Another question: Why aren't the performance measures related to police statistics directly related to the departmental mission and objectives? That was a question referencing the police.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The performance measures track confidence in the police, and the statistics provide a measure of police activity and levels of crime, incidents, and collisions. They are two separate measures in two separate documents.

We had a question about the scanner. Reference, Customs and Head 12.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: When will it be operational?

Actually, for the listening public and for the Member asking the question, the X-ray is operational. It was down this week because they were doing maintenance and replacing parts, but it should be operational this week. The work on the X-ray building will commence this month, and we expect to have it completed by May 2026.

So far, Mr. Chairman, I have only had questions, really, about Customs and the police. If I am missing anything, I welcome the Members opposite to remind me, and I will make sure I get the answers in the next five minutes.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Honourable Member. Thank you, Minister

I recognise that there are about four minutes left, if I am correct. Well, five minutes left.

I recognise the Shadow Minister.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Regarding the G.R.E.A.T. programme, it is a psychoeducational programme. It is not a cognitive behavioural programme. And it is approximately about . . . what is it? . . . thirteen to sixteen sessions. Right?

An Hon. Member: Right.

Mr. Robert King: So, if we understand criminal attitudes and beliefs, we do know that there is a difference between a person who is *at risk* and a person who is *involved*. The treatment modalities used for both would be materially different. You might have the person who has entrenched criminal attitudes and beliefs, who would start off with the psychoeducational in the beginning, as kind of a warm-up to go ahead and increase motivation, and then go into the deeper stuff.

The question is: Is there consideration for the Gang Violence Reduction Programme including cognitive behavioural therapy as a component of it, not just psychoeducational, not for just at-risk kids, but for youth who are gang-involved, so that we can break the attitudes and beliefs that drive the behaviour? Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Shadow Minister. Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Member for that. And I want to make it clear that the coordinator of the Violence Reduction Team, actually, recently, I think it was last year, got a doctorate in behaviour therapy and cognitive behaviour and trauma. So, I think that only adds to the strength and the ability of that team to address the cognitive issues that the Member opposite has raised.

And I want to take my hat off to him because his background is also there. So, I appreciate his view and his analysis of it. But I want him [to] rest assured that this Violence Reduction Team, yes, is really fit for purpose. And like I said, hats off to the now Bishop Doctor in leading the Violence Reduction Team and they are doing a yeoman's job.

So, in answer to the question by the Member opposite about the effect of [the] G.R.E.A.T. programme, it is being led ably and we have a lot of success, not only in the G.R.E.A.T. programme, but in the I AM programme.

The Chairman: Great. You are free to sum up, Minister. There are about another 60 seconds left.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Okay. As I sum up, I want to thank Members opposite. You know, I wanted to leave Member King about three hours, but I changed my mind halfway through.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I changed my mind halfway through and decided to take a [bit] more time.

The Chairman: Odds were on *no time at all*. But with this, you saw that.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes. But in wrapping up, I just want to thank Members for participating. I want to thank my Permanent Secretary for his yeoman leadership in making sure that our department heads gathered the information that we need. You know, he is a former colonel, so he is kind of firm, and he tells people, *Put stuff together*. So, thank you, sir.

And thank you [to] all my department's heads for what you do. And my boss away from home, my comptroller. Make sure that we all do what we got to do. So, thank you, sir.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Honourable Minister.

And we would like to thank the Shadow Minister and all those who participated, including the Honourable Member, Linda Smith.

Minister, go right ahead and move your heads, and we are good.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: So, as I take my seat, so prior to taking my seat, Mr. Chairman—

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: —I move that Heads 83, 6, 7, 12, 45 and 88 be approved as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Heads 83, 6, 7, 12, 45 and 88 be approved.

Is there any objection to that motion?

No objection. It is agreed to.

Thank you, Minister.

[Motion carried: The Ministry of National Security, Heads, 83, 6, 7, 12, 45 and 88 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27.]

[Gavel]

The Chairman: And now we will move to . . . I recognise the Honourable Minister for Housing and Municipalities, the Honourable Zane De Silva.

Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Go ahead, move your heads, Minister.

MINISTRY OF HOUSING AND MUNICIPALITIES

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, I move the following Heads, Head 90, Ministry of Housing and Municipalities; Headquarters 53, Bermuda Housing Corporation [BHC] be now taken under consideration.

The Chairman: It has been so moved that Heads 90 and 53 be considered. Agreed to.

Carry on, Minister.

HEAD 90—MINISTRY OF HOUSING AND MUNICIPALITIES

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I am grateful for the opportunity to lead the debate and present the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for Head 90, Ministry of Housing and Municipalities.

The Chairman: Carry on, Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: This is found on pages B-318 through B-321, C-8, C-16, and C-22 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the fiscal year 2026/27.

Ministry Headquarters is comprised of one business unit, 100000 Administration, which supports

the Minister's office and directs the development and implementation of policy and legislation. The Ministry Headquarters also provides leadership and coordination for its affiliated bodies, which are

- the Bermuda Housing Corporation,
- the Bermuda Housing Trust,
- the Bermuda Land Management Corporation [BLMC],
- the Corporation of Hamilton,
- the Corporation of St. George's, and
- the Morgan's Point Development Company.

Mission and Objectives

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, as can be found on page B-319, the mission of the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities is, *To enhance Bermuda's quality of life through affordable and sustainable housing, vibrant communities, responsible land stewardship, and innovative urban development.*

To achieve the mission, the Ministry Headquarters has the following objectives: one, *to guide and coordinate the Ministry's initiatives through collaboration with government agencies and key public and private stakeholders*; two, *to deliver essential logistical, financial, and administrative support to the Ministry Headquarters and its constituent entities.*

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: As noted on page B-320, the Ministry Headquarters and Administration have been allocated a total budget of \$937,000 for the 2026/27 fiscal year. This amount represents approximately 11.4 per cent of the Ministry's total estimated budget of \$8,206,000.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: For clarity, the other 88.6 per cent, or \$7,269,000, is allocated to the operational grant for the Bermuda Housing Corporation.

Of the Ministry's Headquarters budget allocation, \$597,000, or 63.7 per cent, is designated for salaries. Mr. Chairman, \$257,000, or 27.4 per cent, is earmarked for professional services to support studies and specialised assistance. And the remaining \$83,000, or 8.9 per cent, is allocated to operations.

Mr. Chairman, for the Ministry Headquarters, the 2026/27 budget reflects an overall increase of \$23,000, or 3 per cent compared to the 2025/26 budget, primarily due to salary uplifts. While the total budget remains stable, salaries have increased by \$132,000, or 28 per cent to accommodate the addition of a second special advisor. As a result, professional services has decreased by the same amount, representing a 34 per cent reduction.

Revenue

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The Ministry Headquarters will not collect any revenue given that it is not a revenue generating department.

Manpower

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The manpower estimates for the Ministry Headquarters, as outlined on page B-320, is five full-time posts. This includes a policy analyst, a comptroller, executive assistant, and two special advisors to the Minister.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The Ministry Headquarters does not anticipate purchasing capital assets during the fiscal year 2026/27.

Grants and Contributions

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, as shown on page C-8, the Ministry Headquarters has a total allocation of \$32,863,000 for grants and contributions.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: This will support the following entities, including the Bermuda Land Management Corporation, the Corporation of St. George's, and the Bermuda Housing Corporation. The specific grants and contributions are as follows:

Bermuda Land Management Corporation

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The following grants facilitate payments on three projects currently secured through a single loan with Clarien Bank. The increase in each loan reflects the rise in Clarien Bank loan interest from 4.5 per cent to 6 per cent.

- Cost centre 75054 BLMC Capital Grant, \$1,262,000, increased from the revised estimate 2025/26 of \$1,254,000 for the affordable housing and infrastructure project at Victoria Place. This included the installation of sewage collection and reclaimed water supply extending to Boaz Island Village.
- Cost centre 75334 BLMC South Basin land reclamation—this was \$3,078,000, increased from the revised estimate in 2025/26 of \$3,061,000 for the Cross Island reclamation project completed for the great America's Cup 2017.
- Cost centre 75346 BLMC King's Wharf, \$850,000, increased from the revised estimate 2025/26 of \$845,000 for the King's Wharf dock and terminal upgrade.

The Chairman: Yes.

Bermuda Housing Corporation

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, full details will be provided in the Budget Statement for Head 53, Bermuda Housing Corporation. However, I would like to take the opportunity to highlight several key items as shown on pages C-8 and C-22.

The Chairman: Just before you do, Minister, [I am] just reminding Members that this is a three-hour debate as allocated by the Opposition, and so the Minister will be, for the three hours, going through Heads 90 through 50 and 53. He is now on Bermuda Housing Corporation, Head 53.

I recognise the Minister in charge.

7032, Rental Assistance Grants

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Housing Corporation, Head 53, will receive an operational grant funding totalling \$7,269,000, representing an increase of \$629,042 over the prior year. The increased grant allocation reflects higher operating costs related to the addition of new housing units, increased maintenance, and make-ready works, also the engagement of two additional staff members, higher staffing costs arising from the collective bargaining agreement and statutory obligations, the requirement for an on-call residential supervisor for rooming houses, and expanded training and professional development.

75320, BHC Residential Housing Grant

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, over the past four years, the Government has steadily increased its investment in affordable housing demonstrating a clear commitment to addressing Bermuda's housing challenges and supporting Bermudian families. In 2023, the Government allocated \$4.3 million to the Bermuda Housing Corporation under the Residential Building Programme. In 2024, that investment increased to \$5 million reflecting continued efforts to accelerate housing development. In 2025/26, funding rose again, Mr. Chairman, to \$6.5 million, further—

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —strengthening the programme's capacity to deliver new housing units and improve existing properties.

In 2026/27, this commitment will expand significantly with funding increasing to \$16,355,000—

The Chairman: So, noted, Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —to support a major scale-up of affordable housing initiatives. This sustained and growing investment will enable more Bermudians to

access safe, quality, and affordable housing. It will support the construction of new homes, the refurbishment of existing housing stock, and assist with the implementation of Phase 1 of the draft Affordable Housing Strategy 2025–2035.

The Chairman: Yes, Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I will speak more about that strategy a little further on, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, the BHC has outlined a comprehensive renovation plan to bring much-needed housing units back into service. In 2026, a total of 16 units will be refurbished, including the following:

- twelve units at Harmony East in Paget—that's 6 studios and 6 one-bedroom apartments;
- four two-bedroom units in Middle Town, Pembroke;
- as well as an additional 33 units [that] are slated for renovation—that would be
 - 16 studios at Harmony North in Paget;
 - 12 units at 18 Battery Road, St. David's, comprising of 4 two-bedrooms, six studios, and 2 one-bedroom units;
 - five family-sized units at Chelsea and St. George's, which consist of 2 three-bedrooms and 3 two-bedroom units.

Additional funding of \$10,555,346 has been allocated to support the development of new housing units in alignment with Government's draft Bermuda Affordable Housing Strategy 2025–2035. This funding will support enabling infrastructure for selected housing projects, architectural and engineering services, and the conversion of Channel House to provide senior housing.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Funding for the major projects will be provided through a local banking facility secured by a government guarantee. I look forward and am excited that we will be providing further updates to this Honourable House in the very near future.

The Chairman: So, noted, Minister.

75332, BHC Capital Grant

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The Bermuda Housing Corporation has been allocated \$10,518,000 in its annual capital grant, representing a small increase of \$18,000 compared to last year's original estimate of \$10,500,000. This increase reflects additional funding required to cover bank interest associated with housing development financing.

The grant will also facilitate significant repairs to BHC-managed facilities, and those include:

- Langley House room refurbishments, kitchen and laundry, \$757,500;

- Gulfstream room refurbishments and plumbing replacements, \$900,000;
- Swanston property 10 two-bedroom units refurbishment, \$950,000;
- Cedar Park, the long-awaited electrical, plumbing, lighting and sewage upgrades, \$800,000;
- Alexandra [Road] and Mary Victoria Road electrical, plumbing, lighting and sewage upgrades, \$1.2 million.

Mr. Chairman, these projects represent investments in dignity, security and quality of life.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The St. George's Corporation will receive a grant, cost centre 75003, of \$800,000 for the fiscal year 2026/27, consistent with last year's estimate. This funding will support infrastructure improvements within the municipality of St. George's, and some of the planned initiatives include the resurfacing and bricking of Ordnance Island car park, various road resurfacing projects across the municipality, [and] renovation of a three-bedroom dwelling located at 26 Wellington Street. These upgrades aim to enhance the town's infrastructure, improve public amenities, and contribute to the overall revitalisation of the area.

The Chairman: Yes.

Output Measures

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: [Regarding] output measures, Mr. Chairman—

The Chairman: Carry on, Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —the Ministry Headquarters primarily provides an oversight role, and there are no direct output measures.

Major Policy Changes

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, recognising that the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities is a new Ministry established in February 2025, there are no major policy changes to report on for the fiscal year 2025/26.

The Chairman: Yes.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, the establishment of the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities in February 2025 reflects this Government's commitment to addressing Bermuda's housing challenges while ensuring effective oversight of the Island's municipalities and affiliated public bodies.

As we enter 2026/27 fiscal year, the Ministry will continue focussing on practical and sustainable solutions that expand housing opportunities, strengthen communities and improve coordination across the entities responsible for housing and municipal services.

Mr. Chairman, recent data from the Bermuda Housing Corporation underscores the growing pressure in Bermuda's housing market. Between November and December in 2025 alone, the housing wait list increased from 333 to 357 households with growth across every priority category. While urgent cases remain significant, the fastest increase is among working individuals and families who contribute to our economy yet struggle to afford market rents.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Nearly 60 per cent of applicants are seeking studio or one-bedroom units, reflecting mounting pressures on seniors, smaller households, and individuals living alone. Beyond the statistics, the Ministry continues to receive daily calls from families who are underhoused, overcrowded, or housing insecure.

Mr. Chairman, housing is not simply a social issue, it is also an economic one. Businesses cannot attract or retain talent if housing is inaccessible. Young professionals cannot remain in Bermuda if accommodation is unattainable. Families cannot build financial security when rent consumes an unsustainable share of income. They just cannot do it.

It is important to note that our approach addresses both affordable housing and attainable housing. Affordable housing supports low-income households who cannot access market housing without assistance. Attainable housing focusses on working and middle-income households who are priced out of the market but do not qualify for the traditional subsidies. Both are essential to the strength of our economy and the stability of our communities.

The Chairman: Yes.

Development of an Affordable Housing Strategy

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, this budget supports the development of a long-term, data-driven, affordable housing strategy that will guide future investment, planning, and home ownership opportunities. A coordinated three-year delivery framework is being developed to address the Island's housing needs and build a more sustainable housing system.

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to report that the consultative draft of the Affordable Housing Strategy has now been completed. The Ministry has also concluded consultations with internal government stakeholders to ensure alignment across departments and agencies involved in housing delivery.

Mr. Chairman, the draft strategy will now be presented to Cabinet for consideration. Following Cabinet's review, the Ministry intends to undertake consultations with external stakeholders in April, including representatives from the private sector, non-profit organisations, community groups, and other key partners whose perspectives will be critical in strengthening the strategy. We may even talk to some of the Members opposite if they are good.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The Ministry will then finalise the strategy and develop a detailed implementation plan.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, while the plan is being finalised, we will not delay. The work to address Bermuda's housing needs is already underway. More than 30 publicly owned sites have been identified for potential development, many of them development-ready, with clear ownership, zoning, and supporting infrastructure already in place.

Six priority locations have been selected for the first phase, including Albert and Victoria Row in Sandys, the government-owned site adjacent to Dr. Cann Park in Southampton, and the sites at Tommy Fox Road, Harbour View, and Channel House in St. David's.

The Chairman: Yes, Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I am pleased to confirm that implementation has already begun. Three priority sites have been confirmed for accelerated development. Together, they are projected to deliver over 200 homes within the next 18 months, primarily one-bedroom units aligned with demonstrated demand alongside a smaller proportion of two- and three-bedroom homes. These developments will include both affordable, subsidised units and attainable homes for working and middle-class households available for rent and for sale. The homes will be delivered using precast concrete and modular construction technologies, efficient and cost-effective approaches that respond to rising global construction costs while ensuring local contractors remain actively engaged.

Financing will be provided by local financial institutions supported by our government letter of guarantee. This represents a responsible public-private partnership model—Government providing oversight and financial backing, local banks providing capital, and the Bermuda Land Management Corporation and the Bermuda Housing Corporation acting as landlord and managing project delivery.

For the business community, this provides pipeline certainty, construction activity, job creation, and measurable economic stimulus.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Housing investment, Mr. Chairman, is economic investment.

Emergency Projects

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: At the same time, Mr. Chairman, we must respond to the immediate need. Nine modular units have been procured for installation at Boaz Island to provide transitional housing for urgent cases. The planning application has been submitted, and the units are expected to arrive within the next four to six weeks.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: This initiative will provide rapid relief while serving as a live pilot for scalable modular housing solutions in Bermuda.

The Bermuda Housing Corporation

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The Bermuda Housing Corporation continues to play a vital role in delivering safe, affordable, and accessible housing for Bermudians across all sectors. With three grant allocations totalling over \$23 million for operational support, capital works, and new residential construction, BHC is well positioned to advance its mission with urgency and with impact—

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —Mr. Chairman. As outlined earlier in this statement, these funds are supporting significant renovations to existing housing stock, targeted upgrades to transitional housing facilities such as Gulfstream and Langley House, and the continued expansion of the residential building programme.

Mr. Chairman, several development projects are already underway across the Island. These projects will collectively deliver 37 new affordable housing units with the majority expected to come online within the next couple of months.

Looking ahead to 2026/27, additional works are scheduled to commence, those being at

- 13 Middle Town, 2 three-bedroom units;
- 9 King Street, 3 two-bedroom units;
- 45 Elliott Street, 2 three-bedroom units;
- 39 Battery Road, 4 two-bedroom units;
- Swanston property, 5 two-bedroom units.

Together, these developments will further expand the housing delivery pipeline and strengthen supply across key communities.

The successful HomeStart programme delivered in partnership with Clarien Bank is also helping more Bermudians achieve first-time home ownership. With 88 units completed or in progress and additional developments planned at several strategic locations, BHC continues to respond to rising housing demand reflected in its growing wait list.

Support for seniors and the most vulnerable remains a priority through initiatives such as interest-free home improvement loans and the long-standing H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck programme, now in its 19th year.

As economic pressures continue, the work at BHC is more critical than ever. The corporation remains ready and resolute, responding to Bermuda's evolving housing needs through data-driven planning, strong partnerships, and targeted investment.

Mr. Chairman, in addition to the Ministry's housing responsibilities, the following initiatives are also underway:

- **Bermudiana Beach Residences**—Mr. Chairman, as of February 2026, Bermudiana Beach Residence has reached 73 per cent secured occupancy, up from 35 per cent as of May 2025. Continued lease activity reflects growing confidence in the development and suggests a promising trajectory toward full occupancy in the months ahead. [It] cannot happen fast enough.

- **Master planning for neighbourhoods of Alexandra Road, Mary Victoria, and Cedar Park**—Mr. Chairman, the Ministry, working in collaboration with the Bermuda Housing Corporation and the Ministry of Public Works and Environment, is committed to developing a comprehensive infrastructure master plan for the Devonshire neighbourhoods of Alexandra Road, Cedar Park, and Mary Victoria Road. This initiative will address long-standing and critical issues, including water supply, sewage, and street lighting. Work continues with the Ministry of Public Works and Environment on water infrastructure improvements. Discussions are ongoing with the Bermuda Housing Corporation to address water-related concerns, while coordination with BELCO is underway to improve street lighting.

As part of our commitment to inclusive community engagement, we are identifying multiple ways to consult with residents. Water testing with the assistance of the Ministry of Health is ongoing for interested residents. A survey on dog ownership has been completed to inform future community planning and policy development.

To report non-emergency issues in the interim, residents may contact the Ministry of Housing hotline—something new—[at] 246-8400. For emergencies, the Bermuda Housing Corporation should be contacted directly at 524-8623. Further updates on next steps, timelines, and opportunities for resident engagement will be provided in the coming weeks.

The Chairman: Members, we remain in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates in

Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27. The Honourable Minister for Housing and Municipalities is going through Heads 90 and 53, Bermuda Housing Corporation and the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities.

Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, sir. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Legislative Reform

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, the Ministry will pursue amendments to the Acquisition of Land Act 1970 to streamline processes for reclaiming vacant and derelict properties. The objective of these legislative changes is to create a clearer mechanism to increase the available housing stock in the country.

The Chairman: Yes, Deputy Premier.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: To support this work, the Ministry is collaborating closely with the Ministry of Public Works and Environment, as well as the ministries responsible for the Department of Land Valuation, the Land Title Registry, and the Department of Planning.

Mr. Chairman, the Government remains committed to modernising and strengthening Bermuda's system of municipal governance so that it better serves our communities and reflects the democratic standards expected in Bermuda today.

As Honourable Members are aware, the Government recently received the decision of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council regarding the municipal reform legislation previously approved by this Honourable House. That decision has now brought final clarity to the legal challenges surrounding those reforms. With that matter now concluded, the Government will move forward with amendments to the Municipalities Act 1923. The Bill advancing these updates is scheduled for debate later today.

Mr. Chairman, this step represents the next stage in ensuring that Bermuda's municipal governance framework is modern, effective, and aligned with the broader interests of the country. Further details will be provided during the debate when the Bill is brought before the Members for consideration.

Bermuda Land Management Corporation

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, in the year ahead, the Bermuda Land Management Corporation will focus on completing major infrastructure works at both the west and east ends of the Island while advancing strategic initiatives that support national development. In the west, several capital projects are underway at the North Arm, including the Marine and Ports tug dock repairs, the King's Wharf dock expansion, and the commercial excursion dock extension. The tug dock repairs are approximately 90 per cent complete

and are expected to be finalised by the end of March 2026 with interim berthing and shore power arrangements already in place.

Phase one of the King's Wharf expansion commenced in December 2025 and will extend the dock approximately 90 feet to the existing berthing dolphin, increasing docking capacity and improving cruise vessel servicing. Works will pause in early April to accommodate the active cruise season and resume in November 2026 with full completion anticipated ahead of the 2027 cruise season.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The commercial excursion dock expansion began in February 2026 and will continue through September 2026.

In the east, where there is no Cup at the moment and will not be for a while—

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —the water and waste infrastructure project is now 99 per cent complete and will enable sewage transfer from St. George's to the Southside treatment facility once final pump upgrades are installed and the system testing is complete.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The specialised pumps are expected to arrive in April 2026, after which final commissioning will take place before the system becomes fully operational.

BLMC also continues to advance its residential and land management initiatives. Progress is being made on the leasehold to freehold transition for 38 residential units in St. David's with legal conveyancing underway. However, the full process will extend beyond March 2026 due to the complexity of completing individual property transfers.

With strong operational management, high occupancy across its housing portfolio, and several development opportunities under evaluation, BLMC remains well positioned to support housing delivery and economic activity across both ends of the Island.

Morgan's Point Development Company

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: As Honourable Members are aware, the Morgan's [Point] Development Company, established under the Morgan's Point Development Company Act 2022, continues to lead the Government's approach to the redevelopment of the former Caroline Bay site through a measured and financially responsible framework. Over the past year, the company has focused on stabilising operations,

strengthening governance, and maintaining oversight of the site while laying the groundwork for a comprehensive master planning process.

Looking ahead, priorities for the 2026/27 fiscal year include finalising land consolidation, advancing the master planning process through a competitive request for proposals for experienced planning firms, and undertaking further structural and infrastructure assessments to guide phased redevelopment options. These steps will help ensure that any future development pathway is carefully planned, financially sound, and aligned with Bermuda's broader economic and housing objectives.

Mr. Chairman, the Government remains committed to ensure that the redevelopment of Morgan's Point proceeds in a disciplined and transparent manner that protects the public interest while positioning the site for sustainable long-term economic value.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Chairman Omar McIntosh, board members Bernard Opoku and Permanent Secretary Kirk Outerbridge for their dedication and efforts over the past year. I also wish to acknowledge Executive Director Sue Khan for her continued leadership and support. I would like to extend sincere thanks to Mr. Marlon Williams for his service and contributions during his time with the organisation and wish him well in his future endeavours.

I am also pleased to welcome new board members Mrs. Shannah Butterfield and Mr. Nadir Wade and look forward to their contributions to the continued work of the board.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, this Government stands firmly on the principle that every Bermudian deserves a safe, secure, and affordable place to call home. As we move forward with purpose and determination, we remain guided by a simple but powerful truth: our people come first.

As Bermuda enters the 2026/27 financial year, the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities remains focused on delivering practical, sustainable housing solutions that address both immediate needs and long-term affordability challenges. Through prudent budget management, stronger coordination across government agencies, and continued investment in housing and community development, the Ministry will continue working steadily, responsibly, and with urgency to improve housing outcomes and enhance the quality of life for Bermudians.

Mr. Chairman, the work ahead is significant, but this Government remains fully committed to expanding access to affordable housing and strengthening the communities in which Bermudians live, work, and raise their families.

Mr. Chairman, at this time, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the staff at headquarters, including my hard-working PS, Permanent Secretary Andrew Pettit, Mrs. Wendy Pond, Tracey Wilkinson, Mrs. Jane Brett, [and] Mrs. Julie Marshall. Please

accept my sincere appreciation for all your hard work, valuable contributions, and for putting up with me.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my presentation on Head 90, Ministry of Housing and Municipalities Headquarters.

The Chairman: Very well, Minister.

The Minister has concluded his presentation on Head 90. And [I am] reminding Members that we are on the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27, and as the Minister mentioned, that he has Heads 90 and 53.

Minister.

HEAD 53—BERMUDA HOUSING CORPORATION

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Again, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 53, the Bermuda Housing Corporation, found on pages B-321 and C-22—

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —of the approved Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure.

Mission

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, the mission statement of the Bermuda Housing Corporation is, *To provide accessibility to adequate, affordable housing and promote independent living to enhance the quality of life in Bermuda.* The vision statement of the Bermuda Housing Corporation is, *Every Bermudian will reside in an adequate and safe environment.*

Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Housing Corporation will be receiving three grant allocations this fiscal year to support both its operational and capital requirements.

Firstly, Mr. Chairman, the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities allocates an operational grant that is utilised to subsidise the following:

- annual cost of repairs and normal maintenance of BHC properties;
- support services for families and individuals;
- rental assistance via rent-geared-to-income clients of the corporation;
- and for the continuation of the H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck programme.

BHC is budgeted to receive an operational grant of \$7,269,000, as noted on pages B-321 and C-22.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: This represents an increase of \$629,000, which will help cover operational costs, including energy and other related expenses, like

- the addition of approximately 60 new housing units to the public housing stock;
- increased make-ready works;
- remedial repairs and painting;
- landscaping, electrical, and plumbing maintenance;
- engagement of two additional staff members, a project manager and a support services officer;
- higher staffing costs arising from
 - the collective bargain agreement,
 - payroll tax obligations,
 - and a 0.7 per cent increase in public service superannuation fund contributions,
 - the retirement for a residential supervisor,
 - on-call for rooming houses,
 - and expanded training and professional development.

The second grant BHC is budgeted to receive is a capital grant, 75332, of \$10,000,518, found on page C-22, an increase of \$18,000 from the previous year, as I mentioned earlier. The capital grant will be used to pay for the interest and principal amounts due to the corporation's outstanding bank loans. It will also be used for capital projects on BHC properties, such as

- Langley House for room refurbishments, kitchen and laundry, \$757,500;
- Gulfstream room refurbishments and plumbing replacements, \$900,000;
- Hornston property, 10 two-bedroom units refurbishment, \$950,000;
- Cedar Park for the electrical plumbing, lighting, and sewage upgrades, \$800,000;
- and Alexandra and Mary Victoria electrical plumbing, lighting, and sewage upgrades, \$1.2 million, as stated previously.

The third grant BHC is budgeted to receive is the BHC Residential Housing Grant, 75320, in the amount of \$16,355,000. As listed on page C-22, part of the funding, \$4,800,000, will be allocated to Phase 5 of the Residential Building Programme, which began in October 2022. Additional funding of \$11,555,000 has been included for the development of new housing units as guided by the Government's new Bermuda Affordable Housing Strategy 2025–2035.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, through the Residential Building Grant, BHC continues to renovate and refurbish its housing stock to expand the number of affordable housing units available to our people. Under this programme, the following projects are currently under construction:

- 18 Battery Road—12 units, \$3,750,000. Work is underway. An estimated completion date is August this year.

- Chelsea apartments—five units, \$2,968,183. Work is underway. [An] estimated completion date, July 2026.
- 7 Middle Road—four units' refurbishment, \$775,000. Work [is] underway. [The] estimated completion time [is] March 31, 2026, within the next couple of weeks.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: In the 2026/27 budget, the grant of \$4,800,000 funding is allocated as follows:

- 45 Elliott Street—two three-bedroom units, \$800,000, [which is] in Planning.
- Harmony Terrace North—16 studios, \$1,000,000. The building permit has been received. Demolition work has commenced.
- Harmony Terrace infrastructure—upgrading the electrical power from single phase to three phase, adding individual metres to all units, roadworks, landscaping, and a storage unit, \$3,000,000.

Mr. Chairman, there are no other changes between the 2025/26 and 2026/27 grant allocation.

As a reminder, Mr. Chairman, the primary functions of BHC are to provide housing in Bermuda, to promote home ownership, to undertake and carry out housing schemes, and to undertake such other functions in connection with housing as the Minister responsible for Housing may require.

The Bermuda Housing Corporation administers a range of programmes in pursuit of its mission, including the management and leasing of [a] substantial inventory of properties comprising houses, apartments, and building blocks. These properties include both those owned by the corporation and others leased from the private sector. The BHC manages approximately 539 government and private residential units island-wide and eight transitional homes comprising of 171 rooms. In addition to this, BHC also manages 151 leasehold units at Alexander Road, Mary Victoria Road, Greenwich Lane, and Cedar Park, along with 94 units at Bermudiana Beach Residences.

How do they do it, Mr. Chairman? That group deserves medals.

The Chairman: Quite a lot.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight several of the programmes and initiatives currently being implemented by the BHC to maintain, support, and expand its housing stock.

The corporation has entered into a public-private partnership with Clarien Bank, known as the HomeStart programme, to support hard-working Bermudians in achieving home ownership. To date, the programme has successfully assisted over 30 Bermudian families—30—in becoming first-time

homeowners. This initiative has proven effective in making properties available for purchase at affordable prices. I am pleased to report that this number will soon rise to 33, as three additional families are expected to complete their closing in the coming months. Through this partnership, properties within the portfolios of either Clarien Bank or the Bermuda Housing Corporation that require repairs are listed on the BHC website under the HomeStart Programme. The initiative is designed specifically for the first-time homeowners and offers 100 per cent mortgage financing. BHC provides a guarantee to Clarien Bank on the first 25 per cent of each mortgage, making the programme both accessible and secure for new homeowners.

The corporation, in partnership with Age Concern and the Government of Bermuda, continues to support our valued seniors and persons with disabilities through a programme designed to help families care for their vulnerable loved ones. This initiative enables individuals to remain in their own homes with dignity by providing interest-free loans up to \$15,000 repayable over a period of no more than 10 years. This funding is for the purchase of furniture, fixtures, and fittings, and/or to make modifications or renovations to their home, which will make it easier for them to remain there rather than be housed in a seniors' facility. As a reminder, the purchase of the fixture and fittings under this programme are duty-free.

Since the inception of this programme at BHC, BHC has provided loans for 35 seniors with a total of \$476,000. That is not a bad number.

The Chairman: Not bad at all.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Applications for this programme remain available through the BHC website at www.bhc.bm, or they can be collected in person at the corporation's reception desk at the Seven Arches Building, 44 Church Street, Hamilton.

Mr. Chairman, as of February 23, 2026, the former Grant Atlantic, now operating as the Bermudiana Beach Residences, has leases for 73 per cent of the units, or 68 of the 94 condos. The units make up 25 studios, 25 one-bedrooms, 28 two-bedrooms, and 16 three-bedrooms.

Mr. Chairman, as mentioned previously, the BHC also manages and controls the H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck programme, the acronym for Helping the Unemployed Sustain Themselves with Limited Employment. That's the H.U.S.T.L.E., which has been in successful operation since 2007. This year marks the 19th anniversary of the programme. There were some who said the programme will not last a year or two. It is still there and still flourishing.

The Chairman: It has lasted a while. It has lasted a while.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: It sure has.

This programme, Mr. Chairman, has helped over 2,050 unemployed Bermudians in need of short-term temporary employment and assisted them with finding full-time jobs. In addition, the programme has provided much-valued assistance to our seniors, community groups, churches, schools, and neighbourhoods. It assists with tasks such as removing furniture, collecting and disposing of large bulk waste, landscaping, relocating tenants, public area cleanups, and many other jobs. For the last calendar year, the H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck team completed 677 requests from the community.

The Chairman: That is a lot.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: [Transitional] housing, Mr. Chairman—

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: As previously mentioned, the BHC operates eight rooming or transitional homes that contain approximately 177 beds. The various houses are located throughout the Island and provide a safe habitat for BHC clients. The rooming houses cater to households that need immediate, safe, or emergency accommodation. These facilities are known as Langley House, Gulfstream, Victoria Terrace, Union Street, 7 Middle Town, 9 Middle Town, Roosevelt, and Beacon Hill.

Mr. Chairman, the Support Services Department holds regular meetings at the rooming houses to hear residents' concerns and address any complaints. Satellite offices at the largest rooming houses in Southside are utilised for those meetings, as well as for conducting support classes for clients who have fallen onto hard times. The support provided includes economic, social, and psychological guidance all aimed at helping occupants transition from the facility into more traditional forms of living in Bermuda.

Gulfstream multi-unit rooming housing, Southside, St. David's—Mr. Chairman, the Gulfstream multi-unit rooming house is comprised of 79 rooms and currently houses 41 families. Some families have adjoining rooms or [a] family suite to ensure adequate privacy between parents and children.

Mr. Chairman, refurbishing work continues at Gulfstream as we work to improve the overall conditions of the rooms and infrastructure of the building. The roof was recently repaired and new waterproofing applied. Work is underway to renovate the kitchens and bathrooms. Also, windows and entrance doors needed replacing due to age.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

HOUSE VISITOR

The Chairman: Minister, if you would not mind just pausing for two seconds while I acknowledge the presence of Senator Lauren Bell; she is in our Galleries. We are happy to have her here. Very good to have her.

[Committee of Supply, continuing]

The Chairman: Minister, you may carry on.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am happy to have her here too.

The Chairman: You remain in Committee.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you.

Langley House, Mr. Chairman, the multi-unit rooming housing, Southside, St. David's—Mr. Chairman, building 632 [at] Southside, St. David's, known as Langley House, is a 63-bed rooming house facility located at Southside, St. David's. The rooming house is used specifically to house men in need of affordable and safe accommodations. There are currently 50 men residing at that rooming house. The corporation has qualified social workers working out of the satellite offices, including a former police officer, to monitor and correct any antisocial behaviours.

Mr. Chairman, like the work at Gulfstream, we are in the process of carrying out refurbishing work at Langley House also. In the previous financial year, the project team refurbished a set of washrooms and showers, along with 10 of the residence's rooms. They were all completed in March 2025. We will continue this refurbishment with another 10 rooms, which are nearly complete, along with the second set of washrooms and showers on the first floor. In addition, we are upgrading the laundry room and kitchens.

Harmony Club—Mr. Chairman, the corporation is in the process of transforming Harmony Club property into studio and one-bedroom units, which will include intergenerational living, those 50 years old and older, who are mobile and can live independently. Construction has been completed on Harmony Terrace West, which has eight units, Harmony Terrace East, which has 12 units, with the construction of the Harmony Terrace North underway [at] 16 units. Work is also underway on the parking lot, new electrical upgrades, landscaping, and the storage unit. The Harmony Terrace property is also used as a H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck office, warehouse storage, and the Bonnie-Jean Tweed House, used to provide emergency accommodation for people in immediate distress or in need of immediate rehousing.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

HOUSE VISITOR

The Chairman: Yes, Minister, we recognise the presence also of Senator Lindsay Simmons, who has

entered our Gallery. We are glad to have her in the [Gallery].

[Committee of Supply, continuing]

The Chairman: Carry on, Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you. We have much talent coming to—

The Chairman: Well, you have got all the support, Minister.

BHC Office Staff

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, sir.

Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Housing Corporation's head office is located at the Seven Arches Building, East Entrance, 44 Church Street, in the City of Hamilton and presently consists of 50 personnel. Of that total, three H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck members operate from the office space at the Harmony Club, and five staff members under the Support Services and the Property Operations Department operate off-site at a satellite office in the Southside complex. The current structure of the BHC consists of eight departments:

- Project Management, four;
- Property Operations, 12;
- Finance, Collections and Home Ownership, eight;
- Support Services, 14;
- Administration, five;
- Human Resources, two;
- Information Technology, two;
- and the H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck, three.

Project Management

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, the Project Management Department assists with advice regarding major repair work necessary on existing buildings owned by the corporation to ensure longevity of the corporation's assets.

Project managers oversee the multiple dwellings that come under the BHC remit to ensure effective and cost-conscious maintenance programmes keep the units in a safe and healthy state. The department consists of two project managers, one senior project officer, and one senior property administration officer. They are also responsible for initial drawings of projected capital projects, as well as the project management of the properties through to completion. As mentioned previously, with the economic stimulus grant, Residential Building Programme, repairs and renovations of the rooming houses, day-to-day work on the rental units, including make-readies, this team performs to the highest standards.

Property Operations

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, the Property Operations Department is responsible for maintenance of BHC's housing stock of approximately 700 units, including the rooming houses Island-wide.

The Chairman: Seven hundred.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Seven hundred. The department's responsibilities include the regular maintenance of buildings under the control of BHC and providing advice and assistance to clients of BHC on housing-related matters.

The department is comprised of four property officers, six maintenance officers, one building officer, and one administrative assistant.

The department conducts regular maintenance checks of its buildings under the management of the corporation and is responsible for small maintenance works, along with coordinating more difficult tasks with trusted and able contractors. Last year, the Property Operations Department completed approximately 3,095 maintenance requests. These requests for maintenance, that this capable department handles, are wide-ranging—very wide-ranging. They tackle everything from simple plumbing, electrical, water, sewage and roof repairs, to landscaping, painting, flooring, and also major renovations.

Finance Department

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, the Finance Department has a total staff of eight, consisting of one chief financial officer, one financial controller, one assistant financial controller, one senior financial officer, three finance officers, and one cashier. The Finance Department carefully monitors the corporation's spending and compliance, ensuring that policies and procedures are adhered to and that clients act responsibly in paying their bills in a timely manner. The Finance Department fields questions of a financial nature, provides mortgage advice, and assists clients with understanding their financial obligations to the corporation.

Support Services Department

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, the Support Services Department is the department responsible for ensuring that adequate housing is found for BHC clients.

The Chairman: Minister, if you just would not mind pausing just for a brief minute, I am just going to allow for the change of Chairs. It will be the Honourable Lawrence Scott will be sitting in my place.

[Mr. W. Lawrence Scott, Chairman]

The Chairman: And, Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Okay, thank you. Welcome, Mr. Chairman. Welcome.

Mr. Chairman, the department conducts regular inspections of BHC housing inventory to ensure clients are compliant with their rental contracts. The department consists of 14 people: one manager, one senior social worker, four social workers, one senior leasing agent, one leasing agent, four rental inspectors, one intake officer, and one intake administrator.

There is a current wait-list [for] BHC accommodation of 408. This number is steadily increasing year over year.

The Chairman: [I am] just asking if you wanted the lecture.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: If I want what?

The Chairman: The platform for—

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: No. I am good. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I do appreciate that. My eyes are still pretty good.

Let's just repeat that. I think that we need to make sure we took note of that. There is a current wait-list for the BHC accommodation of 408. This number is steadily increasing year over year.

The Support Services Department offers a myriad of services to clients that include money management, housekeeping, social and behaviour problem eradication, child care, and health and safety guidance. In addition, the department offers advice and support from other agencies that stand ready to assist clients who need professional counselling.

Administration

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, the Administration Department consists of the general manager, one executive assistant, one receptionist, and two office assistants. The Administration Department is responsible for the orderly daily business of the corporation.

Human Resources

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, the Human Resources Department has a total staff of two. The HR department ensures that staff members have the required skills to carry out their daily roles efficiently and successfully as the corporation ensures employee welfare and provides mentoring and training services.

Information Technology

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, the Information Technology Department has a total staff of two. The IT department ensures that the corporation maintains its high standard of delivery and support in the provisions of IT services to all stakeholders.

Helping [the] Unemployed Sustain Themselves with Limited Employment—that is the H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck. Mr. Chairman, the H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck Programme has proven itself over the years, assisting unemployed persons who actively seek work. The H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck headquarters operates out of the Harmony Club and caters to 20 temporary employees per week. The H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck continues to be of valuable assistance to Bermuda with the ability to adjust to the needs of the community as they arise. The H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck Programme allows 20 people per week through the year, with persons able to remain in the programme for up to three months per year, taking one week off each month to seek regular employment. At this level, the corporation can rotate through approximately 260 different people per year. The programme is available for any unemployed Bermudians.

The H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck office keeps a database of information on the unemployed and their skill sets for the specific purposes of making a good fit when partnering with employers. The H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck office regularly receives requests from employers for qualified, suitable, potential employees. Upon receipt of these requests, the database is checked and those people who have the required qualifications are sent to interviews in the hopes of achieving full-time traditional employment.

Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Housing Corporation continues to play a vital role in our society by supporting some of the most vulnerable members of our community, including seniors, individuals with mental challenges, former inmates, young people, and those experiencing financial hardship. This commitment has remained steadfast, particularly in these challenging times marked by economic uncertainty, global supply chain disruptions, and rising prices.

The reality is clear. The more difficulties Bermuda faces, the greater the demand for the essential services provided by the Bermuda Housing Corporation.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Chairman Thomas Famous, the board of directors, the CEO Mr. Paul Martin, and the entire management team and staff of the Bermuda Housing Corporation for their tremendous hard work they continue to do in the service for people of Bermuda.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

The Minister just wrapped up his brief on Housing and Municipalities, speaking to Head 90 and 53.

Is there anybody else that would like to speak to these heads?

The Chair recognises the Honourable Member Michael Fahy.

Michael Fahy, you have the floor.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to the Minister for his comprehensive briefs and the time that we have been allocated to engage in some meaningful debate.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael Fahy: No, it is about the same as last year.

First of all, I do want to, if I may, Mr. Chairman, thank those people who do such amounts of work on behalf of those in need because it is a huge task, and the Minister has accepted that. He has got a huge task in dealing with the housing issues in Bermuda that have been changing over time as a result of different types of population and the different types of need. And I say that, I accept that the job of the Minister and his team is not going to be an easy one because, of course, what we hear all the time is, *Why is there a housing problem in Bermuda when we have less people?* The Minister has also accepted that that is, a lot of times, due to some of the changing demographics and ageing population, the types of needs that people now have. With those comments out of the gate, I will get into some of these heads and ask some questions.

Now, Mr. Chairman, last year was the first year that this Ministry had a budget, and it was very new in that it was a combination of different areas for the first time. We now have a year measurement. We only have a yardstick of a year for this particular Ministry. Last year, I did make mention of a couple of things. I had hoped that they would be a little different this year, and right out of the gates, it is the objectives within the actual Budget Book. They do not align with what the Minister said. He said exactly the same thing last year with the objectives of, say, the Bermuda Housing Corporation on [page] B-321. He gave us a very good list of objectives that do not align with what is actually in the Budget Book. Maybe they can correct that next year so that it gives some more context. I think that is the same generally for headquarters.

That is a minor point. The main thing is that if we go from the Budget Book . . . And I am going to start with page B-321. I will jump around again a little bit as I go through my notes. It says the mission statement for the Bermuda Housing Corporation is rental and mortgage assistance. That is a wider definition that, again, appears on their website and what the Minister read. And I think the mission statement for the Bermuda Housing Corporation is, *To provide accessibility to adequate and affordable housing and to promote independent living to enhance the quality of life in Bermuda.* Let us go with that one because I think that one obviously has a wider definition. I think we will start there.

In respect of the Bermuda Housing Corporation, the Minister has given a very comprehensive idea as to the number of projects that come underneath the remit of the Housing Corporation. He made it clear that

there are 408 people that are on that waiting list. I think last year that same waiting list was 376.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael Fahy: Sorry. Families. Thank you. I appreciate the Minister's clarification.

Last year it was 376 families, as the Minister said, and this year it is 408. That is a mammoth task.

As well, what we have seen . . . And this is, again . . . The Minister last year had made mention of the fact that he has to move with haste. And I seem to recall he challenged me and said: *I hope you don't mind if I move with haste. I am getting on with haste.* The difficulty here is we have moved with haste without the master plan. And I am going to go to what the Minister has said in his Statement because it is obviously not necessarily in the Budget Book itself, but we have heard an awful lot now of the 2025–2035 housing plan. It is now end of February 2026. I would give a bit of a word of advice to my counterpart. Let's call it the plan 2026–2036. Let's get it right at least out of the gate and say the plan is a little late. Look, we will give the Minister some opportunity here because he only just started this plan last year.

The thing is this. The consultation period has been ongoing within Government, and we heard this evening that consultation period will extend to stakeholders in April. And I would absolutely take the Minister up on his pseudo offer. *If I am good*, I think, was his statement. If I am a good person or I do not treat him too badly in this debate, maybe he will consult me. I say that for fun. No, we will consult because I think that is important. I know the Minister will happily do that and give input and thoughts because it is a national problem that needs to be addressed.

Again, the issue is that the master plan has yet to be published, and yet the Minister has this evening reamed off a whole bunch of projects that we have heard a lot about in the last six to eight weeks. And as I said in the original debate . . . and I will not reflect too much, but the point remains the same, Mr. Chairman. And that again is I find it very difficult to understand how we are putting lots of projects in place and moving with haste without actually having had sight of the plan.

So, again, I urge the Minister to bring this plan quickly to the House. As quickly as the Minister is making announcements about the project is as quickly as the plan should be revealed because then it gives, hopefully, an understanding to the public of the overall holistic view that the Government intends to take. Because what has been suggested over the many different plans that have been proposed by, say, the Chamber of Commerce, from HOME, [and] Charity Bermuda, [is] that you need to have those kinds of different layers of housing. And the Minister has alluded to those layers of housing in his statements that we have heard today. But again, we must have sight of that plan.

What is concerning, of course, is that the numbers of homeless and [those] facing homelessness have increased. We have heard that the waiting list for families has also increased. I think the number of people facing homelessness or homeless has risen by some 21 per cent. And again, I am using that number that has been supplied by HOME. It was in a recent report. It is an updated report from last year where that number was 1,100 or so facing homelessness or homeless. So, the problem is not improving; in fact, it is getting worse.

So, if I may now turn very briefly to . . . Again, I am sticking with what we have heard in the Statements, Mr. Chairman, from the Minister today that there is going to be some very swift emergency housing plans, and the Minister again has made reference to the rapid relief (I think was the phrase he used) for modular housing that will be, I suppose, arriving in the next six weeks. The Minister could correct me if I misunderstood that. I am assuming that these are the original expandable container homes and modular homes that the Minister made mention of in a statement to the House last year, that those are those units.

Now with great fanfare that announcement was made last year. It does not seem now to form a central plank of plans. It seems now to be strictly emergency housing. Perhaps the Minister can explain why that is when he has an opportunity to get back on his feet.

And perhaps he can share as well, if in fact I am correct, that the emergency housing units that are modular and/or expandable container homes . . . How many people will actually benefit from that development? How many families are expected to occupy that particular development? [What is] the timeline from arrival to building that development? [What are] the costs that may very well be engaged in respect of servicing that development? And what I mean by that, so we get the terminology understood by everyone, is ensuring that it is provided with proper electrics, sewage, lighting . . . I said lighting, but sewage, water, et cetera, and make sure that it is proper for Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, as well, what is the lifespan of these particular units and what are the long-term costs of those units? I ask those questions because you will recall that there are at the moment some dilapidated units that still sit at the entrance to Morgan's Point that have been used for offices and the like over time, but I believe they are now unoccupied. And those were brought in as emergency units that do not seem to be in use anymore. So, it is, again, just getting the detail from the Minister on that particular unit of housing.

The Minister made mention of the HomeStart programme, which he did mention last year. And again, I think . . . Minister, I think Clarien Bank is what you had said. Good for them for engaging in the programme for HomeStart, and that I believe that . . . I want to make sure I am getting the programme correct. Is that . . . Yes. It is the HomeStart. And the Minister said that it is a private-public partnership with Clarien Bank and that

there are over 30 Bermudian homeowners, and that it soon will be 33 or 34. That does not seem to be that much different from what the Minister said last year. I think the numbers, in fact, are pretty much the same. So, perhaps the Minister can clarify the numbers that have happened in the last . . . since his Statement in May of last year to now. About how many have actually been approved in the last (what is that?) nine months since his last Statement in the House in relation to that particular programme.

I also would like to know—and I think the people of Bermuda would like to know—how many individuals have been rejected from the programme. How many families? How many? Or let's rephrase that. How many applications have been rejected, if data is kept on that? How many people have applied for the programme? And if, in fact, from what my numbers have seen from last year, maybe three additional families or applications . . .

The Chairman: Member, if you could just remind me which line item and head you are speaking to.

Hon. Michael Fahy: So, I am speaking on BHC. The Minister made mention in his Statement, I am making references to his Statement, where he talked about the programmes that the BHC is responsible for. He made specific mention in the debate of the HomeStart programme and gave figures and numbers about that particular programme.

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Michael Fahy: It is not appearing as a particular line item within the Budget Book. Rather, it is some statements made in the Minister's Statement.

So, again, looking at those numbers because that all comes underneath the role of, I suppose, the Ministry of Housing [and] Municipality's Headquarters and their mission statement as well to make sure that . . . See, my eyes are bad. I cannot read that. "Housing, vibrant communities, responsible land stewardship, and innovative urban development."

I would like some further information in respect of the Bermudiana Beach Resort. I am pleased to hear that there is now 73 per cent occupancy. I think what is important is that the Minister gives a breakdown of how many of those occupants are Bermudian, given what the original project was supposed to be for.

As well, I would like a little bit of clarity.

The Chairman: And Member, just letting you know that even though the Minister may have mentioned it in his brief, we still have to speak to specific line items.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Well, I can put you to Bermuda Housing Corporation because I believe that is where the information was contained, and I will simply refer to the objectives of the actual BHC and what it is intending

to achieve for housing for Bermudians. Is that sufficient, Mr. Chairman?

[No audible response.]

Hon. Michael Fahy: Okay, thank you.

With that in mind, just bear with me for one moment. I just want to look something up because I want to make sure I get the wording correct.

Mr. Chairman, in the Minister's Statement, again, underneath BHC . . . what had been said is that under legislative proposals that different amendments would be made for the purposes of acquisition of land. The Minister made that same statement last year, and perhaps, therefore, he can give us some clarity on the progress that has actually been made since the statement was made last year in respect of the acquisition of land that was made reference to in his Statement—again, referring to the Bermuda Housing Corporation.

And the reason that is important is because the Minister . . . In the Budget Book itself, it does make mention of the fact that there has begun [an] exploration of options for the future of the Bermudiana Beach Resort and Grand Atlantic site with the clear objective of returning this public asset to productive use for Bermudians over time. I do not see anything. There was nothing specifically mentioned in the Statement about that, but again, that is being managed by the Bermuda Housing Corporation. What is the intent there in respect of returning that asset for use by Bermudians? Again, 73 per cent sounds grand. Forgive the pun. The point is, what is the number of people who are occupying it who are actually Bermudians benefiting from that project?

In respect of ongoing management that the BHC provides and in respect of any number of different projects, the one that I was most interested in was to hear again about the progress of sewage and water issues that existed at Alexandra Road, Cedar Park, and a number of other developments. We know the issues in those developments have existed for some time, and perhaps the Minister could advise this Honourable House what the anticipated timeline is in respect of the various projects that you mentioned that fall within that grant.

I can take you to the grants and contributions from which that came, that is page B-321. As well, if you go to [page] C-8, you will see that there is the Bermuda Housing Corporation, line item 75320, the BHC Residential Housing Grant, which was going to cover some of those issues. I will make that clear. Thank you for the clarification. There was going to be better engagement.

The Minister made mention in his brief, and again I will take you to page C-8, Mr. Chairman, where the Minister took some time under line items . . . Sorry. I have the wrong glasses . . . 75334, that is the South Basin Land Reclamation. We have heard about that. We have got 75346, the work ongoing at King's Wharf.

I understand that that work will be paused during the cruise ship period, and perhaps the Minister can share with us whether that work is actually running on time. Was it always the plan to in fact have this work start and then halt during the cruise ship season itself?

I happened to have been up in Dockyard this past weekend, and that particular area does not look great. And I do not think it looks good when tourists are coming off, and the first view they have is a half-completed arm of a wharf area. This was on Sunday. The crews down there were working diligently to continue. It looked like there were pylons going in off the shoreline there. Perhaps the Minister could add further clarity to the ongoing works and expected final completion date. He said it would be the end of the cruise . . . and it would start again in November, I think the Minister said.

As well, the commercial excursion dock. The Minister made mention (again, that is under the BLMC line items on page C-8) that that particular commercial excursion dock is work ongoing, and that will happen through the season. And again, was that always the plan to have that work in the middle of the season? I am not understanding why that would not be done in the off-season. Is it simply because of a tendering process? Did it take too long? Or was that always the intent? And obviously, if it is being done in the middle of a tourism season, then it must have been in dire shape. Maybe the Minister can add some context and some clarity to that.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael Fahy: That was some time ago. You can put the emphasis, but it was nine years. So, we got to stop going down that road blaming someone else for the failings of a number of years.

I also would say that it would be incumbent upon the Government to continue exploring the funding. And I believe some of this is being funded, or some works have been funded, by the cruise ships themselves, since they are the ones that are getting the great benefit from these works.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael Fahy: Yes, there were some other innovative Ministers as well, including ferries and the like, but I will leave that there.

I am pleased to hear that the wastewater and sewage work will be completed for the East End. I am sure East End colleagues will be very pleased with that as well.

The Minister made mention of the BLMC having continuing issues of land transfers. He made mention of that in his Statement. And this was in relation to acquisition of land under different names, et cetera. Can he give a definitive timeline when that might be complete?

When we look at the Morgan's Point Development Company . . . And that as well was mentioned in the Minister's Statement, and that would fall, I suppose, under the Housing and Municipalities HQ. A statement was made that, . . . um . . . Lost my point there. Oh. We know that the work is ongoing. We heard from the Minister in this place the other day about land transfers. We heard about the great work that is being done by the Morgan's Point Development Company. Perhaps the Minister can opine on where this medical tourism facility fits into all of this. I have not heard anything about that. It seems to have been missed out.

Right. In respect of the H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck. And again, that is under the Bermuda Housing Corporation. The Minister made mention of the fact that 2,050 individuals have had opportunities to enter the workforce because of the work undertaken with the H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck over the last number of years. Perhaps the Minister can say how many have happened in the last 12 months, since the last budget update.

In respect of Langley House, the Minister advised of the staff that were there and that there is an ex-police officer that is on site, presumably due to safety concerns. Can the Minister advise as to whether there have been any major incidents at Langley House? How many times, if in fact there have been instances where police have been called? The number of residents has increased, I believe. I believe the Minister said 50. I think last year the budget brief said that there were 43, so that number has increased in that particular place as well.

In terms of performance measures, there are none. And in last year's budget debate, I inquired as to why that was. And I would hope, again, that next year when we come, there are some proper performance measures because the Minister has read out a raft of information today in terms of the number of homeless, the number of people that are facing homelessness. We have heard that from HOME, but he has also shared the numbers of people who have acquired opportunities through different programmes. And I think there must be some performance measures that we can look at that we can compare year on year, so that we know if in fact the BHC is fulfilling its mandate, and as well, if the headquarters is fulfilling its mandate. So, perhaps next year when we stand here, we can have some details and some actual measurability because now you will have had by next year at least two years of data. So, that would be helpful, rather than getting it in a one-hour Statement.

In terms of municipalities, and that will come, in the first instance, under the grant. And again, for the benefit of the Chairman and others, that is [page] C-8. The municipalities housing HQ gives a grant of \$800,000. And we heard that that grant is going to be utilised for the purposes of road repaving and other such projects. That was exactly what was said last year. And you might recall, if people were listening, one of the questions that was posed was: What is the status

of the accounts and et cetera for the levy that is placed on petrol that comes into the docks that was put in place in 2013 for the purposes of ensuring that the town of St. George's retains its UNESCO World Heritage Site status? And with that in mind, perhaps the Minister can advise whether or not he has given any specific directions to the Corporation of St. George's in respect of that fund or others. And that would fall within his powers under section 7 of the Municipalities Act 1923, which gives the Minister the ability to give the corporations directions. Maybe he—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael Fahy: Oh, I am. Maybe he can share with this honourable place if he has in fact given any directions in the last 10 months since he took on this portfolio, and if so, what they are related to.

And again, Mr. Chairman, I am using some liberties from the grant that is given for the purposes of the Corporation of St. George's, \$800,000. Does the Minister—

The Chairman: So, you can speak to how that \$800,000 is being spent. But if I am following correctly—and I could be mistaken—it sounds like you are asking about fuel taxes, which would be outside of that.

Hon. Michael Fahy: What I was doing was simply drawing a comparison. But I appreciate that. I know I can't ask questions on that specifically, but perhaps the Minister can share if he has given any directions to the Corporation of St. George's under his powers that exist as a Minister, and if any have been given into the use of the \$800,000 that has been given as a grant. Because what concerns me is that the use of the money, of the \$800,000 grant, again, is to be for road paving and these other types of little infrastructure projects when we have a town of St. George's that must retain its World Heritage status. And I did not hear the Minister make any mention of that at all in his Statement. And I am sure that a UNESCO World Heritage Site remains at the top priority of the Government in the future of St. George's and tourism. So, I would hope that the Minister could opine on that particular point.

Oh, I have closed the Budget Book. Give me one moment.

The Chairman: And while the Honourable Michael Fahy is looking for his page in the Budget Book, just for the listening audience, we are in Committee on Supply of the whole [House] for appropriations of the budget debates for 2026/27. We are currently debating the Housing and Municipalities Ministry, headed by Minister Zane De Silva. And we are speaking to Heads 90 and 53. This is a three-hour debate that started at 6:07, and so it will end at 9:07.

MP Fahy, you have the floor.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, now turning to page B-320 in the Budget Book—and this is Head 90, Ministry of Housing and Municipalities HQ. The Minister made it known that the professional services budget has decreased by, what, \$131,000, but that is because the professional services that were being offered in that particular head have transferred into salaries. And we heard that that was now that the HQ has two ministerial advisors. Maybe the Minister can share who they are and what special advice is being given and the skill set for those particular individuals. I do not know. Special advisors hopefully will bring the skill set that is required to assist the Ministry. Because that is nice to see that professional services go down; but in fact what sounds to have happened is that an individual has actually gone on payroll, which has all the attendant long-term costs with that. And if so, so be it. But perhaps the Minister can opine on that particular issue.

In respect of the . . . I will turn to the mission statement of the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities, and that says, "Enhancing Bermuda's quality of life through affordable and sustainable housing, vibrant communities, responsible land stewardship, and innovative urban development." Perhaps the Minister can opine, when he gets to his feet, about the innovative urban development that the Ministry has advised upon or intends to undertake, because when I read that, I am making perhaps a leap of faith that that also includes the City of Hamilton, which, if things go the way they will likely go with the numbers in the House tonight, the Minister will have direct control over the way in which urban development can proceed within the municipalities, at the very least.

So, I flag that because we did debate last year on a number of different areas in respect of that particular line item, and that is the objectives, to have innovative urban development. And again, I am wondering if there is anything in here, and it does not appear that there have been any directions or grants or anything given to enhance Bermuda's cities, or the City of Hamilton, in respect of empty lots. I banged on last year about the old police station lot that is still empty. Innovative urban development would include at least putting in a park there or something that makes and beautifies our city. Again, I would hope that ideas are coming out. Perhaps the special advisors will give the advice when they listen to me this evening about what we can do to enhance our urban development and make a more beautiful city.

The department's objectives are to guide and coordinate the Ministry's initiatives through collaboration with government agencies and key public and private stakeholders, and to also deliver a central logistical, financial, and administrative report to the ministry headquarters and its constituents' entities. Now, the Ministry has a number of constituent entities, one of which appears directly in the Budget Book as BHC, and

the remaining appear by way of the grants that are given on [page] C-8. For the listening public, the Minister did say it is the Bermuda Housing Corporation, Bermuda Housing Trust, the Morgan's Point Development Company, the Bermuda Land Management Corporation. And I would make a suggestion here because it may become of importance after the municipalities debate. The Urban Development Authority might be a best place to come within this Ministry to help coordinate the efforts of fulfilling the mission statement of the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities of innovative urban development. I think it would make sense to have that considered going forward.

Again, in respect of this particular head, Head 90, and the mission statement, perhaps the Minister can opine, given that mission statement, as to whether or not he has given any specific directions to the Corporation of Hamilton under section 7, and if so, what those directions were, assuming that we are looking to ensure vibrant communities, responsible land stewardship, and urban development.

The special advisors might consider taking into account a number of different areas, and that is in relation to making Hamilton that vibrant place under the Municipalities Ministry, and that is mixed-use housing opportunities. And when I say that, that means having higher builds. You recall we have had a previous debate where the City of Hamilton plan now allows for a much higher building without restriction if they can demonstrate that it is useful, and we would propose—and have proposed—that building higher and enhancing the vibrancy of the city and bringing people into the city into, say, one-bedroom and studio apartments would be a really good idea. And so to avoid having one level of income in a particular building, there are examples in other jurisdictions, Mr. Chairman, where individuals can be part subsidised by the wealthy in particular units. And we think that this comes under having good ideas, innovative urban development. It is a way of enhancing the city.

I want to—

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

HOUSE VISITOR

The Chairman: Member, [I want to] just take a moment to recognise former Minister and former MP Wayne Caines in the Gallery.

[Desk thumping]

[Committee of Supply, continuing]

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you for that.

In respect, again, of enhancing Bermuda's quality of life through affordable and sustainable housing, vibrant communities, responsible land stewardship, and urban development, we have seen nothing in

budget presentation or these line items on two major initiatives that had been championed . . . or one, excuse me . . . one major initiative that has been championed by the Minister in the budget. And that is, in fact, acquiring land and housing that is derelict. And there was no mention made of that in his brief tonight.

And again, Mr. Chairman, I am going simply under the mission statement that we also heard in the budget debate itself, that there is this drive potentially to have, essentially, acquire Bermudian land for the purposes of increasing housing stock and presumably sell or rent to other Bermudians. Perhaps the Minister can opine as to whether or not there is anything in any of the line items that we have seen in terms of grants, probably, maybe to the BHC, that would enable monies to be utilised for that type of project and what timeline would be on that. It is not in the brief, but it is supposedly a project that is supposed to be undertaken. So, it is not aligning in terms of a government desire versus what is in a budget line item.

As well, we have made different proposals, and perhaps, again, the special advisors can look into this for the Minister in terms of utilising some of that government grant under the BHC for the purposes of reutilising and repurposing empty school buildings for the purposes of emergency housing. And we believe that is important, Mr. Chairman, because, again, what the Minister has said is that there are grants that are being given for emergency housing. And again, the Minister can opine on those modular or expandable container homes. If we can do that, then it would appear to me that we can also use some monies to repurpose empty school buildings that will end up becoming a burden before we start doing other types of major projects. It seems to us—it certainly seems to me—that people would rather have a safe and warm place to put their head at night, even if it is an old school building with new drywall and very quick renovations, than perhaps expandable container homes of which we do not know much about until we see them.

[I have] just a few more points, if you just give me one moment while I have something to wet my lips.

The Chairman: And for the listening audience, we are in Committee of Supply of the whole House for the budget debate for budget 2026/27, debating the Housing and Municipalities Ministry Head 90 and Head 53, a three-hour debate, which started at 6:07, which will end at 9:07, and Honourable Michael Fahy is having the floor right now.

MP Fahy, you have the floor.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you very much.

[There are] two other points I would like to make in respect of the mission statement of the Ministry, and their affiliated bodies that receive grants, because these all tie into the way in which the Ministry headquarters administers itself and actually gives out those grants.

So, the mission statement . . . And just for the listening public, this is actually from the Housing and Municipalities website itself for these particular areas. The mission statement of the Bermuda Land Management Corporation is “to drive sustainable growth, foster community partnerships, [and] create dynamic spaces for people to live, work and thrive.” They are “committed to building a stronger future through collaboration, innovation, and strategic development.” [Those are] very lofty goals. And I did not feel that there was too much shared in respect of what the BLMC will be doing in terms of that housing assistance. But there was some detail. But there is quite a lofty mission statement.

When you look at the mission statement of the Corporation of Hamilton to provide positive experiences for everyone for the delivery of quality initiatives and services . . . And again, that is why it is going to be very important to be thinking about that now and probably later. And also, you have the mission statement of the Corporation of St. George's. “We are committed to being effective stewards, working collaboratively to enhance the heritage and culture of the birthplace of Bermuda and maintaining the UNESCO World Heritage Site designation in the most effective way to serve the town of St. George's.” Again, I simply go back to the \$800,000 grant there that made no mention of enhancing the town for the purposes of the UNESCO World Heritage Site designation.

We have also got the Bermuda Housing Trust. We have heard statements from the Minister about the purpose of the Housing Trust. It does very good work “to provide quality and affordable rental accommodation for Bermuda's independent seniors and [to] create a sense of community that enhances the quality of their lives.” And again, whilst there is no grant, that would certainly come underneath the mission statement of the Ministry Head 90.

A few more points, I think.

The Chairman: So, Member, just so that I am clear, so your last question was: Where in the budget is that objective supported?

Hon. Michael Fahy: I believe it would be supported underneath the Ministry Head and objectives there. I will leave that there.

And for the moment, I will take a seat and give the Minister opportunity to reply. And then I may very well have some questions after that.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, MP Fahy.

Is there anybody else that would like to speak to Housing and Municipalities Heads 90 and 53?

The Chair recognises the Member from constituency 2, the Honourable Kim Swan.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I appreciate the opportunity just to make a little

contribution on a very important topic—housing, particularly, and municipalities, but more specifically housing—as we are on [page] B-318 with a grant of \$6.6 million to . . . well, \$7.2 million to the Bermuda Housing Corporation.

Just a general point with regard to that head is that housing has been something that has been around and been an issue with Bermuda for many decades. I remember in 1983 as a young 25-year-old candidate, newly married, [a] candidate in the 1983 election for the United Bermuda Party, living in the studio apartment of a tourist accommodation owned by one of my dearest friends, Lloyd James, who was the PLP sitting MP. That collaboration between us . . . Their . . . politics never separated us at all in life. And he said, *Listen, come stay in my studio apartment*, as a young Bermudian who was at that time, as I mentioned, newly married and playing professional golf internationally. So, housing does not discriminate against anyone no matter what their standing is or their popularity or whatever they are doing. It is a very sensitive issue.

And I feel for persons in the community who are impacted. I felt it necessary to say one thing. It is that we have drifted in this consideration of housing to a place where everything wrong with housing is falling on the shoulders of the Minister responsible for Housing. And if I go back, and if I cast my mind back to those times in the 1970s and 1980s, much housing was built by the private sector, JWS, John Swann Limited, Rego Limited, [Coleman] “Risky” Robinson, Kangaroo Wilson, and many others. Somebody is going to send me a WhatsApp pretty soon, or WhatsApp the Minister and say, *Swan, you forgot so-and-so*.

The Chairman: And just for the listening audience, you are speaking to this under [page] C-8, 75320, the residential grant?

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes, but more specifically about the Bermuda Housing Corps, I am speaking to Head 53, where \$7.2 million is allocated under housing. I think the grant then rolls up the housing thing, but the policy of housing would come in there. And I am saying that it is important because you hear it out in the public where everyone who needs a house is looking at Government. We call it *looking for government*.

And where the things have shifted in this country is that you do not have today people venturing. You could pick up the newspaper, and you would see two-page ads of houses that were newly built and the like. And that is because of the shift of the economic needs of the country. Right? And at that particular time that I am referring to as well, the dynamic that came into play was that you had persons who owned many tourist accommodations who started to shift towards residential homes because you had international businesses starting to take long leases on houses.

And that certainly also tied into the time when you did not get a mortgage. Persons were getting five-

year loans, and if they were lucky, they were getting a three-year balloon payment to pay off their mortgage. So, all of those impacts . . . So, I applaud the Ministry, and I will go to the capital grant for the Bermuda Housing Corporation specifically, because the Bermuda Housing Corporation carrying this burden is enormous.

And when you think about it, that a Minister alone is carrying that burden . . . You see people out there advertising to sell homes all over the world to persons and locally and the like for all types of money. But the emphasis that would have existed in a bygone era when a lot of housing was built is not being done at all by the private sector. And then persons will come here and say, *Listen. But you have got to go through all this red tape.* The person who needs a house and needs it now, you know, sometimes . . .

I liken it, Mr. Chairman, . . . I liken the need for housing almost . . . I liken it to the type of urgency of now that Martin Luther King, [Jr.] always referred to and other persons have used to the type of urgency we use during COVID-19.

COVID-19 was accepted as a global pandemic. And as a consequence, we had to roll up our sleeves, collectively. And the Minister of Finance had to make decisions that were not in keeping with normal traditional best practices to meet an immediate need. Persons out there who have the need today may not necessarily be, and some are, in an income bracket where they can afford to pay because there are many persons earning a good living that cannot find a house that they can afford. So, we may need to collectively . . . And I say the collective we. Both the Government and the Opposition agree that maybe we need to, you know, cut the housing a little bit of slack as to the type of urgency that is required in this country to build houses.

And in addition to that . . . In addition to that, maybe look at incentives that might encourage some private sector folks to get involved more readily to building these . . . to building these necessary homes as well, and to take on some . . . take on some of the risk. Because I am not . . . I am convinced that there is capital floating around in Bermuda. If they can find themselves getting a better return than investment, they might then speculate. There might be some folks who have some property that you could say, *Well, listen. I will give you some favourable . . . some favourable zoning for emergency situations.* And if we can do that, and it is tucked away where it is not as visible, using the topography of Bermuda to have them shaped and located, you know, we might be able to get a win-win.

But I felt it necessary to say that the Minister of Housing is carrying an extreme burden that I do not think has existed in the previous years I can remember. And I just have to say this. In my lifespan of being, trying to get in the legislature, and being in the legislature, two previous Ministers stand out as being exceptional. One just retired. The former Member Lieutenant Colonel Burch built a lot of houses up and down this country

with the Bermuda Housing Corporation during different tenures of being the Minister responsible for Housing. You know. I can turn to St. George's where he converted places down at Anchorage (to declare my interest) in my constituency, which was met with some concern because persons wanted to make sure. But look at what is there now—beautiful places down there at Anchorage, right next to the golf course, and up and down the country.

And the other one is the late Quinton Edness [QE], who through his Ministry built a lot of houses in there. So, those two from two different political parties. Unfortunately, I cannot look at the Honourable Members, Cannonier or Fahy, for that because during their four-and-a-half-year tenure, I do not think they built any houses. So, you know. But I can look certainly at the late QE and Minister Burch especially.

Loughlands just stands out because Loughlands went in a non-traditional housing community. And I think it is an outstanding job. Anchorage Road was another one. Perimeter Lane [was] another one. So, we need to start looking at those types of opportunities and find a way to engage the private sector in it to take the burden off of the Bermuda Housing Corporation.

And just a final thing on the grant . . . And, you know, [I] just salute the work that is done by the Bermuda Housing Trust, who provide housing for seniors. And, you know, seniors and young professional families, men's facilities, and the like are extremely important. And I am sure those studying the demographics have already identified who needs it the most and the soonest.

So, I just needed to speak ever so briefly on that, Mr. Chairman, and I thank you for the opportunity.

The Chairman: Thank you, MP Swan.

Are there any other Members who would like to speak to Heads 90 and 53?

The Chair recognises the Honourable Michael Fahy.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I have a number of other questions, specifically in relation to the grant, again, that the Minister has procured for his Ministry. And what he said in his Statement is that six priority sites have been selected for the purposes of the 200-or-so homes that he is saying will be delivered within the next 18 months. And seeing as we do not have sight of the often-spoken-about-but-never-seen affordable housing report or housing strategy that I know the Minister will take up my suggestion and move it to 2026–2036, [I have] a few questions about that.

In respect of the modular way in which these homes, I understand, will be developed, what was the procurement process that was followed in respect of these 200-or-so homes? Where are they coming from? How many people or entities responded to any RFP in respect of these homes? Because it has been done in

absolutely quick speed. And again, I get it. But it is important that we understand how that process was followed. And were the proper procurement processes followed or were they sped up, either through the Ministry or the BHC in procuring these units?

How many local construction entities or sub-contractors—and I say again, local—will have been trained or have the ability to in fact help develop and put these units into place? Is there likely to be any overseas entity that is giving some form of supervision to these types of buildings being put up if they haven't got the skill set here in Bermuda? And who in fact would that be? Are there any favoured contractors in respect of these units? Again, 200 new homes is a lot to build in 18 months, notwithstanding the modular consistency of these units.

The Minister has previously said that they are tested to a very high standard and that they will stand the test of time, I think was the statement that he has used previously. And what is that time period, standing the test of time? Maybe he can opine on that.

And are they . . . obviously he is going to suggest that they are absolutely suitable for Bermuda's climate. We hope they are. Maybe he can opine on that.

In respect of the phraseology of . . . I think it is *affordable and attainable homes*, great for those different people and different families and different circumstances. Perhaps the Minister can give some further detail on of the 200 homes that are to be developed over the next 18 months, how many of those are allocated for affordable and how many of those are going to be allocated for attainable?

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael Fahy: And it might be in the plan. Maybe it's in the 2025 plan, which we'll look for.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael Fahy: Good, 2026. It's been accepted!

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael Fahy: The 2026 plan has been accepted. Thank you, Minister, for that. We look forward to the front of that report being changed. The PS, I hope, has heard that too.

So, with that in mind, how many of those are affordable and how many will be as attainable?

Of the waiting list of over 400 families, are families that are on that particular list going to obviously be able to utilise or have the opportunity to either fit into the affordable or the attainable?

And if, in fact, [there is] a differential of the 200 precast homes, are all the ones that are affordable the same size? And all the ones that are attainable, are they different size? Because there has to be a cost

differential between the two, between the affordable and attainable.

[Inaudible interjection]

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael Fahy: I'll give him that. He said, *like lawyers*. Okay.

I see the Minister has a sense of humour this evening. I join him in that. Good distraction.

Of that waiting list, how many families does the Minister believe will be able to, in fact, take advantage of that programme? And how much does he believe that that list will reduce over that period of time? It's still 18 months away.

Can the Minister also give us some details on the actual proposed start date of the construction of those units? And 18 months from there, obviously, is the finish date. But the start date would be helpful. We have six priority sites that have been selected, three confirmed for accelerated development.

Has the Minister received some form of advanced Planning permission or some form of other guarantee that these homes will, in fact, be approved? We have to make an assumption that some form of preliminary Planning permission has been sought. And if it has, has it actually been sent into the Ministry or is it waiting to be sent into the Ministry until we actually have these homes delivered? When is it expected that these homes, these precast homes, will actually be delivered for the purposes of construction

The Minister made mention as well, in respect of these particular homes (and I believe he was making mention of these 200-or-so homes), that some will be available for sale, some will be available for lease. Can the Minister give some indication about how many of the 200 will be available for sale? How many will be available for lease? And of those that are available for sale, is that, again, affordable and/or attainable? And how many fit into each category for lease and for sale?

So, in other words, you have leased homes, affordable and attainable, and then presumably you have homes for sale that are affordable and some that are attainable. In terms of those six priority sites, three confirmed for accelerated development, there's 30 sites in total that primarily are under the Bermuda Land Management Corporation and the BHC. Again, I can take you to the grant and line items for that.

Again, given the waiting lists and suitability, when suddenly into a particular area you might have, I don't know, 20 homes in one space, are there going to be suitable and adequate services in the neighbourhoods to ensure that those houses are going to be, in fact, desired by those? We know that people do need the local services available, opportunities if they are perhaps of low income thresholds, that they have adequate transport. Are there going to be adequate

transport links to all of these identified properties? All of this has to come in.

Now, again, I have to ask these questions because we don't have a plan. And I have said before it is very difficult to approve things and say that everyone's in favour if we don't actually have sight of the plan. The Minister has a plan. The Cabinet hasn't yet approved the plan. So, we are talking a lot about plans that we don't know about.

So, there's going to be a lot of pressure on the Minister, I think, to kind of get those details there so that people really understand. And what then happens if it then goes out to public consultation and it turns out this is not what people actually want? We are, again, just got to be very careful not to put that cart before the horse.

Another point, and I share to a certain extent comments of the Member from constituency 2, MP Swan, where he says it's important to get the private sector further involved. In fact, we have made proposals of that so perhaps the policy people under section or Head 90 can consider some form of tourism investment-style Act. And what I mean by that is having some form of investment Act to encourage the private sector to get more heavily involved in housing.

And, again, we say in the City of Hamilton, with higher developments, to allow for that private sector involvement because it should not simply fall to the government to get grants, to then implement those grants, and then have to, in fact, manage the process of the procurement, making sure that it's done within a cost-effective time, that it's not open to any kind of nefarious activities at all. It's a lot of responsibility for the Members.

In terms of the oversight of all of these projects, I assume that there is adequate coverage within the Bermuda Housing Corporation. They have a lengthy list. I believe the Minister said some 500 . . . I think the number is 517 properties or units to manage, which is an extensive amount. It will then add another 200, now you are at 700. I didn't see anything in the budget that there would be some very large number of staff increases. And, again, I can take you to the number of staff that fall within the budget on the relevant page, Mr. Chairman. Under page, I think it's two . . . Let's get the right page number there. Yes, [page] three . . .

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael Fahy: [It's page B-]321. Thank you.

In respect of the likelihood of requirements to have those properties maintained, perhaps we will see in 18 months, two years, there will have to be, I suspect, quite an increase in staff to make sure that those units are maintained, that those units and their surrounding gardens are maintained, that the adequate water is provided, et cetera. And that's got to be a major part of this.

Also, perhaps the Minister can advise as to whether or not these particular module homes will

become part of the HomeStart programme, given that that is a 100 per cent mortgage with a 25 per cent guarantee for those mortgage payments. While I'm on that, again, it comes under the grant and what the Minister had talked about in respect of HomeStart. Have there been any calls on the guarantee to date for the purposes of that HomeStart programme? And if so, what are those amounts that may have been paid out in respect of that guarantee?

Hopefully none, because obviously we don't want people to be in a position where they are unable to afford and then the government has to actually be called on that guarantee.

Thank you for the time being.

The Chairman: And is there any other Member who would like to speak to the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities, Heads 90 and 53?

We're not seeing anybody else.
Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Okay, let's see what we have here. Let's see where we're going to start.

Let's deal with the Strategy 2025–2036. I'm sorry to disappoint the Shadow Minister, but I will not be changing those dates as he suggested or inferred. Surely, he must know that the process started in 2025 and there was a lot of work done in 2025. I'm sure when the Shadow Minister sees the report, soon, he will agree that 2025 is very appropriate for the start of the Plan, especially since this Ministry was started in February 2025. So . . . but the Honourable Member keeps asking for it, and he will get it. It's coming. I am sure he understands that when someone produces a 10-year plan, and consulting, a lot of consulting must take place if you are going to develop a plan that is going to be realistic for the people of this country.

And as I said before, a little tongue-in-cheek, and even though he threw out a little word that a lot of people may not understand, I will just take that word and give the meaning for it, which was in some dictionaries it was "fake." But I think that the Honourable Shadow Minister knows that since I've been in his seat, I don't think I have thrown anything really fake at him just yet. And I don't intend to.

So, with that being said, that document will be made public in the very near future, as I said. A lot of that work has been done. It will be presented to Cabinet, and then it will go out to the public for further consultation, because that document, when it is finally proofed and we stamp it, will have a lot of people in this country's fingerprints on it. And I would think that most, if not all people who read it will be satisfied and agree with it.

Now, the Honourable Shadow Minister Fahy, did also say that he hopes that I do consult with him. I think he will agree that my record since I have been Minister, I have invited him to every press conference

that I have held. Every one. Now, he hasn't showed up to any yet, but I have been very inclusive, and I have invited him to every press conference.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: And the Honourable Member says, *What will happen if he gets a microphone?* When I have a press conference, you're happy to take the microphone alongside me too, because every time I have a press conference, it's great news for the people of this country. And if you wish to opine at one of those, I'll be happy to share the microphone with you, Honourable Member.

Now, there were also some questions about the capsules that will be arriving on the Island soon, within the next few weeks. Those capsules, as I said in my brief, are transitional homes, and they will be for people who are in desperate need of housing in the country. And hopefully that transitional period will be a short one, and one in which we can help some people who are falling on hard times and are in a desperate state.

The Honourable Member talked about the emergency housing that was used up at Morgan's Point. Now, I think it's important that we explain where that [is]. I don't know if the Honourable Member knew exactly where those are located. But there are 62 acres up at Morgan's Point that are owned by government and always have been owned by government. It's 62 acres on the northeastern side of that property. It's not on the Morgan's Point development property that the former developers were going to develop, and failed. It's property that is in government's name and has been for a very long time. So, I just wanted to make sure that we are clear about that. And the Honourable Member, I guess he hasn't been up to the site lately because those homes are no longer there.

The Honourable Member Fahy also seemed to be questioning the speed in which we are doing things. And he will know that I have given enough press conferences, I have given information to this Honourable House on several occasions. And, yes, I have made the public statement that we will produce a couple of hundred homes in the next 18 months.

And he [asked] about whether or not we are talking to Planning. Where are we with Planning? Is this going to happen? When is it going to happen? It can't happen quick enough, Members. It cannot happen quick enough. I take the calls, I get the emails, I get the WhatsApps. It cannot happen quick enough. And I can assure you that even though we don't get up and beat our chest every week, which we could do . . . we could get a cameraman to come out to every meeting that I have. If I want, I could fill the newspapers up every day of the week. But that's not my MO. My MO is going to be to produce as many homes for the people of this country who are in need as quickly as we can.

And yes, we are talking to Planning on a regular [basis]. The director of Planning is on our team. So, we are working very closely . . . We know how the wheels of Planning go in this country. And they can move slow. But we have the Minister involved, we have the director involved, and we have a full slate of qualified, energetic, hard-working people who are assisting us to produce homes in the country.

The Honourable Member also asked about [if] these precast homes [will] stand the test of time. The Honourable Member might remember that when the OBA did come into power in 2012, there was a project underway up in Dockyard that the PLP started, was 100 homes. Well, when they took power, they cancelled that contract. And I think we built 40 homes out of the 100, or thereabouts, approximate, just saying. They stopped that project. Well, those homes are still standing today. So, from 2011, when it was started, to today, those homes are standing, and we haven't had any issues with them, except for they had a little bit of problem with air circulation, which was repaired. You couldn't tell the difference between those homes and a Bermuda-constructed home, the traditional build. You cannot. So, I'm confident that they will stand the test of time.

Now, if I can just flip through . . . give me a second.

The Chairman: For the listening audience, we are in the Committee of Supply of the whole [House] for a debate on the budgets for 2026/27, currently debating the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities' budget for Heads 90 and 53. This started at 6:07, will end at 9:07, and the Minister has the floor.

Minister Zane De Silva, you have the floor.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

There was a question on Bermudiana Beach Resort, the breakdown between occupants, how many were Bermudian. We have five Bermudians who occupy the units on site. So, with a little bit of simple mathematics, you can figure out how many non-Bermudians we have there.

With regard to the progress on the acquisition of land, the Ministry has met, well, several ministries, because as you would appreciate when we talk about Acquisition of Land Act it's not just one Ministry. There will be several ministries that will have to coordinate getting this done. And I know the policy is currently circulating, and stakeholder ministries have undertaken the visual surveys across the Island to identify all the uninhabitable or derelict buildings. So, that has been done, and now the legal teams have to look at it.

It's not going to be easy. I think we all know that there are several situations with regard to derelict or uninhabitable homes in the country. We have homes that no one knows who they belong to. I suggested, of course, my PS put a stop on me. You talk about doing things quickly. A couple of homes have been identified

as derelict homes. They are just sitting there. No one can find out . . . I said, *Well, look, I'll donate a bulldozer. Let's just go knock them down and see who comes out of the woodwork.*

But, of course, you know, *Don't do it. Don't do it.*

Free of charge, by the way; free of charge.

[Laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: So that's one example.

Of course, we are familiar with homes being left to several members of the family, and the family can't seem to come to an agreement. So, we have had that situation. We know that happens. We have probate sometimes. Probate can go on for a lengthy period of time, depending on what the situations are. Sometimes probates are done without too much fanfare, but other times they get quite tricky and sticky. And that can take several years to resolve. So, that is going to be a work in progress, and it is not going to happen overnight.

Some questions were asked about Devonshire neighbourhoods. We call them "the big three" in the Ministry, which are Alexandra, Mary Victoria, and Cedar Park. I did hold last year . . . it was probably about 10 months ago now, 11 months ago. The first time. I think a lot of residents said [it was the] first time they had ever met with any Minister. I asked them all to come out, tell me what the concerns were. We listened. We took notes.

We knew there were some water issues. There were some sewage issues. We had dog issues. And as I said in my brief, we completed a dog survey. We are going to take that information; we are going to look at it and see what we can develop in terms of policy going forward. We know that we have done some work on the water in terms of water testing. That was done. [The] water is fine. We did find some issues with some of the sewage pipes and whatnot. Those are being looked at.

So, what we are doing is a master plan is being developed for those three sites. And for the first time in, I don't know how long, but we have actually allocated, and this budget will be approved, and we are looking at supplying \$2 million for those three properties to improve the lighting, the water, the sewage, and any other issues that have been burning to be done for a long time. So, I'm very happy about that. And I think the neighbours, the residents are going to be very happy as well.

With regard to the work in Dockyard, with regard to the wharf and the construction starting and then stopping for the season and then commencing back in November. That was all part of the plan. We knew what work had to be done, and we knew the timeframe in which we would need to do it. So, the plans were made and they were executed, and they will commence in November when the season closes.

With regard to the leaseholds becoming freeholds, that timeline, the 38 units that we are looking at

moving from leasehold to freehold, we were hoping to have it finished by the end of this month. But as it goes, I'm sure the Honourable Member, being a lawyer, will know sometimes things don't quite go as quickly as you want. But we are very hopeful that that will be all complete by the end of the second quarter.

H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck individuals. Over the last, I can say, nine months, we know that five individuals who were on the H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck programme actually got full-time work in the last year. I think, Honourable Member, we had stated that we had over 2,000 jobs since it started, and we had five people last year. And, of course, performance measures will be, we will have something to go by next year. So, I'm sure the Honourable Shadow Minister will look forward to that.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Good numbers. Of course.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

HOUSE VISITORS

The Chairman: And, Minister, we just want to recognise former Senator Arianna Hodgson in the Gallery.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Okay. All right.

[Desk thumping]

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Hi.

The Chairman: And we also want to recognise the Attorney General back there as well in the Gallery.

[Desk thumping]

[Committee of Supply, continuing]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Now, don't you guys all beat at once.

There is a question from Honourable Member Fahy. Can I advise whether I have given any specific directions to Corporation of Hamilton? No, I haven't. I have had many meetings with the Corporation of Hamilton since I've been in the seat, and I think they have had more meetings than anyone, probably broke a record there. But, no, I haven't given any specific directions.

And I spoke about that . . . there was a question about repurposing old school buildings. That has not been lost on us about some of the old school buildings. We have had some of those conversations. In fact, Mr. Arthur Wightman from PwC, we have met several times because he has a vision for one of the schools in particular. And I have written off to the

Minister of Public Works and Environment and just asked him for his take on it. But, no, we are looking at that. We know we have some buildings that we may or may not be able to use, but it's not off our radar, no.

The procurement process for these 200 homes that we are going to build in the next 18 months, it's probably been . . . let me say this. A committee was formed. That committee has met with . . . my dear. I'll get the list for the Honourable Member if he wants it. But we have met with a substantial amount of people around the world. If I don't receive two or three emails or inquiries every week from people all over the globe with regard to housing, different housing . . .

The Honourable Member will know that I've looked at expandable containers. I've looked at capsules. I've looked at precast. I've looked at modular. I've looked at, I think, everything on the planet, just about. So, we have had many, many, many meetings with overseas construction companies with regard to untraditional Bermuda building, and I will be happy to supply all of those in due course, too. So, that is a work in progress. Decisions will be made. I can tell you this. Decisions will be made to procure at least two companies to start this building for Bermuda. And all companies . . . I can say that any company that has reached out to us, or we have reached out to them, we will sit down and have a conversation with their product and the construction methods that they use. And we have had a substantial number of meetings with many of those who are in the business, with more planned.

With regard to services for the new houses, this is why we identified over 30 sites on the Island. The reason that we picked the six sites that we have is because the infrastructure is pretty close or right on the site currently. For example, you will know that I mentioned that we are going to build some units up in Dockyard, so the infrastructure is there. We are also looking at doing units opposite Dr. Cann Park in Southampton. Infrastructure is there. And of course also down at Bermuda Land Management down the East End, and we know that infrastructure is there. And the reason these sites were chosen is because if the infrastructure is pretty close by or right on site, obviously we can move a lot quicker, and it is less work.

Will those homes become part of the HomeStart programme? Everything is on the table. When it comes to home ownership or rental of units to people who really need them, everything is on the table.

I think I answered most of the questions, Mr. Chairman, for now.

The Chairman: With the Minister having answered all the questions that have been posed to him, is there anybody that would like to speak to Heads 90 and 53?

The Chair recognises Honourable MP Michael Fahy.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, the Minister has answered some but not close to all of the questions posed during the debate. And maybe he didn't get a good note of them, but what I will do is I will ask some questions based on the responses that were just received.

The remark that I made in respect of standing the test of time was essentially repeating what the Minister had said, standing the test of time. Perhaps the Minister can clarify a couple of things to help answer that question. If he is comparing the units in Dockyard to the units that are going to be procured, that has now been (what?) 14 years for the particular units that were put and built in Dockyard. Presumably, there must be some manufacturing timeline as to the suitability of the units and the like. So, I'm sure it's going to last more than 15 years.

I think it's just adding clarity to what does standing the test of time, in fact, mean. Are these units supposed to last 50 years? Are they supposed to last 100 years? Is it dependent on the maintenance that's undertaken by the Bermuda Housing Corporation or one of the other companies that are affiliated with the Ministry, whether that's BLMDC or whether it's one of the others?

In terms of the procurement, I didn't really get clarity on that particular point, Mr. Chairman. I heard that there is a committee, that there's been lots of phone calls back and forth between perhaps the Ministry, the Minister, lots of people making approaches. What I'm not clear on is whether or not the units have, in fact, been procured. Have they, in fact, been procured? Or are they about to be procured? And if so, how many companies were, in fact, considered? Because I didn't hear anything about the actual procurement process that was followed in respect of those units for the purposes of suitability, cost, et cetera.

I also heard the Minister say that he has examined lots of different options from modular to containers, et cetera. And let me just get this—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael Fahy: Sorry, thank you again. Let me get this . . . I've got a problem with this. I'm too tall for these microphones.

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Hon. Michael Fahy: I'm going to have to lean down. That's better. I can hear myself now.

In terms of the types of homes that are going to be used for the transitional homes, the terminology that is now being used is "capsule." Are there going to be any expandable container homes for the purposes of the transitional housing? And the question that then arises from that that has yet to be answered is, Is the numbers of individuals or families who would be utilising those properties for what periods of time . . . is it

anticipated that families would be in that transitional property?

An Hon. Member: It's transitional.

Hon. Michael Fahy: And that's the point. It's transitional.

So, at what point are they transitioned to another type of property? Because obviously you want a step-up programme where people have the ability to have leasehold and then hopefully buy their own property, whether it's through the HomeStart programme or otherwise.

In terms of Planning, the Minister made mention in his latest reply that he has had lots of meetings with Planning. The Director of Planning is involved. There's lots of different departments involved. Has permission been granted or preliminary permission for the 200 modular homes and for the transitional emergency homes? And if not, what's the anticipated timelines for these? We still have not been told, despite my questions, as to what the actual start date will be for the 200 modular homes. We have heard nothing about that at all.

In terms of the comments about the Acquisition of Land Act, this is where you have the value proposition, because it will take, as the Minister's own admission, quite some time to identify the owners of particular properties. And as much as I have no doubt the Minister would be very pleased, as I'm sure many people [would be], *Let's just get on with it. Let's knock down properties.* Okay. I know it's tongue-in-cheek because it's frustrating, I get it, when you have to go through these legal processes to identify.

The point I'm making is that the appropriate thing to be spending time on . . . we have all these other types of projects that are in the burner that will hopefully be successful. But the point I'm making here is the cost and time value proposition on the research and purchasing—because you still have to assume that the properties will be purchased at fair market value before you even knock it down—before you do anything.

You are talking about hundreds of thousands of dollars for any plot of land in Bermuda. And I'm under stating that. So, I'm not really following the purpose of that. There's nothing mentioned in any line item for that particular plan. So, I'm not sure where this is. It's a statement of fact that this is what the Minister has said, but there's no line item for that particular project. So, is it something that's just being said, or is it likely to actually happen? I'm not following that particularly well.

In respect of the big three, "the Devonshire big three" is the phrase that the Minister used in respect of the various developments that he paid a visit to last year. Has the Minister had any other further meetings with the residents to update them in respect of the master plan that's being developed? The Minister said the master plan is being developed. So, the question that naturally is going to arise from that is, When is that plan

going to be complete? When are the works within that plan going to be commenced? When are those works likely to be finished? So, again, it's one thing to say it's happening, but details are certainly required.

The questions that were completely ignored relate to, again, the breakdown of affordable and attainable of those 200 modular homes. Is there a split that the Minister has in respect of each one of those? How many of those 200 are leased for the purposes of affordability? How many will be leased for the purposes of attainability and equally for sale? Because the Minister had said that some of those units would be for sale. Again, based on that phrase, which I accept, affordability and attainability, how many of those will be available at affordability rates and attainable rates?

The Minister did not answer the question in respect of whether or not any directions have been given to the Municipality of St. George's. He certainly answered the question in relation to Hamilton. So, the Minister can opine on that, and recall that the specific reason for St. George's was because of the utilisation of the grant of \$800,000. There didn't appear to be anything mentioned in relation to that \$800,000 for the purposes of ensuring that the Municipality of St. George's or the Town of St. George's will be able to continue to ensure it retains its World Heritage status. Again, I'm sure this will change at the conclusion of tonight's House debate on another Bill.

In terms of the decisions that will be made in respect of companies that will be constructing the 200 modular homes, are those going to be local companies or are they from overseas? Has the Minister identified any entities locally that have the expertise or knowledge to build these homes? I'm sure they do, but it would be good to know, [for] the people of Bermuda good to know, that this work will be undertaken locally was one of the questions of that. And again, the start date of those would be helpful.

The Minister did not answer the question about what work the special advisors are doing within the Ministry because there has been a change from professional services to having special advisors who are now salaried. And is that just a Ministerial appointment and who are those individuals?

In respect of . . . just bear with me for one moment if you may, if I may, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: For the listening audience, we are in Committee of Supply for the budget 2026/27, debating the Housing and Municipalities Ministry budget, mainly on Heads 90 and 53. This started at 6:07 [pm] and will end at 9:07 [pm].

And Minister [sic] Fahy . . . MP Fahy, you have the floor.

Hon. Michael Fahy: I keep getting upgraded, thank you. He said Minister too.

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

An Hon. Member: Don't get excited.

Hon. Michael Fahy: I'm getting very excited.

Just . . . I did want to address one thing because I'm not sure what I might have . . . I don't think I said anything that was suggesting that what the Minister was saying was fake. I want to put that to bed because there's certainly not any intent to say that, if that's what was heard, because it certainly was not what was suggested. I make that clear. The Minister has been sharing the information as best he can.

In respect of the services that will be in place for those modular homes, yes, we have heard that research has been done in respect of those places. But we also want to make sure that there is proper transport links, that the buses run effectively. Because you are talking about whole neighbourhoods that will suddenly, essentially pop up where there has been nothing in the last 20, 30 years.

I will take my seat and hopefully the Minister will answer those questions that have been posed in some instances a second time.

The Chairman: Is there anybody, any other Members who would like to speak to Housing and Municipalities, Head 90 and 53?

Recognising no one . . . Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Okay. Let me just be clear to the Honourable Shadow Minister. I don't ignore anything that he said. I may have forgotten. I may have not wrote down a particular note, but I assure you that I haven't ignored you.

Now, the Honourable Shadow [Minister] asked about the two special advisors that I have. And I do have two. One specialises in social issues, also housing. The other one has been in the construction business for a long time. [He] sat on the Bermuda Housing Corporation's board for the last three, four years, I believe. So, I've taken him on because of his experience not only in the construction sector, but also his experience with being on the Bermuda Housing Corporation Board for the last three, four years. So, those are the two special advisors there.

Let me be clear. I think the Honourable Member asked about if there is going to be any expandable container usage. At this particular point in time, [it is] not on my agenda. Did I look at it early on? Absolutely. As I said, I was inundated with . . . as you can appreciate, things float around on TikTok like nobody's business, right? So, everybody who saw something on TikTok about housing, trust me, I got it. If I didn't get a couple of thousand of those, I didn't get any. So, everybody and their mother and father were sending me, *Look, you got to look at this. You got to look at that. You got to look at this.* Some we took. I passed on. Some I just ignored. But as far as expandable containers are concerned, they are not on the agenda at the moment.

Not to say that they won't be in the future, because I think that's a possibility.

With regard to who is going to go in the transitional units that we are importing, we are looking at seniors. We're only bringing in nine. I would have liked to have brought in about 50 myself. But anyway, that's another story for another time. But we are looking at seniors. We are looking at seniors and maybe single mothers with a child that might be in a very bad situation. And we have seen some of those.

Start date for the 200 homes? Not quick enough. The Shadow [Minister] even mentioned in one of his chats how he knows that I want to push things and move at lightning speed. So, with regard to a start date, not soon enough. All I can tell Honourable Members is that I am pushing those buttons as hard and as quickly as I can. All he has to do is talk to my PS or any one of the people that surround him.

With regard to derelict homes, I believe the Honourable Member is correct. I think he may have asked, Why are we spending time looking at that now with the amount of time that it's going to take with regard to whether it's lawyers, whether it's probate or what have you. But we can chew gum and walk at the same time. I agree with the Honourable Member. But I know . . . I think I have a little bit of experience in construction. And we know that if you take an old building and you talk about you want to renovate it and get it going, that can sometimes be 10 times worse than building a brand new house.

But we have had a call for it from the people of the country. At one stage it was in the newspapers every other day. All over social media every other day. So, we will look at it. But we can chew gum and walk. Is it high on the agenda? No. I want to produce homes for the people of this country as quickly as I possibly can. And that's the intention. That's my priority.

Master plan for the "big three"? Again, see, the Honourable Member has a challenge because I've said that we are going to have a 10-year master plan for houses in the country. Not fast enough for him. Where is it? Now he's asking for the master plan for the "big three"—Alexander, Cedar Park, and Mary Victoria. Where's the plan? Well, if we sat around and did nothing while we developed plans, what's going to happen with our people? We can chew gum and walk.

And if we can help people who are having challenges with water, having challenges with sewer, having challenges with lighting around the neighbourhood . . . If we can do that now while we are looking at a master plan, everyone knows that those three developments have been there for decades. And they will need work. And some of it's going to involve millions and millions of dollars. And if we wait to do that, people are going to suffer in the interim. They have been crying out for some help. Fix a couple of lights. These sewage pipes, you know, they have been here for 40 years

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Let's see if we can get the Honourable Member, Diallo Rabain, that's in his constituency. I get all the calls from him all the time. So, would he . . . ask him if he wants me to take . . . take . . . don't do anything until we get the master plan finished. We will work and try to help people along the way while we develop a master plan, which is going to involve a lot of money and a lot of work. So, we will continue to do that.

Now, the Honourable Member also asked about a breakdown of attainable and affordable units. We have an idea, but that's a work in progress. And what—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: It is in the plan. What you have to realise is (right?), I can understand why the Honourable Member asked the question. It's not a bad question at all. But the fact of the matter is, we have to start building the units, and we have to get people who are in desperate need for units. We have—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: No, no. That's not what I'm going to give you. I'll give you another stat.

We have . . . I had the Housing Corporation break down the list. And on that list of people who are on the waiting list, we have 81 who are in a critical category. We have 262 families who we have put in the urgent category. That's 343 families: 81 who are critical. So, when the Honourable Member asked, *Well, how many are going to be attainable, how many are going to be affordable?* I think I just answered that question. We need to take care of folks who are in desperate need at the moment as quickly as we can. And some of those are living in cars. Some are living in tents. Some households have 10 people in a two-bedroom place, and that has other issues. I have heard from females that are under duress because they are in not-so-good situations. Let's put it right there. So, we . . . I understand the question, but we can't answer that question just yet. We are going to build houses first. Let's get people in houses first.

Have I given any directions to St. George's? No, I haven't. Have I met with them? Yes. I have met with the entire staff at both the Corporation of Hamilton and the Corporation of St. George's.

Precast. Overseas? Yes, they will come from overseas, just like Morgan's Point, just like Dockyard. They will come from overseas. And they will have local representatives to work along with.

And I think . . . I don't think I missed any, I think I got them all.

The Chairman: With 15 minutes remaining in this debate, is there anybody else who would like to, any other Members who would like to speak to Heads 90 and 53?

The Chair recognises Shadow Minister Michael Fahy.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'm going to push the Minister a little bit on this issue of the expandable container homes. And the reason I'm seeking clarity is because he gave a Ministerial Statement in November where he said that there would be four expandable container homes offering two- and three-bedroom units, expandable container homes.

I believe the Minister is saying that there will not be container homes. And that's fine. At least now we know. So, presumably the thought process has changed from the November Statement to now. I think that's certainly something that deserves some clarity. Thank you.

The Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I've said it about three times tonight. How many times does the Honourable Member want me to say it? We looked at it. We thought it would be a good thing. And then whilst we were looking at that, we said we are going to order it, the next thing is the capsules come up. We said, *Wow, we think the capsules would be better than the expandable.*

And see? The Honourable Member even just said it, *container homes*. They were never, ever going to be container homes. Not like *The Royal Gazette* put on the front page, *Oh, Ministers*, you know, *bringing in container homes*. Expandable container homes. You know, in Bermuda, if you tell someone, *I want a container in my backyard*, they are going to want a container that's 20 feet long, 8 feet wide, 9 feet high. Right? So, you know, we have to stop saying that.

Then people [will say], *Oh, we're going to have people living in shipping containers*. No. Expandable container homes. And as I said earlier, some of them look like they're quite nice.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: That's right. You can do that if you so wish. And some people do. But the fact of the matter is it was expandable container homes. And whilst we were doing our due diligence, I'm very . . . you know, we found the capsules, we could get them here, and we could get them here quickly, and that's what we've done.

The Chairman: Shadow Minister.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you for the clarification. That's clearer.

In respect of the transitional housing, again, the Minister, if he could please answer the question as to how long it is anticipated that individuals or families

would be in that transitional housing before they are moved on to other more suitable housing. Because transitional is exactly that, transitional emergency housing. Hopefully with the aim that someone gets in at that level, they have a roof, they have a bed to sleep in, they have something that is suitable for them with the intent that they move on maybe to the modular housing, that may be the affordable modular housing. Now, maybe the answer is it's in the 2025 plan, and maybe that is the answer, and we'll look for that plan. So, maybe the Minister can opine on that.

The Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Surely, if the Honourable Shadow Minister has done any homework . . . to get up and make that statement is quite, quite, quite poor, to be honest. Right? Is that transitional homes . . . he would know that Langley [House] and Gulfstream are transitional homes. Right? And the Housing Corporation are responsible for putting folks who are down on the last dime in transitional homes, or people who have fallen on hard times.

The transitional homes at Boaz Island are no different than Gulfstream or Langley [House]. They are just that. Why doesn't the Honourable Member ask about the transitional homes at Langley [House] and Gulfstream? They have been there for decades. Right? People come in and they go out. They come in; they go out. People find that they get a better job, or their spouse may get a job, and then they can move from that home out to a regular home. So, these capsules will be no different. They are transitional.

How long will people be there? It all depends on the situation. It's as simple as that.

The Chairman: Is there any other Member who would like to speak to Heads 90 or 53?

Seeing nobody else, no other persons wanting to speak . . . Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I move that Heads 90 and 53 be approved as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Heads 90 and 53 be approved as printed.

Is there any objection to that motion?

No objection.

Agreed to.

[Motion carried: The Ministry of Housing and Municipalities, Heads 90 and 53 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2026/27.]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, I move the Committee rise and report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Committee rise and report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

Is there any objection to that motion?

No objection.

Agreed to.

[Motion carried: The Committee of Supply agreed to rise and report progress and sought leave to sit again.]

[Timer chimes]

[Pause]

House resumed at 8:57 pm

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

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2026/27

The Speaker: Good evening, Members.

Are there any objections to the Committee rising and reporting progress?

There are none.

Good.

We now move on to the next item on the Order Paper tonight, and that is the second reading of the Municipalities Reform Act 2026, in the name of the Deputy Premier, Minister of Housing and Municipalities.

Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill entitled the Municipalities Reform Act 2026 be now read a second time.

The Speaker: [Are there] any objections?

There are none.

Continue on, Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If you can just give me one second, as I'm just going to tidy up a little bit after the . . .

[Pause]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Okay.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: No, I'm good. I'm good. Thank you. Thank you.

Okay. Mr. Speaker, before I start, I would certainly like to mention one thing tonight: I am happy to

bring this Bill back to the House. And I would like to say that—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. Okay, here we go. Here we go. Mr. Speaker, I'm ready.

BILL

SECOND READING

MUNICIPALITIES REFORM ACT 2026

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Speaker, and Honourable Members of this House, I rise to introduce the Bill entitled the Municipalities Reform Act 2026 [to] now be read for the second time.

This Bill, Mr. Speaker, abolishes municipal elections. It establishes a structured appointment process for Members of the Corporations. It makes consequential amendments to the Municipalities Act 1923, and it ensures that certain ministerial directions to a Corporation are subject to parliamentary scrutiny.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a radical departure, nor is it a sudden shift in direction. It is the continuation of a reform journey begun in 2010 to modernise Bermuda's system of municipal governance so that it reflects the democratic principles and administrative realities of the 21st century.

Mr. Speaker, to properly frame this debate, we must place it in proper constitutional and civic context. Hamilton was formally established as a town in 1790. Under statute that same year, 155 acres were purchased with public funds and vested in the Government of Bermuda for its use. The land was later divided and sold at auction, except for 44 waterfront lots reserved as public land. Now, we know back in those days, Mr. Speaker, 155 acres were purchased with public funds and then were sold at an auction. Who had the money in this country to buy it at that particular time?

In [1793], Hamilton was incorporated with a mayor, three aldermen, and five common councillors elected by freeholders only of Hamilton. St. George's followed in 1797 with a similar structure. Hamilton became a city in 1897.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members are well aware of Bermuda's democratic evolution, from slavery and age restrictions to dual-seat constituencies and voting rights tied to the property ownership. Our democracy has cast off those discredited practices. Today, we stand firmly on the principle of a single-seat constituency and one person, one vote, each vote of equal value. The same, however, cannot be said in the considerable acreage known as Hamilton and St. George's. Property qualifications for Corporation elections were retained long after they were abolished in general elections in the 1960s, alongside the introduction of modern democratic government under the

Bermuda Constitution Order 1968. In 1978, eligibility was extended to leaseholders and certain businesses. Yet, to this day, the municipal franchise remains rooted in property ownership and commercial interest.

Mr. Speaker, this Government rejects the notion that the exercise of a fundamental democratic right should depend upon land ownership or commercial stake. There are no hybrid forms of democracy. The principle is simple and enduring. Those who are governed by the laws must have a voice in shaping them. In 2019, this House advanced a framework to modernise the Corporations of Hamilton and St. George's. That framework was debated and passed by the House of Assembly. Though it was challenged in the Senate and in the courts by the Corporation of Hamilton, at the taxpayers' expense, it has ultimately been upheld at every level of judicial scrutiny available to Bermuda. Today, we move to implement and refine it. This is not dismantling democracy; it is strengthening it.

Mr. Speaker, our vision, and that of all the stakeholders in St. George's, recognises the town of St. George's as a place of unique historic character, a UNESCO World Heritage Site of global significance. We acknowledge that this distinction carries with it both privilege and responsibility. Its heritage must be protected, preserved, and respected, but it must also live and thrive in the modern world. That vision includes the development of a marina, supported by a sustainable management plan, the creation of a viable year-round economy, and infrastructure improvements that benefit residences, businesses, and visitors alike. Consistent with the direction established in the City of Hamilton, the [City of] Hamilton Plan 2025, our vision for the capital is equally clear. A vibrant and sustainable city of both local and international appeal, one that offers a broad range of services and experiences with a pedestrian-focused and welcoming city centre.

Hamilton's long-term vitality will be sustained not by retail alone, but by fostering a diverse mix of residential, culture, leisure, and commercial life. It calls for development that strengthens identity, protects historic and cultural assets, supports the adaptive reuse of buildings, and places people at the centre of the urban experience. In this way, Hamilton will remain not merely the seat of commerce, but the living civic heart of Bermuda. Realising a vision of this scale requires governance structures that are aligned, accountable, and capable of delivery.

Mr. Speaker, let me be clear about what this Bill does not do. It does not eliminate jobs. It does not dissolve the Corporations. It does not abolish the offices of mayor or councillor. Each municipality will continue to have a mayor and eight councillors. It is not a takeover. It is not an asset grab. The Corporations remain bodies corporate. What changes is the method of selection. The transition from property-based electoral model to a transparent, skills-based appointment system that reflects modern governance standards. This is not the removal of democracy. It is the refinement.

Mr. Speaker, the Municipalities Act dates back to 1923. Its voting structure is inconsistent with Bermuda's commitment to universal adult suffrage. Democracy cannot be measured in acres or balance sheets. Our municipal framework must reflect the democratic maturity of our country. Municipal priorities have not always aligned with the country's development goals. Critical infrastructure requires coordinated oversight. In a country of just 22 square miles and approximately 63,000 people, duplication without alignment breeds inefficiency. This reform ensures that municipalities and central government move forward together, not at cross purposes.

Mr. Speaker, the 2019 reforms were challenged in the courts. The Supreme Court ruled in favour of the Government. The Court of Appeal upheld that ruling. The matter was then taken to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London, the highest appellate court available to Bermuda at the taxpayer's expense.

Mr. Speaker, in October 2025, the Privy Council affirmed Parliament's authority to enact these reforms. This reform has not merely withstood scrutiny, it has prevailed at every level. The highest court available to Bermuda has confirmed that this Honourable House acted within its constitutional authority. The rule of law has spoken conclusively.

Mr. Speaker, the updates in this Bill do not alter the governance model approved in 2019, not one bit. They update statutory timelines, align the Selection Committee process with the deferred appointment cycle, modernise technical provisions, and ensure administrative coherence. This is implementation, not reinvention.

The Bill removes outdated election provisions and establishes a governance framework in the fourth schedule, providing for appointments, qualifications, tenure, and transparency requirements. Ministerial directions expending municipal purposes will be subject to Parliamentary scrutiny under the negative resolution procedure. That enhances accountability, Mr. Speaker. Appointees must possess relevant expertise in accounting, law, planning, engineering, construction, human resources, and labour relations. The Selection Committee will publish its criteria in the media. This ensures that the appointment process is transparent, skills-based, and publicly visible.

Mr. Speaker, let us be honest about what is before us tonight. For too long, municipal governance has rested on a franchise rooted not in citizenship, but in property. Not in an equal voice, but in economic interest. That may have been tolerated in another era. It is indefensible in this one. This Bill draws a clear line. Democracy in Bermuda cannot be whole in some places and conditional in others. Equality under the law is not negotiable. Longevity alone does not confer legitimacy. Systems endure until they are challenged, and when

they no longer reflect the democratic maturity of the people, it is the Parliament's duty to act.

That is exactly what we are doing, Mr. Speaker. This is no reckless experiment, no constitutional gamble, no power grab. It is the lawful exercise of the legislative responsibility. This reform ensures that municipal and central governance move forward together under a unified vision of purpose, shared responsibility, and a common direction.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot affirm one person, one vote in our general elections while accepting a different standard in municipal governance. That inconsistency ends here.

Mr. Speaker, I hope for the unanimous support of this Honourable House on this Bill, because when the history of the country is written, the people of Bermuda should look back at this moment with pride, knowing that we acted to remove the final vestige of a system designed to preserve an unnatural imbalance in favour of a few.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I now move that the Bill entitled the Municipalities Reform Act 2026 be read for the second time.

The Speaker: Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

MP Fahy.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Good evening, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good evening.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Mr. Speaker, the Minister is tenacious. We can give him that. He has been involved in the municipal reform off and on for many, many years. And we are here today, and the Minister is quite right. It's gone through many iterations in the way in which the Corporation has been administered in the last 16, 17 years.

And he is quite right that the iteration of this Bill was taken before all the courts that the Corporation could quite rightfully go to to get a decision, and they were defeated at each and every point. No one is going to suggest that a kind of a property ownership structure is right in any way for these times. And it's absolutely quite right to make sure that you have equal vote.

And I think what we attempted to do ourselves in 2013/14 was to ensure that there was a residential vote and a ratepayer vote for the municipality, so that those who were being taxed, because the Corporation of Hamilton does levy tax in terms of ratepayers, that they had the opportunity to say what they believed would be appropriate. And what we had done to try and solve a problem that existed was to give ratepayers a certain number of councillors, and to give residents one man, one vote. To give them an opportunity to say as well, so that you could end any kind of doubt that it was just this one-sided business opportunity. That's now being taken away with this Bill. We thought it was a good

compromise. That is now obviously not going to be the case.

Mr. Speaker, it's been interesting because it is very difficult sometimes to get people to stand up for public office. And as we have seen over the years, the elections don't often get high turnouts, and people are elected into positions with very low numbers. The Minister didn't make mention of that. But that was always a concern for me as well when I was Minister, as to how do you get people involved in elections.

The issue here, though, is it's one thing to say, yes, we accept and believe absolutely one man, one vote. But now there is no man, no vote. There's no vote at all. It just seems strange to me that we can say that it's obviously very important but then get rid of any vote of any kind for people. Whether they are residents or whether they are ratepayers they are now not having a direct democratic say in respect of those particular municipal rates and taxes that are going to be imposed upon them.

And from what the Minister's Statement said, it's not a land grab, it's not a takeover. The Corporations will stay as they are for how long, that remains to be seen. But the fact of the matter is that the taxes that the municipal ratepayers pay, whether they are residential or business owners, presumably will continue. So, they are not getting a direct say in how those monies will be spent. The Minister presumably will say, *Well, if you vote in the central government, you have to have faith and trust that the Minister will select the right people.*

But ultimately, the Minister will have complete control, notwithstanding the way in which this Bill is written, because he has the ability to make direct appointments, but then the Selection Committee makes recommendations. He appoints . . . he or she appoints the Selection Committee, which therefore means the Minister has direct control. And I say that because, woe betide, I would assume anyone who is appointed that doesn't abide by the Minister's desires . . . presumably, they won't be reappointed because they would be concerned that maybe they won't get another two-year term. This Bill calls for two-year terms.

And there are flaws in even the way in which this is designed. And I'll get into that in a moment.

But let's be clear, on this side of the House, we do believe in that one-man-one-vote principle because sometimes that gets thrown about as if we don't. And that's absolutely not the case. What we tried to do . . . what we tried to do was find a good compromise with ratepayers. It was not about land ownership, it was about ratepayers, both residential and business, both who contribute vastly to the vibrancy of both Corporations.

Now what's interesting is the Minister made mention of any number of things, Mr. Speaker, about why it's important that this Municipal Bill be brought before the House. And he mentioned a number of items that are, of course, the same or similar to the very points that naturally were made in 2019.

And if I may, I'm going to take a moment because I think it's important. This is, in fact, from the Government website and their consultation document on Municipal Reform from 2019. It's available for anyone to see. And I can circulate this particular piece of paper. And it says that the government has a vision for the City of Hamilton. And it says, "[T]he vision is a 'smart city' infrastructure with a thriving residential centre and entertainment hub with distinct districts . . . In order to achieve this vision, the following needs must be met:

- "i. The development of a multi-faceted waterfront
- "ii. Increased city living
- "iii. Increased use of vacant office space
- "iv. Effective traffic management using 'smart city' technology
- "v. Encouraging the development of 'districts', e.g. financial, entertainment, restaurant, etc."

Mr. Speaker, to achieve those goals, we don't need to make these changes because you have a City of Hamilton Plan [2025] that was brought before this place last year. It approved most of what is actually in this. It was . . . the Government accepted it. We on this side of the House voted in fairness with the City of Hamilton Plan [2025]. We have talked about it in previous debates, Mr. Speaker, in terms of building higher, becoming a more thriving environment.

But we have also spoken throughout the Budget Debates and other debates about the services that government is unable to provide in an efficient manner. And one of the things that the Corporation, certainly the Corporation of Hamilton, has been able to do very efficiently is actually provide the services in a reasonably better way, in my view, than the central government has.

In fact, to the point that oftentimes what has happened, for example, when the central government has been unable to have enough garbage trucks on the road, they have relied on the City of Hamilton to back them up over and over and over again. And so, when you look at the services and you consider, How is the city being run, is it being run well? And it has been run well. And I take the types of services that municipalities offer and deal with that are important for the city to survive and be a vibrant place. And that includes items like rubbish pickup. That happens daily in the City of Hamilton. Every morning those guys are out there. In the evenings they are out there. The men are out there on the streets sweeping up and doing an amazing job. They do an amazing job on the infrastructure. So, let's make that clear.

The other piece that is of interest is section 7 of the Municipalities Act. It gives the Minister, as we heard in a previous debate, the ability to give directions if it's in the best interest of Bermuda. Therefore, the Minister has the ability now to give directions if that's what's in the best interest of making sure that things are going in a certain direction within the city. I unfortunately had to use that power myself for various reasons.

An Hon. Member: Oh!

Hon. Michael Fahy: Okay. But the point is that the Minister has the ability to do that now. We have elected officials who have done an amazing job. And I would like to take the opportunity to just take a moment to remember Larry Scott because he was a councillor in the City of Hamilton for many years. We've given thanks already in the House to Mr. Scott. But I worked very closely with him, and we have some very vibrant people who have served on the council both as councillors and as mayor.

Now, it seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that if we are going to maintain any form of vibrancy of democracy in either and or the City of Hamilton and the Corporation of St. George's, that why not find some compromise? Because I don't believe that people really want this, that the two Corporations to essentially become quangos without any real understanding of what will happen down the road.

Again, we have talked lots about master plans and the only plan that we have seen from my point of view is what was published seven years ago as to what the reasons are for having to bring this Bill. Everything, as I have said, can be done by the Minister now. Why not at least have an elected mayor, have appointed councillors, if that's what the Minister wishes to have, to maintain some form of oversight and get things pushed in a different direction?

But if you really want to have some vibrancy and you want inclusion and you want people to be engaged and you want them to be part of the city vibrancy and matrix, then have an elected mayor like we have all over the world in different cities and towns. What we have done here is completely eliminate a vote. Completely. And it's not, in my submission, sufficient to simply say *I'm going to a national election and therefore I have to have faith that the Premier of the day appoints a Minister that is going to do what is in the best interest of what I want for the city.* Maybe someone as a resident has a completely different view of what the city should look like versus what the Minister has.

So, then you get into the whole nitty gritty. Where is the accountability for those who are paying the taxes to the very people that are now going to have the ability to levy those taxes? Because the people who are actually in the city living there and working there will now lose that opportunity to have that say, yet they are going to pay the tax. I find that very strange indeed which is why I would suggest that there be a compromise found whereby you at least have an elected mayor so that the people of Bermuda can feel, the people of Hamilton and St. George's can feel that they are having a say in the way in which the cities and towns that they live and work in will be suitably governed based on the taxes that are paid.

A number of items that I think also need to be put under consideration is the fact that members are appointed for two years. There doesn't appear to be

any more staggered approach to ensure that there is longevity of knowledge, that there's some form of continuity of knowledge. It would appear that what in fact could happen is every couple of years there's a whole new council that's put in place, a new mayor, and I think that's something that needs to be thought about. It's always good to have that ongoing continuity of knowledge. Ministers change. Ideas can change with a Minister. You need to ensure that you have continuity.

Again, I have made a brief reference, Mr. Speaker, in respect of the independence of the individuals who would be appointed either by the Minister directly with the caveats that have been put in place that they have to have a certain skill set if they are appointed directly by the Minister. What is their ability to have that independence without the Minister just giving directions and they do as they are told? How does the constituent of the City of Hamilton or St. George's have the ability to opine on who is actually taxing them? Do we believe, in fact, that this model will improve in any way the city's effective governance, which in the last while has been done very, very well.

In relation to assets of the municipality, again, this now essentially will become, in the event that the Bill passes, a quango. So that means that portfolio of property, which is what the Corporation argued, it's not for me to re-opine on that, but how do we protect those assets and make sure that they are not simply sold off to someone else because the Minister believes that's in the best interest? Again, it's just taking it to a further step and ending any form of democracy of any kind within both municipalities.

In terms of the rates of pay that these individuals are now or could potentially engage in, is it sufficient, for example, and I'm certainly not suggesting do it for free, but that is a point of consideration that I think at the moment councillors and the mayor, they get paid per meeting, which is a paltry sum like most of the boards that people serve on, 50 bucks here, \$100 here. We are asking a number of individuals to do appointed work. Presumably, that will not be done for nothing which, given the size of the city and the things that are going to be done on behalf of taxpayers, quite important.

In terms of the issue of double taxation, it seems to me it is double taxation in respect of the way in which the Corporation has been run and that issue does need to be examined. Because now, as I said, you will continue, presumably, you have your sewage tax, you have got your rate tax, you have got all kinds of things that you need to pay as someone within the City of Hamilton. But also, it's the central government that's controlling them. So, we are already paying tax, so does that disappear? Will those continue? How will those rates be re-examined? And will they be re-examined?

What I find most concerning, again, is the lack of a plan. And I know the Minister and I have debated in a previous debate about the importance of plans. But

I do think that it is of interest to everyone that we have an absolutely updated plan. Again, when you are talking about decisions of this magnitude, it would appear that, again, these decisions are made based on old data. And what do I mean by that? Because, as far as I can tell, the last public consultation on these changes happened in respect of the 2019 iteration of this Bill, which then means we are relying on comments that we believe could be the same.

We have heard this on other issues that have been debated in this House before when things linger for as long as this one has for all kinds of reasons. We know it's gone through three court cases. It has taken six years. Yes, it's taken six years. But that doesn't mean that that data that was received in 2019 and feedback remains the same. Now, maybe it does. But I think it would be incumbent upon the Government to at least look into that and see, is this a desire of the ratepayers, whether they be those who are municipal ratepayers, business ratepayers, or residential ratepayers? Do they feel that this is in their best interest to have a central government appointed committee via the Minister and directly appointed members and a directly appointed mayor?

That one, particularly, you can tell, Mr. Speaker, at the very least I would have expected the Government to perhaps take on board some of the concerns from before about completely ending any form of directly elected member and at least do the mayoral option. And that is in respect of both municipalities. It may be as well that we seek the views directly of the public. Again, that is why I feel that this Bill has not been fully and finally considered based on the way in which things have changed and some of the feelings that have existed about some of the issues over the last 15 years.

The biggest issue does sit as to that accountability and how is it that members will be held accountable? Can they continuously be reappointed? All of these things. We know what the Bill says, but it's how it will pan out in practice is what's most important.

As well, I would like to, again, reiterate that the City of Hamilton and the town of St. George's have done sterling work. The elected officials who have been elected over the years have done an amazing job as best they can with sometimes being desperately under-resourced for various reasons.

And it is also, I think, well worth thanking those members who were originally elected back in whatever it was, 2018, who have continued to serve by appointment, which, to be frank, I had a problem with, and I made mention of that previously when elections are postponed. But, nonetheless, they have continued to serve, and they have done sterling work under very difficult circumstances.

So, Mr. Speaker, in the event that this Bill does pass, I think it's incumbent upon this House to thank those members who have served as municipal councillors and as a mayor.

So, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

MP Ming.

Mrs. Renee Ming: Good afternoon . . . Sorry. Good evening, Mr. Speaker and listening audience.

Mr. Speaker, I want to start my comments today by giving the definition of democracy. Democracy is a system of government where power is vested in the people exercised either directly or through *elected* representatives. I think that's important and I would like for you to hear that and make sure you remember that this evening.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today and I kind of feel like I'm living a *déjà vu* moment because I remember standing in this very House in 2019 . . . well, not this place, Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker: Well—

Mrs. Renee Ming: —in 2019 and looking at this same Bill.

I want to first of all give some context and background to the Municipalities Act. The Municipalities Act is from 1923 so that Bill is now over 100 years old. And if you ask me, do I believe that the Bill needs to have some upgrade or reform, my answer is absolutely yes. But when we consider the municipalities that we currently have, I think we need to understand the stark differences between the municipalities.

And I'm going to give you the difference in terms of data and numbers for the municipalities. And just for the record, you all know that I live and represent a municipality. Hamilton has over 1,600 business ratepayer voters. And they have probably around 650 resident voters. In St. George's, we have approximately 1,300 resident voters and about 60 business voters. So, I believe you can understand the differences of the municipalities and why if I was to turn the clock back and look at 2019, my comments were and would be the exact same as what I'm going to speak to you about today.

Mr. Speaker, it's funny because this came to my mind, Brussels sprouts. I can't stand the Brussels sprouts. I don't care if you cook it, boil it, fry it, whatever.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mrs. Renee Ming: I can't take it. Just can't take it. And that's from when I was younger. So, even if you were to serve me the same Brussels sprouts today, I still don't like them. In my view, this Bill is the exact same Bill that I looked at in 2019. It just has a different date on it. So, how I felt in 2019 is no different from how I feel today.

I have to declare my interest because not only do I live in a municipality, I am a municipal voter. One of my children is a councillor on the St. George's Corporation. And I myself have served as a councillor and an alderman in the corporation before entering this level of politics. So, if you ask me is this personal to me, my answer would be yes. But I also have the honour and privilege of representing in my area. And I know how important it is to my constituents to choose who they want to represent them. Okay?

So, the idea of centralised government has not gone over very well. In 2019, when we stood in this place and we debated this Bill, my colleague and I were vociferous in lobbying for what we wanted to see for the area. And because we are people who believe that *we're not going to just tell you what the problem is, we want to offer as well a solution*, we did.

And one of the things, and I'm not going to tell you anything that you can't go read because there are *The Royal Gazette* articles on what we asked for. We said because of the differences of the municipalities we would have liked to have seen maybe different legislation as it relates to the two municipalities but more importantly to maintain the concept of elected officials.

We thought that, and I'm speaking specifically to St. George's because that's what I know best, that if there could be a compromise of a hybrid model, meaning that the Minister could choose his four people that we believed should come with some level of expertise, whether that be lawyer, accountant, cultural/tourism, and an engineer. And we felt that the other four councillors did not need to go through a Selection Committee because St. George's people are well capable of selecting who they want to represent them.

In some ways, and it's surprising and not surprising, that the changes that we have seen in municipalities over the years have actually come through, and I'm talking about some real change, the Progressive Labour Party. So, in 2003, the then Premier got rid of the double taxation because, yes, if you lived in St. George's, you paid a corporation tax and you paid government land tax. And that became quite expensive and it was, you know, in listening to people and saying, like, *why do we have to pay double taxes?* And so, there was a listen, an ask, and it happened.

In 2008 or 2009, the whole property tax matter was raised, and that was abolished because we didn't believe that that was the way to go. We felt from this Progressive Government that one man, one vote of equal value.

So, I have some family members who at that time . . . it was their first time being able to vote (for some of them) in a municipal election because they did not own any land and so they were unable to go to the polls and vote. And that door opened to them. I have one of my family members who not only did he go and vote, he ran. And so, up until his death, he sat as a councillor, and a proud one at that, for the Corporation of St. George's.

I think that when I was an alderman and a councillor (councillor first, alderman second, and then I moved on), the will of the people was important. And so, for the success that we wanted and what we aim to look for, I had to knock on doors. I had to meet with residents. I had to speak to constituents face-to-face so I could hear exactly what it was that they wanted from an elected official. The people who I visited believed that their vote mattered and that their vote was safe with me.

I was elected through a democratic process. And I will say this here: Their vote is still very safe with me. They can rest assured that I will always represent their best interests as long as I sit in this space.

Mr. Speaker, democracy matters.

The Speaker: Mm-hmm.

Mrs. Renee Ming: I repeat that.

The Speaker: Yes.

Mrs. Renee Ming: Democracy matters. I heard the Minister and I also heard my colleagues speak about low numbers in recent elections. I can confirm that there was one particular election where we may not have had sufficient numbers and we did end up having an extraordinary election two months after that. But a lot of that has actually come from (and that was in recent years) the uncertainty that has come with the reform.

I have no shortage of persons in St. George's that I believe can represent St. George's. But with the reform looming over their head, they were like, *I don't know. I don't know if I want to do it and you guys are going to change it, or whatever.* And so, you may have seen low numbers, but I think any of us can understand that that would have been indicative of instability or uncertainty at that time.

I firmly believe that within the municipalities, the people have the right to choose. They should have the right to choose. We are living in a time right now where people want more choice and yet more is being taken away from us. I mean, let's be honest here. In Bermuda, can you choose your own health provider? No. Not if you work for someone. Can you choose a hospital that is outside of your health plan network? No. And more recently, can you decide where you want to go for your prescriptions? We are living in a space and a time right now where, as a people, we want to make more decisions, especially as they relate to our lives and what we do. That seems to be changing.

It would be very difficult, *very difficult*, for me to stand here today and say that I can support, my people in St. George's especially, (but I think about the other municipality as well), losing their right to choose who they want to represent them. Imagine each and every one of you sit here as elected officials. I surely don't

think we ever want to see the day that somebody appoints us to these seats. Yes?

There was lots of talk in 2019 with the then former Minister. And we challenged him. That's our role, to challenge at times. And I think, and I can agree, and I was happy to see that he listened. And the compromised things that we came out with were a hybrid model, which I spoke to you about just a few minutes ago, and possible standalone legislation.

I still believe firmly that that is the way to go.

I know that over the years I have spoken with my constituents and they too recognise that we could use some levels of expertise in . . . especially in our Olde Towne, but they want the ability to choose. And I don't think it's too much to ask if they could choose their four, and a mayor, elected representatives.

Mr. Speaker, we spoke about continuity of knowledge, and I think that's important as well as we go down this path. Each and every one of you, whether you like it or not, started in St. George's.

The Speaker: Hmm.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mrs. Renee Ming: Whether you like it or not, you started in St. George's.

The Speaker: Well, well, well.

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: Well, well.

[Laughter]

Mrs. Renee Ming: And for that reason,—

The Speaker: Put some red up there. We need some red in this room.

Mrs. Renee Ming: You started in St. George's.

Look. One boat, one shipwreck, two slaves, right? So, we'll leave it at that.

The historic nature of St. George's in itself would . . . brings me . . . what appeals to me, I don't know if it appeals to you, to understand why traditions matter to us. But, more importantly, people matter to us. It's been seven years since we were in this space in 2019, and I think that it's long enough for us to make some serious decisions about what we see from the municipality.

And I don't want you to think that I am against municipal reform, because I am not. I actually believe that it is necessary. I'm just not sure of the path that we are on in terms of what that reform actually looks like.

So, Mr. Speaker, my comments (I'll draw to a close), will say that history will record how we vote and how we speak in this place. And it will show whether

we stood on the side of convenience or we stood on the side of democracy.

Today, I choose democracy. I choose the right side of the people in our municipalities to elect their representatives, and it's for this reason that I cannot support this Bill. But I would also like to take this opportunity to thank those persons who serve within the municipalities, because they may not be big government like us, but they are government, and they do have their parishioners, their constituents, and their areas to actually worry about.

So, Mr. Speaker, I say thank you for allowing me this time.

The Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

Deputy Speaker.

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am rising on a similar point as my colleague and my representative in St. George's. Let me declare my interest upfront. I have a daughter who is a councillor in the municipality in St. George's. I have all of my family who basically live in St. George's and have given me much instruction, including my neighbours.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing that I wish to declare to the House is that I . . . which I think will help you to understand the stance that I take. I did my dissertation in electoral reform. I am firmly opposed not to my Government but to centralisation. I think as parliamentarians and politicians that our action should always be one that enhances and promotes democracy. I believe in democracy. And I believe that this body here should be the most democratic body, and at every stance act to advance democracy.

And so, Mr. Speaker, it is difficult . . . and I will say this. My Minister and my great friend, MP Zane De Silva, is very . . . he already knows basically how I feel in this party. So, nothing that he is hearing me say wasn't said to him directly. I wrote to him and told him what I think, and he asked me if there was any way that I would advocate or could advocate for the position that he is taking today. And I told him that I stand on my principles and that I am unchanged. However, I understand the dilemma that he finds himself in because the institutions that sit have not been . . . have had very little reform in terms of how they operate.

And I can go back many, many years when I was a child and listened to the conversations, especially of my mother, when she spoke about the Corporation of St. George's, even back then, and how many of the actions that they engaged in, she felt back then were not as democratic as they could be.

So, I, too, with my sister parliamentarian, am proud of the PLP Government that did create reform in the space of the municipalities. And I, too, am hopeful that the Minister in charge of Municipalities, in the near future, can look to create a model that he believes will

best serve the . . . I am very biased, the municipality in St. George's. And if he thinks he needs to institute that within the municipality of the City of Hamilton, I say, go full speed ahead. Because I do believe, and I'm not going to be long, I do believe that we as parliamentarians should always act to enhance democracy.

And I do believe that the Minister of Municipalities and Housing will continue to look at this situation to bring about further change that he believes will help promote the democratic process within municipalities, because (I will end as I began) as a parliamentarian, as a person who put together a thesis in electoral reform and believes in the parliamentary process, I cannot support centralisation, because it operates contrary very much to the democratic process.

So, on that note, I will take my seat.

The Speaker: Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

Does any other Member . . . MP Jarion Richardson, you have the floor.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I must especially thank my honourable colleagues from the East End rising today because I was going to make the point of the difference between the Corporation of Hamilton and St. George's.

As you are well aware, Mr. Speaker, I grew up on the West End where we have no need of such strange things as these Corporations. But it was very, very helpful to learn of the role of the Corporation of St. George's. I spent a great deal of time in St. George's, and I can appreciate how localised and how important the Corporation is to that community. It's embedded in everything. Everyone in St. George's knows everybody's name. So, all of the aldermen know each other. I mean, it is an incredible working relationship down there and it's very different. The Corporation of St. George's is definitely a centre of culture whereas the Corporation of Hamilton functions more like a centre of commerce.

Mr. Speaker, following on from the Honourable Member from (I want to say) constituency 1, MP Ming. Constituency 1?

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Yes.

Her story about Brussels sprouts. I have a similar story about corporations. I remember, I only fell asleep in one class in Police Training School and that was city . . . city . . . sorry, Hamilton Traffic and Sidewalk Ordinance 1988. I passed out almost immediately. It was the most boring class that I had ever been in in my life.

And would you believe, Mr. Speaker, on my first foot patrol I come out of the old Hamilton station, I hang a left on to Reid Street, I walk about a block on the junction of . . . I want to say Reid and Burnaby, and an old lady stops and asks me, I kid you not, *Officer,*

can I park here? The first question was the one thing I didn't pay attention to in my whole career. And I will never forget it. So now I don't fall asleep.

[Laughter]

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, I'm also declaring my interest. I was a ratepayer in the Corporation when I had a company and I rented an office. I believe that a number of people here, in fact, the Honourable Minister as well would be a former ratepayer or current ratepayer.

I'm going to evaluate this argument on the two points that have been made, which is, first, on the need for reform; and secondly, the need for . . . and the need of this Act will be to increase democracy. So, two points, reform and democracy.

I'll start with the fact that the Corporation of Hamilton and the Government's documents outlined in the Government Municipal Reform background paper as well as the corporation's strategic plan, are basically written in the same language. In fact, you would think the same person wrote them.

The Government's stated purpose is to rejuvenate the city of Hamilton into a vibrant economic centre. That's exactly what the Corporation says as well. The Corporation says, increase city living, smart city infrastructure. It says, let's increase the water front development. Let's increase residential population, increase commercial districts. This is all right out of both documents, which is again the Government Municipal Reform vision and the Corporation's Strategic Plan.

The Corporation also goes on to say that they have got all kinds of plans for improving infrastructure, economic vitality, city living. And both the Corporation's budgets and annual reports outline and emphasise an increase on infrastructure improvements and long-term investment in the city, including traffic systems, wastewater improvements, and public amenities.

So, functionally the Government papers and the Corporation of Hamilton are on the exact same page.

Now the question therefore comes . . . this Act does only one thing. And that is abolish elections. So, the question is, If the Corporation of Hamilton and the central Government are on the exact same page, then how does abolishing elections achieve revitalisation of the city? And it simply doesn't. The central question for the House is whether this change in governance actually increases the economic outcomes for the Corporation of Hamilton. And it doesn't.

That disconnect therefore means that one of the arguments for this piece of legislation immediately falls away on the face of it.

Now, as I prepared for this debate, Mr. Speaker, I did look through a number of the Corporation's documents. They do have a webpage, and on that webpage is their strategic plan, annual reports,

business plans, audited financial statements, et cetera, and so forth.

The Corporation is a currently existing and operating municipal authority, and it does deliver on core services, things such as twice daily trash pickup. And I'm sure we all remember when the whole Island had twice weekly trash pickup. But the Corporation does it twice a day. The sanitation, parks maintenance, CCTV, they do all of this stuff. They have approximately 130 employees and an annual budget of around \$21 million, and they manage quite a few municipal assets.

So, as I said, this is a going concern. This is an organisation that already exists and operates as a body responsible for daily municipal administration, and to all appearances, is doing it well.

Mr. Speaker, I'll speak to the evidence of financial integrity and the independent oversight of the Corporation right now, because, again, we are talking about the Corporation. We are doing away with its governance structure. Maybe there's something functionally wrong with it. So, that's why I'm evaluating it. And what I see is that the Corporation's financial statements do receive independent annual audits.

The 2024 audit opinion confirmed the statements present fairly the financial position of the Corporation. I'm looking at the Corporation of Hamilton 2024 financial statements, Mr. Speaker. It recorded approximately \$27.2 million in total revenue in 2024, and tangible capital assets exceeded \$75 million. Accumulated surplus stood at \$61.5 million, and that's in the 2024 financial statements. So, they seem to be doing well insofar as financial integrity and independent audit oversight.

Another thing I thought to evaluate, Mr. Speaker, was strategic planning and organisational governance. Now, as it stands right now, the Corporation of Hamilton operates under a formal strategic planning framework. And those strategic objectives are published and include, as I said before, infrastructure improvement, economic vitality, quality of life improvements, and it's implemented through department business plans and performance monitoring.

The management of this is all overseen through annual reviews and dashboards which track progress. So, it's clear that they are financially sound and well-governed. It's clear that they have a plan that they are following and they are managing that plan.

Further, Mr. Speaker, I thought I should evaluate them on operational delivery and infrastructure investment. As I said before, they are functioning quite well with the trash pickup and maintaining the parks, et cetera. No one's perfect, but they are certainly not so bad that they required us to dismiss them all. Road resurfacing, just right now, on Cedar Park . . . Cedar Hill—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Cedar Avenue. Thank you.

They just tore up a new chunk of road. In fact, on the way here, I walked past the crew that was moving some material from one place to the other, and it was about nine o'clock at night and those guys were still working.

The environmental and infrastructure projects continue apace. And this is outlined in their annual report of 2024. And they continue to invest in public amenities and Heritage assets such as the Fort Hamilton restoration. They also have a vibrant community calendar of events that are taking place not only in the parks but in the City Hall. So, to all outwards appearances, Mr. Speaker, the evidence of their operational delivery and infrastructure investment is for the success.

Mr. Speaker, the public, by the way, thinks the same thing. The Corporation of Hamilton released a satisfaction report. And that independent research shows strong satisfaction with city services among both residents and businesses. Approximately seven in ten businesses report satisfaction with city service with a similar number or proportion of residents, and most businesses in that satisfaction report would recommend the Corporation of Hamilton as a place to do business. So strong financial management, good strategic planning, cooperation in the community, community buy-in and satisfaction.

Moving on, we do have existing government oversight powers. The Municipalities Act already provides for extensive oversight powers for the Minister, as my honourable colleague has already mentioned. The Minister can issue written directions that the Corporation must carry out, and the Minister may assume control of financial governance, or governance of the Corporation in cases of mismanagement. So, the central government is in no way, shape, or fashion cut out of the management of the Corporation, and in fact has substantial and sweeping powers to adjust where they see the Corporation going wrong. And this includes that the Minister can approve certain . . . or must approve certain resolutions and participate in Corporation meetings.

So effectively what we are looking at right now is . . . I have done a performance measurement of the Corporation of Hamilton, and insofar as I can see, they are a successful organisation that is going from success to success.

The Bill that we are looking at today will convert that locally elected authority into one whose members are appointed by the central government, and therefore there is a strong disconnect between the performance of the Corporation as it stands today and this Bill. This Bill, in fact, does nothing to improve on the performance of the Corporation as the Minister has put forward as the reason for the Bill.

Moving on, Mr. Speaker, on the second point of evaluation, which is democracy. The Government is making an argument that this will improve democracy in the city, but the simple fact is that it abolishes the

election. And if a democracy is worthwhile and worth propagating, then it's certainly worth fixing and reforming. It's not worth abolishing.

Now, the Government can already legislate on certain electoral changes to the primary Act, and one of the things that's been brought up here is the change in democracy over time, and the Honourable Member from constituency 1 had pointed that out. One of the things that we have done in Bermuda over the last 20 or 30 years is expand the participation in our democracy. In other words, we are bringing more and more people into participating in the electoral process, and that's obviously key to Bermuda's success.

The problem with this Bill, though, is it doesn't do that. It actually limits people from participating in democracy, not including them in.

Mr. Speaker, it also is worth pointing out that municipalities are not national governments. There are millions of municipalities all over the world, and they operate on very different levels for very different purposes, and to that end, there is always some sort of a hybrid mechanism of different kinds of voters. In fact, even here in Bermuda, we see, the Honourable Member who took her seat, Corporation of Hamilton, or I should say the difference between the Corporation of Hamilton and the Corporation of St. George's, where we see more business ratepayers voting in the City of Hamilton than we do in the town of St. George's. And that's fine. They shouldn't be identical. There should be variances between municipalities for their own purposes.

As I said before, the town of St. George's is very localised, it's sort of a heart beating place, it's important to culture, it's important to community. The Corporation of Hamilton is, especially in large parts of it, functionally a commerce centre.

Now, with that being said, Mr. Speaker, and of course that's me coming from the West End as well, where we don't have corporations. The Corporation of St. George's has multiple roles, multiple authorities, multiple lines of accountability. And given all of this taken together, both in terms of its current success, both in terms of this Bill not actually expanding democracy but rather limiting it, in all, this Bill, in no way, shape, or fashion, connects with the stated intent that the Minister laid out. And as such, it leaves the public to entertain ideas about, *Well, why is it happening if it's not doing any of the things that the Government is saying so?*

So, with that being said, Mr. Speaker, I will close with this much: If democracy is so important, and this Government is so concerned about it, then it should get about reforming it and not abolishing it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Does any other Honourable Member wish to speak?

MP King.

Mr. Robert King: Yes, good evening, Mr. Speaker, Members of this Honourable House, and the listening public.

For me, it's not about democracy, it's about results. This Government talks about doing things, great things. One thing that it does very well, it tells us that it does very well, is balancing a budget. Historically, it does that amazingly well.

So, imagine this. The current administration is now going to be in control of the City of Hamilton, and St. George's as well. And what do we see when we look next door? We see the House that we are actually supposed to be in. We already know that there are many government buildings which are in a poor state of repair, badly in need of repair. We have got an asphalt plant which is in Chattanooga (in what?), Tennessee, waiting to come home.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Robert King: The point is that when you are looking at the record of the current administration completing projects, when we are talking about housing, what the Minister is saying is, *not soon enough*, we are not going to talk about plans, we are going to go ahead and get it done.

But then we have got the Signature Schools, \$8.8 million and counting, \$16 million and counting for a Casino Commission that we keep talking about and nothing is being delivered. But as long as we talk about it, it's as good as actually getting it done, according to this administration.

What we have seen, though, is with the Corporations of Hamilton and St. George's, they do get the job done.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Robert King: They do get the job done.

The people are happy with the level of service. They are happy with the level of representation that they have. And they can see the results. What they don't get is just rhetoric and nothing to show for it, nothing *good* to show for it.

We know that we have got a problem with housing and homelessness. Since November of last year, it went up from 1,101 to 1,331 within four months under the current administration's policy and strategic planning to address the issue of housing.

What we are talking about is performance, and we know, based on history and the pattern of performance and their ways of thinking and doing, that they cannot be relied upon to deliver the results that they say they are going to. They have shown us that this is not going to be the case. Repeatedly. And we would be

fools to go ahead and vote yes to this when the evidence is so strong to the contrary.

We don't need plans, start dates, it's not, you know, soon enough. You know, people are in need of housing. Yes, all of these things are true, and the current condition of people in this country is getting worse.

But what the Government tells you is, *Trust us, we're going to get the job done, don't know when*, and somehow or another we are to believe them that things will be better with them running the municipalities despite the fact that the people who are already running the municipalities are doing a great job that we can see that the people experience. That is not the case with the current administration.

So, it's not about democracy, it's about results. And the Government is not delivering the results, and we should not believe them when they say it's going to be better under them.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

Does any other Member . . . ?

MP Swan. Would you like your . . . you have the floor, rather.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, not too dissimilar from my colleague from constituency 1, this is a bit of déjà vu for us because in 2019 we did express concern for the uniqueness of St. George's. And whilst we supported our Government, we had to represent and express our concern on behalf of our constituents. And I will do so once again and be consistent in the way in which I did it at that particular time.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that is important to recognise . . . and in doing so, I like to go to our memory lane. It took me back to the 1970s when I had state and local government with Governor Patterson, the former Governor Patterson of Alabama. And he and I used to have many long talks after our evening class there. He used to come down from a little north of Troy down from Montgomery and teach that class. And I would keep him a little late talking about local government.

Local governments are unique to the communities that they serve. And we know that it all started down in St. George's, and the community of St. George's are already very used to and appreciate the significance of having, in addition to a national voice that also has a local responsibility, it has some say in the local community as well.

And when I came to St. George's in earnest (I worked in Tucker's Town in 1980, but when I came to St. George's in earnest in 1985), I found a few cousins who were formerly on the . . . and uncles, who were on the Corporation. I always marvelled at Uncle Clinton Hall who was a very flamboyant . . . my grandmother's brother was a very flamboyant common councillor and alderman back in the 1960s and 1970s. I remember

Cousin Gladstone Trott who was a common councillor and an alderman for many years. I became very close to the late Ronald Smith who gave me a lot of advice and encouragement along the way.

I was very good friends with Jimmy Williams and used to meet with Jimmy very regularly with Dr. Snaith and myself. When I first came to St. George's, my mentor and boss, Terry Brennan, made sure that I got to meet the people of the community who had influence. And Jimmy was a common councillor before becoming a Member of Parliament in 1993. That didn't stop us from networking on what was important for the town.

I remember when Mayor Lois Perinchief was the mayor. And I remember when Henry Hayward was the mayor. I remember when George Dowling was the mayor. He was the mayor when my daughter Zindzi was a common councillor in 2020, until she got ill in 2024. I thank the mayor for his support of my daughter when she had to take a sabbatical during that time. Similar to the Members from constituency 3 and constituency 1, we have all had our children as part of the Corporation and as part of the electoral process.

We want to figure out how we can get more people encouraged in the electoral process. I come from the West End, and it wouldn't be such a bad thing if it happened up there, too. But that's not for me. I don't represent the West End, but I do have a licence to say one or two things on its behalf because I am a son of that soil as well.

There's no bad time to have democracy. There's no time not to speak up for democracy. Democracy is very important. Like I had to hold my nose once before with the will of my Government, I am holding my nose with a clothes peg today and expressing with my mouth some of the concerns I hear in my community as it relates to the importance.

And let us not forget the significance of mayors like Mayor Michael Jones and the late Kenneth Bascome. May he rest in peace. And people who served and they loved, and nobody can pick them, that little vote that allows people in the community to decide whether or not they are going to vote for Mayor Dowling or Mayor Francis or Mayor Bascome or Mayor Jones.

I call every person who was a mayor "the Mayor" because you are a Mayor Emeritus once you have retired, and they still make invaluable contributions and they will still come and sit with me in my clinics and give advice and call me and say, *Listen, this is important for the community*.

I remember when I used the canvass back in 1998. And I remember the words of David White, the editor of *The Royal Gazette*, who said to me, he said, *Never lose sight that St. George's has always been a working town*. There is a balance that's needed between the importance of residences and the importance of businesses in the works. Because when I came to St. George's in 1985—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: —when I came to St. George's in 1985, I came there to run a business on behalf of the Government. I ran a quango, one of the largest employers for Bermuda in St. George's in 1985, employed many people. And I worked closely with the Corporation of St. George's. I worked closely with the Government who had a depot in St. George's. We had the western depot, we had the quarry, we had the central depot . . . so there was good coordination. So, I see the wisdom of having both sides, a hybrid, in work.

And I have asked that . . . I will table a few things with you, Mr. Speaker, and I will do it electronically by sending it to Mr. Lamb. I will table an article where the [former] Minister Roban, when these same types of comments were made, when we supported in the vote that he took on board our comments. I have tabled that article. I have also tabled the debate from 2019 and what it contained, and indeed the vote that's taken place, so that I can corroborate what I am saying is consistent with what I said at that particular time.

But the challenges that we have makes eminent good sense for us to enlist persons even outside of the community when it comes to technical expertise as what is contained in the Bill as well because, yes, we do have lawyers and we do have persons with engineers and technical expertise. But whether or not those who are there are available is another thing. We would not want to be limited not to be able to look outside.

And many of us who come from outside of St. George's have come to love St. George's. Notwithstanding many people would say we all come from St. George's. I can prove that. I can prove that my Anderson family have origins in St. George's. I can prove that my Hall family and Burrows family have origins in St. George's.

An Hon. Member: I am a thoroughbred.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And we are all thoroughbreds under the umbrella of Christ. And so, I'm not accepting that.

But I'm here to tell you that, yes, we are special in St. George's. And as such, we are expressing how special we are. And so, as we did in 2019, we are prevailing upon the Minister on behalf of our constituents. And we are doing so again. But as I did in 2019, I'll do so again, Mr. Speaker. I will support the Bill that's been presented as it stands similar to what it was (well, exactly the way it was) prior. I will do likewise again.

But I felt duty-bound to just refresh and I provide for tabling that of which was said then and that which was said now and that which was done then and that of which I will do now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Member. Does any other Member . . .

Minister . . . Minister Rabain.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I stand in support of my fellow Minister in bringing this Bill as I stood in support of the Minister when he brought the Bill in 2019.

While I know times change and people's ability . . . the way they view things does change and they are able to move forward, Mr. Speaker, and I do respect that. You absolutely have to.

Mr. Speaker, what I have not heard (and I do want to have just a small opportunity to speak to) is the actual Bill. We have heard all sorts of reasons why things should stay the same. One thing that I did hear that I actually found offensive is a Member standing up and saying that, *We have come up with a compromise for voting*. Mr. Speaker, there should be no compromise for voting. There shouldn't be. And because the only thing that we can do is come up with a compromise, we have now said *Let's revamp this completely*, so we can have municipalities that are in sync with what the rest of the Island is doing while still retaining the ability to work by themselves to do the things that they need to do.

I have not heard anything coming from anyone [who has] spoken today that says that if this Bill passes . . . nothing that has convinced me that the municipalities will operate worse than what they're operating now. I know some persons would like to say that. But Mr. Speaker, history will state that this Progressive Labour Party has won three elections in a row based on the fact that the people trust that we are leading them in the right direction.

An Hon. Member: Ooh!

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Virtually just over a year ago, we won yet another election that tells us that the people trust what we are doing.

And so, when we hear comments like that coming from someone who was removed after six months—

[Laughter]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I don't understand how anyone can actually listen to anything that he says. I'm not even sure if it was six months.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I can't even be sure why he would get up and continue, why a Member in here would get up and continue to speak about this Progressive Labour Party and about the things they cannot accomplish when in the dark of the night they did what they did.

But, Mr. Speaker, I do want to move forward. I understand completely where we are.

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: [Microphone off]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: But Mr. Speaker, as I said, I want to speak to the Bill.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: The Member is intentionally misleading the House by that comment of what was done in the dark of the night. That is not true. It was done democratically.

The Speaker: You noted that I stopped him before he went down that road. I called him as he started and told him it's time to move on. Before he—

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: It is just important for the record to correct that, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Speaker: —finished it. Okay.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Just keep it on a higher ground. We have had a good tone all night.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, as I said, let us focus on the Bill because I don't think this part of the Bill has been articulated to the people listening to what has been said today.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister does not get to just nilly-willy appoint anyone he wants to the municipalities. Mr. Speaker, a committee of persons who live, who reside, do business or work in the municipalities must form a Selection Committee. That Selection Committee then picks, nominates people to the Minister to become part of the municipality, Mr. Speaker. So, to say that the voice—

Mr. Jarion Robinson: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Mr. Jarion Richardson: The Honourable Member is misleading the House. The Minister has more than one

method, and he is just talking about that one method of a committee. There's a direct appointment as well.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, I will continue to talk about the part of the Bill that I am talking . . . I am speaking about the part of the Bill that still gives a voice to the persons within the municipality.

And so those persons, that Selection Committee, will then offer nominations to the Minister to choose from to appoint, Mr. Speaker. So, the idea that the voice of the people of the municipality is completely removed from this process is simply not true, Mr. Speaker. And so, with that I just wanted people to understand that that does exist because everything that we have heard today and everything that we have heard spoken makes it seem as if the Minister himself, with no input from anyone else, just gets to appoint people to the municipalities. And that is simply just not true, Mr. Speaker.

And for that reason, I fully support this Bill, as I supported it in 2019, as most of my colleagues, all of my colleagues supported it in 2019, and I support it in 2026.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

None other?

Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I think that it is important that we look back at the history of this particular matter. And I think it's particularly interesting that when we look at the Hansard, because Mr. Speaker, it was exactly seven years ago. It was on March 13, 2019, that, in a different place, we were debating this exact same piece of legislation. And it is particularly interesting that the arguments are the same then as they are now. The challenge is that seven years have gone in between.

And why is that, Mr. Speaker? It is because millions of dollars of taxpayer money were spent challenging the decision of Parliament. And whether it was our Supreme Court, whether it was our Court of Appeal, or whether it was the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, all ruled that Parliament is supreme, and Parliament has the power to act. Those are the principles. And so, nothing contained inside this legislation can be even deemed as contrary to law.

Now, I will revise the speech or reprise the speech that I gave seven years ago, Mr. Speaker, because it's important to remember where this came from.

The Progressive Labour Party did not get elected in 2017 and say, *You know what, we want to fully commit to municipal reform*, et cetera, all the rest. It became an issue of necessity. And it is important that people understand what we are dealing with when

talking about a country trying to plan national infrastructure, and what happens when there is a body of persons who may not agree with what a national government is planning.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda is 21 square miles. Bermuda is a small place. We are, you know, one of the smallest places in the world to have multiple levels of government inside of a jurisdiction this small. Many of our other overseas territories are far larger than us and do not have municipalities for their various regions. But of course, because Bermuda is another world, we understand the history and the vestiges and all the rest of the things that came with it.

However, Mr. Speaker, it's important to note that I remember that it was the former Minister of Public Works, the Member, the Lieutenant Colonel Honourable David Burch, who, when we came into office to deal with matters related to a national infrastructure plan, wanted to make sure that we had an upgrade to our sewage systems in the country.

And I remember that there was a conversation and discussion that was held with the Corporation of Hamilton, who, of course, as we know, Mr. Speaker, and I mean, it is public record, so I'll say it, pumps raw sewage or lightly treated sewage onto the South Shore.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Grease balls.

Hon. E. David Burt: Still happening. We know the issues that would happen and all the rest. We got it.

And so, the whole issue is, let's go ahead and commit to the work. And this was a whole master plan, which would tie in from St. George's. It would tie in from the West End, would tie in Central, all these lines which have been digging, et cetera, all the rest.

And guess what the Corporation of Hamilton said? [They] told the Minister of the central government, who was going to pay for a countrywide sewer system, *No*.

An Hon. Member: That's right.

Hon. E. David Burt: So, let's go back to the origin of where this started from, Mr. Speaker. That's where it was, because the Cabinet said that we cannot have sub-regional bodies that will tell the elected government, who has the responsibility for providing for the people of this country, making sure that we upgrade the infrastructure to make sure that we are not dumping raw sewage out onto the South Shore, to make sure that we can tie things together at once.

What sense does it make that a 21-square-mile Island would have two separate sewage systems, Mr. Speaker?

But guess who it made sense to? The people at the Corporation of Hamilton.

Now, some may wonder what interest they may have had in retaining their own sewage system, Mr. Speaker, but that's not for discussion here. We hear

a whole lot of conversations. And let's be clear, Mr. Speaker, I accept the position of the Honourable Members who got voted in from the Progressive Labour Party from the East End. I have got it. They want their own separate Act, the same thing which they said seven years ago. And the Minister will undertake to go through that process.

But what we will not do, Mr. Speaker, is allow for seven more years to go, because as has been stated, and the legal advice is clear, if we make adjustments and changes to legislation that has already been vetted by the Supreme Court, by the Court of Appeal, and by the Privy Council, we can have another seven years before this Government or a future Government has to deal with the major infrastructure issues of this country.

Those are the facts. So, I get it. I understand the perspective. But here's the thing, Mr. Speaker. It is important for the Government to govern. It is important for us to make sure that we do not have sub-regional bodies that will have the ability to say, *No, you cannot build national infrastructure because we want our own little piece of the rock*. That is not the way that you have modern governance. It is not the way that it works. It is not the most efficient way.

How on earth would you have two separate sewer systems? How on earth would you have two separate electric grids? How on earth, if we are talking about smart cities and building and things, is the Corporation of Hamilton going to say, *no, no, no, no, no*?

Do we have those problems with the Corporation of St. George's? No.

But the reality is that we have a Municipalities Act that governs both. And the legal advice back then and now was this is the direction of travel which we have to go to. So, I accept the position that was raised by Members in the east that they want their own Act and they don't want to be tied in together. Got it.

The former Deputy Premier accepted that position and gave an undertaking when this Bill was last debated exactly seven years ago. And the same undertaking has been made today. But what we must do is move forward on this seven years' delayed legislation, which delayed progress for seven years and spent countless amounts of taxpayer dollars on both sides to arrive at something that everyone knew from the beginning. Parliament is supreme. Parliament has the right to decide.

That, Mr. Speaker, is why we are here today. And so, I am sure that we will hear other persons talking about matters related to democracy and matters related to, *Oh, people have the right to vote* and all the rest. People did have the right to vote, Mr. Speaker. They voted in a national election to elect a Parliament to make the laws for this country. That is what we do. That is where we sit. And these are the decisions that are being made in the interests of the people.

The Minister has made the arguments. Other persons made the arguments about there is still local

representation. There's still the ability. There's still all those types of things.

But let's make sure that we are clear in this. You cannot advance national policy when you would have persons who will, for whatever reason or not, say, *No, we cannot have a national sewage system. No, we cannot have a national system* because they retain the right to do so under the laws of this House. That does not make sense.

And that is the reason, Mr. Speaker, why this Government, seven years later, will advance this piece of legislation today, because it's the right thing to do for this country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution? None—oh. MP Pearman.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am conscious of the hour, so I will try and keep my points brief—

Hon. E. David Burt: Hopefully as brief as you were seven years ago.

Mr. Scott Pearman: —before . . . we are hearing more about the seven years from the Premier. We will get to that in a minute.

But before I start, Mr. Speaker, I am not sure I heard the Honourable Minister declare his interest. But let me not make that same mistake. Conyers, Dill & Pearman, where I am as a lawyer, is a ratepayer in the City of Hamilton, and I declare that. And I am sure the Minister will appreciate he has interests as well in buildings in Hamilton.

Mr. Speaker, just because you can do something, doesn't mean you should do something. What the courts have decided in the intervening seven-year period, since we sat in the other place and debated this Bill, is that this Parliament and this Government does have the power to do it. They decided no more, they decided no less.

As the Premier said, it was an issue of parliamentary sovereignty. Just because you can do something, however, does not mean you should do something. And whether or not you should do something ultimately depends on whether or not it is the right thing to do.

The Minister, in his brief to this House, made a number of points about what this Bill is not. And I would just like to touch on those points. He said firstly, *This is not a takeover of the Corporations*. Then he said, *This is not an asset grab*. Really? I am not convinced by either argument. If this is not a takeover, then what is?

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Scott Pearman: A hostile takeover of the Corporations is when you remove the democratically elected people and you put in people who are appointed either directly or indirectly by the Minister.

And I accept that there is some form of indirect control as well as direct control. And if it's not an asset grab, well again, would we be standing here having this debate if there were no assets in the Corporations? I very much doubt it. I'm not convinced.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member is misleading the House.

The Speaker: Point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: I am giving a point of order. The Honourable Member is misleading the House. Because the arguments he is making today are completely different to the arguments he made seven years ago. Because seven years ago, he admitted that this was not an asset grab. So, either he was misleading the House then or misleading the House now. I would invite him to clarify his position.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Oh-oh! Which one is it?

The Speaker: Member.

Mr. Scott Pearman: I do not accept the characterisation the Premier has just given to this House. Seven years ago, I stood up and I made a speech against this very Bill. Tonight, I stand up and make a speech against this very Bill.

What I am addressing now—

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Scott Pearman: —without misleading the House in any way—

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker, if you would allow me. The Honourable Member to be in the House. And I will quote from the ¹Hansard, from Mr. Scott Pearman. He said, and I quote, "No, no, it is not an asset grab by the Government because the entities will remain, the corporations will remain." Close quote.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Oh!

¹ Official Hansard Report, [13 March 2019](#), page 1168
Bermuda House of Assembly

Hon. E. David Burt: Either he was misleading the House then or he is misleading the House now, Mr. Speaker. But he cannot change his position.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Should I, should I give the words some context? “No, no, this is not an asset grab by the Government.” How’s that for sarcasm, MP—Premier?

Anyway, the point I was making is what the Honourable Minister—

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Come on.

[Inaudible interjections]

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: As I have said, the Honourable Member was misleading the House. He either was misleading the House then or [is] misleading the House now. But he cannot have two different positions on the same piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Pearman: I am going to be directed by you, Mr. Speaker.

Shall I continue?

The Speaker: I’m trying to find the right context for this in that . . . you got to see. It has been seven years and in seven years people’s viewpoints can change. I give that.

Wait, wait, wait. Don’t shake heads yet. I am saying your viewpoints can change in seven years.

If your viewpoint has changed, different from what was said, then it has changed. But if your viewpoint is the same as it was seven years ago, then it hasn’t changed.

But it just needs clarity on where it is.

Mr. Scott Pearman: I would be very happy to clarify. Thank you for your direction.

My viewpoint has not changed just as I thought it was an asset grab seven years ago. So, too, do I stand here tonight and say it is an asset grab today. And I am not, therefore—

The Speaker: Wait, wait—

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. No point of order. The comment that was read earlier was actually

from the Hansard. And Hansard said that he indicated it wasn’t an asset grab.

Mr. Scott Pearman: That was a sarcastic remark, Mr. Speaker. *No, no, this is not an asset grab*, i.e., question, [mark].

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Scott Pearman: I mean, listen, I have a lot of points, Mr. Speaker. It was the Honourable Minister who stood up and said that this was not an asset grab. And I have merely said that I find his arguments unconvincing. And if you would like me to move on, I will. But I do not accept that seven years ago, the quote that the Premier has just thrown at me—

Hon. E. David Burt: It’s in Hansard! *No, no, it is not an asset grab by the Government.*

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Pearman: And if he insists, Mr. Speaker, I will now address the Premier in this way, which is whatever it was seven years ago, as we stand here tonight, I am wholly unpersuaded by the Minister’s arguments that it is not an asset grab this evening. And I hope that that puts paid to the Premier’s intervention.

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Mr. Scott Pearman: But seeing as he’s intervened, let’s talk about some of the remarks that he made. Because what he said is the reason we are coming back for all of this is because he has been stifled for seven years. Because seven years ago, this Government, with what money (I would ask) went to build a national sewage system. And they had their plans stifled by some municipal authority.

Well, I would respectfully remind the Premier of a point that was made by his very Deputy, by the very Minister who presented the Bill, and indeed by MP Fahy behind me. At any point in the last seven years, Honourable Premier, the Minister could have stepped in and intervened. If you wanted that intervention, if you wanted that sewer system dragged through and pushed through, you had the power, you had the statutory power, as both—

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: The Honourable and Learned Members is misleading the House, because clearly, that was the very first issue that we raised. It was not

the law that was passed. The Municipalities Act gave us the right to possibly and go ahead and direct. And it was the legal advice that says, no, we do not.

Now, the Honourable Learned Member, if he wants to become the Attorney General and the legal counsel of the country, then that's fine. But the fact is, that was the advice that the Government had, and that is the same exact points that were made in the legislature when we debated this seven years ago.

The Speaker: The Premier has cleared out the legal advice that was provided.

Mr. Scott Pearman: There we are.

The Speaker: And they went by the legal advice that was provided.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Well, if the legal advice is the reason that nothing's happened for seven years, then let's blame the lawyers and not the Corporations, shall we? In any event, what is happening—

An Hon. Member: He's right.

Mr. Scott Pearman: I was saying the other point. There was another denial by the Honourable Minister. He said it was not a takeover. And we were wondering whether or not this would be happening, if both of the Corporations didn't have something worthy of controlling, worthy of grabbing. And I think that is an important word, *control*. Because, make no mistake, if this Bill passes here, and in another place, and if it is signed into law by the Governor, the Minister will have control of the Corporations, direct or indirect.

And as someone behind me earlier in the debate, I think from the other side, *one man, one vote*, if we can still say one man, in this day and age (perhaps we shouldn't, *one person, one vote*), it is now *no person, no vote*. And it's interesting, isn't it? Because so far, we've not heard anyone from the Government address the issue of those who are now being denied the vote, namely the ratepayers of the Corporations.

And, Mr. Speaker, there's a great word in history that launched the sailing of ships and massive wars, and that is *no taxation without representation*. Well, that is precisely what is being introduced tonight. And it's a principle that has been fought over, and it's a principle that's important. And I think we really must be careful that we don't have a drift towards corporations of cronyism.

So, Mr. Speaker, what should we do?

Well, rather than just trotting out a Bill from seven years ago, this Government could think big; it could think bold. Where are the great cities of the world going? They are going towards elected democracies. They are instituting mayors, writ large, to run these great cities. So why not two of Hamilton? Perhaps we should have a directly elected mayor of Hamilton,

elected by the entire Island. There have also been some suggestions by the Honourable Members for St. George's, and it wasn't just having their own Act, as the Premier said. If one listened to the speeches that were made, at least two out of three, and possibly all three, mentioned a hybrid system. It was better than what we got tonight.

So again, I made the suggestion, to no avail, the other day, but perhaps the Honourable Minister might want to rise and report and consider the submissions from his own MPs in the back and see whether or not at least some bit of democracy would be better than none at all.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps one of the most famous advocates for democracy in history was the Athenian, Pericles of Athens. He said this, "Freedom is the sure possession of those alone who have the courage to defend it." *Freedom is the sure possession of those alone who have the courage to defend it*. Tonight, we can either vote for this Bill, or we can defend the freedom of the democratic vote.

And I respectfully suggest we should all have the courage to defend democracy. *Freedom is the sure possession of those alone who have the courage to defend it*.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time? None other?

Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I find it rather rich that the Honourable Member who just took his seat, talked about freedom and the issuing of freedom. I just find that rather rich knowing the history of this country.

An Hon. Member: Explain it. Why?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: You can read between the lines.

An Hon. Member: No, I don't want to read between the lines.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: But, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about a few things. And when you talk about—

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —the municipalities, and let's talk about the city, the Corporation of Hamilton for just a second. If memory serves me correct, a certain Minister from the OBA did take control. And you remember the figure \$18 million? Does that ring a bell with anyone, Mr. Speaker?

What did the taxpayers of the country have to pay because of decisions made by the Corporation of Hamilton? How many millions of dollars did they spend

on the court cases over the last seven years? How many millions of dollars did they spend during that process of protecting the city back in 2010, Mr. Speaker? When they took out full-page ads in *The Royal Gazette* at \$4,500 per page, per day. For months on end, Mr. Speaker, for months on end. And here we are again today.

And as the Premier said, and reminded everyone about the sewage issue, because that was a big issue back then. It was a very big issue. And we still have sewage issues in the city. And I know, and maybe others don't know, but I know that there are current plans for the city to revamp the sewage system that they put in several years ago.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's things like that which is why you need a joined-up organisation. And I will say "organisation" to run certain segments of our country.

The people of this country, Mr. Speaker, voted in the Progressive Labour Party three times since 2017. And when they were, because Members over on the other side talked about trust. *You want us to put the trust in the hands of a Minister.* Well, that trust in the Minister came from the people of this country in the general election. If they had an issue with the way we were running the country, they would have booted us out, Mr. Speaker. But instead, they re-elected us three times.

And you want to talk about trust? That Honourable Member who talked about trust sat in a seat for six months. And we saw what unfolded in the paper over that period of time.

And you talk about trust? But that's why the people of this country trust us.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Let's—

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Point of order. Come on.

The Speaker: Let's, let's not go down that road.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Let's not go down that road.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: That's why the people of this country keep voting us in, Mr. Speaker, because they trust us.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: They trust us to run the country and to look after the finances of this country. And they will continue to do so.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let me make it clear.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I heard the East End MPs talk tonight and talk with passion and talk with care about the people they represent. And it's not lost on me, and it's not lost on their colleagues. We hear them loud and clear.

And, Mr. Speaker, I will repeat what the former Deputy Premier of the Progressive Labour Party said back then. It's that when this Bill passes tonight, the first call that will be made tomorrow will be to the MPs from the East End. And let's talk about how we can move forward together with the people of St. George's. And that's what we will do, Mr. Speaker.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move that the Bill be committed.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Deputy Speaker.

House in Committee at 10:49 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

COMMITTEE ON BILL

MUNICIPALITIES REFORM ACT 2026

The Chairman: Members, we are in Committee of the whole [House] for the Bill entitled [Municipalities Reform Act 2026](#). I call on the Minister responsible.
Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I move that . . . I would like to move clauses 1 through 12.

The Chairman: It has been moved that we consider clauses 1 through 12.

Are there any objections? There are none.
Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, as stated previously, this Bill would abolish municipal elections, provide [for the] appointment of Members of the Corporations, and make consequential amendments to the Municipalities Act 1923 (the principal Act). It would also make certain directions given by the Minister to a Corporation subject to parliamentary scrutiny.

Clause 1, Madam Chairman, is self-explanatory.

Clause 2 abolishes municipal elections. Elections are replaced by selection and appointment of Members. Apart from clause 5, the remainder of this Act makes consequential amendments.

Clause 3 amends section 1(1) of the principal Act to repeal various definitions that are applicable only

to municipal elections as there will be no more municipal elections.

Clause 4 amends section 7 of the principal Act. Subsections (4)(b) and (8) are amended to delete references to being elected and to insert a reference to being appointed.

Clause 5 amends section 7AA of the principal Act by amending subsection (1A)(a) and inserting subsection (3A). The amendment to subsection (1A)(a) clarifies that if an act or thing done by a Corporation would otherwise not be construed as being for municipal purposes, it will be deemed to be for municipal purposes if done under a direction by the Minister. A direction will have legislative effect, and therefore be a statutory instrument and subject to parliamentary scrutiny, if it expands the meaning of “municipal purpose” by directing the Corporation to do anything that would otherwise not be for a “municipal purpose” (see the Privy Council decision of *Mexico Infrastructure Finance LLC v The Corporation of Hamilton* [2019] UKPC 2, at paragraphs 57 to 59, which construes “municipal purpose” very narrowly). Subsection (3A) therefore provides that directions given by the Minister to a Corporation under section 7AA(3)(aa) of the principal Act (directing the Corporation to do any acts or things that the Minister, acting under the general authority of the Cabinet, requires the Corporation to do) are statutory instruments subject to parliamentary scrutiny by the negative resolution procedure.

Clause 6 repeals the following sections of the principal Act, which currently provide for municipal elections, as there will be no more municipal elections: section 9 (municipal elections); section 9A (eligibility to vote in municipal elections); section 9B (application of Parliamentary Election Act 1978 as modified by order); section 9BA (registration of municipal residents); section 9C (registration of business ratepayers); section 9D (requirements for registration in the business ratepayers’ register); section 9E (registration of persons in business ratepayers’ register); section 9F (maintenance of business ratepayers’ register); section 9G (objections to registration); section 9H (application of Parliamentary Election Rules 1979); and section 91 *[sic]* (false statements, et cetera). It also repeals section 17—

The Chairman: Minister, that’s 9I.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Pardon?

The Chairman: [It is section] 9I.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: [Section] 9I, sorry.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Sorry, thank you. Thank you. It’s been a long day, Madam Chairman. Thank you for that.

It also repeals section 17 (tenure of office) of the principal Act. The section currently provides that a Member of a Corporation holds office from the date of his election until the declaration of the results of the next ordinary municipal election. Under the repealed section 9(4)(a), the next ordinary municipal election would have been a day in the week following the first Sunday in May (in other words, between 4 and 8 May 2026).

Clause 7 inserts sections 17A and 17B in the principal Act. Section 17A provides that the current elected Members’ term of office will end on 11 May 2026 (at the end of that day). Section 17B provides that the Minister shall appoint Members in accordance with the provisions of the Fourth Schedule (inserted by clause 11), and their term of office will begin on 12 May 2026 (immediately after the elected Members’ term ends).

Clause 8 amends section 18 of the principal Act to delete the references to the election and nomination of candidates and replace them with references to appointment.

Clause 9 repeals section 18A (determination of proportion of business ratepayers’ Councillors to residents’ Councillors) of the principal Act, as this is part of the current election process.

Clause 10 amends section 19 (vacancies) of the principal Act to reflect that there will no longer be municipal elections, and to provide that notice of a vacancy will no longer be published by the Secretary or the Mayor (as the case may be) in the *Gazette*, but will rather be given in writing by the Secretary to the Minister.

Clause 11 inserts the Fourth Schedule, which provides for the appointment of Members and for their tenure of office. For each Corporation, the Mayor and four Councillors will be appointed by the Minister. The other four Councillors will be appointed on the recommendation of a Selection Committee appointed by the Minister. It also provides that the name of every person appointed to the office of Mayor or Councillor of a Corporation, and any vacancy in such office, be published in the *Gazette*.

Clause 12 revokes the Municipalities (Election) Order 2015.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to clauses 1 through 12?

There are no others. Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I move that the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: Would you . . . it has been moved that the preamble be approved.

Are there any objections?

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I move . . . I move the clauses 1 through 12.

The Chairman: It has been moved that clauses 1 through 12 be approved.

Are there any objections?

There are none.

[Motion carried: Clauses 1 through 12 passed.]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: 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?

There are none. So moved.

[Gavel]

[Motion carried: The Municipalities Reform Act 2026 was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed without amendment.]

House resumed at 10:57 pm

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

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

MUNICIPALITIES REFORM ACT 2026

The Speaker: Members, are there any objections to the Bill entitled Municipalities Reform Act 2026 being reported to the House as printed?

An Hon. Member: Objections.

The Speaker: Objections and names are being called.

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: We are officially . . . Mr. Somner, have we officially started the two minutes?

[No audible response.]

The Speaker: Okay.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. E. David Burt: Can I ask exactly what is attempted to be voted on at this point in time? Because I

understand that there was no objection to the matter being reported to the House. The Bill was approved, it was sent to the House, so I am trying to understand exactly under what Standing Order is an objection currently being launched at this time.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker, if I may refer to Standing Orders 29(9) and 29(8). It says *[at] the conclusion of the Committee consideration of the Bill, the Member in charge may move the Bill be reported to the House and the question shall be put without amendment or debate.* That question was put. It was approved without objection.

And Standing Order 29(9), states *When a Bill is reported from the Committee of the Whole House, it shall be [referred] for a Third Reading.*

Those are the Standing Orders, Mr. Speaker. I say that we move to a third reading. The Honourable Members missed their opportunity to object in Committee.

The Speaker: But to be clear, it can still be objected to at the third reading.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: At the third reading, it can be objected at the third reading. So, the time will come at the third reading for it to be objected then. Okay.

We are now at the point where it's been received by the House, and now that there's no other business . . . there's no other business. No other business—

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: So, we are now calling for the third reading.

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: At this stage.

So, the objection that was just raised will now be put off until the third reading. Now we are at the third reading at this stage.

So, Minister, would you like to do your third reading?

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 21

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that Standing Order 21 be suspended to enable me to move the Bill entitled Municipalities Reform Act 2026 be now read the third time by its title only.

The Speaker: Are there any objections?

An Hon. Member: Objections.

The Speaker: And you are calling for—

An Hon. Member: Names.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: The two-minute clock will start now for Members to be present in order for us to take their names.

[Pause for the ringing of the bell]

[Crosstalk]

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, if I may, to refer to Standing Order 30(2).

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: It does say, for “the third reading of a Bill an amendment may be proposed to delete the word ‘now’ and add the words at the end of the question ‘six months hence’; or an amendment may be moved to delete all of the words after [the] word ‘that’ in order to [add] words stating the reason for opposing its passage, but such motion should be strictly relevant to the Bill and not deal with its details.”

So, I am not entirely certain of what . . . so, we are asking . . . I want to make sure that we are clear on what we are voting on at this particular point in time. Because I know that matters are read and referred for the third reading, and then the matters that are stated here strictly state what amendments may or may not be allowed to the motion that is moved by the Member.

The Speaker: At any of the different stages, when we bring it in, and the Chair asks, *Are there any objections?* There is . . . the fact that the question is put, Members have a right to sit here and say nay or yay.

And we are at a stage where the Members have indicated they would like to take a vote on it. And the vote has been called, the two minutes have been given, and in two minutes, about, the two-minute time will be up, and we will take the vote.

[Crosstalk]

[Pause]

The Speaker: You can do your names now.

The Clerk: Okay, Members, the motion is for a third reading by the Minister, and those in favour of the third reading will vote aye. Those opposed to the third reading will vote nay.

DIVISION

[Motion in favour of the third reading on the Bill entitled Municipalities Reform Act 2026]

Ayes: 19

Hon. J. Adams
Pastor L. Bean
Hon. E. D. Burt
Hon. O. Darrell
Hon. Z. J. S. De Silva
Rev. Dr. E. A. Dill
Hon. T. Furbert
Hon. W. L. Furbert
Hon. J. Hayward
Hon. A. Lightbourne
Mr. D. Lister III
Hon. D. V. S. Rabain
Mr. W. L. Scott
Mr. S. Simmons
Mr. H. K. E. Swan
Mr. N. S. Tyrrell
Hon. M. A. Weeks
Mr. P. Wilmot
Hon. K. N. Wilson

Nays: 11

Mr. V. Campbell
Hon. L. C. Cannonier
Dr. D. DeCouto
Hon. M. Fahy
Mr. R. King
Mr. S. Pearman
Mr. J. Richardson
Mr. D. Robinson
Hon. B. Smith
Ms. L. Smith
Ms. R. Tucker

Absent: 5

Mr. C. L. Dickinson
Mr. C. Famous
Ms. L. F. Foggo
Mrs. R. Ming
Mr. J. S. Simmons

The Clerk: Okay, the Ayes are 19, the Nays are 11 [and 5 absent]. The motion is carried.

The Speaker: The third reading has been approved. That now brings us to the motion—

[Motion carried by majority on division: The Municipalities Reform Act 2026 to be given a third reading.]

[No audio]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a third time by its title only and passed.

Several Hon. Members: No, no.

An Hon. Member: We already voted.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Oh?

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: Third time by its title and is now moved.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Okay

The Speaker: And we will do the motion.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that this Honourable House do now adjourn until Monday the 16th of March.

The Speaker: Does any Member wish to speak to that? Minister Hayward.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker: Yes.

ENGLISH PROFICIENCY TEST IN BERMUDA

Hon. Jason Hayward: I wish to address a matter regarding English proficiency in Bermuda. I want to make it abundantly clear that this Government will retain the English proficiency test for employees and work permit holders in Bermuda.

Bermuda is an English-speaking country—

An Hon. Member: Last time I checked.

Hon. Jason Hayward: —and it is an expectation that the employees who work within Bermuda have a level of English proficiency. And it's extremely important for a number of reasons.

Mr. Speaker, the previous work permit policies have always had the expectation that workers obtaining a work permit have a level of English proficiency. We trusted that employers were going to do the right thing for many years. And what we found was that there was a flagrant abuse of that policy. As a result of that, when we revised the policy we instituted an English proficiency test to ensure workers emanating from non-English-speaking countries, who did not have a college or university degree from an English-speaking institution, must prove proficiency. And that will remain.

Mr. Speaker, I have heard stories of Bermudian workers who work in a kitchen of . . . in a restaurant that is filled with non-Bermudians, and they speak a different language from that Bermudian, and that person is not able to properly integrate into the work environment within that kitchen. I have heard of young Bermudian landscapers who wanted to build a career in landscaping but have been placed with entire crews that do not speak English and, as a result, cannot communicate with their employees.

Mr. Speaker, I have known of employees who come to the Labour Department to make complaints of abuse and violations to the law but require an interpreter. Similarly, persons make complaints where they are being forced to work outside their provisions within their work permit, and they are unable to communicate to the Immigration Department. These individuals cannot read their employment contracts. They cannot read

the laws of the land that provides them with rights. They do not know their rights because they do not understand their rights.

Mr. Speaker, I have spoken to business owners who have crews of workers who cannot communicate to each other because they do not speak a common language. I have heard of business owners who then have to hire bilingual supervisors so that they can provide the instruction. But on the days in which those bilingual supervisors cannot show up to work or are on vacation, they have challenges communicating with their staff.

Mr. Speaker, I have heard numerous complaints from Bermudians as it pertains to non-Bermudians providing them with a service, and they are not able to effectively communicate with the service provider.

Mr. Speaker, as Bermuda is a small country, it is important to maintain our cultural identity as well. We simply cannot have growing sub-communities within Bermuda who speak alternative languages and do not communicate in the English language. And, as a result of that, we saw that it was a growing problem, and we sought to address it with an English proficiency test.

Mr. Speaker, it is fundamentally important that persons understand the importance of speaking English in Bermuda. And, as a result of that, this Government will be unwavering in ensuring that workers who enter into Bermuda speak and have a level of English proficiency. I have heard enough from enough employers surrounding the testing scores, and the Ministry of Economy and Labour will put out guidance as it pertains to the testing scores, because some score high in the speaking of English and low in the writing of English. For some occupation categories, the writing of English is less important than being able to articulate in English. And as a result of that, we will ensure that we provide the appropriate guidance.

But rest assured, the test will remain. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

None other?

MP Simmons, are you raising to make a contribution?

ENGLISH PROFICIENCY IN BERMUDA

Mr. Scott Simmons: Mr. Speaker, good evening, sir. I just will speak very briefly on and in support of the Minister as it relates to this one.

I recognise, Mr. Speaker, throughout Bermuda, that we are challenged in labour and that we are also challenged in the way that we relate to each other in our employment and our labour environments.

Mr. Speaker, I struggle on this one because I think that there are those in our community who don't see a problem with our foreign nationals who choose to

speak in their language as they see fit. But, Mr. Speaker, I have existed in environments where our foreign visitors and workers in our different hotels and in our different environments where I have been, from having served in the Police Service, having worked in banks, and also having worked in hospitality and in government.

Mr. Speaker, in this broad spectrum, I must say that we have encountered many who have chosen to converse in their own language, in my humble opinion, for whatever reason they wish to do so.

But, Mr. Speaker, I want to say this, and I say this delicately and out of respect for our foreign nationals, and I want to *pre-face* this—

The Speaker: Preface.

Mr. Scott Simmons: Preface this . . . it's the first time I've had a challenge.

[Laughter]

Mr. Scott Simmons: Because, Mr. Speaker, this subject is a subject that we refuse to address, and we refuse to see it for the value that it is, and it is disrespectful to Bermudians. And we are afraid in our different environments to bring it up because there are those in our community who take exception when we say it and when we are offended by it.

I have been in many circumstances. In hospitality, I mentioned those different occupations that I have been involved in, and it has been very vexatious. But when you bring it up, everybody says, *Why are you making a fuss about that? Why are you upset that I'm speaking in my own language?*

Mr. Speaker, I have to say this, that Bermudians, if they are uncomfortable in environments where the foreigner feels comfortable enough to hold conversations in [their] presence . . . Mr. Speaker, let me say this, if we're going to be frank about this.

The Speaker: Go right ahead.

Mr. Scott Simmons: Because, Mr. Speaker, I think in a lot of our environments we try to be as accommodating as we can. We try to make people feel comfortable in Bermuda, and I think sometimes Bermudians, as Bermudians, in looking for that level of comfortableness for them, we forget ourselves. And sometimes, Mr. Speaker, I say this with the greatest of respect, we go too far. Sometimes you have to put your foot down. And I think a lot of times, in doing that we feel bad, but we have to realise that sometimes you have to.

I was walking through from the kitchen, and I don't have to express my current capacity in hospitality where I think that if I say it, in most circumstances in the hotel, it is so. But I'll say this, Mr. Speaker: I walked from the kitchen, going into the dining room, and I noticed that from the kitchen to the dining room there was

no English. And there are policies that are in place, and there are procedures that are in place, where English language is encouraged, for a number of reasons, whether it be safety reasons, health and safety, whether it be for, just so that we are able to transition from one department to the next that we have a consistent language. We can't have all departments speaking a different language.

So, I'm walking from the kitchen all the way through to the dining room. No one is speaking English. So, I simply said to the *maître d'*, who was standing there, I said to him, *I don't understand anything that you guys are saying.*

He said to me, *Exactly.*

How do you think I felt? He said, *Exactly.*

I was in another circumstance where individuals know my view as it relates to language in these environments, that we are better served if we do speak English. It is the national language. And the individuals who were in those circumstances chose to take the route they took. And that was . . . *I am not speaking, no, I'm talking in my own language.*

There is nothing more frustrating. Individuals have come into my office at every level I've been in, in hospitality, and have expressed their displeasure with it.

Mr. Speaker, I'll repeat this. There are some things in our Bermudian diaspora, nationally, that affect us. That is a part of our culture. And I will repeat this, Mr. Speaker. Bermudians, we have accepted things. Sometimes, you have to put your foot down.

Now, individuals will say, *but this is not the line in the sand. This is not the time for us to say, you know, that we could . . .* Mr. Speaker, I just believe that we should understand this for the value that it is. And it is out of respect for Bermudians. It isn't difficult for certain parts of our society, certain classes of our society, to accept it because they live very close to the element and the foreign element that lives in this country. For those of us who have some distance between those from overseas speaking these languages and us, we should never feel bad about bringing it up and stating it clearly.

I have to qualify this, Mr. Speaker. I am not against our foreign nationals. I sit in the capacity as chair of the Immigration Board. I am well aware of the behaviour. I'm well aware of the complaints. And I'm well aware of the individuals who now are struggling with this particular exam.

When you decide to travel overseas and become a part of a whole different country, then there are things that happen in that country that you have to accept. There are requirements. And everybody knows the requirements. But, Mr. Speaker, in Bermuda, we relax the requirements because we don't want to offend anybody. We don't want to hurt anybody's feelings. And that is why our foreign nationals on so many issues in this country have absolutely no respect for us.

This is a tough, difficult subject. This is probably a subject no one expects to necessarily come from me because I felt that I had been a part of a society in Bermuda [where] we have tried to work with our different nationalities in this country. But how much more do you want Bermudians to bend?

We say speak English, and suddenly there's a national uproar. What type of foolishness is this? It is the national language. It is simple and it needs to be instituted, and it needs to be; this is what the standard is. And I will say this, Mr. Speaker, I am aware that there are challenges in labour. It is difficult to find Bermudians to fill all the positions that we have.

The challenge that has now started to happen is that in trying to find qualified individuals there is now a difficulty, or perceived difficulty, in finding individuals who speak English to fill those roles. But we have to set . . . if that is the case, then I'm sure that the Ministry will begin the process of looking into how that can be addressed. But until such time, the standard is the standard. And we shouldn't cower from it.

Individuals say this is a small issue. That language is no big thing. Just let them speak in whatever language they want to do and do it. Mr. Speaker, I am speaking of this small issue of language, the smaller, I apologise, issue of language. But I am also speaking about the larger issue of Bermudians always, and the Bermudians always having to bend.

If they say that they feel uncomfortable about something, the minute that they bring it up, all of a sudden individuals say, *You shouldn't feel that way and you have to drop it.* And say, *Oh, now I'm going to do it.* If this is something that is making . . . this is an issue that is making our people in Bermuda uncomfortable, then it needs to be addressed. And it will be addressed. And it has been addressed.

I'll finish on this note, Mr. Speaker, and I say this with the greatest of respect for everyone in Bermuda, my fellow Bermudians. For so long we have had to settle. We have had to say okay, all is well, and have walked away in our own circles feeling as if we have been left behind, we've been ignored, and we have not been listened to. If this is allowed, if it is said in a relaxation, say *Okay, don't worry about the language* . . . this wasn't instituted for nothing. The Minister articulated it. This is part of a greater picture. It's part of a system in Bermuda where we have had to always give, give, give, and give.

So, when did you expect for Bermudians to say they've had enough? There's probably going to be individuals who are going to say, *Well, this is not the issue. Why would you worry about the language. It doesn't matter; this is no big thing.* But feel it for yourself when individuals are standing around talking in their own language, you're not a part of it, and they tell you, *Exactly, exactly.* Something must be done.

Mr. Speaker, I spoke on the fact that we recognise that labour is an issue. We recognise that there are some roles that cannot be filled or are not being

filled by Bermudians, and that it is harder and harder to find those individuals to fill those roles. But on construction sites, for safety reasons throughout our different industries, we must insist that English is the standard language. It must be in writing, it must be on the walls, anything that's giving advice, that it's all done in English, and that is the national language of Bermuda, and that is where we should sit.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, MP

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this hour?

Any other Member?

Any other Member? Going once, going twice, it's gone.

Members, thank you for your contribution today, and we will be back here on Monday morning at ten o'clock to do the conclusion of the annual budget debates. So, rest up this weekend, get plenty of down time to relax, and come back for another full day on Monday.

With that, Members, the House now stands adjourned.

[Gavel]

[At 11:29 pm, the House stood adjourned until 10:00 am, Monday, 16 March 2026.]

**BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
16 MARCH 2026
TIME 10:03 AM**

Sitting Number 32 of the 2025/2026 Session

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

The Speaker: Good morning, Members. Once the Sergeant secures us there, the Clerk will lead us in prayer.

I trust everyone had a nice weekend and are refreshed for another day of session.

PRAYERS

[Prayers read by Mr. Clark Somner, Clerk]

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Somner.
Good morning, Members.

[Gavel]

The Speaker: The House is now in session.

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

The Speaker: Members, the Minutes from the 11th and 13th of March have been deferred.

MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR

The Speaker: There are none.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER
OR MEMBER PRESIDING**

APOLOGIES

The Speaker: Again, we have the announcement from MP Christopher Famous that he will be absent today.

MESSAGES FROM THE SENATE

The Speaker: There are none.

**PAPERS AND OTHER
COMMUNICATIONS TO THE HOUSE**

The Speaker: We have two such papers this morning, and the first is in the name of the Minister of Economy and Labour.
Minister.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY
2023–2027**

**STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3:
ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SMALL BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT 2023–2027 UPDATE**

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

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 3, Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

The next Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister of Health.
Minister.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

**HEALTH INSURANCE (STANDARD HEALTH
BENEFIT) AMENDMENT REGULATIONS 2026**

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for the consideration of the Honourable House of Assembly the Health Insurance (Standard Health Benefit) Amendment Regulations 2026 proposed to be made by the Minister responsible for Health under section 40 of the Health Insurance Act 1970.

The Speaker: All right.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Thank you.

The Speaker: No problem.

Good morning, Members. That's all the Statements. We now move on.

PETITIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

**STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS AND
JUNIOR MINISTERS**

The Speaker: We have two such Statements this morning.

The first is in the name of the Minister of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport.
Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good morning.

The Speaker: Good morning.

44TH ANNUAL SPORTS AWARDS: ELEVATING SPORTS TOGETHER

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Speaker, our National Sports Policy guides us with a five-year commitment to elevate the value of sport in Bermuda. The Annual Sports Award serve as a powerful example of the Government's dedication to celebrating excellence, perseverance and leadership within our sporting community. Several awards were presented across a number of categories to honour individuals and teams whose accomplishments have brought pride to Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, allow me briefly to outline the selection process for these awards. Each December the Department of Sport and Recreation launches a public call for nominations. Submissions are welcomed from members of the public and from the National Sport Governing Bodies. Once the nomination period closes, all applications are forwarded to a selection committee for review. The committee evaluates nominations across all categories and determines whether award recipients will be based on established criteria. This committee is appointed annually by the Minister responsible for Sport and conducts its work through a ballot process overseen by the Committee Chair.

Utilising a point-based scoring system, the selection committee comprises of representatives from several sectors of the sporting community. The Director of Sport and Recreation, [the Chairperson], two representatives from the sports media, press, radio or television; two representatives involved in Olympic sports; two representatives from non-Olympic sports; and a senior sport development officer serving as an ex-officio secretary.

Mr. Speaker, the highest honour of the evening, Athlete of the Year, is reserved for athletes who have demonstrated a consistent level of excellence throughout the year. The 2026 recipients were:

- Male Athlete of the Year, Sebastian Kempe (Sailing)
- Female Athlete of the Year, Caitlyn Bobb (Athletics)
- Junior Male Athlete of the Year, Elijah Daley (Swimming)
- Junior Female Athlete of the Year, Robin Selley [(Archery)]

Mr. Speaker, if I can just clarify, these recipients are for the work that they did in the 2025 year.

These outstanding athletes have once again demonstrated that sport matters, delivering exceptional performances on the international stage and serving as an inspiration for our next generation.

Mr. Speaker, as Minister responsible for Sport, I have the distinct honour of selecting and presenting awards for Bermuda's National Sports of Football and Cricket. The recipients were:

Football:

- Male: Jonté Smith (North Village Community Club)
- Female: Jenay Edness[-Gomez] (Dandy Stars)

Cricket:

- Male: Kevon Fubler (Plays with St. George's)
- Female: Brianna Ray (Who I think we can say plays her cricket all over the world, but she is now recently registered with the Somerset Cricket Club, Mr. Speaker, which I think you would also be very familiar with.)

Mr. Speaker, awards were also presented in several additional categories as follows:

Senior Achievement Award—recognising athletes who have demonstrated high standards of performance in national and international competition.

Male Recipients:

- Sebastian Kempe
- Jack Harvey
- Jaydon Roberts
- Nicholas Narraway

Female Recipients:

- Caitlyn Bobb
- Erica Hawley
- Emma Harvey
- Jessica Lewis

Junior Achievement Award

Male Recipients:

- Elijah Daley
- Oliver Betschart
- Miles Outerbridge
- Cameron Adkins

Female Recipients:

- Robin Selley
- Tatiana Sousa
- Charlotte Millington
- Marleigh Howes

Mr. Speaker, the Appreciation Award recognises clubs, organisations, or companies that have demonstrated sustained community support through sport programming for a minimum of five years. This year's recipients were:

- Fat Tire Massive
- ShotoCup Bermuda

The Special Achievement Award honours individuals who have made a significant and sustained

contribution to sport beyond athletic participation. Recipients were:

- Katura Horton-Perinchief
- Juanita Blee
- Ross Roberts

The [Sport] Citation Award, recognising individuals who have distinguished themselves in sport both past and present, was awarded to:

- DeVon Bean
- Leopold Kuchler

Mr. Speaker, the Special Recognition Award for individuals or teams went to:

- Thomas Cechini
- Bermuda Senior Men's National Football Team
- Scott Barnes
- Bermuda Triathlon Youth and Junior CARIFTA Team

Finally, the Team of the Year Award, presented to teams who have distinguished themselves internationally during the calendar year, was awarded to:

- Bermuda Women's National Netball Team
- Bermuda Davis Cup Tennis Team

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry was delighted to once again host this prestigious event, celebrating the best and brightest within Bermuda's sporting community. The camaraderie, pride, and spirit displayed throughout the evening were a true reflection of the strength of sport in Bermuda.

I extend my sincere gratitude to the Sports Awards Committee, the dedicated staff of the Department of Sport and Recreation, and all those who have contributed to the success of this year's event. Together, we will continue to recognise excellence, celebrate achievement, and elevate sport in Bermuda.

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.

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

The Speaker: Good morning.

BERMUDA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2023–2027 UPDATE

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to continue reporting on Bermuda's Economic Development Strategy 2023–2027, following my previous reports on Strategic Priority 1: *Local and International Business Retention and Expansion*, and on Strategic Priority 2, *Business Attraction and Investment*

Promotion. Today, I will speak about Strategic Priority 3, *Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development*.

Mr. Speaker, Strategic Priority 3 supports Bermudians who start and grow small businesses that create jobs, build community wealth, and strengthen resilience. This is done by improving access to advice, finance, concessions, and an easier pathway through government.

A central focus under this priority is improving access to practical support at each stage of our entrepreneurial journey. This includes providing business advice, training, and guidance to those who are moving from a simple business idea to a registered business and form a small operation to a growing entrepreneur. BEDC is delivering practical support through one-to-one advice and structure programmes that include financing and that help entrepreneurs expand networks and build sustainable enterprises that create stable jobs.

In addition, BEDC is ensuring that the products that it designs, and that are intended to support entrepreneurs, are understood, accessible, and used by the people they intend to help. This covers not only BEDC's own products but also the concessions that are available through various legislative instruments to reduce cost pressures and lower structural barriers. That is because support that is not known or is too difficult to access will not deliver the desired outcomes.

Small business growth today also depends on digital readiness. Many entrepreneurs can produce a good product or service, but still struggle to reach customers, engage in e-commerce, or market beyond conventional local channels. BEDC's ByBermuda Virtual Marketplace, therefore, supports local business adoption of e-commerce—65 sellers and 85 buyers are active on the platform so far.

Mr. Speaker, last but not least, Strategic Priority 3 is about widening access to opportunity. It is about backing Bermudians who are prepared to take the risk of building something of their own and ensuring that they have the tools, finance, skills, and support to grow. This is how we strengthen our local economy, expand employment, and build a broader base for long-term prosperity.

This concludes my update on Strategic Priority 3 of the Economic Development Strategy 2023–2027. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, that brings us to a close of the Statements for this morning.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The Speaker: There are none.

QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: There are no written questions this morning, so the questions today will come from the Statements that were given just now. And we have a Member who has indicated he has questions for Minister Hayward on his Statement just now.

MP DeCouto, would you like to put your question?

QUESTION 1: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2023–2027, STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT 2023–2027 UPDATE

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Good morning to those who are listening, and thank you, Minister, for the update. Obviously, it's an important part of your strategy.

The ByBermuda Virtual Marketplace was mentioned with 65 sellers and 85 buyers. Does the Honourable Minister have an estimate of the revenue that has been flowing through that ByBermuda platform?

Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I am just looking through the report to see if it's captured, but it is a . . . it was reported in the budget brief to the House, the actual figure, that this entrepreneur has actually generated on that particular platform, but I will endeavour to get the information to the Honourable Member.

The Speaker: Any supplementary or second question? None? Okay.

Thank you, Members. That brings us to a close of the Question Period. We'll now move on.

CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY SPEECHES

The Speaker: Any this morning?
None this morning?
Okay. Thank you. We'll 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

GOVERNMENT BILLS

The Speaker: There is one Bill to be introduced this morning by the Minister of Health.
Minister.

BILL

FIRST READING

HEALTH INSURANCE (MUTUAL RE-INSURANCE FUND) (PRESCRIBED SUM) VALIDATION ACT 2026

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, I'm introducing the following Bill for its first reading so that it may be placed on the Order Paper for the next day of meeting, namely the Health Insurance (Mutual Re-insurance Fund) (Prescribed Sum) Validation Act 2026.

The Speaker: Thank you.
No other Bills.

NOTICE OF MOTIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Speaker: That now brings us to the reason for today, the resumption of the Committee of Supply for the further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue [and Expenditure] for the period of 2026/27.

And again, for the listening audience, when we go into Committee of Supply, the budget debates are done in the Committee of Supply. And when we are in Committee of Supply, the Speaker has to be out of the Chair. So, I will leave the Chair and put it in the hands of a Panel of Chairs. And today that first Chair will be held by MP Pearman.

There are eight hours, as I indicated. The first four hours are for non-ministries, and the second eight hours will be for the Ministry of Home Affairs.

I will now call on the Premier to move us.
Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I move that the House now resume in Committee of Supply to consider the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for fiscal year 2026/27.

The Speaker: Thank you.

MP Pearman, will you take the Chair for the Committee? Thank you.

House in Committee at 10:18 am

[Mr. Scott Pearman, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2026/27

The Chairman: Good morning, Honourable Members, and good morning to the listening public. We are now in the Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for fiscal year 2026/27.

And as indicated by the Speaker, the first debate this morning is a four-hour debate on the non-ministry heads. Those are Heads 2, 5, 56, 63, 85, 92, 98, and 101. And this morning, at least on the Opposition side, it's going to be MP Richardson. But who is going to be leading us off on Head 2 for the Government? I think it is the Honourable Minister Diallo Rabain.

Honourable Minister, it's a four-hour debate, and we are starting at 10:19 . . . Let's call it 10:20.

And, Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, I move the following heads: Head 2, Legislature; Head 5, Office of the Auditor General; Head 56, Human Rights Commission; Head 63, Parliamentary Registrar; Head 85, Ombudsman's Office; Head 92, Internal Audit; Head 98, Information Commissioner's Office; Head 101, Privacy Commissioner's Office now be taken under consideration.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Minister.

It has been moved that Heads 2, 5, 56, 63, 85, 92, 98, and 101 be taken under consideration.

Are there any objections to that motion?

There being no objection, Minister, please continue.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Before I begin, Mr. Chairman, I will let you know that [Head] 5, Office of Auditor and [Head] 92, Internal Audit, will be done by the Premier. And [Head] 56, Human Rights Commission will be done by Minister Tinee Furbert.

The Chairman: So, you said [Heads] 2 and 95. Did you mean [Heads] 2 and 98?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: [Head] 92, Internal Audit.

The Chairman: [Head] 92, thank you. So, [Heads] 2, 92, and 5 will all be done by the Premier?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Yes.

The Chairman: And could you just clarify—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: No, no, not [Head] 2—[Head] 5.

The Chairman: [Heads] 5 and 92?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Yes.

The Chairman: Thank you very much for the clarification. And so, you will lead us off on Head 2, will you?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Yes.

The Chairman: Excellent.

Minister, you have the floor.

NON-MINISTRY HEADS

HEAD 02—LEGISLATURE

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: All right. Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to present the budget estimates for Head 2, Office of the Legislature, as found on pages B-10 through B-13 of the Book of Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2026/27. The Legislature is critical to the Government in presenting and achieving its legislative agenda and policy objectives, while also providing the forum for parliamentary oversight of the conduct and effectiveness of Government programmes and the management and accounting of the people's purse and Government spending.

Part and parcel of this work is the appropriation of the funding of the Government through the annual budget debates and approval of the Estimates and Revenue Expenditure by members of the Legislature.

Mission

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Office of the Legislature's mission statement, *To facilitate strong parliamentary oversight, administrative support, and professional services for a Parliament that is responsive to the people of Bermuda.*

Mr. Chairman, the total current expenditure, as shown on page B-10, is estimated at \$6,701,000 for 2026/27, an increase of \$890,000, or 15.3 per cent, over the approved 2025/26 budget estimate.

Mr. Chairman, as seen on page B-11, there are seven full-time equivalents in business unit 12000 Administration; 47 members of the Legislature in business unit 12010 Ministers and Members; and one FTE in the business unit 12015 Opposition Leader's Office. Business unit 12002 Youth Parliament, provides the funding

for the activities of Bermuda's Youth Parliament and some compensation for the Youth Parliament coordinator and Youth advisors who oversee the Youth Parliament activities and debates.

Through business unit 12000 Administration, the Parliamentary staff, led by the Clerk of the Legislature, provide reliable and impartial administrative and support services for both Houses of the Legislature, the Speaker of the House, and the President of the Senate and Parliamentary Committees.

This also includes providing quality advice on proper parliamentary procedure and practice to accord with the Standing Orders of each House administrative and clerical support services, research and IT services, legal advice where needed, and other professional support services, and ensuring that the House, the Senate, and the parliamentary committees have adequate funding and resources to support their operations and fulfil their responsibilities.

Members of the House of Assembly and the Senate. As of March 2026, the House of Assembly remains composed of eight women, 22 per cent; 28 men, 78 per cent; as was the case in last year's budget debate. The Senate remains composed of seven female Senators, including the President, 64 per cent; and four male Senators, 36 per cent.

Parliamentary Staff

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the current Parliamentary staff is as follows:

- Clerk to the Legislature, Mr. Clark W. Somner, serves as Head of Department and Clerk to the House of Assembly. He is the Accounting Officer for the department and oversees the parliamentary staff and operations of the department, the House, the Senate and the parliamentary committees, including the management of all aspects of the legislative process, procedural advice and guidance to the Presiding Officer and Members, and the administration of the parliamentary salaries for Members and salaries for staff.

- Deputy Clerk to the Legislature, Mrs. Kara A. Beale, assists the Clerk and serves as Clerk to the Senate and several parliamentary committees, including the Public Accounts Committee. Supervises the Sergeant-at-Arms and the Assistant Clerk. Assists the Clerk in the management of the department operations and all aspects of the legislative process including procedural advice and guidance to the Speaker, the President of the Senate, Committee Chairs and Members.

- Assistant Clerk to the Legislature: It is currently vacant. But this role assists the Clerk and Deputy Clerk in providing procedural advice to Members, clerical and other supporting services to the House, Senate and parliamentary committees. Assists the Clerks with logistical arrangements for committee meetings and the drafting of Minutes and agenda for the House, Senate and committee meetings. Also works with the Clerks and other staff in the planning and coordination of

ceremonial events. A formal job description review of this post was undertaken in 2025 by [DEOD (Department of Employee and Organizational Development)] in conjunction with the Clerk and recruitment of the Assistant Clerk is currently in train.

- Parliamentary Information Officer, Mr. Derek P. Lamb, is responsible for managing all aspects of Hansard production and editing, including digital recording of House and Senate proceedings and some cross-training with other staff, manages, populates and updates the Parliament's website, Member's SharePoint, and our social media pages; actively coordinates the provision of various IT services for the Office and for Members of the House and Senate committees including extensive liaison with local and overseas service providers, IDT, the Clerk, the Speaker and the House and Grounds Committee where required; online streaming of proceedings, and information research services for the Clerks and Members. A formal job description review is to be completed in conjunction with the [DEOD] in 2026.

- Sergeant-at-Arms, Mr. Arnold E. Allen, EM, is responsible for active liaison with the House and Grounds Committee, the Speaker and Clerks in [coordinating] maintenance matters at Veritas Place and at Sessions House and Grounds, liaison with the Speaker, House and Grounds Committee, and Clerks on providing robust security and safety arrangements at Veritas and at the Sessions House in coordination with the Bermuda Police Service Special Branch and other security services providers, and aide to the Speaker and performs ceremonial duties in House proceedings and other formal events such as the convening of the Legislature. Actively supports the Clerks and staff carrying out their duties in liaison with the Members and other stakeholders. A formal job description review is to be completed in conjunction with DOD in 2026.

- Finance Administration Officer, Mrs. Nadine C. Place, manages all aspects of office operations, communications, in liaison with other local and overseas officials and parliaments as well as administrative and logistical support services for the Clerk and the Speaker and the President. The procurement of office supplies, equipment furnishings, cleaning and other office services, as well as food and catering for Members [of the] staff, responsible for purchasing, payment of billings, and maintaining financial accounting records per Financial Instructions. [She] is responsible for all aspects of salaries and administrations for staff and Members of the Legislature and for administering the personal data and information records of all Members and staff. A formal job description review was conducted in 2025 in conjunction with [DEOD] resulting in the post title being revised from Administrative Officer.

- Administrative Assistant to the Clerk, Ms. Andrina T. Smith, provides administrative and clerical support for the Office of the Legislature, the Clerk and Deputy Clerk, as well as the Speaker and Deputy

Speaker of the House, assists the Clerk in the preparation and distribution of House Order Papers and other documents, official correspondence and communications, and assists with the annotation of House and Senate proceedings when required, and works with other staff in planning and coordinating official and ceremonial events, and performs other duties that may be assigned by the Clerk.

- Aide to the Opposition Leader, Mrs. Judy M. Benevides, provides administrative and clerical support services to the Opposition Leader, including communications, administration of the office operations, and arranging professional services for the Opposition Leader and for the Opposition's official work and presentations to the House and the Senate.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, you will note on page C-4 of the Estimates Book that some \$1,700,000 has been allocated in fiscal [year] 2026/27 for Capital Development Programme 75230, Parliament Building Refurbishment. The House and Grounds Committee remains in coordination with the Ministry of Public Works and Environment on the Sessions House Renovation Project. In these examinations the auditor expresses an opinion on whether or not the financial statements present information on the auditee's operation and whether the financial position is presented fairly and complies with auditing standards generally accepted in Bermuda and Canada.

Every year the Office of the Auditor General audits the financial statements of the accounts of the Senate, the House of Assembly, all government departments and offices including the Public Service Commission, and all courts of Bermuda as per the Bermuda Constitution Order 1968 and the Audit Act 1990.

In addition to the completion of financial statement audits and reviews, the office also completed and participated in the following:

Practice inspection: The office successfully completed their practice inspection. The practice inspection is a vital component of our regulatory processes. A practice inspection is dual purpose:

- To protect the Government and the citizens of Bermuda and contribute to users' confidence in the integrity of financial information by assessing whether the Office of the Auditor General is adhering to the professional standards set out in the CPA Canada Handbook.
- To provide an educational experience to help practitioners on staff improve their professional standards where necessary.

An assessment of the interior state of the building has been undertaken, and the Committee has been advised that interior demolition work is planned to be done in early 2026/27 following the appointment of a project manager by the Ministry. Substantial capital works on the second phase of extensive internal

renovations of the building are to follow. The Committee has been actively working with Public Works to push this work forward.

The Parliamentary Building Refurbishment Project includes the maintenance and renovation of the facilities at Sessions House, and its precincts falls under the remit of the Parliamentary House and Grounds Committee chaired by Deputy Speaker, MP Lovitta Foggo.

Rental accommodations and arrangements for Members' use, the Legislature offices and the temporary House/Senate Chambers at Veritas Place are also funded through this programme.

A separate project for the rental renovation and furnishing of the second floor of Veritas Place for appropriate offices and accommodations for the Premier, Opposition Leader and Members of the House and Senate to use during meeting days and committee meetings was initiated by the House and Grounds Committee in 2025 and it was hoped that the new facilities on the second floor would be ready for Members by now. But an unfortunate delay resulted from a requirement to ensure compliance with fire codes and this project is now to be completed in early 2026/27.

Current Expenditure

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, I now turn attention to the specific current account estimates of revenue expenditure in the four cost centres for the Legislature office.

The total current budget allocation for the Legislature for fiscal year 2026/27 as shown on page B-10 of the Estimates Book is \$6,701,000 which represents an increase of \$890,000, or 15.3 per cent when compared to fiscal year 2025/26.

It should be noted that the very large majority of the increase in 2026/27 funding covers the recent uplifts in parliamentary salaries for Members and the negotiated uplifts in salaries for staff.

Administration—Cost Centre 12000

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the objectives for the Legislature's Administration office cost centre 12000, for fiscal year 2026/27 include the following:

- Provide reliable and impartial advice on parliamentary procedures and standards in support of the work of the presiding officers and Members of the Legislature, ensuring that the House, the Senate and the parliamentary committees have adequate funding and resources to support their operations and fulfil their responsibilities.

- Facilitating professional services including legal advice [to] the presiding officers and Members on parliamentary business, procedure, and Constitutional matters, and the interpretation of relevant legislation and parliamentary rules.

- Being customer-centric and improving public knowledge of the parliamentary website and their understanding of the importance and leading role of the Legislature in governance of Bermuda.

- Keeping public service officers and their stakeholders informed about parliamentary protocols and about the legislative process in their roles in helping the parliamentary staff and Members to expedite that process.

- Advancing the digital transformation for the presentation of legislation, papers and reports in the Legislature. A safe storage of parliamentary records and information and the use of artificial intelligence applications in recording of parliamentary proceedings.

- Administration cost centre 12000, found on page B-10, has a budget of \$1,392,000 which represents an increase of \$31,000, or 2 per cent when compared to 2025/26. This budget covers administrative staff salaries, office supplies, data lines for Members' tablets, software maintenance for both internet and Hansard systems, along with overseas Hansard transcribers. Additionally, provisions of funding is allocated for the Speaker of the House and Members of the Parliament for legal services. The increase in funding here, again, is largely related to the increase in staff salaries resulting from the recent uplift negotiated by the Bermuda Public Service Union and Government in 2025.

Youth Parliament—Cost Centre 12002

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, this cost centre is found on page B-10. The total budget is \$6,000 for 2026/27, which remains the same as for fiscal year 2025/26. This funding covers office supplies and administrative expenses related to the Youth Parliament and stipends for the Youth Parliament Coordinator and Youth Advisors conducting Youth Parliament meetings, debates and other activities and educating the Youth Parliamentarians on parliamentary procedure.

Ministers and Members—Cost Centre 12010

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the responsibility of the Legislature is to enact laws, fund Government spending and initiatives, and to hold the Government to account through its parliamentary oversight function. In turn, legislators can expect to be fairly remunerated for carrying out their legislative and constitutional duties. The total budget for cost centre 12010 found on page B-10, is \$5,150,000 for 2026/27, representing an increase of \$840,000, or 19.5 per cent over fiscal year 2025/26. Some \$4,899,000 of this funding is allocated specifically for parliamentary salaries of all officers and Members of the Legislature and the increase in funding for 2026/27 is attributed to the parliamentary salary uplift approved by the resolution of the House of Assembly in March 2025.

Other funding is allocated to the annual grant to the Bermuda branch of the Commonwealth

Parliamentary Association, committees, and operational food and catering provisions for Members on meeting days, and cell phones for presiding officers.

Opposition Leader's Office—Cost Centre 12015

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the role of the Opposition Leader's Office is important, and non-partisan administrative aid staff as required are needed to oversee its operations.

Currently there is one part-time administrative assistant working in the Opposition Leader's Office under the supervision of the Opposition Leader. The 2026/27 funding of this cost centre totals \$153,000, an increase of \$19,000, or 14.2 per cent, which results largely from a boost to the annual grant to the Opposition Leader's Office. The Opposition Leader's Office grant for the 2026/27 fiscal year is \$105,000 found on page C-17 which is an increase of \$19,000 over 2025/26. The additional funding of \$48,000 covers the salary of the administrative aid.

Subjective Analysis

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, I would like to turn your attention to page B-11. Subjective analysis of the current account estimates.

The Chairman: [Page] B-11, yes.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Salaries increased by \$863,000. The salaries estimate for 2026/27 is \$5,672,000 versus \$4,809,000 in 2025/26. This \$863,000, or 18 per cent increase in salaries results from the negotiated BPSU's [Bermuda Public Services Union] salary uplifts for the parliamentary staff and the aforementioned parliamentary salary increases for [officers] and Members of the Legislature approved by resolution of the House in March 2025.

Communications

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Communications estimate for 2026/27 is \$90,000, which remains the same as 2025/26. This funding covers cost for telecom, cell phones for the Clerk and Sergeant-at-Arms and data lines for tablets of Members and staff tablets.

Professional Services

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The estimate for Professional Services for 2026/27 is \$412,000, an increase of \$12,000, or 3 per cent over 2025/26 estimates. This funding covers various professional services for the [Legislature] Office including the digital recording, online streaming, radio broadcast and Hansard production of proceedings of the House and Senate, local consultancy services, overseas services including the transcription of digital recordings for the Hansard, legal and

other professional services provided [for] the office, the presiding officer and parliamentary committees [and] the funding of operations for the Parliamentary Oversight Committees which is now active after its formal appointment by the Speaker.

[Crosstalk and laughter]

The Chairman: Would the Premier like to take a point of order? I'm not sure, Minister.

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: Honourable Minister, when you are ready, please continue.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, Members should note that the Parliamentary Joint Select Committee was established to examine matters surrounding the September 2023 cyberattack on Government IT services continues to be active and the Legislature Office uses some of the professional services funding to provide secretarial and clerical support for the working operations of the Joint Select Committee.

Repairs and Maintenance

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The Repairs and Maintenance estimate for 2026/27 is \$138,000 versus \$124,000 in the original 2025/26 funding. This is an increase of \$14,000, or 11.2 per cent. This funding covers costs largely for software maintenance, \$86,000; and for office cleaning, \$35,000; photocopier maintenance contracts, pest control and maintenance of security apparatus and equipment.

Grants and Contributions

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The Grants and Contributions funding for the Legislature Office can be found on page C-17 of the Estimates Book. The 2026/27 estimate is \$215,000, which is an increase of \$44,000 over the 2025/26 funding. Members will note that \$110,000 has been allocated for the annual grant to the Bermuda branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association [CPA] versus \$85,000 in 2025/26. This funding is intended to cover the annual membership fees for both the CPA and the CPA Caribbean Regional group for the Bermuda branch as well as rising travel and accommodation costs for increased in-person attendance and participation in overseas CPA conferences and seminars by our Members and staff, including the Speaker who currently serves as a Caribbean Regional Representative on the Executive Committee of the CPA..

An annual grant of \$105,000 has been allocated for the Opposition Leader's Office, an increase of \$19,000 in the 2026/27 grant over 2025/26. This covers an imminent increase in office rental costs as advised by Lands and Buildings within the Ministry of Public

Works and some additional money for operating costs and services.

Performance Measures

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, Performance Measures on the work and activities of the parliamentary staff and Members of the Legislature, the House of Assembly, the Senate and the Parliamentary Committees, and our Youth Parliament, as well as statistics on the number of Bills and other legislation passed by the Legislature, reports and papers tabled, the number of visitors to the Parliamentary website and our Facebook and Instagram pages, and the number of persons who access the streaming of our House and Senate proceedings on the website can be found on pages B-12 and B-13. (That is a run-on sentence.)

Mr. Chairman, the [Legislature] Office is pleased with the increased number of visits to the Parliamentary website, www.parliament.bm, and access to the Hansard. As you may be aware, Mr. Chairman, Members can and do make regular use of the Hansard as a research tool to gather information for debates. Streaming of our parliamentary proceedings is also very popular and can be readily accessed on the website.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, Performance Measures focusing on professional development opportunities and certification in parliamentary practice and procedures are encouraged for both Members and parliamentary staff. In 2025/26, our clerks and staff again actively participated in select CPA Academy training programmes as well as other professional development courses, and also in online meetings and discussions of the UKOTP [UK-led UK Overseas Territories Project] Clerk Leadership Group. Members of the Legislature are also eligible to participate in select CPA Academy training programmes including certification courses in the role and work of the Public Accounts and Oversight Committee, et cetera.

Mr. Chairman, the Clerk to the Legislature and the Deputy Clerk conducted our annual DEOD [Department of Employee and Organizational Development] training course in February 2026 on "Understanding the Standing Orders and Legislative Procedure" for senior government directors, heads of departments, and technical officers.

His Honour the Speaker, the Honourable Craig Cannonier and Senator Lauren Bell as well as the Clerk were pleased to represent Bermuda at the 68th [Commonwealth] [Parliamentary] Conference (CPA) held in Barbados in October 2025, with the Speaker continuing to serve as one of the three Caribbean regional representatives on the CPA Executive for a three-year term ending in 2027.

His Honour the Speaker, MP Vance Campbell, Senator Lindsay Simmons and the Deputy Clerk represented Bermuda at the 47th CPA Regional Conference of the Caribbean, [Americas and the Atlantic (CAA) Region] held in The Bahamas in September 2025.

The Speaker along with the London Office Director, Ms. Kimberley Durrant, represented Bermuda at the Commons and Overseas Territories Speakers' Conference held in London in May 2025.

A particular highlight for the Legislature in 2025/26 was our planning organisation and presentation of the Post Election Seminar for the Bermuda Parliament in late January 2026 at the [Rosewood] Bermuda resort in conjunction with seminar coordinators from the UK CPA UK branch. The seminar was a success and much appreciated and enjoyed by those Members in attendance. Many Members enjoyed the practical learning and remarked on how the seminar had helped them to have a better understanding of their role and how they can work to serve their constituents and their own professional development as parliamentarians. Coming out of the seminar Members participating were able to express their strong support for further adoption of AI technology and tools by our Legislature for the recording and transcription of our proceedings and for suitable adaption on the parliamentary website.

The Post Election Seminar session on "Separation of Powers" also stood out for Members as they were in support of formalising the separation of powers in our jurisdiction that has been done in several Caribbean Overseas Territories in recent years. Members may also note that the Speaker represented Bermuda as one of the main session presenters at the Post Election Seminar conducted for the Cayman Islands Parliament in late October 2025. The Clerks and Parliament staff were also available to present workshops on Parliamentary procedures, protocols and the legislative process for Members of both the House of Assembly and Senate as requested by the Speaker and President.

Mr. Chairman, in closing, I must take this opportunity to recognise the hard work and dedication and professionalism of the Legislature staff which has remained a very small contingent over many years, far smaller than in other small parliaments in the Caribbean region and internationally.

The presiding officer and Members of the Legislature are obliged to thank the staff for their commitment and services in helping us meet the responsibilities in performing our legislative and oversight duties to the best of our abilities throughout a very busy parliamentary calendar.

This concludes the presentation brief on Head 2. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Minister Diallo Rabain. We are in the Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the fiscal year 2026/27. That was the conclusion of Head 2.

We will now move on and hear from the Honourable Premier and Minister of Finance in relation to Head 5, the Office of the Auditor General.

You have the floor.

HEAD 05—OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman. I will present the budget for Head 5 for the review of the estimates and revenue. And expenditure for Head 5, Office of the Auditor General, found on pages B-14 through B-16 of the Budget Book.

Mandate and Mission

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, the Office of the Auditor General strives *To provide positive change by fostering accountability, transparency and efficiency within the public sector.* The Bermuda Constitution Order and the Audit Act 1990 provide the legislative mandate for the Office of the Auditor General, and the Office's primary responsibility is to assist the House of the Assembly in carrying out its oversight responsibilities relating to government spending and accountability for the use of public money.

The mission of the Office of the Auditor General, which is derived from its legislative mandate is, *To add credibility to the Government's financial reporting and to promote improvement in the financial administration of all government ministries, departments, and all other entities for which the Government is accountable to Parliament.*

Expenditure Overview

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, the Office of the Auditor General meets with the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the annual budgets. The meeting on the 2025/26 budget recommendation was . . . I'm sorry. I was just reading what was provided but I will fix it.

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: The meeting on the 2026/27 budget recommendation was held in December. This committee is appointed for the duration of the life of Parliament by Standing Order 34(4) for the House of Assembly and according to the section 45 of the Constitution. The committee has the responsibility for ensuring that the Office of Auditor General has the funding and tools to carry out its responsibilities and to ensure the independence of the office is not comprised. Once the Office is in agreement with the budget requests, the recommendation by this bipartisan committee is transmitted to the Minister of Finance.

The reviewed and recommended budget by the committee to the Ministry of Finance was

\$4,329,205 [sic]. The total current expenditure allocated to Head 5 is \$4,397,000 for fiscal year 2026/27 which represents an increase of \$217,000 [sic], 5 per cent [sic] over the prior year's budget and notably is in excess of the request that was—

The Chairman: Mr. Premier, I am afraid you may have been given a few errant numbers¹ in your brief.

Hon. E. David Burt: We are all over the place.

The Chairman: For the benefit of . . . yes, I do apologise.

For the benefit of the listening public the figure you gave was the 2025/26 original. And I can assist you. At [page] B-14, the estimate for 2026/27 is \$4.686, which is an increase of \$289[,000], and 7 per cent.

Hon. E. David Burt: You are far too kind. Let me go ahead to—

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: Yes, it might assist it. Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: No problem.

The Chairman: [Page] B-14.

Hon. E. David Burt: So, I can actually read the correct numbers in to the record.

The Chairman: Please.

Hon. E. David Burt: I will spare the time to say, hopefully, that the Auditor General will provide the correct figures for the Minister of Finance but—

[Laughter]

The Chairman: I am sure that the Honourable Premier does not wish to draw the good name of the Auditor General into the debate.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. E. David Burt: No, I'm going to . . . I'll . . . No worry. I have that to do on a substantive notion on another issues. I'll leave that alone.

The Chairman: Well, let us just hope the Budget Book is correct.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: Whilst the Honourable Premier is just getting to the page in the Budget Book, just for the benefit of the listening public, we are in the Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the fiscal year 2026/27. This is a four-hour debate, and it goes through all the various non-ministries and their budgets, of which there are several.

We are now on the second head, which is being presented by the Premier and the Honourable Minister of Finance, and this is Head 5, which relates to the Office of the Auditor General, and Head 5 is set out in the Budget Book at pages B-14 through to B-16.

And Mr. Premier, with that brief respite, perhaps you are ready to take over again?

Hon. E. David Burt: Sure, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much.

The Chairman: No problem.

Hon. E. David Burt: So, it is important to note, as you had stated and indicated that the total allocation for the Office of the Auditor General is \$4,686,000, an increase of \$289,000 over the prior year, or 7 per cent, which is important.

Revenue Overview

Hon. E. David Burt: The revenue estimate for the Auditor General is \$315,000, which is a decrease of \$142,000 from last year. Most of these represent audit fees charged to the accounts that do not form part of the accounts of the Consolidated Fund and paid the Auditor General as public funds in accordance [with] the Audit Act 1990.

Subjective Analysis

Hon. E. David Burt: The subjective analysis of the current account estimates for the Office of the Auditor General is found on page B-15. Salaries are \$3,742,000, an increase of 8 per cent, or \$278,000 from last year's figure. The increase is mainly due to the negotiated BPSU's salary uplifts. The office did not fill all posts for the entire year. In the prior year the office was working to reach a full complement of staff.

The office continues to face challenges in attracting a full complement of qualified professionals. This issue is not unique to the government part of a broader global shortage of professional accountants, creating an extremely competitive market both locally and worldwide.

While the office's salary ranges align with similar government positions, they remain less competitive

¹ Please see [Errata](#) to Head 5 at page 2680.

than those offered in the private sector. The office strives to build resource organically and invest in future talent by providing supportive and collaborative workplace for our students to thrive and grow. Presently, the office employs four Bermudian students pursuing professional and academic designations.

Professional Services

Hon. E. David Burt: Professional Services' amount is \$359,000, a decrease of \$9,000, or 2 per cent, from last year. This is the next most significant expense and includes services for contracted audits and expert advice as needed.

We expect to continue to use contracted firms to aid us in meeting our Legislative commitments and aid the office during peak workloads and for unexpected separations.

The office outsources roughly six financial statement audits. An outsourced audit does not absolve the Auditor General of their responsibilities to audit the records presented to the Senate and the House of Assembly and all Government departments and offices of all courts of Bermuda. The Auditor General signs each and every independent auditor's report. The decision to outsource any audit is not taken lightly. The Auditor General is able to sign-off on an agent audit independent auditor's report because [the] office reviews the completed agent auditor's working papers, files, reports and schedules and very often may require additional tests or other documents in respect of the audit of the public entity audited to satisfy that all requirements of the auditing standards generally accepted in Bermuda and Canada are met.

Repairs and Maintenance

Hon. E. David Burt: Repairs and Maintenance has a budget of \$157,000, an increase of \$17,000 from last year. The increase mainly relates to software maintenance agreements and [subscriptions].

Travel

Hon. E. David Burt: Travel is \$33,000, an increase of \$3,000, or 11 per cent from last year. Staff auditors pursuing their professional designations may travel to attend training and development courses in pursuit of their professional designations.

Additionally, the Auditor General and team members may attend training for long-term sustainability of the office. It is critical in keeping abreast of emerging auditing trends and participation in the round-table discussion to support and influence matters impacting our jurisdiction from the development of the auditing methodology, practices, and professional development with standard setters such as the Public Sector Accounting Board.

The office also takes an active role in the Canadian Council of Legislative Auditors and the Caribbean Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions. The Auditor General is also on the Executive Committee of the CPA Atlantic Board.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, I am moving over to Capital Expenditure.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: The Office of the Auditor General has not been given any capital expenditure budgets this year.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: I would like to explain this, that the Ministry does review capital requests. I do note that there has been a note that has been sent to the Committee of the Auditor lamenting the fact that a capital budget was not given. I do wish to make sure I give this explanation, that the Ministry does review capital requests and noted that current year capital funding had not been spent by the time of the review and therefore additional funds were not approved.

The Ministry of Finance has communicated with the office that additional funds can be provided if there is in fact evidence that the existing funding in this year's budget was actually spent so the office can replace the desired equipment. They are looking to replace laptops and then instructions from the Ministry of Finance—

The Chairman: If I could direct the Honourable Premier to [page] C-9 of the Budget Book. There is a line item for capital acquisition for this Ministry.

Hon. E. David Burt: And it's zero.

The Chairman: Yes. I'm sorry. Yes, okay.

Hon. E. David Burt: It is zero for this year. It was \$20[,000] for last year, but it's zero for this year.

The Chairman: Yes, there we are.

Hon. E. David Burt: And that—

The Chairman: Thank you.

Hon. E. David Burt: And so, I'm just trying to make sure that I do explain that. Though it is zero this year because when it was done, when it was reviewed at the time, the funds were not spent and typically they do not give additional minor capital from the particular monies that were not spent.

There was a letter that was written to the Committee of the Auditor which comes here. It was shared with me as the Minister of Finance. I communicated that back to the officials at the Ministry of Finance to say that if the Auditor General wants to, say, buy new laptops for her staff or desktops as the desktops are five years old, she's more than welcome to do so. We'll facilitate that to go ahead and happen. That is the way that it is supposed to work, but the Auditor General's Office is subject to the same processes as all others.

I do wish to note, Mr. Chairman, though the government continues to meet the Auditor General's requirements for spending on a current account basis, it has been evidenced in year after year after year the Auditor General does not actually spend the money allocated to that office in current account. But that is not a criticism. It is just a statement that it is difficult to recruit. However, I do not want it to be seen that the Ministry of Finance or the Government is not providing the funds that are necessary and are required for the office in itself.

The Chairman: Duly noted, Premier. Thank you.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Manpower

Hon. E. David Burt: Moving back to Manpower, the employee numbers, estimates for the Office of the General are 30 full-time posts, which is two more, or a 2 per cent increase there. And the note that I have is that there are 10 Bermudian staff, four students, three professionals, and three support staff. And out of the students, one recently passed their CPA certification, and another is on their last notification.

Moving on to Performance Audits, if I may.

The Chairman: Yes, that is [page] B-16.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes, thank you.

Performance Audits

Hon. E. David Burt: To continue to support the House of Assembly to hold Government to account and to add to the credibility of Government's financial reporting, and to promote improvement in the financial administration of all Government ministries, departments and other entities for which the Government is accountable to Parliament, the office intends to fulfil its constitutional mandate by completing 50 financial statement audits. They do wish to do 7 financial statement reviews; 2 non-financial audits; and also wish to, of course, meet the release date for the annual audit. This year we did get it completed in December but of course it was not fully ready to be tabled in this House until February, but at least in December I was able to report on the audited financials to the House of Assembly.

Current Year Achievements

Hon. E. David Burt: It is important to note that the office expects to complete 56 financial statement audits by the end of the fiscal year. So, that is actually an improvement over last year's actual outcome, or the prior year's actual outcome of 45 financial statement and test audits or examinations of the auditee's financial statements.

Peer Reviews

Hon. E. David Burt: Peer reviews are voluntary and are performed by qualified Professional Accountants of Canada. The outputs of these reviews provide insight for the continuous monitoring and improvement of the office quality management processes.

Team members participated in training with the Canadian Council of Legislature Auditors, the Caribbean Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions and the UK National Audit Office.

To ensure that all staff are kept abreast of the new and evolving standards and to meet continuing professional development requirements all qualified staff in the Office of the Auditor General complete a minimum of 20 hours of continuous professional training. This ensures that all qualified staff are kept abreast of any new and evolving standards and meet the continuing professional development hours for CPA Bermuda and their regulatory bodies.

The office has worked with the Ministry of Finance at applying for the funds in arrears and the remit of the Ministry of Finance and achievable results of reduction of the numbers of accounts in arrears.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, the Government's risk landscape continues to change. And the office is building in agility to respond to the emergent risk. Presently, the office continues to work with various stakeholders across Government and the industry partners, such as CPA Bermuda, CAROSAI [Caribbean Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions], and CCOLA [Canadian Council of Legislative Auditors].

The following continued to have an impact on the office's audit assessment and strategies:

- environmental hazards from coastal erosion due to hurricane frequency;
- malicious attacks from cyberattacks infrastructure;
- areas of significant judgment, such as impairment and obsolescence of tangible capital assets and other assets and additional disclosure requirements; and
- an increased number of fraud risk factors in terms of pressures and opportunities due to changing landscapes and conditions.

The office was built on the work that has been done so far to provide the Public Accounts Committee, the House of Assembly and the Parliamentary Standing Committee with the same high-quality financial and nonfinancial audits to support accountability.

The staff of the Auditor General are independent of the Government, noting that increased independence was given to that office following the 1998 election of the Progressive Labour Party. This independence enables the office to conduct its auditing and reporting responsibilities fairly and effectively.

The Auditor General would like to acknowledge her exemplary staff for their hard work, dedication and continued commitment to the mandate of the Office of the Auditor General. The Office [of the Auditor General] will continue to support the House of Assembly and the Public Accounts Committee and help to help to improve Government's financial reporting and public services through our high-quality audits for the benefit of citizens.

And, Mr. Chairman, I apologise for the errors but that does end my presentation of Head 5, the Office of the Auditor General. I am grateful for the corrections.

The Chairman: Thank you very much.

For the benefit of the Honourable Members and the listening public, we have just heard a presentation by the Honourable Premier and Minister of Finance in relation to Head 5, the Office of the Auditor General. That is the second of eight heads that we are going to be dealing with in this four-hour debate.

The next head is Head 56, the Human Rights Commission. And I believe that that is back to . . . Oh, it is the Honourable Minister Tinee Furbert [who] is going to take us through that.

Thank you, Honourable Minister. Head 56, Human Rights Commission, is on [pages] B-17 through B-19 of the Budget Book, for those following along.

Honourable Minister, when you are ready, you have the floor.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning.

NON-MINISTRY HEADS

HEAD 56—HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the Human Rights Commission, it gives me great pleasure to present the Current Account Estimates for Head 56, Human Rights Commission, a non-ministry office, found on pages B-17, B-18 and B-19 of the Estimate of Revenue and Expenditure.

Mr. Chairman, the Human Rights Commission is a statutory body charged with the promotion and protection of human rights in Bermuda. The Human Rights Act 1981 was enacted by the Bermuda Legislature in December of 1981 and shortly thereafter, in early 1982,

the Commission was established to administer the Act. The Human Rights Commission is Bermuda's national human rights institution. The United Nations "Paris Principles" require the National Human Rights Institution [NHRI]:

- to have a broad human rights mandate and functions;
- to be independent;
- to have an international engagement;
- to have an inclusive and transparent selection and appointment process; and
- to have adequate powers and resources.

Mr. Chairman, the mission of the Human Rights Commission as found on page B-17 is, *To protect and promote human rights through education, collaboration, advocacy, and enforcement*. The Commission takes a leading role in the modern interpretation of its statutory mandate and the promotion of indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights. The Commission's mandate involves education, the promotion of principles of non-discrimination and equality, and the investigation and resolution of allegations of discrimination.

Mr. Chairman, the head of the public authority is the executive officer who serves as the accountant officer and is responsible for maintaining a sound system of internal controls which safeguard the public funds and assets of the Commission. The Human Rights Commission is administratively accountable to the Minister with responsibility for Human Rights and in accordance with section 13(5) of the Act. The Commission receives a budget allocation annually from the Legislature.

Mr. Chairman, the Commission's vision is a Bermuda that honours human rights for all as it relates to the provision of services to the public as noted on page B-17 of the Commission's objectives.

Mr. Chairman, on page B-17 you will note the Commission's original budget for 2025/26 fiscal year was \$1,434,000. The allocation for the 2026/27 financial year is \$1,526,000. The represents a 6 per cent increase in the proposed overall spending.

Mr. Chairman, you will note on page B-18 there are seven full-time employee positions with the Human Rights Commission for fiscal year 2025/26.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, Head 56 has the following business units:

- business unit 66020, Office of the Commission
- business unit 66030, Appointment Committee; and
- business unit 66040, Tribunals.

I will discuss the functions of each business unit and provide explanations of variance between the original 2025/26 budget versus the 2026/27 allocations.

Business Unit 66020, Office of the Commission

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the Office of the Human Rights Commission provides strategic and operational management of the Commission. Key works include

- complaint management and dispute resolution services;
- education and outreach initiatives to the community on the principles of human rights; and
- provision of policy recommendations to the government on local and international human rights matters.

The budget allocation for business unit 66020 is \$1,414,000. The 6 per cent increase from the previous year's budget of \$1,331,000 is due to cost-of-living increase salary uplift.

Business Unit 66030, Appointment Committee

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the budget allocation for business unit 66030 is \$12,000. The 45 per cent decrease of \$10,000 is attributed to the decrease of administrative costs associated with the Selection and Appointment Committee's public recruitment campaign and appointment processes in accordance with section 13B(1) of the Act. [Human Rights Amendment Act 2021] The most recent appointment occurred in 2025 as appointments are staggered to promote continuity. Recruitments will occur in this financial year for the appointments that end in September of 2026.

Business Unit 66040, Tribunals

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the budget allocation for business unit 66040 is \$100,000. The 23 per cent increase of \$19,000 relates to the statutory functions of the Human Rights Tribunal. The independent quasi-judicial body responsible for adjudicating meritorious human rights complaints. The funding estimate is based on the number of active matters currently before the Human Rights Tribunal for adjudication. An increased volume of matters filed with the Commission which could potentially be referred for adjudication unless resolved through mediation.

Subjective Analysis

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the subjective analysis for Head 56 can be found on page B-18. Salaries, the original full-time employee headcount for the 2025/26 fiscal year was seven. And the budget allocation for salaries was \$750,000. In contrast, the budget for the 2026/27 financial year is \$786,000, which reflects a 5 per cent increase of \$36,000. This reflects successful negotiations between the Bermuda Public Service Union and the Government who agreed to uplift salaries in keeping with inflation and the rising cost of living.

Operational Expenditure

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, turning to Operational Expenditure, I will now discuss expenditures within professional services, repairs and maintenance, and insurance.

Professional Services

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the 2026/27 budget reflects an 8 per cent increase in professional services, of \$422,000 to \$456,000. The increased costs are primarily attributed to local consultant fees, costs associated with the Commission's voluntary mediation programme, legal services, research services and funding to remunerate human rights tribunal panel members.

Mr. Chairman, fees increased from \$48,000 in 2025/26 to \$53,000 in 2026/27, a 10 per cent change. This increase is primarily attributable to higher annual fees associated with the Commission's case management system and related system maintenance costs.

Insurance

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, during the previous fiscal year the Commission obtained Director's and Officer's Liability Insurance as part of its governance and risk management framework. This measure was taken to mitigate legal and financial risk and to ensure adequate protection in the event that legal actions are commenced against the Commission or tribunals.

For the current fiscal period the premium has changed to \$5,500. This coverage remains a key component to the Commission's risk management strategy safeguarding its leadership and adjudicative bodies while supporting the integrity of its operations.

Mr. Chairman, the Commission's performance measures can be found on page B-19. In accordance with the Public Access to Information Act 2010, the Commission's quarterly expenditures are available to the public on request. The Human Rights Commission has a statutory dual mandate, enforcement and education. Discrimination is addressed by way of meritorious complaint referrals to the Human Rights Tribunal but also the Commission helps to prevent discrimination by fostering awareness and empowering individuals and institutions to uphold human rights in their daily practices.

The complaint management and dispute resolution processes involve several stages which I will briefly outline below ahead of sharing the key performance indicators achieved during fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman, the executive officer performs a screening function of all complaints filed with the Commission and has statutory powers to investigate complaints, collect evidence, and refer meritorious complaints to the Human Rights Tribunal. Throughout the complaint-handling process efforts are made to

facilitate the resolution of a complaint. Examples of grounds protected within the Act include race, sex, and disability while examples of protected areas include employment or goods, facilities and services.

In 2025, the primary protected grounds were discrimination, which were identified [as] sex, disability, ethnic or national origins, and place of origin. These included instances where individuals alleged that these grounds were a factor in discriminatory treatment experienced by them. With respect to conduct deemed unlawful within the Act, members of the public primarily alleged discrimination in the area of employment when contacting the Commission which was followed by alleged discriminatory conduct when assessing goods, facilities or services and allegations of harassment in the workplace.

Mr. Chairman, during the 2025 calendar year there was 215 complaints received by the Office of the Human Rights Commission which represents a 20 per cent increase from the previous year. Mr. Chairman, 77 per cent of the intakes received were resolved within the calendar year, 23 per cent of intakes are ongoing.

The Commission provides an extensive triage and referral process to assist the public in finding a resolution to their queries or complaints in the event their matter does not appear to fall under the jurisdiction of the Human Rights Act. During the period, various intakes once screened were referred to the Labor Relations Office. Additional referral agencies included trade unions, the Department of Education, the Office of the Ombudsman for Bermuda, the Treatment of Offenders Board, the Police Complaints Authority, Age Concern, advocacy groups and nonprofit organisations such as Bermuda is Love, the Women's Resource Centre, and Citizens Uprooting Racism in Bermuda [CURB] and referrals for independent legal advice.

Mr. Chairman, when a matter is referred for an investigation in the first instance parties are offered the opportunity to engage in the Commission's voluntary mediation programme. Where parties agree to participate, efforts are aimed at assisting them to mutually resolve their complaints by bringing parties to a complaint together with an independent mediator who assists them to achieve a resolution. In 2025, parties in nine matters participated in mediation; however, offers were also made in eight other matters, but the parties did not wish to participate in mediation. With respect to the nine matters active in mediation in 2025, four matters were resolved through mediation, three matters did not result in a resolution, and there were two matters still actively engaged in the mediation process when the year ended. Based on a review of the matters currently before the Commission, it is anticipated approximately nine matters will be engaged in mediation services provided by the Commission during the 2025/26 [sic] financial year.

Mr. Chairman, following an investigation where a complaint appears to have merit and it appears unlikely that the parties can resolve the complaint, in

accordance with section 18(1) of the Act, the executive officer shall refer the complaint to the Human Rights Tribunal for adjudication. After hearing a complaint, the Tribunal shall determine whether the Act has been contravened, may order any [party] to do any act or thing that constitutes full compliance with the Act and may order any party to rectify any injury caused to the complainant in the form of financial restitution. An order made by the Tribunal under section 20 of the Act shall be made an order of the Supreme Court and is enforceable in the same manner as an order of that court.

Mr. Chairman, there are 13 cases before the Human Rights Tribunal for adjudication. If historic trends continue throughout the financial year, the number of cases before the tribunal will likely reach 23. In 2025, the Tribunal rendered decisions in one matter which concerned a preliminary issue. The matter is moving on to a substantive hearing to be determined in 2026. For more information on these judgments, please see the Commission's website: www.humanrights.bm.

Mr. Chairman, the Human Rights Commission exists to make human rights a lived reality for all people in Bermuda. Central to its mandate is the provision of education and guidance on the protection and compliance requirements set out in the Human Rights Act as well as fostering a deeper understanding of the principles of equity and inclusion amongst all residents.

With respect to the consultations and policy reviews conducted by the Commission, the Commission continued to provide guidance to employers and employees on their human rights obligations in the workplace. This guidance focused particularly on the duty to accommodate as well as addressing discriminatory policies and practices. In addition, the Commission's consultation and policy reviews examine the broader human rights implications arising from Bermuda's international obligations offering guidance to promote alignment between the domestic practice and global standards.

Mr. Chairman, during the physical [sic] year the Commission facilitated 71 engagements, demonstrated its commitment to education and outreach. These engagements reflect the breath of its mandate and continued to focus on ensuring that every member of our community is informed about their rights and obligations under the Human Rights Act.

Mr. Chairman, 26 of these engagements were formal presentations delivered to a wide cross-section of the community. These included sessions with organisations such as the Mid-Atlantic Wellness Institute, Tomorrow's Voices, Vision Bermuda, and the Bermuda Police Service new recruit orientation. The Commission has also hosted sessions on the duty to accommodate provisions within the Act.

Mr. Chairman, the Commission was pleased to participate in the launch of the Human Rights Education Network, HuRen, a newly established non-profit dedicated to strengthening human rights knowledge and advocacy amongst Bermuda's youth. As part of

HuRen's inaugural curriculum for its first cohort of students, the Commission was invited to deliver a module contributing to the organisation's broader mission of developing a context-relevant human rights education model for Bermuda. HuRen's approach is rooted in accessibility and intergenerational expertise, which aligns closely with the Commission's commitment to fostering a culture of dignity, equality, and informed rights awareness across the community.

Mr. Chairman, the Executive Officer further represented the organisation through several major public speaking appearances. This included participation in the Hamilton Rotary's panel discussion on disability inclusion in Bermuda; an address at the "Walk for Palestine," a tribute honouring the life and the legacy of Dr. Eva Naomi Hodgson on the anniversary of her passing; a facilitated session under the theme "Human Rights: Ethical Decision-Making, and Leadership at the BPSU's Women's Annual Conversation and Brunch; and the keynote address for Mount Saint Agnes Academy's Human Rights Day Observances, this held under the 2025 theme "Everyday Essentials."

These engagements provided important platforms to speak directly with members of the public about current human rights issues. In addition to these appearances, several joint press statements were issued in partnership with faith-based groups and social justice organisations, reflecting the intersectional nature of human rights issues affecting our Island and the wider world.

These statements addressed a range of matters, including honouring the history of emancipation and its present-day commemorations, collective appeals to end the cycle of violence on Island, marking the 55th anniversary of local protests against the sale of arms used to support apartheid in South Africa, and continued calls for a ceasefire, the release of all hostages, and an end to the genocide in Palestine.

Mr. Chairman, last year at this time, the Human Rights Commission reported on the results of its extensive public consultation on disability inclusion, which informed the Disability Inclusion Report published in July of 2025. These findings reveal persistent discrimination, widespread inaccessibility, and systemic barriers across education, employment, health care, transportation, housing, and the public service.

The Commission reaffirms that Bermuda already has clear commitments and obligations at the national level that should ensure persons with disabilities are able to participate fully in society free from discrimination. However, despite these obligations and statutory requirements, this is not yet the lived reality for many individuals with disabilities.

Mr. Chairman, the report's 10 recommendations form a roadmap for change, with three being especially critical:

- Representation—Nothing About Us, Without Us: Ensuring persons with disabilities

participate directly in all decisions affecting their lives.

- Compliance, Accountability and Enforcement: Without which existing rights remain ineffective, and
- National Disability Strategy: The creation of this strategy will coordinate action, set measurable goals, and embed inclusion into national planning.

Since the report's publication, the Commission has met with Honourable Members of the House of Assembly and the Senate, the public service executive, and continues to meet with stakeholder groups to promote the urgency and obligation to implement these recommendations collectively. The Commission's efforts are pivotal, but this requires sustained leadership from every organisation and individuals to drive the momentum towards a systematic change called for by participants in the consultation and to ensure dignity and equity and full inclusion for all.

Mr. Chairman, in October, the executive officer attended the Caribbean Disability Network Conference in Barbados, held under the theme "Breaking Barriers: Advancing Inclusive Education for All Abilities." The conference convened governments, civil societies, educators, researchers, and disability advocates from across the region to consider inclusive education, examine what is working, and identify measures for reducing structural and attitudinal barriers. It also benefited from the participation of the prominent legislatures with disabilities, including the Honourable Jeremiah Norbert of St. Lucia, an amputee who serves as Minister in the office of the Prime Minister with responsibility for Crime Prevention and Persons with Disabilities, and Senator Andwele Boyce of Barbados, a Government Senator with cerebral palsy who has been a leading voice on disability inclusion and systemic reform in Barbados.

The Commission's participation ensured Bermuda's presence in a regional forum and aligned closely with priorities identified in the Disability Inclusion Report, particularly the need for accessibility, collaboration, and coordinated regional action. The conference also underscored the absence of an organised disability advocacy network in Bermuda.

Notably, the executive officer presented the key findings of Bermuda's Disability Inclusion Report, along with structures, functions, and mandate of the Human Rights Commission within Bermuda's human rights framework, offering regional partners insight into the system's guiding national compliance and governance. The executive officer's attendance further affirmed the position of Bermuda's Human Rights Commission as a model national human rights institution within regional counterparts, continuing to seek guidance on institutional operations, legislative frameworks, and programme design. Through the conference, the Commission shared insights and strengthened partnerships that enhanced collaboration between ageing and

disability services, local disability organisations, and [similar] entities across the Caribbean.

These connections are expanding. Regional knowledge sharing will support potential joint initiatives. The Commission was also approached by the emerging Barbados Human Rights Commission for consultation, reflecting Bermuda's recognised leadership and the high regard for its human rights infrastructure across the region.

Mr. Chairman, in the coming fiscal year, the Commission will develop a new strategic plan for 2026–2028 to guide its next phase of work. The Commission's priorities [include] strengthening internal processes and governance, expanding staff professional development, and steadily increasing its visibility across Bermuda through targeted education outreach and stakeholder engagement initiatives. A core focus will be the continued promotion and practical implementation of the Disability Inclusion Report, including convening stakeholders and contributing recommendations to the government aimed at closing gaps within Bermuda's disability framework. As part of this collaborative process, the Commission will bring forth its own observations alongside the recommendations arising from the Disability Inclusion Report to support the ongoing strengthening of Bermuda's disability protections.

Mr. Chairman, arising directly from the relationships forged during the conference in Barbados, the Human Rights Commission now looks forward to hosting a distinguished fact-finding and observational delegation that further affirms Bermuda's regional leadership in human rights. The Most Honourable Karryann Ifill, FB, Barbados' first Human Rights Commissioner, appointed on Human Rights Day, December 10, 2025, by the Honourable Mia Amor Motley, SC, MP, Prime Minister of Barbados, will lead the visiting delegation. Commissioner Ifill is also the former President of the Senate of Barbados and the first woman and first person with a disability to hold that office.

In hosting the delegation, the Human Rights Commission will provide the opportunity to observe and document key institutional and operational systems, and to identify best practice approaches that support effective NHRI functioning. This fact-finding visit, scheduled for the summer of 2026, further strengthens the growing regional recognition of Bermuda's leading position in human rights matters and reflects its shared commitment to peer learning, institutional excellence, and the implementation of best practice aligned with the Paris Principles.

Mr. Chairman, the Commission's public consultation on ageism and age discrimination launched in January. This will inform its recommendations to address the current legislative gap in the Human Rights Act with respect to age as a protected ground in

employment, a necessary step towards ensuring a more equitable and inclusive Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, the Human Rights Commission continues to be recognised as a vital public resource and is available to assist the public by visiting their offices or via phone at 295-5859 or email "info@human-rights.bm." The Commission calls on us to act clearly, consistently, and collaboratively to make human rights real for all in Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, in closing, I wish to take this opportunity to thank the Human Rights Commission for its dedication to the advancement of human rights in Bermuda and for supporting the Commission's statutory mandate with integrity and excellence.

Mr. Chairman, this ends my presentation on Head 56, Human Rights Commission.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Minister.

That concludes Head 56 on the Human Rights Commission. That's the third of the eight heads that we are hearing about this morning.

The next head is Head 63, the Parliamentary Registrar. Is that also again . . . yes, is Minister Rabain is going to take us through that one. For those listening, that's at [page] B-20 through B-22 of the Budget Book.

Minister, when you are ready, you have the floor.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

HEAD 63²—PARLIAMENTARY REGISTRAR

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, I would now like to present the brief for the Parliamentary Registrar, Head 63, found on pages B-20 through B-22 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure.

Mr. Chairman, the mandate for the Parliamentary Registrar is, *To independently manage elections and promote voter awareness in Bermuda to facilitate free and fair elections.*

Mr. Chairman, the Parliamentary Registrar is appointed by the Governor under the provisions of the Parliamentary Election Act 1978 and as such is required to discharge the duties conferred or imposed under the Act. The Parliamentary Registrar is subject to the general direction of the Governor and in the exercise of her statutory duties is assisted by such [members] of public officers as may from time to time be authorised to be employed.

The Parliamentary Election Act 1978, the Municipalities (Election) Order 2011, and the Bermuda Constitution Order 1968 are the instruments by which the activities of the Parliamentary Registrar are governed.

Mr. Chairman, the staff at the Parliamentary Registrar consist of six full-time positions under the

² Please see [Errata to Head 63](#) at page 2684.

direction of the Parliamentary Registrar, Ms. Tenia Woolridge. (People often mispronounce her name and I see it is actually written: pronounced Tenia.)

[Laughter]

The Chairman: Well, we got it right.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Yes. Yes. Yes.

Mr. Chairman, the Parliamentary Registrar is responsible for maintaining of the Parliamentary Registrar and overseeing a range of daily operational functions. In July 2025, the department relocated to 42 Victoria Street.

During the last budget cycle, the office focused on post-election activities including election close-out reviews, and an analysis of the 2025 general election. As the Registry moves into a new election cycle the department looks ahead to the potential of electoral reform while continuing to strengthen and grow the newly established team at the Parliamentary Registrar. I will make a slight correction there. As the department looks ahead to electoral reform . . . not potential.

The Chairman: Yes, thank you.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The department would also like to take this opportunity to thank and congratulate former Assistant Parliamentary Registrar, Mr. Michael Smith, on his retirement in September 2025. Mr. Smith dedicated 43 years to public service, nine of which were spent at the Parliamentary Registrar. And we extend our sincere appreciation for his contributions and wish him every success and fulfilment in retirement.

During the 2025/26 fiscal period, the department also supported the work of the constitutional boundaries and the Boundaries Commission which was temporarily paused due to the general election and reappointed in May 2025. The Commissioner's work is anticipated to be completed within the current year. The regular review of constituency boundaries is a constitutional requirement and remains essential to preserving fairness, representation, and the integrity of the electoral process.

Mr. Chairman, the Parliamentary Registrar has commenced a new election cycle with a strategic plan covering the next four years. In the upcoming budget cycle, the department will revive Voter Awareness Month in April, during which it will engage key stakeholders on electoral processes. This will include candidates from the last general election and Members of Parliament. The department also intends to visit senior schools to facilitate voter registration for students turning 18 during the year, ensuring early engagement in the democratic process.

All outreach activities will be framed around the core principles of voter rights, responsibilities, and informed choice. In addition, the Parliamentary Registrar has begun a detailed examination of absentee voting,

a topic of significant public interest in Bermuda. This work is intended to support the policymakers by providing operational and legislative insight to help ensure that reforms pursued are workable, credible, and capable of being implemented effectively in practice.

Parliamentary Registrar's Office

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, I now turn to the detailed estimates of expenditure and revenue across the five cost centres of the Parliamentary Registrar's Office.

For fiscal year 2026/27, the total budget allocation for the Parliamentary Registrar's Office is outlined on page B-20 of the Budget Book. It is \$1,420,000, an increase of \$87,000 compared to the original allocation in 2025/26.

Administration, Cost Centre 73000

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The proposed budget for the administration of the Parliamentary Registrar for 2026/27 fiscal year is \$1,157,000, representing a 9 per cent increase, or \$93,000 over the original 2025/26 budget. This increase is primarily contributable to higher rental and utility cost associated with the department's new location as well as approved salary increases.

This cost centre supports the Registry's day-to-day operations, including administrative supplies, voter registration materials, and equipment maintenance. It also funds the ongoing operation of the cash-receiving system and associated credit card processing fees, which facilitate the efficient issuance of apostille certificates, an important component of the department's core responsibilities.

Boundaries Commission, Cost Centre 73005

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain:

Mr. Chairman, the proposed budget for the Constituency Boundaries Commission for 2026/27 is \$90,000, a 2 per cent decrease *[sic]*, \$2,000, compared to the original 2025/26 budget. Funds allocated to this cost centre will support the administration—

The Chairman: It is an increase, I think you mean.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I'm just reading.

The Chairman: It's a 2 per cent increase. Yes.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: A 2 per cent increase.

The Chairman: Yes, it is \$88[,000] up to \$90[,000]. Yes.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: It doesn't list what the previous amount was.

The Chairman: Yes. No problem.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, a 2 per cent *increase* compared to the original 2025/26 budget.

Funds allocated to this cost centre will support the administration of the Commission, including travel and accommodation expenses for overseas Members participating in its activities.

General and Bye-Elections, Cost Centre 73010

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the proposed budget for the general and bye-elections cost centre for 2026/27 is \$124,000, representing a . . . am I getting this right?

The Chairman: Reduction.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: A 10 per cent decrease of \$25,000 from the original 2025/26 budget.

The Chairman: So, we can assume, Minister, that perhaps you are not triggering a bye-election this year then?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Ah . . .

[Laughter]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I'm not. I can't speak for anyone else.

[Laughter]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The allocated funds are intended to cover the costs of two bye-elections should they be required during the fiscal year.

So, you guys can replace two.

[Laughter]

Municipality Elections, Cost Centre 73015

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Ah, we may gain some savings here.

A proposed budget of \$29,000 has been allocated to the municipality elections cost centre for 2026/27, a decrease of 5 per cent, or \$3,000—

The Chairman: You weren't sure your Bill was going to pass, eh?

[Laughter]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: —from the 2025/26 budget.

This allocation provides for the conduct of one extraordinary municipal election if required during the fiscal year. Ah! *If required!*

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The Registrar does not expect to conduct an ordinary municipal election this year, as plans for reform are currently underway. Ah!

Electoral Reform Research, Cost Centre 73017

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the 2026/27 budget includes an allocation of \$20,000 for electoral reform research. This provision is intended to cover legal advice and related professional services required to support the drafting of any legislation or amendments arising from government-led electoral reform initiatives.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to turn your attention to page B-21, this subjective analysis for current account estimates.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Professional services decreased by \$87,000 [*sic*]. During the next fiscal period, most funds allocated under this object code will support the operations of the Constituency Boundaries Commission, including sitting fees for Commission members and costs associated with consultants engaged in this work. Consultants transitioning to full-time employees will be funded through the salaries budget.

Advertising and promotion decreased by \$42,000 [*sic*]. [The] advertising and promotion budget for the 2025/26 fiscal year . . . I'm assuming I should say 2026/27 fiscal year.

The Chairman: No, I think what's happened is perhaps the brief hasn't been updated because the numbers aren't tallying with the numbers in the Budget Book, which I think was something that happened to the Honourable Premier earlier in the earlier head.

If it assists, Minister, [page] B-21 is the actual budget numbers in this subjective analysis, and the last two have been incorrect. So, it may assist just to go through those. [Page] B-21, the top right there.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Okay.

The Chairman: And if you go back to professional services, I think that that was wrong too, but I—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: All right.

The Chairman: Thanks.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Okay.

Professional services will now be at \$124,000.

The Chairman: Yes. For the reasons stated.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: For the reasons stated.

I'm assuming they would still be doing the same work.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: And it will . . . which is an increase of \$13,000 from what was approved last year.

The advertising and promotion is \$65,000. These funds are primarily allocated across the Constituency Boundaries Commission, general bye-elections, and Municipalities cost centres with the main focus on voter information and public awareness.

[Pause]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Oh, goodness.

The Chairman: Minister, if it assists, why don't I just quickly ground us with where we are, and then you can just do some quick number rewriting for a minute.

So, Honourable Members and members of the listening public, we are in the Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27. We are currently listening to a four-hour debate on all of the non-ministries, of which there are eight up for debate today. Those are Heads 2, 5, 56, 63, 85, 92, 98, and 101. For those following along in the Budget Book, we are currently on the fourth of the eight heads, and that is Head 63, which relates to the Parliamentary Registrar. Again, these are non-ministries.

And we are hearing the presentation from the Honourable Minister Diallo Rabain who is taking us through Parliamentary Registrar's budget, which is laid out in the Budget Book at pages B-20, B-21, and B-22. And owing to a technical defect, some of the numbers in the Minister's brief appear to be outdated, and so he is just updating those numbers in accordance with the subjective analysis of current account estimates, which, for those following along, can be found on the top of [page] B-21.

And hopefully, with that stalling tactic, Minister, you might be where you need to be in order to continue the presentation.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: Well, I think, to be fair to the Honourable Minister, this isn't something that's prepared by him, and we are on non-ministries. But nonetheless, duly noted.

And, Minister, if you want to continue taking us through the numbers at [page] B-21 on the 2026/27 estimates, that would be helpful.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I thank you for your guidance on that.

Rentals

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the allocation for rentals is \$151,000, which would cover rental costs with the new premises that the Registrar General has moved to, which is actually just around the corner down here, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I now move on to revenue.

The Chairman: Yes.

Revenue

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Revenue generated through the issue of apostilles—

The Chairman: Apostilles?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Apostilles.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: For the 2025/26 fiscal . . . for the 2026 . . .

The Chairman: Twenty-seven.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Fiscal year 2026/27, the total revenue is estimated at \$250,000, unchanged from the previous budget.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The Parliamentary Registrar remains committed to the prompt and efficient issuance of apostille certificates for international and private sector clients. In support of this commitment, processes and procedures have been enhanced to improve the accuracy of financial reporting, ensuring greater efficiency and transparency in service delivery.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, I extend my sincere appreciation to the staff of the Parliamentary Registrar under the leadership of Tenia Woolridge. I got the—

The Chairman: It's spelled out.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: It's not got the correct spelling—

The Chairman: The correct spelling was included in the presentation in lieu of other things.

Thank you, Honourable Minister, for your presentation on Head 63, the Parliamentary Registrar.

Where are we for time? I think we still got some—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I was just . . . [there] was a few more words here.

The Chairman: Oh, well, sorry. I didn't mean to interrupt. Please continue, Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: For their unwavering commitment and dedication through the past fiscal year, their contributions are deeply valued, and I look forward to continued success in the year ahead.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Minister.

I'm sure we all echo that thanks. So that is the conclusion of the fourth of eight heads in the non-ministries, which was Head 63. And we are now moving on to Head 85, which is the Ombudsman.

And, Minister, I believe this is also your head? Or is someone else doing it?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Yes.

The Chairman: You're doing the . . . yes. So, we have Minister Diallo Rabain who will take us through Head 85, Ombudsman's Office.

For those following, that can be found at [page] B-23, B-24, and B-25 of the Budget Book.

And, Minister, we do have some time still to go before lunch, so you have the floor.

HEAD 85—OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased to present the budget for Head 85, the Office of the Ombudsman for Bermuda, found on pages B-23 through B-26 of the Budget Book.

Introduction and Mandate of the Office of the Ombudsman for Bermuda

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the Ombudsman is an independent non-governmental official who investigates complaints from the public about the administrative actions of public authorities. The role of the Ombudsman is to strengthen governance through the promotion of fairness, accountability and transparency.

The office works for the good of the public and those who work for the public. The office provides an impartial form of alternative dispute resolution which is flexible, accessible and less costly than adjudication through the courts. Anyone who feels they have been unjustly treated by an administrative action of a public authority may bring their complaint to the Ombudsman. A family member or other suitable person may make the complaint if the person is unable to do so.

Services are free, confidential and available to everyone. Even if a complaint is outside the Ombudsman's jurisdiction, the office can assist by providing information or making a referral to a body that can investigate the issue raised. The Ombudsman aims to put things right if they have gone wrong.

Mr. Chairman, the Ombudsman's mission is, *To protect the interests of the public by providing independent resources and interventions for individuals who have complaints about public services while influencing improvement in standards of those services to ensure people are treated fairly.*

To achieve this mission, the aims of the Ombudsman's Office are to

- ensure that these services are accessible to all users and provide [complainants] with effective and timely avenues to seek redress and restore fairness;
- enhance the impact of its work, encourage authorities to improve the services through [compliance] with recommendations and lay reports in the House of Assembly;
- expand its community engagement by developing public awareness, confidence and satisfaction of its performance;
- utilise local and international relationships to identify best practices and prepare for future developments;
- train and develop staff to create a positive and healthy working environment; and
- identify succession plans and contribute to the retention of key staff.

Mr. Chairman, core values of the Office of the Ombudsman are independence, fairness, respect and professionalism.

Mr. Chairman, the mandate of the Office of the Ombudsman is to receive complaints and investigate any administrative action of an authority for the purpose of deciding whether there is evidence of maladministration on the part of the authority. Wherein an investigation is conducted, the Ombudsman makes recommendations to the authority concerning any administrative actions that formed the subject of the investigation and more generally about ways of improving its administrative practices and procedures.

Mr. Chairman, the Ombudsman advocates alternative dispute resolutions and is addressing more complaints with informal resolution wherever it is suitable to do so. The office encourages the preservation of relationships between government authorities and persons with complaints. In addition, as an office of last resort, the Ombudsman also assists complainants by directing them for assistance to a more appropriate authority. The office also aims to assist whenever possible those who do not know where else to go for help.

Mr. Chairman, the Ombudsman's Office was established in Bermuda by the Bermuda Constitution (Amendment) Order 2001, and it is governed by the Ombudsman Act 2004. The office opened in August 2005. Section [93]B(2) of the Constitution protects the fundamental characteristic of an Ombudsman's Office, which is its independence, by stipulating (and I quote) that "in the exercise of his functions and jurisdiction, the Ombudsman shall not be subject to the direction or control of any other person or authority."

The Ombudsman submits an annual report of his operations to the Speaker of the House of Assembly with copies to the Governor and the President of the Senate. The accounts of the Ombudsman's Office are audited annually and reported on by the Auditor General.

The Office of the Ombudsman for Bermuda continues to be highly regarded by regional and international ombudsman institutions and colleagues. Its memberships include the Ombudsman Associations of the Caribbean, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada, as well as the African Ombudsman Research Centre, and the International Ombudsman Institute. Such relationships provide the Bermuda office with valuable assistance and access to the best available information on current practices and procedures.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, I now turn my attention to the specific estimates of expenditure which can be found on page B-124.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The estimated budget for 2026/27 is \$1,174,000, an overall net increase of \$74,000 when compared to the revised budget for 2025/26. Variances between 2025/26 original estimates and the 2026/27 estimates for amounts with a net change of \$10,000 and over are as follows:

- Estimate for salaries increased by \$44,000 as a result of union negotiated salary increases.
- Professional services increased by \$11 . . .

The Chairman: Yes, I think it is a different figure there.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Yes.

The Chairman: —for professional services—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: —Professional services increased by \$26,000—

The Chairman: Yes—

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: —as a result of additional assistance required from overseas technical consultants.

I am only assuming they don't do these reports that often.

The Chairman: No, the bottom-line figure was correct. So, it is just the professional services number that you—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I take what is written here and what is written here—

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: —doesn't align.

The Chairman: Well, in terms . . . we are going to go with the Budget Book, Minister, if that is all right with you.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Yes. That is why I looked at the Budget Book to ensure the number was going—

The Chairman: Perfect. Thank you.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: —because it has one thing written and one thing in numbers.

The Chairman: Do you want to take a minute to—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: No, no, I'm fine.

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I can move past . . . that is the last number I quote.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the allocated budget for six full-time employees (Okay that's correct.), all of whom are Bermudians, shown on page B-124 is \$830,000. Here we go.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: These positions are Ombudsman, Deputy Ombudsman, two investigative officers, a manager of finance and administration, and an intake and research officer. The Ombudsman also engages service providers and technical and professional services as required.

Capital Expenditures

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: For the 2026/27 fiscal year, there have been no approvals for capital purchases.

Mr. Chairman, this brings me to the end of Office of the Ombudsman's budget information. Mr. Chairman, in closing, I would like to thank the Ombudsman and staff for their commitment and dedication to their duties on behalf of the people of Bermuda.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

And I suppose to look on the bright side, we could be thankful to Head 2, the Legislature, for getting all of their numbers correct. So, credit to the Legislature for that one.

That concludes Head 85, which is the fifth of our eight heads today in our four-hour debate on non-ministries. And I believe the next head is 92, and I believe, Honourable Minister, you said that was going to be done by the Premier and Minister of Finance. So, Head 92 is internal audit. That commences at page B-26 of the Budget Book through to [page] B-28.

Honourable Premier, you have the floor . . . oh, you're not just ready. Okay. So, as the Premier gets himself ready for the further debate, this is the Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27. Today's debate is a four-hour debate on all of the non-ministries. So those are the entities outside of the various ministries that . . . each of them, we are looking at their budgets.

And we are now coming on to Internal Audit, Head 92, and we will hear the presentation on the budget for Internal Audit from the Honourable Premier and Minister of Finance when he is ready.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I'm prepared to do matters related to Internal Audit. I just want to seek your guidance, because you recognise we have some technical challenges.

The Chairman: We did. We have so far.

Hon. E. David Burt: We've gone back and forth.

The Chairman: Is it to be repeated on this non-ministry?

Hon. E. David Burt: I think we might be fine here.

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. E. David Burt: But I am concerned, certainly, with the incorrect information that has been read into the record.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: And specifically, I'm concerned for, I guess, the Shadow Minister who will be doing this particular matter specifically around the office related to the Auditor General. So, after I finish Head 92, can I just go back to Head 5 and provide the corrections for the record?

The Chairman: I think it would be very sensible. Would you like to do that right now?

Hon. E. David Burt: I can do it now.

The Chairman: Why don't we do that now? If it makes no difference to you, let's do the errata now.

Hon. E. David Burt: Okay.

The Chairman: So, we will go back, for those listening and following along, we are going to go back to Head 5, which is [page] B-14 of the Budget Book. And this relates to the officer of the Auditor General.

And the Honourable Premier is now—there was some misidentification of numbers earlier, or indeed the numbers were inaccurate. And the Honourable Premier is now going, for the benefit of the record, to correct with the accurate numbers.

Hon. E. David Burt: All right.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Premier.
At your leave.

HEAD 05—AUDITOR GENERAL ERRATA

Hon. E. David Burt: Got it. So, just as a note, I am just going to cover the points that were not fully accurate and to just provide additional context where context has been provided. And again, apologies have been expressed from the Permanent Secretary to the Ministry as the Auditor General did provide the correct figures. They just were not uploaded to the file nor printed for our particular items.

So, the one thing . . . the first place I will go to is actually on the current account expenditure for this year, the overall. And the reviewed and recommended budget by the Committee to the Ministry of Finance was \$4,747,475. The Ministry of Finance budget ceiling as seen inside of the Budget Book is \$4,685,875. This figure represented \$61,600 less than the reviewed recommended budget by the Committee. And I've explained the reason for that. However, this year's budget ceiling represents an increase of \$288,872, or 6.57 per cent compared to the prior year approved budget of \$4,397,002.

[An] important point, Mr. Chairman. As noted, it is understood and recognised that the Committee of the Auditor recommended this. We do an overall look and view of all of these Ministry budgets. And we also have to take into account prior year's spending. And as has been noted, the Auditor General has—not as a criticism—but has not ever met the spending amount. So, it does not make sense to allocate more monies that, in the estimation of the Ministry of Finance, will not be spent. And as I said last year, when we went through this debate, if the Auditor General does need additional funds, we can always make sure those additional funds are provided.

But as we see in this particular year, there is less money expected to be spent than was allocated, though there was the, I would say, comment that last

year we didn't fund the office to the full amount that was recommended. And that's just the . . . you know, it's the importance. We recognise that it's difficult to fill those particular matters.

On matters related to revenue, there are no particular changes that I wish to represent at this time. I do, however, wish to move on to [page] B-15 over to subjective analysis on to salaries, an important point here. And I'll read the updated matters related to salaries into the record for the Shadow Minister.

Salaries are \$3,742,000, this is an increase of \$278,000 or 8 per cent from the prior fiscal year. However, the reason for the increase that I gave before are, in addition, the increase is due mainly to the negotiated BPSU salary uplifts. And for the first time in many years, the office will have vacant budgeted posts that they expect to fill. The office did not fill all posts for the entire fiscal year 2025 [sic], but the office is working to be at a full complement for fiscal year 2026 . . . sorry, they did not fill all posts for the fiscal year 2025/26. However, the office is working to be at full complement for fiscal year 2026/27.

I hope that helps the Shadow Minister on that particular point there, Mr. Chairman.

Moving down still on matters related to salaries, I just want to update on matters related to Bermudians in the office and designations. The office does currently employ four Bermudian students who are pursuing professional designations. We have had a recent team member qualify for their professional accounting designations and who the office is working to position them with a more senior role in the office.

Moving to the next line item of professional services, if I may, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: Professional services are \$359,000, a decrease of \$9,000, or 2 per cent from last fiscal year. That was read into the record, but I do want to read the expanded explanation which has been given by the Office of the Auditor General.

This is our next most significant expense and includes services for our contracted audits and expert advice as needed. There are several significant updates and amendments to the Public Sector Accounting Standards that are forthcoming from the Conceptual Framework for Financial Reporting and the financial statement presentation to changes to Employee Benefit Standards. The office must also keep pace and assess the impact on the Government of Bermuda's control environment and financial statement audits from the adoption and rollout of artificial intelligence to digital assets.

The office expects to continue to use contracted firms to aid them in meeting their legislative commitments and aid during peak workloads and for unexpected separations from the office.

We will move to another line item, which is repair and maintenance, where it is different from what I had stated previously—not the amounts, but the reasonings behind it.

The Chairman: Yes, yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: The amounts are \$157,000, an increase of \$17,000 from last year's budget. And this increase primarily relates to software maintenance agreements and subscriptions as they recently completed their migration to Microsoft Office 365. Now, you will see that this is something that we are seeing across the board as the Minister, who also shares responsibility for the Cabinet Office with me, and we went over it. We are seeing significant amount of money for software subscriptions.

These are certainly things that over the next few years we will have to look at ameliorating as those expenses continue to rise. But, of course, we need to make sure that we are rationalising using the correct thing. That's a broader comment here, but this is a specific matter related to the Office of the Auditor General.

If I could just move on to travel, the figures that I gave was \$33,000, an increase of \$5,000.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: Just to provide the particular background on that for the Shadow Minister's benefit. Staff auditors pursuing their professional destination may travel to attend training and development courses in pursuit of their professional destinations. Additionally, the Auditor General and team members may attend training for the long-term sustainability of the office, as it is critical in keeping abreast of emerging auditing trends and participating in the roundtable discussions to support and influence matters impacting the jurisdiction from the development of the auditing methodology practices and professional development with the standard settings bodies, such as the Public Sector Accounting Board.

Mr. Chairman, I did speak to the capital acquisitions, which is found on page C-9.

The Chairman: You did.

Hon. E. David Burt: Noting that there were none and there was a particular request, and I did state the fact that the reason why that request was not given, because at the time the money was not spent,—

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: There was still a surplus.

Hon. E. David Burt: However, as has been communicated by the office for the replacement in matters related to laptops and desktops for the office, we will

make sure those funds are made available, because we do not want the Office of Auditor General working on old computers.

We know that we have had to do significant computer replacement throughout government over the last years, and we all will recognise and know the frustration of working on old devices, especially when you are trying to deal with complex matters.

The Chairman: Pausing you there, Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes.

The Chairman: [Page] C-9 should therefore be adjusted—

Hon. E. David Burt: No, no, no. [Page] C-9 is zero. It is still going to remain zero.

If there is going to be a need to provide additional items, we will, and we will update—

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: —when it goes, yes.

But from that perspective, there is no errata that has been issued, because we might actually try to get them the money this year, as there are unspent capital funds. So that is what the Ministry of Finance Office is working with.

The Chairman: Understood.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Just so we are all on the same page, which, as it happens, is [page] B-15, there is no need for an errata because the Budget Book is accurate.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mm-hmm.

The Chairman: The Honourable Premier has now clarified, firstly, that it was not an error by the Auditor General, which we note, and that the Budget Book is correct. And he has clarified certain of the reasons for the changes in this fiscal year for the benefit of the listening public and, indeed, the Shadow Minister. So, hopefully that is now all done.

Hon. E. David Burt: One more thing.

The Chairman: Oh, one more to come?

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes. One more.

The Chairman: Sorry.

Hon. E. David Burt: One more. Sorry.

The Chairman: Please continue.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: No. Go ahead.

Hon. E. David Burt: The final item, of course, will be manpower.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: Manpower, it says the employee numbers estimates for the Office of the Auditor General are 30 full-time posts. Of the 30 full-time employees, Bermudians still fill 10 posts out of the 10 Bermudian staff, there are four students, three professional accounts, and three support staff.

The important thing to note here is that we anticipate continued growth in our student base over the next two to three years, and this represents a significant milestone for the office, as the office had no students just a few years ago, and she wanted to make sure that the House of Assembly was aware of those particular matters.

Finally, yes, Mr. Chairman, that would be the final matter for me to add.

The Chairman: Well, I'm grateful to the Honourable Premier for the clarifications and corrections in relation to Head 5. That was our sort of second bite at Head 5, which featured as the second head originally in the eight.

We will now commence anew with our . . . what is it, our sixth head, I think, of eight, which is Head 92, Internal Audit. And that can be found at [page] B-26.

And Honourable Premier, I believe you are going to address us on this one as well, yes?

Hon. E. David Burt: Absolutely, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Okay, you have the floor.

Hon. E. David Burt: I will just, with your leave, just to say I did miss one particular thing, and that is the fact that the Auditor General has noted that there has been a decrease in the audits that are outstanding, and it has gone from a number of 172 last year to 148 this year, which recognises progress that has been made.

But let me move on to Internal Audit, and I'm sure there will be some questions on that as we go.

The Chairman: Sorry, what were those figures, just quickly?

Hon. E. David Burt: The figures . . .

The Chairman: Decrease from 100 and . . .

Hon. E. David Burt: Last year, there were 176 years of financial statements that were outstanding.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: This year, it is down to 148 years.

The Chairman: Thank you, 148.

Hon. E. David Burt: So, it is just a decrease.

The Chairman: Yes, thank you very much.

Hon. E. David Burt: It's not something that is inside the [Budget] Book, but it's just an overall decrease, as we did state that we are trying to make progress on outstanding audits, and it is clear that progress actually has been made on outstanding audits.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I will now move on to pages B-26 through 28 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure, dealing with the Department of Internal Audit, Head 92. This one will be pretty quick.

The Chairman: Well, let's hope that Internal Audit can get their audit numbers right—

Hon. E. David Burt: I'm nervous now.

The Chairman: —for the purposes of your brief.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman, just so we are clear, the Auditor General did provide the correct figures. They just forgot to print it.

That is, I do not want the story today to be, you know,—

The Chairman: No, no.

Hon. E. David Burt: —*the Premier says the Auditor General provided the incorrect figures.* That was a little bit of jest earlier. But she did provide the correct figures.

The Chairman: I am sure that the Auditor General would have taken that in the spirit with which it was intended when the Premier made the comment, and we all appreciate that she got the numbers right, and we are grateful for that. Thank you, Mr. Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: All right. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

HEAD 92—DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AUDIT

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, I now rise to present the budget for Head 92, the Department of Internal Audit, found on pages B-26 through B-28 of the Budget Book.

Mandate/Mission

Hon. E. David Burt: The mandate and mission of the Department of Internal Audit is, *To provide independent, objective assurance and advisory services to improve operations and internal control systems.*

Expenditure Overview

Hon. E. David Burt: The expenditure overview, including the subjective analysis is found on page B-27, the total current account expenditure is expected to be \$1,177,000 for fiscal year 2026/27, and represents an increase of \$62,000, or 6 per cent more than the estimate for the prior financial year, and this change is primarily due to the 4.3 per cent salary uplift for 2026/27 and salary increments. Line item 1, Salary, is \$57,000, an increase in service costs for rented office space. Line item 7, Rentals, 2,000, an increase in audit software licence costs. Line item 8, Repair and Maintenance of \$3,000.

Capital expenditure for this department is non-applicable.

Insofar as manpower, total estimated FTEs and funded positions for fiscal year 2026/27, the department is nine, representing eight professional staff and one administrative officer.

The department's funded posts are comprised of one director, one administrative officer, one internal audit manager, one IT audit manager, one senior auditor, one IT audit senior, and three internal audit officers who are working towards obtaining professional internal auditor qualifications.

The internal audit officer positions are Bermudian-only training positions to encourage in-chamber meetings in the internal auditing profession.

Performance Measures

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, the reported forecast performance measures for fiscal year were achieved as follows:

- The department achieved its engagement activity reporting staff utilisation and continued professional development outcomes during the year.
- The number of recommendations issued from all audit projects totalling 20 related to remediating identified weaknesses in internal control systems and governance and risk management activities. As a result of follow-up procedures performed, the department recorded
 - eighteen management actions which were implemented by decree upon dates;
 - issued four audit reports covering operations, financial and IT systems;
 - four surprise compliance audit reports for a total of eight audit reports issued during the year.

- It is anticipated the department will issue six audit reports and four compliance reports by the end of fiscal year 2025/26.

There are no major policy changes for this department.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. E. David Burt: Plans for the upcoming year, Mr. Chairman, is to execute the department's 2026/27 approved audit plan to conduct six audit projects and five compliance reviews to continue to train and develop our staff, especially the three Bermudian internal audit officers as they work towards attaining their certified information systems auditor and/or certified internal auditor professional qualifications while gaining work experience in the internal audit field.

That is the shortest brief for this particular set of non-ministry departments but ends the presentation on Head 92 Department Internal Audit.

And all persons are standing by and listening for questions that may be asked, so we are ready to respond to whatever plethora of questions the Shadow Minister may wish to give.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Premier.

And we now move on to our penultimate head, which is Head 98, which is the Information Commissioner's Office. I see the Honourable Minister limbering up for Information Commissioner's Office presentation, so Honourable Minister Diallo Rabain will now take us to the Information Commissioner's Office, which for those following is on [pages] B-29, 30, and 31, and 32, and 33.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: Hang on. Yes. [pages B-]29 through [B-]33 of the Budget Book.

Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Yes, and Mr. Chairman, for reasons similarly explained by the Premier, I would like to seek leave of yourself and the House to go back to the Parliamentary Registrar to correct some incorrect information that had been inadvertently inserted into the binder.

The Chairman: Okay, so I suppose what I should have done with the Premier and I didn't, but I will do just for you if you don't mind.

Is there any objection as to why we would go back to that head?

There being none, Minister, please feel free to make corrections.

And just for the record, we are making corrections to your prior presentation, which was in relation to the Parliamentary Registrar, which was Head 63. So,

for the benefit of the Hansard, that would have been the fourth head we dealt with already. Minister, that is [page] B-20, and I suspect the corrections are at [page] B-21—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Starting at page B-21—

The Chairman: [Page] B-21. And these, again, to be clear, this is not a need for an erratum. These are just the clarifications around—

HEAD 63—PARLIAMENTARY REGISTRAR ERRATA

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: These are the clarifications of the numbers that are actually already in the [Budget] Book. Inadvertently, an old brief . . . some sprinklings of an old brief was printed. And I do apologise to the listening public and especially to the Shadow Minister. I'm sure he was furiously writing.

So, when I look at [page] B-21, I want to speak about professional services that have increased by \$13,000. During the next fiscal year, most funds allocated under this object code will support the operations of the Constituency Boundaries Commission—I believe I said they had decreased previously—including sitting fees for Commission members and associated costs

Advertising and promotions have decreased by \$14,000, and I believe I said something else last time. This advertising and promotion budget for the fiscal year is \$65,000, representing a \$14,000 decrease from the previous year. These funds are primarily allocated across the Constituency Boundaries Commission, general and bye-elections, and municipality cost centres with the focus on voter information and public awareness campaigns.

Repair and maintenance increased by \$33,000. This budget allocation for this object code is \$97,000, and these funds will cover new internet charges, software maintenance, and subscription changes. It also covers weekly office cleaning.

And lastly, energy increased by \$11,000. The budget allocation for this object code is \$13,000 as a result of the office relocation. The department has assumed responsibilities for electricity costs, which were previously borne elsewhere. This allocation will cover the associated utility expenses for the financial year.

And, Mr. Chairman, that is the only change from what I read previously, and it should marry-up with what is in the Budget Book.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Minister.

Is there anything else that we need to deal with in Head 63, or can we put it to bed?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: And we can put Head 63 to bed.

The Chairman: Okay. In which case, let us take you back. I think you were about to start the presentation on Head 98.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Yes.

The Chairman: Which was the Information Commissioner's Office, which we can find at [page] B-29 of the Budget Book and onwards.

And this is the second to the last head in what is a four-hour debate on the non-ministries. And we are just coming up on the conclusion of the second hour of this debate, which has got two more.

So, Minister, when you are ready on the Information Commissioner's Brief, you have the floor.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you.

HEAD 98—INFORMATION COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 98, the Information Commissioner's Office found on pages B-29 through B-33 of the Budget Book.

Mandate and Mission

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the Information Commissioner Office [ICO] is an independent non-ministry public office established in 2015 when the Public Access to Information Act 2010 (or PATI Act), was brought into operation. The ICO's mission is to, *Uphold the right of all Bermudians and residents of Bermuda to access public records to the greatest extent possible within the provisions of the Public Access to Information Act 2010.*

The ICO's objectives as listed on page B-29 of the Budget Book are to

- encourage a cultural shift with the public and public authorities by embracing the principles of public access to information;
- foster the use of PATI rights through public awareness and education;
- assist public authorities to develop and follow best practices in meeting their obligations [under] the PATI Act through guidance and oversight;
- conduct independent and impartial investigations and reviews in a fair and timely manner;
- engage stakeholders to strengthen and enhance public access to information rights and their protections in law.

The ICO's mission and objectives, taken together, bring life to the purposes of the PATI Act for the public's benefit, which are to

- give the public the right to obtain access to the information held by public authorities to the greatest extent possible, subject to exceptions

that are in the public interest, or for the protection of the right of others;

- increased transparency and eliminate unnecessary secrecy with regard to information held by public authorities;
- increase the accountability of public authorities;
- inform the public about the activities of public authorities including the manner in which they make decisions; and
- have more information placed in the public domain as a matter of routine.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, a total of \$1,280,000 has been allocated to the Information Commissioner's Office as shown on page B-30, which represents an increase of \$80,000, or 7 per cent from the previous year's budget allocation.

This increase constitutes approximately 6 per cent of the ICO's total budget for 2026/27. This increase is primarily due to a salary uplift which sees an increase of \$40,000 attributed to new BPSU pay scales taking effect. With the remaining \$40,000 of increases being used to fund reasonable costs associated with necessary professional services that are essential for the ICO's operation. Details of these expenditures are discussed further in the subjective analysis.

Mr. Chairman, the Information Commissioner's Office is subdivided into four fiscally identifiable business units.

108000—Administration

108010—Reviews and Decisions

108020—Compliance

108030—Public Awareness

I shall proceed to address each business unit individually as follows:

Administration, 108000

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The Administration business units provide for the full range of administrative operations and personal costs to maintain the day-to-day operational activities of the Information Commissioner's Office, which total \$1,224,000. This represents an increased allocation of \$67,000, or 6 per cent. The administration's business unit's estimated costs represent 96 per cent of the ICO's total budget allocation for 2026/27. The largest expenditure items on the administration's business unit are for salaries, office rent, and IT infrastructure.

These are fixed and unavoidable costs for which the ICO continues to exercise fiscal prudence over.

Reviews and Decisions, 108010

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The Reviews and Decisions business unit covers the costs associated with the Information Commissioner's external reviews and investigations of decisions made by public authorities regarding requests for access to public records under the Public Access to Information Act.

A total of \$20,000 has been allocated to this budget, principally to cover expected costs for external legal services to support legal and litigation risks that arise from reviews and decisions, and this represents a \$12,000 increase, or 150 per cent increase year over year.

Mr. Chairman, legal issues arise during external reviews by the Information Commissioner are increasingly complex as PATI Act regime matures, resulting in perennial need to seek legal advice or to prepare for potential judicial review actions in courts. Most of the resource costs by way of human capital used for conducting reviews comes out of salaries for public officers on the Administration business unit.

During fiscal year 2025/26 the ICO curbed some legal costs by utilising in-house legal opinions drafted by their investigation officer and former senior investigation officer as they are both qualified attorneys. Utilising their legal expertise, although not originally a part of the job description, has opened opportunities for future development of both roles but does not completely replace the need for external legal counsel.

Compliance, 108020

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: For 2026/27 fiscal year, \$6,000 has been allocated to support the Information Commissioner's compliance-related oversight and assistance to public authorities. This is a \$2,000, or 25 per cent reduction.

Mr. Chairman, this allocation covers briefings, guidance, and support activities tied to the PATI Act compliance for public authorities. Cost savings continue to be realised by reducing rental costs by using public facilities like Bermuda College when hosting in-person activities. This economical approach retains spending within the public sector.

Public Awareness, 108030

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The Public Awareness business unit encompasses costs related to the delivery of public awareness and education activities aimed at informing the public of their right to access public information. For the fiscal year 2026/27, a total of \$30,000 has been allocated to this business unit. This represents an increase of \$3,000, or 11 per cent, over the previous fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman, the ICO's Public Awareness business unit is steadily recovering from years of underfunding. This minimum increase will allow ICO to maintain existing educational outreach programmes, production of the ICO's annual report, and calls for

promotion and events around International Day for Universal Access to Information in September.

Subjective Analysis

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the subjective analysis of current account estimates for the Information Commissioner's Offices is found on [page] B-113, and I will now highlight the material object code increases and decreases. The estimated for ICO salaries is \$855,000, an expected increase of \$40,000, or 5 per cent, year over year. Specifics of the ICO staffing complement are detailed later in this presentation, but the 2026/27 increase in salaries is due to salary uplifts from the new BPSU pay agreement.

Mr. Chairman, the next notable increase in ICO's subjective analysis is an increase of \$35,000 for professional services, for a total estimate of \$135,000. This is an increase of 35 per cent. Professional services include the provision of a full range of IT services, bespoke case management software, office security services, website development, legal services, and design and production services for the ICO's annual report.

Anticipated expenditures for these services remain relatively stable year over year. The ICO intends to use the \$35,000 increase in professional services to engage technical and professional advisors which are necessary to exist in the discharge of the office's functions. Using the increase in this way will enhance human capacity for ICO during this period of understaffing. It will also bring new expertise to apply in technically complex investigations which aid in the acquisition of new skills and competencies for the ICO's investigative officers. Other small increases in the subjective analysis cover expected increases in cost of electricity, telephone services, and training for public officers.

Mr. Chairman, the Information Commissioner reports that the ICO still awaits an approved lease for the new office accommodations to finalise the office's relocation to its own facility. The ICO remains tethered to a rolling month-to-month lease and co-location arrangement with the Office of the Privacy Commissioner. This arrangement has outlived both office needs and the process of decoupling the offices has lagged since 2024/25 fiscal year resulting in vulnerability and instability in both offices' secretarial separate functions and mandates.

The ICO expects to spend \$125,000 on rentals. Of that amount, projected building rental costs of \$117,300 is for the new office location in Hamilton that is currently under negotiation by the Department of Public Lands and Buildings. Securing the proposed new lease for ICO will help realise \$22,000 in savings during the 2026/27 for rentals.

Mr. Chairman, the Information Commissioner's Office has an estimate of \$10,000 allocated for travel expenses for this fiscal year, an increase of \$3,000, or 43 per cent, which will be used for attendance at the

annual 2026 International Conference of Information Commissioners [ICIC] taking place during September in Sierra Leone. Bermuda's ICO continues to serve as a member of the ICIC Executive Committee. Bermuda's presence raises our international profile as a trusted jurisdiction with a robust access to information regime and then support to the advancement and capacity-building for improvements to the information rights globally. Public officers benefit greatly from the transference of skills, expertise, and insights which are exchanged at the ICIC Conference.

Capital Expenditures

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the capital expenditures for ICO are found on page C-9. The capital account estimate for 2026/27 fiscal year is \$36,000.

This capital expenditure allocation will be used by the ICO to purchase furniture and equipment needed for its new office. The ICO relocation also triggers additional costs for necessary infrastructure enhancements to the computer equipment and IT software.

Manpower

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, for 2026/27, the Information Commissioner's Office has a salaries allocation of \$855,000. As stated earlier, this is a 5 per cent increase from the previous year. Salaries continue to comprise the majority of the ICO's operating budget, accounting for 67 per cent of the total allocation.

This will fund six full-time equivalents, although there is a total of eight established FTEs. The ICO currently has a staff of five, including the commissioner. And the ICO has four public officers supporting the discharge of the Information Commissioner's statutory functions: A deputy information commissioner, a manager, finance administration, an acting senior investigation officer, and a project officer.

In October 2025, the ICO's senior investigation officer resigned after one year in that role. With this resignation, the office now has three established FTEs that are vacant and a senior investigation officer and an administrative assistant. During 2026/27 the ICO plans to recruit an investigation officer and expects to fill the senior investigation officer post through internal promotion. However, two established FTEs will remain unfunded for this year.

Mr. Chairman, the Information Commissioner maintains that funding for these two vacancies is not a request to expand the office, but an urgent need to return the office to expected staffing levels. The ICO has consistently . . . What am I seeing here? Oh, I'm sorry. For [an] office this size, these two posts represent a quarter of the ICO's operational capacity. That impact . . . the remaining officers shall continue to perform with professionalism and commitment. The Information Officer is clear that the office will continue to discharge its

mandate to the best of its ability within the resources provided.

Mr. Chairman, the Information Commissioner's officers have made downward adjustments to its performance measures because of the ongoing staff shortages as outlined in pages B-32 through B-33. The ICO's output continues to demonstrate operational excellence, resilience, and commitment to fulfilling a statutory mandate within a challenging fiscal environment.

Business Unit 108000, Administration

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The Administration unit is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the ICO, including facilities management, staff support, training, and access to the necessary resources.

Its performance is measured by how effectively it upholds statutory, financial, and governance obligations. The ICO has consistently met its statutory requirement to lay its annual report before the Legislature by March 31. The ICO demonstrates fiscal transparency and accountability by proactively establishing its quarterly expenditure reports and financial records online.

The office maintains a strong audit record, having consistently received "unqualified" audits from the Auditor General. In the year ahead, the unit plans to continue its review and updates to external guides and policies and procedures to align with evolving best practices and legal standards.

Business Unit 108010, Reviews and Decisions

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: This unit handles applications submitted for external review of public authorities' PATI request decisions. It represents the most complex and labour-intensive function within the ICO. In 2025, the ICO received 30 new applications for external reviews.

The unit is challenged to meet its eight-month target to close reviews, a miracle impacted by the complexity of investigations. Delays are frequently due to public authority challenges in responding to reviews while managing their core functions. As of now, there are 38 open reviews to the investigation process.

To address the growing backlog, the ICO is streamlining its internal review processes for greater efficiency while maintaining fairness and decision quality. The ICO proactively seeks resolution opportunities between parties to reduce review timelines.

Business Unit 108020, Compliance

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The Compliance unit is responsible for monitoring and guiding public authorities in fulfilling their legal obligations under the Public Access to Information Act, particularly those outlined in Part 2 of the Act. Key responsibilities include

- collecting and analysing annual return data from around 190 public authorities;
- promoting the proactive publication of public records;
- ensuring information statements are updated regularly; and monitoring the gazetting of details for contracts over \$50,000.

Despite the volume of authorities, the ICO delivers quarterly compliance briefings on emergent issues, provides direct assistance to public authorities as needed, and publishes guidance materials to support consistent best-paced compliance.

In 2025/26, the ICO has utilised a new digital tool for collecting compliance data through annual returns. Leveraging data analysis from annual returns has identified trends and opportunities for improvement. As a direct result, targeted compliance intervention with non-compliant public authorities has risen this year.

Business unit 108030—

The Chairman: Minister, is that a convenient moment to pause, or are we almost at the end of your ICO briefing and you would like to finish, I don't mind?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Ah . . . no.

The Chairman: Still [have] a way to go.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Yes.

The Chairman: All right.

Minister, would you kindly move that we adjourn?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, I move that we adjourn for lunch and pick this back up at 2:00 pm.

The Chairman: It has been moved that we adjourn until 2:00 pm.

No objection; approved.

[Gavel]

Proceedings in Committee suspended at 12:31 pm

Proceedings in Committee resumed at 2:01 pm

[Ms. Linda Smith, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026/27

[Continuation thereof]

The Chairman: Good afternoon, Honourable Members, and good afternoon to the radio listening

audience. We have just resumed after lunch. We are resuming debate in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27 for the non-ministries.

There are eight Non-Ministry heads. We have completed six. We are in the process of the seventh one. The debate started at 10:20 this morning, and we have about one hour and a half left. When we broke for lunch, we were debating Head 92, which is Internal Audit. I am sorry . . . no, it was [Head] 98, Information Commissioner's Office, found on pages B-29 through B-33.

Minister Rabain was leading that debate, and would you like to continue?

Thank you.

NON-MINISTRY HEADS

HEAD 98—INFORMATION COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

[Continuation thereof]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and for your edification, we were just getting ready to discuss business unit 108030.

I don't actually have what page it is on here—

The Chairman: It was 108010?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: [It was 1080]30.

The Chairman: Okay, that would be on page B-30.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: [Page] B-30. Okay, thank you.

The Chairman: Under General Summary.

Public Awareness, 108030

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The Public Awareness unit plays a central role in advancing, promoting, and safeguarding the right of access to public records, which opens pathways for and links to, access to other important fundamental rights and civil participation. The ICO raises public awareness through:

- educational initiatives;
- social media and accessible online resources;
- public events, including International Day for the Universal Access to Information; and
- stakeholder engagement to strengthen understanding and use of information access rights.

Public awareness and support for the right of access of information is high, with 87 per cent of respondents in the ICO's 2025 public engagement survey indicating that access to public records was important to them. Public awareness efforts are transitioning towards improving the public's understanding of the array

of public information that is already accessible online. The ICO also plans to design methods to activate public participation in identifying gaps in publicly available information that can naturally support ICO's efforts to encourage public authorities to make more information proactively available online.

Major Policy Changes

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Madam Chairman, the Information Commissioner's Office awaits government implementation of two significant policy changes from amendments to the PATI Act. The introduction of a fee schedule for certain PATI requests and the introduction of a statutory deadline of eight months for the ICO to complete external reviews. As of now, ICO stands ready for the announcement of a planned implementation date.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: In the upcoming year, the Office will continue advancing the Information Commissioner's vision of achieving balance to the mandate. While reviews and investigations remain essential, the ICO will be directing greater efforts towards strengthening proactive disclosure and improving public authorities' compliance with Part 2 of the Act.

This strategy is not an expansion of scope. Rather, it is a compliance-driven, efficiency-focused approach designed to reduce disputes, lower administrative burden across government, and improve public access to information at the source.

The Commissioner and staff will achieve this through strategic priorities designed to modernise oversight activities by

- strengthening proactive publication; encouraging public authorities to publish information of relevance or interest to the public regarding their activities and functions;
- enhancing existing online compliance tools to support public authorities in understanding and meeting their obligations, and
- supporting digital innovation to overcome barriers to access public information and reduce bureaucratic burdens on public authorities.

Bringing life to the legislature's intent to give Bermuda's public the right to access public information to the greatest extent possible can only be aspirational without investment of public funds for the effective oversight of the PATI regime of the Information Commissioner. The Information Commissioner renews its commitment to safeguarding the right of access to public information in Bermuda and sound stewardship of this office with money appropriated by the legislature for the 2026/27 fiscal year.

Madam Chairman, that ends my presentation for Head 98, the Information Commissioner's Office. I wish to commend the Information Commissioner, Mr.

Jason Outerbridge, on his first year in office and thank his staff for their exemplary work over the last year as they managed the transition to a new Commissioner.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

And that moves us to the next head which would be [Head] 101, Privacy Commissioner's Office.

Minister, will you be leading that?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I will.

The Chairman: Okay, thank you.

HEAD 101—PRIVACY COMMISSIONER

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Madam Chairman, on behalf of the Office of the Privacy Commissioner for Bermuda, it gives me great pleasure to present the current account estimates for Head 101, PrivCom (I guess that is what we call them now), a Non-Ministry office found on B-35 and B-38 of the Budget Book.

The Chairman: I believe it starts on B-34.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: [Page B-]34, what did I say, 35? I am sorry, B-35 [*sic*] and 38.

Mission and Mandate

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Madam Chairman, the mission of the Privacy Commissioner is found on page B-34, is, *To protect the rights of individuals in Bermuda in relation to use of their personal information*, in accordance with the Personal Information Protection Act 2016 (PIPA) (or the Act).

The mandate of the Privacy Commissioner is, *To monitor the administration of [the Personal Information Protection Act 2016] (PIPA) to ensure that its purposes are achieved for the upholding of the privacy rights of individuals enshrined in the statute*. The Privacy Commissioner's mandate involves undertaking reviews, investigations, and providing reports and developing public awareness of the statutory framework.

The Privacy Commissioner is empowered to regulate the use of personal information by organisations so that such use is in a manner which recognises both the need to protect the privacy rights of individuals in relation to their personal information and a necessity for organisations to use personal information for legitimate purposes.

Our strategic priorities for the year include:

- Enforcement—proactively uphold and advance privacy rights to deliver impactful outcomes for the community through increasing efficiencies in intake and investigative purposes.
- Engagement with community stakeholders and strategic informant activities.
- Education and awareness—develop the capacity of organisations to engage in statutory rights

request processes and interactions with the Privacy Commissioner's Office in a more informed manner via the delivery of practical and accessible written guidance, education and engagement programmes, and measure success via surveys and mechanisms that allow for public feedback.

- Develop the public spaces of the physical office of the Privacy Commissioner to support opportunities for members of the community to receive on-site education, support with intake processes, and general enquiries.

- Compliance outcomes, internal—advance effective and efficient regulatory practice, communications, and internal governance through risk-based data-driven sustainable operations and risk management.

- Conduct a review of the current department objectives as part of a wider audit exercise to support the general maturing of the public authority and reflect on all sections of PIPA that have been fully enforced for over a year.

- Staffing—foster a workplace where staff are valued and empowered and have the appropriate skills and experience to meet accountability standards within a complex regulatory environment, provide career pathways to support succession planning, growth opportunities, and ensure that the Privacy Commissioner's Office is positioned as an employer of choice.

- Engage in resource development and training to ensure staff are adequately supported and consistently uphold public trust in the delivery of the Privacy Commissioner's mandate.

Madam Chairman, the Personal Information Protection Act 2016 (PIPA) establishes the statutory mandate for the Privacy Commissioner and sets out its powers and duties and independence. The Act was assented on July 27, 2016, with provisions for establishing the Office and appointing the Commissioner enacted in December 2016. The remaining sections of the Act came into full effect on January 1, 2025, marking a significant milestone in Bermuda's data protection framework. PIPA applies to all organisations in Bermuda that use personal information and part of a structured filing system, whether manual or automated.

PrivCom operates as an independent Non-Ministry entity, and must submit an annual report to both houses of the legislature by June 30th of each year, [and] undergoes an independent annual audit by the Auditor General. This audit is outside of the Consolidated Fund. The Privacy Commissioner is appointed by the Governor of Bermuda and exercises their statutory functions [and] is not subject to the direction or control of any other person or authority. Every member of staff appointed or engaged is subject to the Privacy Commissioner's direction and control for their performance and their function under PIPA. These legislative requirements support regulatory and operational independence while ensuring public accountability for the regulatory office.

Madam Chairman, PIPA empowers individuals to control how their personal information is used, offering protection for themselves while strengthening Bermuda's position as a trusted and modern digital jurisdiction. PIPA supports Bermuda's reputation as a premier offshore jurisdiction with robust regulatory regimes which are aligned with international standards, encouraging innovation, engagement, and investment in commerce.

The Privacy Commissioner has numerous resources on its website, practical tools and guidance for businesses, especially small to medium-sized organisations: [General Data Protection Regulation] (GDPR) [and] PIPA crosswalk, accessible resources such as the Guide to PIPA, Advice for Individuals, templates and checklists (at www.privacy.bm), guidance for recording in public places, and numerous other resources.

Internationally, the Commissioner has engaged with global data protection peers, ensuring Bermuda's policies align with international best practice, positioning Bermuda as a regulatory leader among financial centres on the global stage. These efforts have advocated both public understanding and privacy rights while also strengthening protections and rights for the people of Bermuda.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Madam Chairman, as shown on page B-34 of the 2026/27 fiscal year, the Office of the Privacy Commissioner has been allocated a budget of \$2,392,767, representing a net increase of \$150,632, or 7 per cent, over the previous year.

The Chairman: Just for the record, Minister, it is \$2,393,000 according to the Budget Book.

[Pause]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Seems like a recurring theme here, Madam Chairman.

[Pause]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Madam Chairman—
Oh, I am looking at—

The Chairman: Okay. Okay, we're on—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: If you just give me an opportunity to make sure that I have that page.

The Chairman: No problem, no problem.
It's [page] B-34 is what I'm looking at now.
Thank you.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Yes. Ah, I know what the issue is, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Okay.

IT Infrastructure

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Is in the Budget . . . and for the edification of the listening audience, in the Budget Book, it is rounded up to the nearest hundred thousand. Whereas here, it's the exact figure. Okay?

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: So, I will be guided (and I see some more) if I see it elsewhere.

Madam Chairman, both the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and PrivCom are currently located on the fourth floor of the Maxwell Roberts Building, and share common areas, as well as the expenses involved with the operation of physical premises as public authorities. In light of PrivCom's staffing increase, to support the delivery of PIPA's statutory mandate, the heads of the non-ministries have been engaging with the Department of Public Works for guidance and assistance on each of the non-ministries having their own separate locations.

And just for the listening audience, I believe that would be the Department of Land . . . it's not the Department of Public Works. It's another department, but it's within the Ministry of Public Works and Environments. Got that—

The Chairman: That would be the Department of . . .

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Estates and Lands.

The Chairman: And Lands, yes.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Estates and Lands.

It is anticipated . . . just for the Hansard. It is anticipated that PrivCom will have the option to expand and take over the entirety of the fourth floor of the Maxwell Roberts Building following the ICO move to their new location later this year. Accordingly, most of the expenses currently shared between the non-ministries, mainly rent, but also IT infrastructure, energy, cleaning, and other miscellaneous expenses, will increase for PrivCom during this fiscal year. This is the explanation for most of the increases in this budget year.

Office Accommodation

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Madam Chairman, following the expiry of the fixed lease in January 2025, PrivCom adopted a month-to-month leasing arrangement while awaiting a new lease arrangement to be procured, again, by the Ministry of Public Works and Environment on behalf of the non-ministry. This lease is expected to be completed in the first quarter of fiscal year 2026/27. A rental estimate of \$163,000 has been included in the 2026/27 budget based on the lease negotiated by the Ministry of Public Works and the Environment.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Madam Chairman, \$110,000 has been allocated for information and communications technology. This infrastructure has increased by \$28,000 as the office will absorb the full expense and benefit for IT infrastructure.

Human Resources

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Madam Chairman, the Office of the Privacy Commissioner has an approved staff complement of 14 full-time equivalents as shown on page B-35 of the Budget Book, consistent with the previous fiscal year. The total salary allocation, and I'm sure in the book, okay, we got it right here. The total salary allocation \$1,807,376. Whereas in the [Budget] Book it just says \$1,807,000 because they rounded it down there. Reflecting a \$4,000 increase above the 2025/26 estimate. This funding supports nine-month salary for the two vacant positions. This will allow the newly appointed Privacy Commissioner to direct the recruitment and hiring process.

The Privacy Commissioner will also be responsible for conducting an assessment on how best to allocate the resources of the non-ministry to meet PrivCom's statutory mandate. In light of the full implementation of PATI in January 1, 2025, PrivCom will be considering the engagement of external legal and technical advisors as needed to support its statutory regime.

Subject Analysis

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Madam Chairman, the subjective analysis of PrivCom's total budget allocation (now we've got it) [is] \$2,393,000 for 2026/27 as shown on page B-34 of the Budget Book. Madam Chairman, \$1,565,000 has been designated for operational activities, an increase of \$70,000 compared to the original 2025/26 allocation. These operational funds will be strategically focused on public engagement, skills development, and rights education, including:

1. Supporting organisations and public authorities:
 - The Privacy Commissioner will continue to assist businesses and government entities, especially small and medium-sized organisations by developing practical resources such as policy guidance, codes of practice, templates, and hosting educational forums.
2. Empowering Bermudians through skills training:
 - In partnership with schools and community groups, PrivCom will support individuals seeking to enter the privacy field by promoting career pathways via privacy officers and legal pupillages, enhancing job readiness, and meeting private and public sector needs.

During the year, PrivCom plans to attend various school career fairs to allow students enrolled in high school education to see the benefits of a privacy career in Bermuda.

3. Educating individuals on privacy rights:

- In educating individuals in respect to their privacy rights enshrined in PIPA, PrivCom will also generally be supporting the facilitation of pre-established rights regimes on Island by
 - responding to public enquiries;
 - conducting investigations into complaints;
 - issuing official guidance and directions where appropriate;
 - conducting surveys; and
 - hosting and attending town hall meetings and private gatherings.

While the operational budget has been adjusted to reflect broader fiscal planning, PrivCom remains fully committed to delivering meaningful community engagement and ensuring that privacy protections are clearly understood, accessible, and actively supported across Bermuda.

Madam Chairman, the operational expenses totalling \$1,565,000 located on [page] B-35 include

- \$169,000 for building and facility rents;
- \$163,000 for professional services consisting mainly of IT support and consultants;
- \$23,000 for staff training and professional fees, development and certifications;
- \$25,000 for travel expenses to attend such training and professional conferences and staff secondments with fellow privacy regulators;
- \$32,000 for communication services;
- \$46,000 for repair and maintenance;
- \$36,000 for energy needs;
- \$23,000 for advertising and promotion;
- \$24,000 for material and supplies; and
- \$31,000 for equipment.

The Privacy Commissioner is committed to responsible use of public funds throughout fiscal year 2026/27. The Privacy Commissioner will assess the needs of PrivCom and make any additional fund requests to the Ministry of Finance to ensure that the mandate of the Regulatory Office will be met.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Madam Chairman, the capital expenditure allocation for PrivCom is found on page C-9 of the Budget Book and is \$3,000 for the fiscal year 2026/27. These funds have been allocated to purchase network hardware.

Performance Measures

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Madam Chairman, the performance measures for PrivCom are found in the Budget Book on pages B-36 through B-38.

In 2026/27, the Privacy Commissioner will engage on monitoring how PIPA is administered to ensure its purposes are achieved. The operations business unit of PrivCom will undertake initiatives to develop the operational maturity of the Office, enhancing risk management and compliance functions and processes concerning various statutory requirements related to finances, annual reports, and access to information in other business operations. This unit will conduct an audit of PrivCom's operations to ensure compliance with both internal and external obligations. This could be with respect to security, human resources, financial, and other legislative requirements.

Madam Chairman, the Policy and Innovation Unit of PrivCom will undertake initiatives related to creating technical guidance in compliance with PIPA. The public will be given specific guidance on how to more closely adhere to various sections of the Act as well as produce sector-specific guidance to support organisations with their compliance with the Act. The Policy and Innovation Unit will continue to work with the Privacy Innovation and Knowledge-sharing (or "Pink") Sandbox to support businesses engaged in innovative uses of personal information.

This Investigations unit of PrivCom will engage in initiatives related to PrivCom's overall mandate, inclusive of continuing to facilitate individual rights requests, investigate personal information breaches, draft compliance orders, and achieve timely resolutions of investigations.

Madam Chairman, the Government is proud to have brought the PIPA Act into full effect on January 1, 2025. The Act is of vital importance to protecting Bermuda and its residents from a variety of online, financial, or even physical harms. In addition, for a country to promote technological innovation, we need forward-thinking rules and regulators.

I commend the work of Bermuda's first Privacy Commissioner in shepherding PIPA into full force and guiding the community to comply with it. The newly appointed Privacy Commissioner will continue to engage with the Government on the administration of the Act and consult with the Minister for establishment of a codes of practice for compliance by organisations.

Madam Chairman, it's been a long road to PIPA since 2016. With the Act coming fully into effect in 2025, it would be easy to say that we have reached our destination. However, the embedding of a new data protection framework intended to support a jurisdiction at a national level is a journey, not a destination.

Even though the Act is now fully in effect, it is a continuous process to protect the rights of individuals. Organisations should continue to conduct internal enquiries to understand the legal, reputational, and operational implications of their adherence to the current data regulation. By better understanding their data

assets and risk management activities, they can be better placed to determine what policies and procedures would be ideal for their organisations to reduce the risk of harm to individuals, therefore increasing the likelihood of compliance with PIPA.

Madam Chairman, I encourage any organisation that needs a better understanding of the Act to visit the website of the Privacy Commissioner at www.privacy.bm.

Madam Chairman, this now concludes my presentation on Head 101, Office of the Privacy Commissioner's budget, and I wish to congratulate the newly appointed Privacy Commissioner, Gretchen Tucker, and wish her well in this upcoming budget year as she leads the Office beyond PIPA's implementation.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

That concludes the presentations for the Non-Ministry heads.

Are there any Members who would like to speak to the Non-Ministry heads?

MP Richardson, you have the floor.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I would first start by thanking the Honourable Minister and most especially the technical officers who have prepared the briefs. They are fulsome and contain some very insightful information as it relates to these estimates.

To that end, I would like to start with the Privacy Commissioner, that being under Head 101, Privacy Commissioner's Office, or PrivCom. I would like to start with this area because we didn't touch on this in the previous years, Madam Chairman, that or the Information Commissioner, and this area will require some parliamentary scrutiny, most especially because Bermuda faces a natural tension between the protection of personal information and its circulation.

As we are all very well aware, we live under a new mandate under anti-money laundering and other financial crime regulations, which require the sharing of lots of information. In fact, most financial services companies simply collect every single piece of data they can. The natural tension is that PIPA, or the Personal Information Protection Act, is designed to limit the extent of that sharing because our personal information belongs to us and us alone. To that end, we'll be talking a lot about the enforcement of that legislation on a going forward basis, or what we've done so far, to basically combat the sharing or the oversharing of information, Madam Chairman.

The presence of Google in Bermuda, as well as other information or other persons who make their trade through the sharing of information, goes to show you that Bermuda, though being "another world," is not located on a different one. We are fundamentally exposed to our information, our personal information, and

our sensitive personal information being overshared. To that end, the Privacy Commissioner has a key role to play and so we will start our scrutiny there, Madam Chairman.

With that being said, I would start by congratulating Gretchen Tucker on assuming the role of Privacy Commissioner. As a matter of declaring conflicts, Gretchen and I worked together at a law firm before she moved on to another. She has done quite well in this privacy space, and I wish her and her team the best of luck.

I'll start, Madam Chairman, with some fairly high-level questions. I'm going to repeat them a little slowly because some of these are quite detailed, and I know we have technical officers listening in to catch a lot of this.

My first question, Madam Chairman, starts on Head 101, Privacy Commissioner's Office, mostly under the General Summary where total current expenditure [is] estimated at \$2.393 million for 2026/27, compared with \$2.242 million in both the original and revised 2025/26 estimates, and \$2.063 million in actual in 2024/25, representing a year-on-year increase of some 7 per cent. Employee numbers also moved from 12 revised (and that's on page B-35) in 2025 back to an estimated 14 in 2026/27, Madam Chairman.

Now, in the 2025 budget debate, the Government said that the increase in the prior year reflected the completion of staff recruitment, with remaining open positions expected to be filled and tied that build out directly to full implementation of PIPA after 1 January 2025. The Government also said that bringing PIPA into operation marked a major milestone in Bermuda's data protection framework, and that compliance would be a journey, quote, "not a destination."

[Madam] Chairman, can the Minister explain what concrete operational change the House is buying with the move from \$2.242 million to \$2.393 million, whether the Office is now truly staffed to its fully intended model, and whether the Government considers the Office to be in a mature enforcement phase now that PIPA is fully operational, or is it still in a developmental phase that has yet to translate the budget growth into visible enforcement strength?

My next question, Madam Chairman, still under Head 101. Employee numbers show . . . this is on [page] B-35. Employee numbers show 14 full-time equivalents estimated in 2026/27, compared with 14 original and 12 revised in 2025/26, and 14 actual in 2024/25, with business unit allocations as seven in operations, two in communications, three in investigations, and two in innovation. Again, reflecting on the previous year's debate, the Government told the House in 2025 that the Office had reorganised functions and was completing recruitment to support the Act now being fully enforced. This means the return from 12 revised to 14 estimate is not merely a clerical move. It goes directly to whether the Office is now supposed to be at full capacity for its statutory role.

Madam Chairman, can the Minister explain which posts are presently filled, which remain vacant as of this debate, and whether the House should understand the 14 full-time equivalent in the figure as a genuine in-post complement or simply as a funded structure that may still be subject to recruitment lag, because that distinction materially affects whether the Office can meet its performance targets as shown in the estimates, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, while I'm on my feet, can I get a time check for how long I have in this debate?

The Chairman: We have approximately, I believe, an hour and 20 minutes. The debate will conclude at 3:50 pm.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Madam Chairman, can I beg your indulgence if I can grab a despatch box?

[pause]

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Thank you.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Madam Chairman—

[Laughter]

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Good point, sir. I think we are holding the Government so much to account that they needed multiple despatch boxes, Madam Chairman, for this debate.

Okay. So, we are moving on to question three, Madam Chairman, relating to Head—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Point of information, [Madam] Chairman?

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Sure.

POINT OF INFORMATION

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: And I am not sure you may still want this information, but I did note in the brief that there are two vacant posts that are currently being recruited. I know that was a question you just asked, but I did note in the brief that there are two spaces that are being recruited.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: No, thank you. No, I thank the Honourable Minister for that. The briefs were quite fulsome, and one of the areas that we really want to examine during this debate, Madam Chairman, is going to be the staffing levels, because the Honourable Minister, in the very thorough briefs, including through the entire non-ministry area, had mentioned quite a few times, especially under Auditor General, the staffing difficulties we're having. And I can reflect back to a much

earlier debate when one of the . . . sorry, previous Parliament, where one of the Cabinet Ministers had mentioned just how difficult it is to recruit into the civil service as well as retain into the civil service.

So, one of the questions we will be raising with the Honourable Minister in these ministries is a lot relating to the full-time equivalent numbers.

The Chairman: Okay. Just for clarification, though. At the moment we are on Head 101. Is that correct?

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Yes, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Okay, on subjective analysis, [it] shows salaries increasing to \$1.633 million revised in 2025 to \$1.807 estimated in 2026/27, whilst professional services fall from \$280,000 revised to \$163,000 estimated. Rentals rising from \$155,000 and revised to \$169,000 estimated. The Honourable Minister mentioned that there are some changes to rentals as the ICO and the Privacy, or PrivCom, will no longer be co-located. So, I thank the Minister for getting ahead and explaining the movements in rentals.

I would ask the Minister to explain how much of the additional spending this year is driven by in-house staffing, as opposed to accommodation and residential set-up costs; why professional services drop sharply whilst salaries rise, again curious about the FTE; and whether this signals that Government expects the office now to perform more of its regulatory and guidance work internally rather than through outside support. Again, given that the professional services is seeing a drop.

Question number four, Madam Chairman, in relation to . . . Madam Chairman, moving on to business unit 111000, Operations, which is estimated on [page] B-34 at \$1.565 million for 2026 compared to \$1.456 million revised in 2025/26 and at \$1.34 million actual in 2024/25, making it by far the largest business unit inside of Head 101. The 2025 Hansard said that the operation unit was expected to develop operational maturity of the office by enhancing compliance, function and processes relating to finances, annual reports, access to information, and other business operations, and also said that in 2024/25 communication functions had been reorganised into operations.

Can the Honourable Minister explain what "operational maturity" means in concrete terms for 2026/27? What measurable institutional weaknesses are still being addressed inside that operations unit? And why such a large share of the operations budget remains concentrated in a business unit framed around internal functioning instead of outward-facing enforcement?

Madam Chairman, still under business unit 111000, Operations. It's measured in 2026/27 by

targets including an annual report. I am just moving on to the performance measures, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: What page are you on?

Mr. Jarion Richardson: [Page] B-1 . . . sorry, B-36.

The Chairman: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Yes, the 2026/27 targets for Operations including annual report publication by 30 June 2027; publication of audited financial statements for financial years 2024 and 2025; completion of the PATI (Public Access to Information) annual return by 31 December 2026; 100 per cent compliance with statutory request timeframes for internal audits of whole of office operations; 100 per cent performance appraisals; 100 per cent staff; professional development goals for awareness/education initiatives; 100 per cent advice and comment on government initiatives and legislation. That's an unusually broad mix of internal governance, statutory compliance, staff management, public engagement, and policy advisory work.

And in 2025, the Government said that the Office would continue to advise the Government on the Act and provide recommendations regarding the exercise of PIPA provisions now that the Act is operational.

So, Madam Chairman, my question is, Can the Honourable Minister explain whether the Operations unit has become effectively a catch-all for too many functions? What proportion of its work is truly inward facing as opposed to public service delivery or policy work? And how the House is supposed to judge whether this very broad unit structure promotes accountability rather than obscuring it?

Staying on business unit 111000, specifically the measure, Madam Chairman, *review whole of office operations for compliance with privacy, confidentiality, security, human resources, human rights, financial and other requirements*, moves from 70 per cent actual in 2024/25 to two audits revised in 2025/26 and four audits targeted in 2026/27.

Now, this is one of the clear signs that the Office is trying to formalise its own internal compliance programme, but it also suggests that an office regulating others is still having to build and test its own internal controls at a fairly basic level.

The Government in 2025 described this as part of developing the Office's operational maturity, which I've already raised. Madam Chairman, Can the Honourable Minister explain what the four planned internal audits will cover in 2026/27? What weaknesses were identified by the 70 per cent actual result in 2024/25 and the two audits forecast in 2025/26? And further, whether the Office is now fully confident in its own privacy, security, and governance controls.

Moving on, Madam Chairman, but still on business unit 111000, page B-36, the measure to conduct an annual risk assessment across whole of office was

100 per cent actual in 2024/25, 100 per cent original forecast in 2025/26, but is then discontinued in the revised forecast and the 2026/27 target.

Now, Madam Chairman, for a privacy regulator, enterprise risk assessment should be central, not peripheral. The decision to discontinue the whole of office risk assessment measure at this point, when PIPA has only just come into force, invites scrutiny, especially when the Office is simultaneously expanding compliance investigations and public engagement functions. Those of us who work in the regulated financial services sector are well aware of just how crucial enterprise risk management is, and so we would not expect to see that discontinued.

Madam Chairman, can the Honourable Minister explain why the annual risk assessment measure has been discontinued, whether risk management is now embedded elsewhere or simply no longer reported? And how is the House meant to take confidence in the Office's own governance if a foundational risk management measure has disappeared from the forward performance framework?

Staying on business unit 111000, relating to the measures, *Establish advisory committee; and Execute office advisory committee secretariat functions to the satisfaction of members*, are both discontinued after previously being contemplated in 2025/26. The estimates state that the relevant board was not in operation, and the performance measure disappears. That is notable because advisory and governance structures often matter most during early days of the regulator, really of any regulator, and at this point its substantive law becomes fully operational.

So, Madam Chairman, can the Honourable Minister explain why the advisory committee or board concept has been dropped, whether Government decided it was unnecessary or impractical, and what governance structure now provides strategic oversight, external challenge, or technical input that such a committee was apparently intended originally for?

Madam Chairman, I'm going to move on to a general theme on investigations, complaints, and enforcement.

Specifically, Madam Chairman, speaking to business unit 111020, Investigations, which on page B-35 . . . or sorry, [page] B-34, is estimated at \$411,000 in 2026/27, compared with \$386,000 original and revised in 2025/26. I'm reading on [page] B-34 again as it relates to 111020, Investigations.

The Government said in 2025 that the Investigations Unit would respond to individual complaints, generate own initiative actions, draft compliance orders, and undertake sectoral and industry surveys, and describe this as constructive and proactive regulation.

Madam Chairman, can the Honourable Minister explain whether the three investigators as outlined in the employee numbers, or full-time equivalents, on [page] B-35 is a serious and sustainable enforcement capacity for a law that now applies across all

organisations in Bermuda that use personal information in structured filing systems? What is their case volume? What is their anticipated case volume? What is their anticipated sector coverage, and/or enforcement output, given that they, again, have those three and are allocated the funding as outlined?

Madam Chairman, staying on business unit Investigations, 111020, but moving on to the performance indicators on [page] B-37. The key performance measure: *Achieve 95 per cent rate of timely resolution of investigation*, shows 100 per cent actual in 2024/25, 100 per cent original and revised forecast in 2025/26, and 100 per cent target in 2026/27. These are some very strong headline metrics, Madam Chairman. But the estimates don't actually define a denominator, any kind of complexity mix, or the time standard around underlying timely resolution. In other words, what [does] timely resolution means? Since PIPA only became fully operational on 1 January 2025, the 2024 and even part of the 2025/26 period may not yet reflect the mature volume and complexity of a full enforcement and compliance framework.

So, Madam Chairman, can the Honourable Minister explain what is meant by timely resolution, whether by days or months? May the Honourable Minister also provide how many investigations this measure is based on and whether Government accepts that 100 per cent success metric may conceal a low investigation volume or relatively early-stage caseload rather than demonstrate a deep enforcement maturity.

Moving on, Madam Chairman, to the measure still for Investigations, *Audit representation sample of target sector, industry, or group* is at 100 per cent actual in 2024/25, 100 per cent revised in 2025/26, and 100 per cent targeted again in 2026/27.

This measure is framed as a percentage, but it does not disclose how many sectors, entities, or audit exercises are actually involved. The Government has described the office as a regulator whose role matters for both protecting individuals and for Bermuda standing as a trusted digital jurisdiction. The Honourable Minister actually outlined that in his brief with which this, His Majesty's Honourable Opposition, agrees.

Madam Chairman, can the Honourable Minister explain how many sectoral or representative sample audits are actually planned in 2026/27? Which sectors are under consideration? What criteria determines those selections? And whether the House is being shown a meaningful enforcement workload, or simply a metric that always reads 100 per cent, regardless of scale.

Moving on, Madam Chairman, still on the Investigations, though, and on page B-37 for the performance measures. Under Investigations, it has that . . . this unit says it will post quarterly statistic reports on the website within one month following the end of the previous quarter. That performance objective moves from not applicable actual in 2024/25, and zero in both

original and revised 2025/26, and 100 per cent targeted in 2026/27.

Now, the reason this is important, Madam Chairman, is because the publication of statistics is one of the ways that not only the public, but this House, indeed any kind of regulated organisation, can see that enforcement is active, what kinds of complaints are emerging, and how fast matters are being resolved. It also provides an early public test of whether PIPA enforcement is becoming real rather than rhetorical.

Madam Chairman, can the Honourable Minister explain why quarterly statistics were absent or not targeted in the earlier period? What exactly will be published under this new 2026/27 commitment, and whether those statistics will include complaint numbers, sectors involved, types of breaches, disposition outcomes, and enforcement timelines?

The Chairman: Just as a reminder to the listening public, we are in debate in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditures for the year 2026 for Non-Ministry heads. We are currently discussing [Non-]Ministry Head 101, the Privacy Commissioner's Office, and we have one hour and two minutes left in this debate, and MP Richardson has the floor.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Staying on Investigations, which sits alongside the operations target to *Develop mediation and alternative dispute resolution* (which is otherwise known as ADR) *policies and procedures*, which is marked completed and then discontinued. This is on [pages] B-36 and B-37 as we are looking at both investigations and operations, or I'm just highlighting that they both mention it.

Government said in 2025 that the operations unit would establish mediation and ADR processes for both formal and informal issues linked to complaints and potential violations of the Acts. That suggests the Office is consciously trying to avoid a model based solely on formal enforcement. And we do have to be . . . as much as I am asking a lot of questions about enforcement, I am very mindful that not every problem requires a sledgehammer. So, please don't take this as me saying that we have to fight about everything relating to PIPA. There should be alternative forms, such as mediation and ADR.

Though for the purposes of this question, Madam Chairman, can the Honourable Minister explain how the Office now decides between guidance, mediation, informal resolution, and formal investigations? Whether ADR is intended to reduce enforcement load or improve outcomes? And how Parliament is to know whether informal resolution is being used effectively rather than simply as a substitute for visible enforcement?

Moving off of the investigations and enforcements, Madam Chairman, going on to communications and back to page B-35 . . . sorry, [page] B-34.

Communications is estimated at \$228,000 in 2026/27 compared to \$209,000 revised in 2025/26 and zero original in 2025/26 (because the function was then reorganised), while two full-time equivalents are allocated to the unit, as outlined on [page] B-35. Again, speaking to the Government's previous commitments, the Government has said that communications had been reorganised and incorporated into operations, but the current estimates show communications, again, as a distinct business unit.

Now, about two years ago, there were a number of workshops and events held by this team. So, communications is quite key to informing the public as well as all the organisations as to their rights and privileges, as well as the duties those organisations now are subject to due to the Act.

So, my question to the Honourable Minister is, Could he comment on whether these changes have taken place or are they reverting backwards? Whether there's a strategic correction or some sort of operational difficulty. Just to clarify, what the public is supposed to know about the Office's communications model.

Madam Chairman, going into Operations, which again is business unit 111000, on [page] B-36, under performance measures. Operations include awareness/education initiatives offered, which declines from 14 workshops or events actual in 2024/25 to six revised in 2025/26 and four targeted in 2026/27.

Now, the decline is striking because PIPA has only become fully operational on 1 January 2025, and Government has repeatedly stressed the need for guidance, awareness, and public engagement and understanding during this compliance journey. As I said before, the Minister had highlighted in a previous Hansard (not this Minister) that over 25 workshops or events and a focused data privacy week campaign had been undertaken. And indeed, in 2025, we saw a year-long Road to PIPA campaign with practicums for businesses.

My question to the Honourable Minister is, Can the Honourable Minister explain why awareness and education activity appears to be decreasing just as the law enters its live compliance phase? Whether the Office believes the system is now sufficiently educated, that is, all of us in the public are sufficiently educated, to require less outreach, and what evidence supports that judgment?

Further to that point, Madam Chairman, I would add that when we go through the enforcement phases with the Bermuda Monetary Authority, we are all very familiar that the circulation of enforcement actions, the information, including the flaws in certain compliance programmes informs other organisations within the market as to what they should be doing. And so I would definitely say that there is a large role for

communications even during an enforcement phase, probably more so, not to make people feel bad, not to embarrass people, but to educate those who weren't participating in that last assessment or examination as to what they can do to their own programmes to comply with the laws.

And again, Madam Chairman, I sort of back it out. I can go a little bit too much into the detail, but I back out here and say we are talking about sensitive personal information, who is allowed to access it, who is allowed to hold it, who is allowed to use it. And when done poorly, our sensitive information then becomes subject to public disclosure. It becomes available for others to use, and that's when we see all kinds of ramifications such as fraud and other impacts into the market, never minding that our personal information is being stolen, which requires . . . anyone who has had that happen knows well the long story you have to explain to the bank.

So, as much as this can be a conversation about compliance, it's really a conversation about protecting the public, Madam Chairman.

Moving on to communications, or rather business unit 111010, estimates on [page] B-34.

The Chairman: Are you still in communications?

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Yes, Madam Chairman. Sorry, I'm just finding myself here.

I want to go to the performance measurements for Operations, which is to create and implement, by the way . . . the performance measures being on [page] B-37, B—yes, B-37.

The Chairman: [Page]B—

Mr. Jarion Richardson: [Page] B . . . I want to say B-37, just because it rolls over on those two pages, so I'm just looking for the . . . oh, here it is.

The Chairman: It looks like Operations is on [page B-]37, and it looks like the communications elements of the performance measures are included in the operations. Am I . . . do we agree?

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Yes, well, it starts on [page] B-36, Operations, and it keeps going.

The Chairman: Right, [Page] B-36, correct.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: With that said, Madam Chairman, the performance measure is *create and implement an annual comm strategy with all planned campaigns delivered on schedule*, targeted at 100 per cent, and to a communications budget line item of \$228,000.

Madam Chairman, I would like the Honourable Minister to explain what the 2026/27 communications strategy will prioritise, how success will be measured beyond simply delivering campaigns on schedule, and

whether the office is prioritising the breadth of reach, depth of understanding, or targeted sectoral compliance in deciding how to spend its \$200,000 on communications.

Staying in the performance measures for business unit 111000, wherein it's achieved 90 per cent satisfaction rate from members of public making general questions and enquiries is shown as 100 per cent actual in 2024/25 and targeted at 100 per cent both in 2025/26 and 2026/27. Madam Chairman, and that's on [page] B-36.

Public satisfaction is useful as a performance measurement, but for a regulator, it can be a relatively soft metric if not paired with evidence of compliance understanding, reduced breaches or effective enforcement. And the Government has made a point of enforcing or rather promoting broad public education, guidance issuance and international best practice.

Madam Chairman, can the Honourable Minister explain how public enquiry satisfaction is measured? How many responses [does] it reflect? And whether the Government accepts that a high satisfaction score tells the House very little on its own about whether the organisation actually understands and complies with PIPA in practice.

Moving on to business unit 111030 Innovation, Madam Chairman, where it is estimated on page B-34, to cost some \$189,000 in 2026 compared with \$191,000 in revised and \$361,000 original in 2025/26 and only \$1,000 actual in 2024/25, with its full-time equivalents in 2026 being two, there being two staff.

Madam Chairman, the Government said in 2025 that the Policy and Innovation Unit would continue work on the Pink Sandbox, the Honourable Minister did mention, and on technical guidance to help organisations comply with the Act while also supporting innovative uses for data and personal information. In fact, in 2023, the Government emphasised the Global Privacy Assembly (GPA) international accreditation, and Bermuda's desire to be a leader in this space.

Madam Chairman, can the Honourable Minister explain why Innovation remains a material budget line now that PIPA is operational? What balance is being struck between helping organisations innovate whilst holding them accountable? And whether Government believes this innovation-facing function is now proportionate to the more pressing need for enforcement and compliance supervision.

Madam Chairman, speaking to business unit 111030, again on Innovation, this time in performance measurements on [page] B-37. Pink Sandbox partnership engagements target is set at two in the revised 2025/26 and remains at two in 2026/27 after a zero actual outcome in 2024/25 when the Sandbox was being revamped. That means the Office still sees enough value in the Pink Sandbox concept to preserve it after the revamp and even while enforcement obligations under PIPA have become live. The government has linked this work to enabling innovation while protecting

privacy rights and maintaining Bermuda's attractiveness as a digital and business jurisdiction.

Madam Chairman, can the Honourable Minister explain what the two targeted Pink Sandbox engagements are expected to produce in 2026/27? How [are] these engagements selected? And whether Parliament should regard these as a strategic regulatory tool with measurable value or as a niche initiative whose relevance should now be tested more strictly against the Office's core statutory duties.

Madam Chairman, still on the Innovation Unit, [business unit] 111030. Specifically, Madam Chairman, there are a number of performance obligations here. Modified innovation measures for 2026 include six guidance notes. I have seen two research analytical reports, two crosswalk, two training modules, two biannual surveys. My question is, Can the Honourable Minister explain what are the legal or operational priority areas across all of these guidance notes and various documents? In other words, what are we seeking to do by producing all of these materials? We seem to have been at this for a while, and one of my concerns is that we continue to produce more and more guidance, whilst not holding people accountable to following it.

Just bear with me a moment, Madam Chairman.

I think I will . . . that's all I will take for the Privacy Commissioner. And I will check with the Honourable Minister, or Madam Chairman, to see if I can keep asking questions in another space or if I should take a seat to get some of those answers.

The Chairman: The Minister has indicated to keep going.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and I thank the Honourable Minister.

To that end, then, I will go over to the Information Commissioner. Again, Madam Chairman, because we have not evaluated these areas in Parliament in this budgetary process—

The Chairman: The Information Commissioner is Head 98.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Head 98. And, how much time do I have, Madam Chairman?

The Chairman: You have approximately 55 minutes left.

An Hon. Member: More than enough time.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Yes, I definitely have more than enough time. But I am not sure I am leaving enough for the Minister to answer.

Thank you, Madam Chairman. I thank the Honourable Minister again.

The Chairman: Head 98 starts on page B-29.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Yes, thank you.

As it relates to the Information Commissioner, Madam Chairman, again, Head 98 on page B-29. If you will just bear with me as I move to that section.

[Page] B-29. Here we go. I will start on the General Summary on [page] B-30, where the current expenditure is estimated to be for 2026/27 \$1.280 million compared to \$1.2 million in both original and revised 2025/26 estimates and \$1.131 million actual in 2024/25, representing an \$80,000, or 7 per cent increase, year on year. I note the employee numbers on [page] B-31 remain fixed at six full-time equivalents in 2026/27, after six original and revised in 2025/26 and seven actual in 2024/25.

In the 2025 Budget Debate, the Government said that the Office had deliberately scheduled recruitment in quarter three in order to manage salary expenditure within the approved budget, and said the ICO remained committed to strengthening capacity to support delivery of services and uphold statutory responsibilities. In the same debate, the Government also said the Office had refined its performance measures and that the applications unit had remained the most complex labour-intensive function within the ICO.

Madam Chairman, can the Honourable Minister explain what the additional \$80,000 in the 2026/27 estimate is actually buying in terms of public access rights, investigative throughput, compliance supervision, or institutional resilience, and whether the House should understand this as real strengthening of the ICO or simply adding more expense. I have a sneaky suspicion it will have something to do with the salary uplift, but I would like to see if we are going to get anything more out of the ICO this year.

Madam Chairman, also under Head 98, employee numbers show the ICO moving from seven full-time equivalents in 2024[25] to six, original and revised in 2025/26 and remaining at six, estimated for 2026/27, all within business unit, 108000, Administration. Again in last year's debate recruitment had been, or the Honourable Minister said the recruitment had been deliberately deferred to quarter three so as to manage the salary budget and that staffing constraints were one of the reasons the applications unit had difficulty meeting the eight-month closure target with 33 open applications in the investigation stage at the time of debate.

Madam Chairman, can the Honourable Minister explain precisely which posts are presently filled, which are vacant, and whether the office is operating at true functional establishment as of this debate? The Honourable Minister during his brief did mention, I want to say three vacancies and two unfunded. In all it sounds like quite a fluctuation. So I am trying to nail down exactly how many people are currently employed in this unit, what they are doing and which positions are vacant and/or unfunded, and the distinctions made there.

Madam Chairman, moving on to . . . or staying on Head 98, subjective analysis shows (and subjective analysis is outlined on page B-30) salaries increasing from \$795,000 revised in 2025/26 to \$855,000 estimated in 2026/27. While professional services rise from \$114,000 revised to \$135,000 estimated. Communications also rose from \$30,000 revised to \$35,000 estimated and travel rises from \$7,000 revised to \$10,000 estimated for this year.

The Government describes the ICO in 2025 as continuing to demonstrate operational excellence, resilience, and commitment despite a, quote, "challenging fiscal environment" while also acknowledging that the applications unit was labour intensive, that delays were partly driven by staffing constraints and that delays were also affected by public authority responses during reviews.

Madam Chairman, can the Honourable Minister explain how much of the budget increase is tied to sustaining existing staffing and how much is intended to improve the Office's core statutory output? And can the Minister provide a breakdown of the additional funding for salaries, professional services, communications, and travel in terms of the specific capability or service improvement the public should expect in 2026/27?

Madam Chairman, on capital expenditure for the Information Commissioner's Office which is on [page] A-9 *[sic]*, it rises from . . . just bear with me while I go to [page] A-9 *[sic]*.

[Pause]

The Chairman: Are you looking at the capital budget?

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Yes, I am, which is . . . I am thinking it's [page] C-9.

The Chairman: It should be [page] C-9.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: I think I just wrote that wrong. Yes.

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

It rises from zero in 2025/26 to \$36,000 in 2026/27, after \$6,000 actual in 2024/25, and \$10,000 original in 2025/26. And the key . . . I am curious about, is the ICO's work is very document heavy, very review heavy, very deadline sensitive, as we all are well aware, most especially those in government service. And the Office's own performance measures include deadlines for acknowledging reviews, for validating applications, for publishing decisions on ico.bm, receiving unqualified audits, meeting annual report deadlines, and conducting targeted reviews.

Madam Chairman, can the Honourable Minister explain what exactly the new \$36,000 dollars in

capital provision is purchasing? Why there was no revised capital spend in 2025/26 and whether the current capital line is intended to address case management, records handling, public facing publications, or operational tools necessary to reduce the delays in the ICO's review and compliance functions.

I would further add that given the nature or document heavy nature of this work and those tight deadlines with which the ICO has to operate including the challenge that the Minister made in his brief that the ICO has making its eight-month deadline and a backlog starting to happen, whether the ICO or the Minister has considered introducing artificial intelligence into the process.

Madam Chairman, moving back into the estimates on pages B-31 through B-32, specifically under Administration, or [business unit] 108000. I am going to speak about the performance measurements, Madam Chairman, on [page] B-32, which is measured in part by filing the ICO's section . . . the annual report by the statutory deadline, completing targeted review of internal guides, procedures, and policy manuals, receiving an unqualified audit, publishing the financial statements documenting, learning from conferences and training, complying with statutory deadlines and responding to PATI requests, and submitting the necessary annual return.

And this is all under again, the Administration unit. Now, the Government said in the 2025 debate that the Administration unit is responsible for day-to-day operations, facilities, staff support, training, and resources, and that its performance is measured on how effectively it upholds statutory financial and governance obligations. Government also said that the 2024 report had been tabled on time and that quarterly expenditure reports and financial records are published online.

Madam Chairman, can the Honourable Minister explain whether the administrative function of ICO is now fully stable and mature? Why [was] the targeted review of internal guides, procedures, and policy manuals not met in 2024/25 despite being set again in 20-being set again at 100 per cent for 2025/26 and 2026/27? And what specific governance gaps [is] the Office still trying to close internally?

Staying on the performance measurements for the same business unit, Madam Chairman. This includes a target to complete targeted review of internal guides and procedures, policy manuals at 100 per cent by 31 March 2027 after not being met in 2024/25 and then forecast at 100 per cent in both original and revised 2025/26. Again, reflecting on last year and the reason I'm doing so, Madam Chairman, is because I'm trying to connect promises to performance, and so to that end, I always review the previous year's commitments the Government makes before we go into what is going to be allocated to these business units within the budgetary process.

And again, in the 2025 Hansard, the Government said that the administration had planned "to

review and update internal guides, policies, and procedures to align with evolving best practices and legal standards." That means this is not an incidental house-keeping, but a stated governance priority for the Office itself.

Therefore, Madam Chairman, can the Honourable Minister explain what internal guides and policy manuals remain outstanding, why this target slipped in 2024/25, what risks are created when an information rights regulator is itself still updating core internal procedures, and when the House should expect that work to be fully complete and operationalised?

Staying on the performance measurements for the Administration unit, Madam Chairman, another is to receive unqualified audit and published financial statements, which was met in 2024/25, and is targeted in financial year, or was targeted in financial year 2025/26.

Just bear with me, Madam Chairman. There's quite a lot here.

So, Madam Chairman, the Government said in 2025 that the ICO had consistently received unqualified audits from the Auditor General, and it demonstrated fiscal transparency and accountability by publishing quarterly expenditure reports and financial records online.

So, Madam Chairman, my question is, Can the Honourable Minister explain what accounts for the movement and timing around publication of audited financial statements, whether there were any operational administrative constraints affecting the publication timeline, and whether Government considers the ICO's current financial governance framework fully mature at this time?

The Chairman: We have 35 minutes left in this debate.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Also, Madam Chairman, I'll ask. . . I am going to ask one or two more questions and [then] I am going to take my seat for the Honourable Minister.

Staying on the Administration, Madam Chairman, business unit 108000, Administrative performance includes hosting . . . this is a performance measure. I apologise, Madam Chairman, for being unclear. This is a performance measure on [page] B-32. Administration performance includes hosting volunteers, interns, or work shadow candidates. And where the actual outcome in 2024/25 was not met, the original and revised 2025/26 forecast was one, and the 2026/27 target remains at one. This is an incredibly small target, and yet it was missed, Madam Chairman.

And at the same time, the Government has repeatedly framed the ICO as an institution that must build sustainable internal capacity, model best practice, and continue to operate under fiscal constraint while maintaining statutory output.

Madam Chairman, can the Honourable Minister explain why even a target of one volunteer, intern,

or work shadow candidate was not achieved, whether this reflects resource pressure, lack of supervisory capacity or insufficient planning, and what the Office is doing to create a pipeline of experience and information right for Bermudians?

Madam Chairman, I'll stay on Administration, performance measures including a target, under Administration 108000. The performance measure includes a target of one internal education session per quarter on best practices, information rights, principles, or professional development topics, and this was only partly met in 2024/25. Forecast at three in revised 2025/26 and targeted again at one per quarter in 2026/27.

Madam Chairman, the Office is both a regulator and a decision-maker under the PATI Act, and the government has said it intends to keep refining performance measures and align them to the ICO's revised mission and objectives. If so, internal learning should matter, especially where legislation, case law, and public authority practice continue to evolve substantially.

Madam Chairman, can the Honourable Minister explain why the Office only partly met this internal education target, whether this is because operational caseload is crowding out professional development, and whether Government accepts that a regulator unable to maintain internal training requirements may struggle over time to preserve consistency and quality of its own decisions and guidance?

With that, Madam Chairman, I am going to take my seat because I'd like to get some answers relating to the PrivCom and it's going forward in this budgetary year.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, MP.

Is there any other Member who would like to speak on the non-ministry heads?

If not, I will turn it over to the Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I will answer as I can. The gentleman has asked quite a few questions, and I see that they are furiously typing them out, and so I will answer them as they appear.

I have a question here. Employee numbers show 14 FTEs, seven in operations, two in communications, two in investigation, two in enforcement. Is the Office at full capacity? Can you explain which are filled and which are vacant, and what does the 14 represent? Does the 14 represent true staffing? I'm . . . this is in Head 101.

Answer. The Office is currently staffed with 12 FTEs. It is anticipated the newly appointed Privacy Commissioner will participate in the review of all existing job descriptions for alignment with PIPA being fully enforced now and determine the recruitment and staff

retention strategy to bring the total staff to a full complement of 14.

Next question. Salaries are increasing to \$1.807 million, while professional services decreases. Rental decreases. As ICO and PrivCom will no longer be co-located, explain how many additional spending is driven by staffing.

Answer. The current two vacant FTEs were funded in 2025/26 and not filled. Therefore, the increase is not due to staffing. The increase in budget is mainly due to the separation of the physical premises of ICO and PrivCom. This amounts to approximately \$84,000 as PrivCom takes on the full expenses of leasing the entire floor of the Maxwell Roberts Building. This is accompanied by increases in energy, cleaning, and maintenance operating as a public authority for the first time.

Question. In relation to . . . this doesn't look right, but 111000 Operations—

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business code is correct—

[Pause]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Head 101, right? Oh, it is right. It is correct. Kudos to my team.

—which is estimated at \$1.65 million making it the largest business unit. The Operations unit is meant to achieve operational maturity. Can the Minister explain what that means in concrete terms, what weaknesses are being addressed, and why so much inward focus rather than outreach?

Answer. This is a good one. Section 49 of PIPA requires the Minister to carry out a comprehensive review of the statute within five years of coming into operation. This reflects Parliament's expectation that the office and its administration of PIPA will undergo a maturity exercise whereby the intended objects of the statute will be considered against actual outcomes that can be delivered by [statutory] framework. The Act has only been fully in effect for just over a year at this time, so for the last six months there has been an interim Acting Privacy Commissioner.

From the physical practical perspective, this has meant the staff at PrivCom has largely maintained a holding position on work while awaiting the new appointment. More generally, this means that the Office has only had the benefit of that period to test its operations and risk management controls and now is better placed to work towards finalising the same to support the statutory mandate. Within this context, there is not so much weakness to address rather than it is the natural evolution of a new regulator. This means that after a year of implementation the unit . . . Oh. That means that after a year of implementation . . . I am sorry, it actually just ends there.

[Laughter]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I do apologise for that. Perhaps someone forgot to type the rest of that [answer] there.

So, based on the debate thus far, I expect in four years' time you'll be saying *four years ago you said there was a report coming here and what shall we do about that?*

Next question under [business unit] 111000 performance measures, targets for publications of audits, reports and returns, 100 per cent of the target for all. Can the Minister explain whether this unit is a catchall maybe taking on too many functions and what does this promote? Does this promote accountability? How? Or does it obscure? It's like three questions in one.

This unit is not a catchall. Every line . . . the question is shorter than the answer. The question is *longer* than the answer.

This unit is not a catchall. Every line item properly falls within operations and is clearly and transparently set out for public accountability. Here's one of them answers you like, Jarion.

Can the Minister explain what the four planned internal audits address? What's addressed in 2025 and whether the Office is fully confident in its capabilities and controls. (Another three-question question.)

Answer. In respect to human resources, an audit of all job descriptions is to ensure proper alignment of post responsibilities with experience, skills and, where appropriate, the proven ability to effectively manage and lead internal teams. In respect of legislative requirements ensuring that PrivCom is meeting its statutory obligations in a transparent manner.

In respect of security an audit of infrastructure security following the planned relocation of ICO which will result in PrivCom becoming responsible for security of the entire fourth floor of the Maxwell Roberts Building. Lastly in respect to financial audits ensuring meeting the mandate for the external audit requirements.

I will scroll back up to see if this one has been answered . . . not yet.

Next question is measure to conduct risk assessments, discontinued in 2026/27. The decision to discontinue this invites scrutiny. Why has this annual risk assessment been discontinued and how will it be reported? Has it been absorbed somewhere else?

Answer. Originally planned to have an external reviewer conduct an overarching singular risk assessment. Departed from this approach in favour of conducting four internal focused audits.

Next question. We're still on Head 101, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Establishing advisory committees, both discontinued. Relevant board was not

consulted. Can the Minister explain why the advisory was disbanded? How is this interchange being carried out? Is it no longer necessary?

The answer. Establishment of an advisory committee for PrivCom was originally considered by Government as an extension to the Government's plan for the ICO. However, the initiative ultimately was not extended to PrivCom.

Next question. Investigations unit. Can the Minister explain whether three investigators is a serious and sustainable enforcement capacity for an organisation responsible for all organisations? What is their caseload and enforcement output?

The experience of global data protection authorities has been that the demand for the investigation of complaints and breaches of security resulting in harm to individuals has increased each year that the regulatory enforcement powers have been fully enforced. The three investigators are needed.

And I do know that it doesn't answer *what are their caseloads or performance outputs*. Hopefully, the team is listening in, and they can go back and revisit that one for you.

The Chairman: Just to let you know, we've got 22 minutes left in this debate.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Okay.

The Chairman: And just for the listening radio audience, just to remind them that we are in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27.

We are covering the non-ministry heads right now specifically, Head 101, Privacy Commissioner's Office and then we'll move on to [Head] 98 where there were some questions about the Information Commissioner's Office.

At the moment, we have 22 minutes left in this debate.

Please proceed, Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Again, staying with Head 101, Privacy Commissioner's Office, our question was [regarding the] investigation unit, timely resolution of investigations [is] 100 per cent, but this doesn't define a standard. What does timely resolution mean? Is it days, months? How many investigations is it based on? This might conceal a low caseload rather than enforcement maturity. Ah, sneaky.

The answer is these vary depending on the written response received and are ultimately defined by PIPA statutory timelines.

Next question, investigations. Again, measure is framed as a percentage without knowing how many sectors. How many sample audits are planned for the upcoming year? Which sectors are under

consideration? What's the criteria? Is it a meaningful metric being used here? The answer is one sector will be audited at 100 per cent. Hmm.

Next question, again, under investigation. (Jarion, you like these investigations.) Performance measure of posting quarterly stats in a timely manner; 100 per cent is the target for 2026/27. Stats are how we see that enforcement is effective. What kind of complaints are being investigated? What will be published under this? Can we see enforcement timelines, case numbers, et cetera.?

Please see our website where the Authority posts quarterly statistics for public accountability and advice to the public on the types of cases received during the quarter. I think I mentioned that in the brief. You remember that's [www . . . for the listening audience, that's \[www.privacy.bm\]\(http://www.privacy.bm\)](http://www.privacy.bm).

Next question, ADR. (What does ADR stand for?)

[Inaudible response]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: On pages B-36 through B-37. Operations unit would establish different processes suggesting a different model for format enforcement. Can the Minister explain how the Office decides between the different kinds of dispute resolution? Is informal resolution being used effectively or as a substitute for formal processes?

The answer is no formal resolution is being used as a substitute for formal processes. I guess that answers that question.

Page B-34, Communications. Two FTEs allocated to the union. I guess it should be [page B-]35 for those who actually have a [Budget] Book because that's where the FTEs are listed. Could you comment on whether there are changes taking place? Tell us what we're supposed to know about the Office's comms plan.

The answer, the Office is looking to expand its communications capacity to ensure that communications are more timely, effective, and better correlated to strategic regulatory enforcement strategy and priorities for the Privacy Commissioner.

Question . . . I think this is the last answer. I think this is the last one that's been entered in for [Head] 101, so we can move on to the next one.

Awareness and education declines to four in the coming fiscal year. Please explain why education and awareness activities are declining. Does the public require less education? What evidence has led to the decision to decrease the number of [awareness and education] sessions?

Answer. During the road to PIPA prior to January 2025, there was a lot of engagement with the public and this is a reduction as the Office looks to re-channel education initiatives to organisations to understand the regulatory enforcement. I guess what they are saying prior was everybody, this is what this is about. Now that

it's in place, the education is now geared specifically towards individual companies versus just the general public.

They must have heard you, Jarion, and another one just popped up.

Operations, create and implement annual communication strategy, \$228,000. Explain the 2026/27 strategy, what the strategy will prioritise and how they will decide to spend that amount in this area.

The sum referred is not connected to regulatory communication strategies. Instead, it refers to data lines, telephone and other miscellaneous communication channels.

It's your lucky day. Another one just appeared.

The satisfaction rate from public, 100 per cent, [page] B-36. I'm sure there's another . . . it must be on page B-30. Wait a minute. Yes, [page] B-36.

Can you explain how this is measured? How many responses received and the high rate tells us very . . . because the high rate tells us very little. This is measured by communications team as they record each query and question to the PrivCom.

I will now move, while they are looking at additional answers for [Head] 101, I will move on to [Head] 98, Information Commissioners Office, page B-29.

General summary current expenses. Increase from previous year, \$80,000 increase. Employees remain fixed. Office had deliberately scheduled recruitment in Q3 to better fit within budget. What does this \$80,000 increase actually pay for? Is it real strengthening or is it for something else?

Answer. Projected recruitment for vacant post was deferred because of unplanned separation of the senior investigations officer and overall budget shortfall for salaries in Q4.

Next question. Seven FTEs in administration. Which posts are presently filled? Is the Office running at true capacity or are there vacancies still to be filled? If they are doing, what's vacant, what's unfunded?

Current posts are Information Commissioner, Deputy Information Commissioner, Acting Senior Investigation Officer, Manager, Administration and Finance, Project Officer. Vacancies are Senior Investigation Officer, Investigation Officer, Administrative Assistant. And I believe in the brief, it actually did speak directly to that the Senior Investigation Officer would be recruited internally, and they would be recruiting for an Investigation Officer as well as someone else. But I don't want to waste what little time we have looking through the brief, but I do remember reading that about the Information Commissioner's Office and the terms of recruitment.

Salary increases. Oh, where did we jump to? Salary increases under Operations. Oh, I'm sorry. The page just jumped because someone typed something in.

Salaries increasing to \$855,000. Professional services also increased. Comms increases. Travel increases as well. Can you explain how much is tied to

sustaining staffing versus improved operations? Can you produce a breakdown showing service improvements for the coming year?

Process improvements to education are directed at streamlining processes to achieve the mandate with less than full staffing complement. Professional services increase of \$35,000 is explained in the budget brief, which includes costs for legal and technical expertise to support the reviews of investigating functions.

Next question. And we are still on Head 98. Capital rises to \$36,000 in 2026/27. Very document-heavy, review-heavy, time-sensitive. Can the Minister explain what is this purchasing, why there is no revised for the preceding fiscal year, and what tools are being developed to reduce delays and meet deadlines? Is artificial intelligence being considered?

Capital expenditures for the purchase of office furniture and infrastructure required for the move to a new office location. Furniture in the existing location is mostly owned by the landlord. Equipment purchases include IT and security system infrastructure for the new office setup.

And I will take a moment of privilege to also point out that one of the mandates of our office is to figure out how more government information can be posted on the government portal to reduce PATI requests. And so, I've asked for the PPU, which is the government arm of these offices to come up with policies on what information can be listed, should be listed, how it can be put up. And so, we're looking. We are steadily trying to move forward with that, to come up with policies so all government departments will just generally post things, like relevant things, like minutes to meetings and different things like that on their portal so people can just go in and get them versus having to make specific requests. So that is something that we're working through on our office but understand the work that we do and the work of these offices are separate.

These offices are non-ministerial offices, but they do have some dotted line connection.

Policy manuals. Targets not met in past years. Question, and we are still on [Head] 98. Policy manuals. Targets not met in years past. Looking at fully meeting the coming year. What internal guidelines manuals are outstanding? What has slipped in the past? What risks exist when the regulator is behind in these areas if any?

Answer. The production of internal guides and manuals requires more staffing capacity. Most of the ICOs published internal guides have not been reviewed for updates since they were first published. Other internal guides are not yet completed but are a draft employee handbook and a draft records management handbook. Internal guides are established by the commissioner and process standards may be documented by internal memos.

Next question is [regarding] audited financial statements. Can you explain what accounts for the

movement in timing around publication of statements? Is the governance framework fully mature at this time?

Answer. The ICO is undertaking audit for the 2024/26 [sic] fiscal year now. There are no governance gaps identified. Audits continue to be unqualified indicating fiscal responsibility.

Question. Administrative performance (listed on page B-32) hosting volunteers, interns, et cetera. The 2026/27 target remains at one and was missing last year. Can the Minister explain why this was not achieved? Was it resource pressures, lack of capacity, and what is being done to develop Bermudians?

The answer here is hosting volunteers will continue. It was reduced to one to ensure that staff had capacity to receive a volunteer so that their experience was meaningful.

And I see some addition to the previous question about the audited finances. It says the audit schedule is set by the auditor and not by the department.

And Madam Chairman, at this time, I will take my seat. I still see some movement around, but that is all of the answers that I do have at this particular time. And that does represent all of the answers [to questions] that were asked on [Head] 98. But there are still some outstanding answers for [Head] 101.

The Chairman: Okay. We have approximately eight minutes left in this debate.

Is there any other Member who would like to speak?

MP Richardson.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chairman, and I thank the Honourable Minister and his technical staff for getting back to me on the matters arising from the estimates of expenditure and revenue for Head 101 Privacy Commissioner (PrivCom) as well as the Head 98 for ICO.

I still have plenty of questions left, so the Minister and those department heads can expect very full-some parliamentary questions.

But let's actually refocus, because we only have a few minutes left. I want the Honourable Minister to be able to speak to an issue that I see in the estimates relating to the Parliamentary Registrar, specifically electoral reform. And though I have quite a developed line of questions and set of questions, we simply don't have time for it.

But what I want the Honourable Minister to be able to speak to under Head 63 is because the Honourable Minister has spoken at length in multiple town halls, et cetera, relating to electoral reform, an issue that's been promised for some time, and that the Minister has committed to working to provide legislation by, I want to say, September 2026.

Now, again, I can't look at my notes, because I won't have time to get through them all. Would the Honourable Minister be able to speak to this specific point under business unit 73017 on [page] B-20, Election

Reform Research, where we see an allocation of some \$20,000, and as well as [page] B-22, same business unit 73017, Election Reform Research, where the target for research on alternative voting methods to facilitate absentee voting is at 50 per cent?

So, two questions. One, why do we have such a limited amount of money being allocated to electoral reform, given the wider promises made to it? And secondly, why is the target only half of a very small provision of total electoral reform?

Thank you, and I thank the Honourable Minister.

The Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: You know what? Beneath this mask I am sure my permanent secretary is smiling, because I said, when I saw that, I was like, I knew what question was coming with that. And I actually . . . you know how you go fishing and you kind of chum the water, and you are hoping somebody, hoping a fish will come and grab, right?

[Laughter]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: So, here's the thing. The electoral reform process is being led by the Ministry for the Cabinet Office of Digital Innovation, Headquarters, my Ministry, and we already did that debate, actually a week ago. A week ago today. And I was actually . . . I was saying she was smiling, because we were chuckling, because it was like, *We didn't get any questions about electoral reform.*

In my budget, I've got \$275,000 for electoral reform, allocated for electoral reform—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: —because all of the work, the bulk of the work, will be done by my office.

And if you saw . . . in the brief that I read, this work was . . . and the Parliamentary Registrar spoke very specifically of what that funding would be used for. And I want to say it had to do with seeking . . . it had to do with seeking legal . . . oh yes, these guys. Oh, here it is. Provision is intended to cover legal advice and related professional services who require to support the drafting of legislative amendments arising from government-led electoral reform initiatives. So, we're leading it, and the Parliamentary Registrar will be the one enacting.

And so, the idea . . . and this will come. This will be part of some of the disagreement on how to do it, we had in a previous iteration, and that is because we want to, when we do pass it over, we want to have been vetted and passing of a package that says this is (because we've actually been talking to the Parliamentary Registrar) this is how it's going to work, and now it's just a matter of putting it in train, versus having to

go out and do the research on can it work, and how it can work.

And so that's why the bulk of the funding remains within my Ministry.

Now, as far as the 50 per cent, that is something that we will have to take up with the Parliamentary Registrar, because we have guaranteed that it will be, in September we will be laying down this legislation, and we will be passing it in September. But the legislative portion is our part. The passing it on to the Registrar to implement what happened after we passed it through these Chambers.

The Chairman: And we are coming close to the time of concluding.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Five more minutes?

The Chairman: No, no, no, we have three more minutes left.

So, we are coming to the conclusion of the debate for consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27, for the non-ministry heads.

And I would like to invite the Minister now to move his heads.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: We have got three minutes.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: I could be a nice chairman.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: Take your time reading your heads.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Madam Chairman, I move that Heads 2, 5, 56, 63, 85, 92, 98, and 101 be approved as printed.

The Chairman: The Minister has moved that Non-Ministerial Heads 2, 5, 56, 63, 85, 92, 98, and 101 be approved.

Are there any objections to that?

If not, then it is accepted.

Thank you.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you.

[Motion carried: Non-Ministry Heads 2, 5, 56, 63, 85, 92, 98 and 101 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2026/27.]

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: Next item up is the debate on the Ministry of Home Affairs for further consideration of the

Estimate of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27.

The heads to be debated today are [Head] 89, Energy, [Head] 93, the Ministry of Home Affairs Headquarters and [Head] 97, Land Title and Registration. And I now call on the Honourable Minister Alexa Lightbourne to present.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Good afternoon, Madam Chairman.

I move that the following heads: [Head] 93, Ministry of Home Affairs Headquarters, [Head] 89, Energy and [Head] 97, Land Title and Registration be now taken under consideration.

The Chairman: Please proceed.

MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I am pleased to present the 2026/27 Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the Ministry of Home Affairs. These estimates cover Head 93, Ministry Headquarters; Head 89, Department of Energy; and Head 97, Land Title and Registration Office. And I will speak to each in turn.

Madam Chairman, the remit of the Ministry of Home Affairs expanded to include the advancement of affordability in Bermuda, reflecting the government's recognition that reducing cost of living for Bermudian households is a matter of national priority.

As the Ministry entrusted with these impactful responsibilities that directly affects those living and working in Bermuda, we approach this mandate with a great diligence and resolve. Consistent with the 2026/27 budget theme of "Responsible Choices . . . Lasting Benefits for Bermudians," the 2026/27 budget allocations for the Ministry of Home Affairs demonstrates the continued commitment and alignment of the government's broader objectives of affordability, modernisation and regional engagement, which include:

- strengthening consumer protection;
- modernising key legislation;
- reducing the cost of living;
- supporting energy reform; and
- advancing regional policy development within CARICOM.

HEAD 93—MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS HEADQUARTERS

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Madam Chairman, Head 93, the Ministry Headquarters, leads the strategic direction, policy development and coordination of activities across the departments under the Ministry's remit.

The Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for Head 93, Ministry of Home Affairs Headquarters, can

be found on pages B-307 through B-311, C-8, C-16 and C-22 in the 2026/27 Budget Book.

Madam Chairman, Head 93 encompasses two business units, Administration which is 103000 and 103010, Consumer Affairs Administration.

The mission of the Ministry Headquarters is, *To empower Bermuda residents by promoting affordability and prosperity through transparency in property ownership and rights, consumer protection, energy sustainability and focused legislative change.*

To fulfil its mission, the Ministry Headquarters has defined the following strategic objectives:

- provide strategic leadership, policy direction, legislative, financial and operational oversight of departments and sections within the Ministry for the delivery of excellent public service;
- provide oversight of the relationship between the landlord and tenant through effective policies and legislation to ensure equitable standards and fairness;
- advance consumer protection through public engagement, education and effective regulation;
- develop deepened relations with CARICOM and its member states to explore greater economic and cultural opportunities of mutual benefit;
- advance enhanced safeguards for affordability for all Bermuda residents; and
- support the regulatory authority in ensuring fair and transparent regulation across various sectors.

To deliver effectively on the national priorities, the Ministry Headquarters implemented a defined roadmap for fiscal year 2025/26. This is informed by the 2025 Throne Speech, the 2025/26 Budget Statement and the Government's commitment to digitise 93 per cent of eligible public services by 2026.

Madam Chairman, I want to share how the 2025/26 approved budget was used for the work of the Ministry during the past year as structured across five strategic priorities.

- policy development;
- consumer protection enforcement;
- exploration of CARICOM membership;
- regulatory reform; and
- digitisation of platforms.

Madam Chairman, the first strategic priority policy development includes energy reform. The Ministry has been steadfast in leading integrated cross-sectional policy developed to promote affordability, access and equity across the regulated and unregulated markets.

Critical work that was progressed include the following.

- The advancement of the amendments of the Electricity Act 2016 to ensure that costs incurred by the utility were not automatically or inappropriately passed

through to customers. These amendments will continue to strengthen the scrutiny of the utility recoverable expenses and ensure that only costs that are efficient, reasonable, and justified are eligible for recovery through consumer retail tariffs.

- A draft Bill was completed with consultation taken with key stakeholder groups in November 2025 and the Ministry has considered the feedback received and is currently working on further amendments to finalise the Bill for tabling.

- The Ministry in tandem with the Department of Energy completed a draft 2025 National Electricity Sector Policy which reflects significant structural developments in Bermuda's electricity sector since 2025 when it was first brought to this House and provides an updated framework to guide long-term planning, regulation and investment. The policy framework establishes guiding principles centred on affordability, system reliability, economic efficiency and resilience and provides the policy context for which the integrated resource plan, regulatory designs and legislative amendments can be developed. The draft policy will be further reviewed by the Energy Policy Steering Committee and subsequently launched for public consultation during which written submissions will be invited and feedback from stakeholders.

- The Ministry advanced amendments also to the Regulatory Authority Act 2011 to strengthen transparency, accountability and fiscal discipline where utility investment decisions and operational expenditures have a direct implication on retail electricity prices. These refinements are intended to improve alignment between policy, regulation and consumer outcomes while preserving regulatory independence. The amendments are still being worked on through the Attorney General's Chambers and are more extensive than originally expected.

Madam Chairman, further policy work is part of the energy reform inclusive of the broadcasting policy, electronic communications and fuel policy. I will speak to them when presenting the budget estimates for the Department of Energy.

Madam Chairman, the second strategic priority for the delivery of work focused on by the Ministry Headquarters is to consumer protection and enforcement.

Madam Chairman, the work of Consumer Affairs Unit is a backbone of the Ministry for ensuring consumer protection. Consumer Affairs is working closely with drafters and the Attorney General's Chambers to enhance the current legislations that will support fairness and equity for both landlords and tenants. Amendments to the Landlord and Tenant Act and Rent Increases (Domestic Premises) Control Act are in train.

These amendments provide powers for Consumer Affairs to prevent and or resolve conflicts between landlords and tenants and to provide alternative dispute resolution processes to resolve complaints on arrears.

A draft Bill was produced for public consultation in November 2025 that included a virtual consultation meeting. Valuable feedback was received from landlords, tenants, real estate professionals, legal practitioners, advocacy groups, municipal representatives and concerned residents. In response, the Ministry has developed a summary of the feedback and input received by key themes. The document outlined how stakeholder input would inform the Ministry's policy direction and shape the next iteration of the Bill.

In January 2026, the summary document was posted on the Citizens Forum to complete the consultation. The Ministry, through Consumer Affairs, also advanced amendments to the Cost of Living Commission Act 1974 and the Cost of Living [Essential Commodities] Regulations 2022. The amendments will expand the Cost of Living Commission's remit to go beyond goods and include critical services and strengthen transparency and accountability aligning with the Affordable Bermuda Agenda.

The amendments reflect policy development informed by the 2025 Cost of Living Summit, public feedback from surveys and stakeholder consultations. The expansion in critical services includes utilities, telecommunications and water and grants powers to require notification and information filing on pricing and service offerings. These changes are intended to protect consumers, small businesses, importers and service providers by establishing a unified affordability framework that ensures transparency and fairness across the economy.

Consumer Affairs continues to collaborate with legal professionals to progress this work as it is a complex piece of legislation with the aim of tabling in July 2026 after stakeholder consultation.

Madam Chairman, during 2025/26 Consumer Affairs conducted 1,356 civil and criminal case investigations of which 43 were deemed to have insufficient evidence to proceed with prosecution. Civil cases primarily involve the sale of goods or services from retail stores in which consumers were not satisfied with the services provided.

Criminal cases on the other hand include instances where a vendor refused to provide refunds to a consumer or the landlord overcharged rent on a property under rent control and refused to pay. While this figure fell below the 2,000 investigation target projected for 2025/26, the variance reflects a strategic shift towards more complex resource intensive investigations that yield higher enforcement outcomes rather than a volumes-based approach. The quality of investigations improved with a higher portion of cases resulting in actionable findings and referral to the Department of Public Prosecution.

An investigation is defined as the collection and verification of facts to determine jurisdiction and potential violations of the law. The timeline begins from the date the complaint was received to the date the investigation was closed. Complaints and investigations

in which evidence and facts have substantiated a violation of the law are referred to the Department of Public Prosecution for action.

Madam Chairman, 699 rent control matters were dealt with which included inspections, floor plans, and adjudication of rent increases, appeals, unfair evictions, overcharging of rent, illegal apartments, wills and trusts, and vacation rental licensing applications.

Madam Chairman, Consumer Affairs dealt with a diverse range of matters in servicing clients during the 2025/26 fiscal year. The following data provides an indication of the number of clients served and the diversity of queries handled by the section of Consumer Affairs, including:

- case investigations at 1,313;
- product recalls, consumer redress applied, there were 52;
- court proceedings, there were 18, which involved landlord and tenant matters
- rent control, adjudicated rent increases were at 581,
- process applications for the RC2 and S37, (which are forms), were 42. The RC2 application form represents an agreed increase in rent by the landlord and tenant, whereas S37 refers to section 37 of the Rent Increases Act *[sic]* that gives the landlord the right to set the first rent after completion of renovations.
- rental inspections, floor plans, and reports, 539;
- fraudulent paperwork submissions, 11; and
- appeals at 7.

Madam Chairman, globalisation has permanently changed the landscape of how consumers behave, think, and more importantly, spend. The risk to consumers of over-[indebtedness] is inherent in financial contracts for goods and services.

During the 2025/26 [fiscal year], the Consumer Affairs section randomly selected and examined 29 various types of contracts to assess potential threats, trends in the behaviours of companies by contract type, and also to obtain a clear understanding of how and why consumers found themselves in financial harm. Four types of consumer contracts were reviewed and comprised negative option marketing contracts, whereby businesses offer upgrades, goods, services to consumers, mainly by phone, and if the consumer does not reject or cancel the offer, their silence is construed as acceptance and assent to be charged. Also, standard form contracts, whereby businesses have set application forms for goods and/or services with no option for the consumer to negotiate terms.

The Chairman: Minister, if I could ask just for a break for a second.

We are going to change Chairpersons now.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Absolutely.

The Chairman: Thank you.

[Mrs. Renee Ming, in the Chair]

The Chairman: Good afternoon, Members and listening audience.

We are currently in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27.

The following heads are being debated. Home Affairs, Heads 89, 93, and 97.

Minister, you may continue.

[Committee of Supply, continuing]

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I was before sharing the contracts that the Consumer Affairs section had randomly selected, and I went through the negative options, marketing contracts, also standard form contracts, and I'll now continue regarding verbal contracts.

These include many who engage in this type of contract and typically do so believing that it's in [their] best [interest] to opt out of legally. However, the Consumer Affairs section has ensured education to clarify that legally verbal contracts are just as valid as written ones requiring an offer and acceptance and consideration, which is bargained for exchange. For example, I'll do this if you pay me.

Lastly, the real estate leases, which encompassed a random selection that fell under rent control and the Landlord and Tenant Act of 1974, along with leaseholders and boarding houses. The review of these leases provided Consumer Affairs with greater insight as to the limited knowledge contracting parties have about Bermuda Law, even more alarming which Act governs the rental unit.

Many of the leases reviewed had copied terms and conditions from different jurisdictions which contravened the Bermuda Acts. Consumer Affairs also found that leases tend to favour the landlord's position over that of the tenant's legal rights. Additionally, it was surprising to discover that there was a lack of stamp duty on signed leases. Once this was identified, the Consumer Affairs advised the parties that they were required to add stamp duty, of course, to validate these leases. All of these findings were critical to ensuring that consumer rights and consumer protections remain in effect.

Madam Chairman, Consumer Affairs oversees the fee collection from vacation rental properties under the Vacation Rentals (Application and Registration Fees) Act 2023. This legislation establishes annual application and registration fees for vacation and rental licensing. During the fiscal year 2025/26, Consumer Affairs processed 53 vacation rental property applications and granted 41 licences. Consumer Affairs will continue to steer the requisite activities and exercise

greater enforcement for enhanced consumer protection, market transparency, and regulatory oversight.

Madam Chairman, the third strategic priority work centred around the expiration of CARICOM membership. As stated in my 2025/26 budget presentation, Bermuda's progress towards deepening CARICOM ties will proceed via a phased consultative strategy. During the past year, the Ministry engaged directly with CARICOM Legal Advisory Committee and completed a comprehensive review of the Treaty of Chaguaramas, formulating specific reservations that would shape Bermuda's intended deeper membership under the treaty.

We have continued to also consult with stakeholders to invite their input and have now published the Green Paper and conducted a Quarter four Omnibus survey to obtain feedback on the proposed intent of greater CARICOM membership. We've also provided updates to the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) through the Cabinet Office, and developed and completed the Green Paper for consultation by the public and Cabinet.

The Green Paper on Bermuda's application for membership in the Caribbean community was released on March 9th. A public education campaign has also commenced, which will include town halls and engagement, which will be able to be found on the togetherfor-caricom.gov.bm website.

Madam Chairman, the fourth strategic priority of the work of the Ministry is focused on regulatory reform. In addition to the legislative reform, the Ministry exercised its policy role by providing oversight and guidance to the Regulatory Authority. In May 2025, the Ministry issued a ministerial directive to the Regulatory Authority in accordance with the governing legislation to ensure that the Government's policy objectives were clearly articulated and appropriately reflected in the regulatory decision-making. The directive was given to the Regulatory Authority to ensure that statutory mechanisms were fully utilised to protect consumers from undue utility costs, pass-throughs, and to signal the policy intent from the Government in advance of the publication of the updated Energy Policy.

In October 2025, the Management Consultant Services [MCS] undertook a functional review of Consumer Affairs operational activities that directly aligned with the 2025 Throne Speech to review and amend the Regulatory Authority's mandate to oversee both regulated and unregulated sectors, ensuring transparent pricing, fair competition, and enhanced consumer protection. The objective of the MCS review was to assess whether there was the capacity and the capability to leverage the Regulatory Authority's infrastructure, digital capabilities, and institutional independence with a view to modernising consumer protections and access to services. The strategic review of the functions of Consumer Affairs determined the most effective and sustainable governance model for the future delivery of consumer protection functions.

Stemming from the strategic review and recommendations received, the Ministry received approval to undertake a one-year pilot transition of selected non-housing-related functions such as debt collection, licensing, and consumer complaint handling. Subsequently, the Ministry has collaborated with the Regulatory Authority to start such implementation of a phased pilot transfer of Consumer Affairs to the Regulatory Authority. The development of a targeted transition plan for Consumer Affairs is now being framed.

Madam Chairman, in alignment with the Affordable Bermuda Agenda and rent control reform, the Ministry has already developed the requisite policy for the establishment of a national housing registry. Currently, there is no central database of the housing stock for all residential rental properties in Bermuda, including long-term residential tenancies and properties offered for short-term or vacation rental use. The establishment of a national housing registry will be a core component of a modernised rental housing regulatory framework for Bermuda. The implementation of this housing framework will facilitate targeted oversight of the rental housing market while preserving market-based pricing and supporting evidence-based policymaking in relation to affordability, housing supply, and cost-of-living pressures.

Lastly, [Madam] Chairman, the fifth and final priority of work during 2025/26 was formed around digitisation aligned to public service reform. In support of the Government's goal to digitise 93 per cent of eligible services by 2026, the Ministry's Consumer Affairs section continues to work with the Department of Information and Digital Technologies (IDT) to rebuild its case management system and develop dedicated digital platforms to deliver end-to-end service integration for both the public and the internal regulatory teams.

Consumer Affairs has been diligently meeting with the IDT specialists to develop the foundational requirements of an upgraded and modernised system. The digital platform will be well-placed to enable online rent control functions using digital forms submitted on the digital platform. To date, 12 out of 15 rental forms have been fully digitised and will be available via the Government portal and the Consumer Affairs website. Completed forms will be electronically forwarded to Consumer Affairs via a dashboard for processing by Consumer Affairs staff.

Some of the completed forms to date are as follows:

- vacation rental applications;
- notice to quit for landlords and tenants;
- notice to quit for landlords to tenants, notice due to renovations;
- notice to quit landlords, occupation;
- notice of termination tenant to landlord;
- RC9 which is a counter notice;
- RC2 mutual agreement for an existing tenant;
- RC5 rent review request;
- RC7 vacant premises for new tenant; and

- RC8 non-mutual agreement for an existing tenant.

Submissions of these forms will be centralised and stored electronically for future reference as well as quantifiable for statistical analysis going forward. The remaining three forms to be digitised are the rental appeals form, the debt licensing application form, and the debt licensing renewal form.

Madam Chairman, in alignment with the 2025 Throne Speech, the Ministry embarked on its remit to address the rising cost of living in Bermuda. As stated in the budget presentation last year, the Ministry launched the government's first cost of living website in April 2025 that currently serves as a central hub for information on the government's cost of living initiatives. Later in June 2025, the Ministry hosted a first-ever Cost of Living Summit with more than 250 participants comprising representatives from the government, industry, labour, and the broader community.

The summit's objectives were two-fold and included to deliver quick wins to the public and those who are consuming goods, particularly within the food and essential goods supply chain, and to develop a roadmap for sustainable affordability addressing structural factors that drive long-term cost pressures. The data, information, and insight gathered from the public survey and stakeholder consultations undertaken by the Ministry in March of last year [proved] valuable for informing discussions and recommendations at the Cost of Living Summit. This helped to develop and frame the Affordable Bermuda Agenda that was released in October 2025.

The objectives of the Summit were met in that the Affordable Agenda maps out a clear phased approach and a roadmap for addressing affordability and consumer protection. This roadmap extends from Phase 1 (February 2025) when the Ministry launched the stakeholder surveys and held focus group sessions for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data in preparation for the summit, to Phase 5 (September 2026 and beyond) when the Ministry will be positioned to consistently undertake tracking and quarterly reviews of outcomes, complete legislative updates, and stakeholder and public engagement sessions for further feedback.

Quick wins included the appointment and gazetting of members of the Cost of Living Commission, the buy-in and partnership with wholesalers and retailers for the development of the Affordable Bermuda Basket containing core staple goods purchased by households through an agreement to reduce costs at 10 per cent at the wholesale level and 10 per cent at the retail level in exchange for the commitment to review the regulatory framework and legislative changes that would be required to improve affordability for business operations. Those wholesalers who committed to apply the 10 per cent reduction in the cost of brand products supplied to retailers include Butterfield & Valis, BGA, Pitt & Company, [Ltd.], Dunkley's Dairy, and

Viking Foods, Ltd., while retailers include The Marketplace and Lindo's Group of Companies who agreed to apply a further 10 per cent reduction at the shelf, guaranteeing customer savings on participating brands for a nine-month period.

The food retail partnership expanded as two additional key suppliers, The Garden Market and The English Market, recently joined the affordable basket initiatives in November 2025 and January 2026, respectively.

Madam Chairman, the Affordable [Bermuda] Basket initiative currently includes 178 essential grocery items across four participating retailers and, with support from wholesalers, provides consumers with consistent price reductions on commonly purchased goods. Since the launch of the programme, the [Affordable Bermuda] Basket has generated approximately \$381,000 in cumulative customer savings based on price monitoring conducted by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Early monitoring indicates that participating stores have maintained reduced prices on designated items, allowing households to benefit from lower costs on staple goods and basic food items and household essentials. The initiative continues to track retailer participation, item price stability, and consumer purchasing patterns to assess the impact of the programme on households' affordability and to inform potential expansion and future reform.

The Affordable Bermuda Basket initiative is a clear example of the responsible choices that produce lasting benefits for Bermudian families. By working collaboratively with the private sector to deliver the cumulative savings of \$381,000 across 178 essential items, the Ministry has demonstrated that targeted, evidence-based interventions can make a tangible difference in everyday cost pressures facing households. This model of public-private partnership for affordability will continue to inform the Ministry's approach in the year ahead.

Madam Chairman, overall, the Cost of Living Summit provided a highly successful forum, presenting several recommendations for consideration and designing key affordability initiatives that bring together cross-ministry and cross-sector collaboration, working in tandem towards affordability on behalf of Bermuda.

Madam Chairman, the affordable initiatives as outlined in the Affordable Bermuda Agenda have either started or implemented under each of the five affordability pillars for reform and are as follows.

Imports

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: To advance legislative amendments to establish a framework for phased diversification of Bermuda's supply, the Ministry policy team has commenced the requisite research and is now collaborating with teams at the Ministry of Public Works and Health to design a way forward. In

partnership with the US Consulate, the Ministry of Home Affairs has coordinated with the US Department of Commerce and other US business associations and entities to discuss how to strengthen imports in the areas of most need, including Bermuda's 33 duty-free or lower-duty essential goods.

The planning of this initiative commenced in December 2025 with a meeting held with the US Consul General who confirmed the participation of her US Department of Agriculture colleagues and the US Department of Commerce for the planned virtual trade event which introduced US businesses interested in the Bermuda market.

Subsequently, on March 3, 2026, the virtual trade event took place with representatives from the Bermuda Business Development Agency, the Minister of Economy and Labour, the Minister of Home Affairs (myself), and all made presentations promoting market opportunities in Bermuda to roughly 40 US businesses that registered for the virtual trade event. Also in attendance were the President of the Chamber of Commerce, representatives from the Bermuda Small Business Development Corporation, and technical officers from the Ministry of Home Affairs and Economy and Labour.

Since the undertaking of the virtual event, several US businesses have already reached out directly to the US Consulate, BDA, and the Ministry to ascertain next steps. Moving forward, this initiative will prove fruitful as US businesses are linked with the correct Bermuda contacts to engage in possible business opportunities for diversification of imports at lowered costs.

Additionally, representatives from the US Department of Agriculture and Foreign Agricultural [Service], who assisted in facilitating the virtual forum, visited the Island to engage directly with the local businesses and regulators of the import sector. They heard firsthand the challenges that the Ministry had previously shared with them and further committed to future engagements to remove barriers for suppliers.

As a result of the facilitated engagement, invitations to upcoming trade events free of charge were offered to Bermuda's market participants.

I'll just have a water break, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: No problem, Minister.

Food Security

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Madam Chairman, under the affordability pillar, which includes food security and affordability, the Ministry undertook the review, or the department undertook the review of policies governing and influencing the pricing of imported goods.

The Ministry's policy team is currently undertaking the foundational research for this initiative. Full implementation of this reform is to increase competitiveness and ultimately reduce prices, which will unfold during the upcoming year. The digital currency pilot,

and this pilot has not yet been launched, but is expected to be implemented in this fiscal year.

In January and February, the Ministry has met with potential partners that have the capacity, technical expertise, and experience in the areas of compliance, education, and distribution of wallets. The Ministry is refining the requisite framework for launching this pilot in the upcoming year.

Utilities

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Madam Chairman, the affordability pillar also includes utilities. I have already spoken to the policy and legislative work that the Ministry is currently undertaking related to the amendments of the Regulatory Authority Act and amendments to the Electricity Act of 2016 to increase efficiency and enforcement and strengthen consumer protection and to reduce long-term electricity costs and improve stability for customers, respectively.

Housing

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Madam Chairman, under the affordability pillar of housing, the Ministry of Home Affairs is the lead Ministry for three of the four affordability initiatives under the housing pillar. Earlier in the budget presentation, we spoke to the progress that had been made relating to the amendments to the legislation to strengthen protections for landlords and tenants, review of the vacation rentals listings, and development of a vacation rental policy and the policy development of an established housing registry.

Consumer Protection and Education

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: The last affordability pillar, Madam Chairman, is number five, consumer protection and education. The Ministry has engaged the Cost of Living Commission to actively pursue the reform activities that fall under this pillar and pertain directly to introducing regulatory measures to ensure transparent and fair pricing, launching a national consumer rights and pricing education campaign, and the regulation of critical goods and services. The Cost of Living Commission meets bimonthly to discuss these reform tasks.

The Commission has continued its research and stakeholder engagement to better understand the drivers of price formation for essential goods in Bermuda. This work has included consultations with the Bermuda Chamber of Commerce and the Department of Statistics to examine import costs, supply chain dynamics, and retail pricing structures, all geared towards understanding what is needed for regulatory frameworks.

Based on these discussions, the Commission is exploring recommendations to improve market transparency and to enhance the government's ability to monitor the price of essential goods, including the

development of price monitoring tools and amendments to the legislative framework. These measures are intended to support the implementation phase of the Affordable Bermuda Agenda.

The Commission has been thorough in its deliberations to ensure that the requisite legislation relating data systems and existing tools are fully understood before moving from discussion to decision that will inform the Ministry's policy direction.

Madam Chairman, during the past year, the work [stemming] from the Consumer Affairs section of the Ministry Headquarters played a key role in enforcing consumer protection, consumer safety, market integrity, and particularly in monitoring consumer awareness and education. With the hiring of a business and community liaison officer, several education initiatives have been implemented that align with the tenets of the Affordable Bermuda Agenda and promote education and awareness, equipping customers with the knowledge and tools to make informed purchasing decisions and understand their protections and redress if needed.

In February of 2026, Consumer Affairs participated in the fourth annual Bermuda Economic Development Corporation Small Business Expo. Participants in the Expo included local entrepreneurs, businesses, and vendors who showcased their products and promoted business development. Consumer Affairs took advantage of the opportunity to participate and engage directly with the community and businesses, informing them of the key legislation that drives consumer protection in Bermuda and providing attendees with guidance regarding good business practices and what it means to be a good consumer.

Consumer Affairs also launched the Consumer Corner, a monthly radio show featuring information on different consumer-related topics. The show held in February 2026 focused on reintroducing the work of Consumer Affairs to the community, its core role in educating the community about consumer rights and practical ways that they can reduce their cost of living and increase household savings.

Consumer Affairs is developing additionally the first phase of the Cost of Living National Consumer Rights and Pricing Education campaign relating to food security, an affordability initiative in the Affordable Bermuda Agenda. The campaign features live interviews, social media engagement, bus decals, and information dissemination, all of which aim to empower consumers with practical ways to become self-sufficient.

One aspect of the education campaign for promoting an awareness of affordability called for an appearance on the Daily Hour show in February by the chair of the Cost of Living Commission. The work of the commission was shared with the listeners of the show in addition to highlighting the Ministry's Grow, Eat, \$ave pilot affordability initiative. The continuation of the National Consumer Rights and Pricing Education campaign on food security will unfold during the month of

March as we focus on Consumer Affairs Awareness Month.

Madam Chairman, food security underpins affordability and in February 2026, the Ministry expanded the Grow, Eat, \$ave programme across the Ministry food resilience initiative for Devonshire Parish residents, balancing affordability and healthy eating aligning with the Affordable Bermuda Agenda's food security pillar.

The pilot programme was structured around a curriculum extended from February to April 2026 which includes hands-on gardening, pest management, composting, and food literacy and gardening information sessions. The pilot is designed not only as a community gardening programme but as a micro food system intervention that tests local production capacity, household engagement, and behavioural shifts towards growing and consuming locally produced food.

A total of 23 Devonshire residents are currently participating in the GES [Grow, Eat, \$ave] programme, gaining practical skills in growing their own produce, experiencing enhanced community connection, learning practical ways to reduce their grocery bills, and gaining a sense of ownership over a shared food system. The pilot programme will continue for nine weeks after which in April 2026 there will be a graduation ceremony for all participants.

Madam Chairman, additional work initiatives carried out by the Ministry through Consumer Affairs in support of the regulatory mandate and the protection of consumer interests include the January 2026 website posting reintroducing the services provided by Consumer Affairs. Topics included:

- Reintroducing Consumer Affairs;
- Budget Glow Up;
- Consumer Feedback for Businesses;
- Rent Control 101;
- Small Moves that Prevent Big Headaches for Landlords;
- Cost of Living; and
- Price Check Challenge.

Additionally bus decals on the back of four government buses with key messages to primary school children about computer safety was also deployed.

Dollars and Sense, an interactive financial literacy and consumer awareness experience designed for Bermuda's teens and specifically our S2 and S3 students through a fun hands-on spending village [simulation]. Students are given a mock budget and must navigate real life purchasing and consumer decisions such as savings for goals, managing subscription, shopping online safely, understanding pricing, and knowing their rights as consumers.

The Dollars and Sense initiative is intended to empower young people with the practical skills and confidence they need to become informed, responsible, and consumers in today's digital world. The Dollars and Sense [Teen] Financial Literacy Experience is planned for March 19th and 20th of this year.

Madam Chairman, as outlined on page B-309, the current account estimates, the Ministry Headquarters has been allocated \$3,899,000 for the 2026/27 fiscal year.

Madam Chairman, the subjective analysis of the 2026/27 current account estimates can be found on page B-309 and represents resources needed aligned to the strategic uses.

Line 1 Salaries. This includes the salary allocation for the 2026/27 fiscal year which totalled \$1,727,000. This reflects a minimal decrease in a cost of \$7,000. This decrease is due to recently vacated positions budgeted at a lower end of the pay scale.

Lines 2 through 6, Wages to Travel costs show no increase in the expenditures for fiscal year 2026/27.

Line 7, Communications is reflecting a decrease in expenditure of \$15,000 less than budgeted in fiscal year 2025/26. This reflects a reduction in postal expenses.

Line 8, Costs for Advertising and Promotion increased by \$8,000 to support public awareness in the campaigns previously discussed that will be driven through support from Consumer Affairs to execute the Affordability initiative and launching the National Consumer Rights and Pricing Education campaign.

Line 9, Professional Services. An increase of approximately \$312,000 has been allocated for the cost of professional services. This increase will [cover] the [cost] of the following initiatives and fees:

- the development of a human resource framework for consumer affairs;
- rent control reform;
- the housing registry;
- the continuation of the two Affordability initiatives (the Grow, Eat, \$ave and the digital finance pilots);
- Cost of Living Commission fees; and
- an annual subscription relating to the digital grocery price tracker app.

Madam Chairman, I will pause here to utilise, sorry, to itemise the funding of these initiatives in the line item professional services.

The development of a human resource framework for Consumer Affairs will assess the unit's full scope of operations and functions. This review will provide critical data information and recommendations that will inform the decision making regarding the full transition of the operational and legal functions of the unit to the Regulatory Authority. The Ministry will initially implement a phased pilot transfer of non-housing related consumer protection functions from Consumer Affairs to the Regulatory Authority.

The one-year pilot, as recommended by Management Consulting Services, will assess the feasibility of transferring consumer protection functions, such as the licensing of debt collection agencies and the mediation of consumer complaints. Simultaneously with the undertaking of this one-year pilot, the human resources

framework will be developed. The funding for this initiative is \$150,000.

Madam Chairman, in alignment with the Affordable Bermuda Agenda and rent control reform, a housing registry will be developed for all residential properties in Bermuda, including long-term residences and residential tenancies and properties offering short-term or vacation rental use. Funding of \$78,000 will be used towards the preparatory work needed for the housing registry and to modernise the current rent control management legacy system. There will be capability to monitor and track rental control properties in Bermuda. The Ministry has already developed the requisite policy for the establishment of such a housing registry. Legislative amendments will be required to the Landlord and Tenant Act and will be enacted to establish the housing registry.

The Ministry will continue the implementation of two affordability pilot initiatives. Madam Chairman, \$25,000 will fund the digital finance pilot which aims to develop a digital currency incubator that will test lower transaction fees for residents and businesses. By reducing costs for businesses which is passed on to consumers, this can increase savings for consumers and help to reduce the overall cost of living in Bermuda.

The Ministry has already taken the requisite due diligence in the planning of this pilot. Meetings were held in January and February of 2026 with potential partners to discuss and plan compliance requirements, selection and the education of participants as well as the distribution of a wallet. The framework for this pilot is being refined and is targeted to be launched in the new fiscal year. Madam Chairman, \$30,000 will support the free community Grow, Eat, \$ave pilot programme which was implemented in February 2026 and to which I spoke earlier in this budget presentation.

Madam Chairman, a total of \$11,000 has been budgeted for fees paid to members of the Cost of Living Commission in alignment with the fee structure in the Government Authorities (Fees) Act 1971.

Lastly, an annual subscription of \$18,000 will support the maintenance and operation of a digital grocery price tracker which is an app designed to allow consumers to easily access, view and compare the prices of grocery items across all major supermarkets in support of affordability and transparency.

Madam Chairman, I will continue on [page] B-309, line 10 which is addressing rentals. The total cost of rent and facilities increased by \$14,000 and reflect the rental cost for the Consumer Affairs Unit located in the [D.] Rego building on Reid Street.

Across lines 11 through 14 and 16, Operating Costs, there are no increases in expenditures during 2026/27 for these operational activities.

Line 15, Other Expenses, a minimal increase of \$3,000 in other expenses supported bank charges and gifts purchased for overseas conferences and meetings.

Madam Chairman, the 2026/27 budget positions the Ministry Headquarters to continue to:

1. deliver more equitable landlord-tenant relationships;
2. protect the public from unfair pricing and exploitative practices;
3. modernise licensing and enforcement across key sectors; and
4. accelerate digital services that improve the everyday experience of the people that we serve.

In a time when Bermudians are seeking not only relief but fairness, transparency and trust, this budget affirms our responsibility to lead.

Moving to revenue, Madam Chairman. The revenue summary is located on [page] B-310 of the 2026/27 current account estimates. For the upcoming fiscal year, the Ministry Headquarters projects revenue generation of \$88,000. This revenue is derived from the vacation rental fees (\$84,000) and the licensing of two debt collection agencies, each of which is subject to licensing fee of \$2,000 under the oversight of Consumer Affairs.

Madam Chairman, the manpower estimates for the Ministry Headquarters as outlined on the page B-310 reflect a total of 16 full-time equivalents for the 2026/27 fiscal year remaining the same as in the fiscal year of 2025/26. Each of these positions has been strategically aligned with the Ministry's core objective including advancing legislative reform, digital service delivery, expanding consumer education, and strengthening regulatory compliance to implement its strategic priorities.

Madam Chairman, as outlined on pages C-8 and C-16, the Ministry Headquarters does not anticipate any capital asset purchases during the 2026/27 fiscal year. While no formal capital acquisitions are planned, the Ministry continues to explore opportunities for digital platform integration and service delivery enhancements as part of its commitment to support broader public sector modernisation.

Madam Chairman, the Department's performance measures are outlined on page B-311. The Ministry delivered on 75 per cent of its Throne Speech initiatives. Amendments to legislation include the Cost of Living [Commission] Act 1974 to expand the investigating powers of the Cost of Living Commission to examine records of businesses involved in the supply of essential goods. The Ministry is currently reviewing such a draft Bill and will eventually be fielded for consultation.

Legislative amendments to the Electricity Act 2016 have commenced for the review of the Regulatory Authority's mandate to oversee both regulated and unregulated sectors. Also, the development of a transition plan is currently being constructed for the phased pilot transfer of non-housing-related consumer protection functions from Consumer Affairs to the Regulatory Authority.

Madam Chairman, in the 2025 Throne Speech the Ministry was tasked to take steps to:

- reduce the cost of groceries and wholesalers importing goods into Bermuda so that savings are reflected at the register and implement fair pricing control and pricing transparency measures and expand the categories of essential goods accruing 0 per cent duty import;
- amend the Cost of Living Commission Act to expand the investigating powers of the Cost of Living Commission; and
- amend the Regulatory Authority's mandate and amend the Electricity Act 2016 to limit categories of recoverable expenses that is allowed to be passed on to the consumers.

Madam Chairman, I presented an update on the policy development work for these initiatives earlier in the budget presentation when speaking to the work achieved under policy development, the Ministry's first strategic priority.

Madam Chairman, the CARICOM Green Paper was tabled in this House last week, Wednesday, March 11, 2026, and the CARICOM process is ongoing in that the public—

POINT OF CLARIFICATION

Hon. Michael Fahy: Just a point of clarification, if I may. The Minister said that the Green Paper was tabled in the House. I don't think it was.

The Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Thank you . . . it definitely was. It was tabled on Wednesday, March 11.

The CARICOM process is ongoing in that the public consultation on the Green Paper has commenced and will extend for the next two months.

Madam Chairman, for the upcoming 2026/27 fiscal year, the Ministry Headquarters is targeting 100 per cent completion of all initiatives outlined, except for the establishment of a rental registry of rent-controlled properties, which will first require legislation and comprehensive stakeholder consultation. These performance measures reflect the work at hand for the Ministry and form a crucial part of the Affordable Bermuda Agenda.

Specifically, the key measures [to be] delivered in the 2026/27 fiscal year include:

- tabling the Landlord and Tenant Act Amendment Bill following stakeholder consultation;
- tabling the Cost of Living Commission Act 1974 amendments by July 2026;
- finalising and tabling the Electricity Act 2016 Amendment Bill;
- commencement of one-year pilot transfer of non-housing consumer protection functions to the Regulatory Authority with a feasibility assessment to inform such a full transition;

- launch of the digital finance pilot programme;
- digitisation of all 15 consumer affairs rental forms and launch of the government portal;
- completion of the CARICOM public consultation, and the development of the policy position informed by stakeholder feedback and release the White Paper; and finally,
- launch the National Housing Registry, including the legislative amendments required under the Landlord and Tenant Act to establish such a registry framework.

Madam Chairman, the Consumer Affairs section engaged in additional initiatives during the past year, focusing on consumer protection. A total of four rent control appeals were handled by Consumer Affairs staff and were provided guidance in ensuring that the operational areas of oversight complied with the Personal Information Protection Act of 2016.

Consumer affairs also continued engagement with the Bermuda Monetary Authority to explore potential avenues for enhanced collaboration aimed at expediting the resolution of consumer complaints involving financial institutions. This includes instances where money has been stolen from personal accounts in scams.

Madam Chairman, as shared in the 2025/26 budget presentation, the Ministry of Home Affairs, through its Consumer Affairs Unit, placed a renewed emphasis on public engagement and consumer empowerment through the expansion of its education outreach and regulatory oversight. The successful recruitment of a community and business liaison education officer as planned now leads the targeted public awareness campaigns and is supporting the development of education materials and seeks to increase the visibility of consumer rights and responsibilities throughout the community. Consumer Affairs revitalised its website and designed a comprehensive promotional education and awareness campaign focused on consumer rights and protection.

Madam Chairman, from December 2025 to March 2026, Consumer Affairs enhanced its digital presence using its website and social media platforms to provide accessible information and guidance and consumer protection resources to the public.

The following metrics reflect the effectiveness of the consumer outreach. During this reporting period, the Consumer Affairs website recorded 497 site sessions, representing a 37 [per cent] increase compared to the previous year. The site also attracted 356 unique visitors, reflecting a 32 per cent increase in the new users engaging in the online resources. In total, the website generated 1,364 page views, an increase of 20 per cent with visitors spending an average of 5 minutes and 32 seconds per session.

The most visited page during this period was the landlord and tenant information page, highlighting the continued demand for clear guidance on rental rights, responsibility, and dispute resolutions.

Additionally, the website's AI-powered assistance feature handled 662 user queries, providing instant responses to frequently asked questions and consumer concerns to improve the access to information outside of the regular office hours.

The Consumer Affairs Instagram platform recorded 273 content views during the period of December [2025] to February 2026. Madam Chairman, 72 per cent of the views stemmed from followers, while 30 per cent were from non-followers, demonstrating that the content is reaching audiences beyond the immediate community. The page also gained 18 new followers during this period, reflecting continued audience growth. Top-performing posts included educational content focused on consumer rights, budgeting tips, and understanding purchases and contracts.

Overall, [Madam] Chairman, Consumer Affairs digital platforms continue to serve as an important tool for public education, outreach, and consumer empowerment that link directly to the Ministry's Cost of Living website to ensure alignment with the Affordable Bermuda Agenda. Increased website engagement through social media growth and strong interaction with educational content supports the public and also ensures that we are making informed consumer decisions. These platforms will continue to play a vital role in ensuring education through customers across Bermuda and ensure that they have easy access to reliable information, guidance, and support.

Madam Chairman, the Ministry's performance measures for the 2026/27 fiscal year reflect an unwavering commitment to advancing affordability across Bermuda and address cost of living challenges as a matter of national priority in the areas of housing, energy, and pricing of essential goods and services.

Madam Chairman, the Ministry pledges to complete the remaining performance measures in full during the upcoming year, except for the establishment of a registry of rent controlled properties, which will involve not only legislative amendments to the Act but also comprehensive consultation with stakeholders.

Madam Chairman, to improve transparency and accessibility, the Ministry websites of Consumer Affairs and Cost of Living respectively will continue to expand the public communication tools. Key initiatives include:

- monthly bulletins;
- interactive investigations;
- outlining active investigations and enforcement outcomes;
- development of online dashboards to monitor complaints and responsiveness;
- anonymous complaint submissions; and
- ensuring that there is secure and confidential reporting.

These reforms aim to provide consumers with clear, accessible pathways for redress, foster greater accountability among businesses, and ensure that the

public remains both informed and protected in the increasingly complex and digital marketplace.

The focus for the year is to rebuild community confidence through consistent engagement, practical workshops, and modernising public-facing education that supports informed decision-making, address key consumer issues, such as cost of living pressures, fair business practices, rent and housing stability, youth financial literacy, scam prevention, contract awareness, and holiday shopping protection measures, alongside partnership with community organisations and targeted businesses, compliance support through an enhanced social media strategy, public forums, and hands-on learning opportunities.

The intention is to ensure that the public receives information that is digestible, relatable, and actionable for the average residents and business owners, ensuring that there is a strengthening of trust and promoting a more informed and empowered Bermuda.

It is important to underscore that the work of the Ministry Headquarters, Madam Chairman, does not operate in isolation.

The energy reform policies developed directly inform the regulatory and operational priorities of the Department of Energy, which we will discuss under Head 89. The housing registry initiative and the digitisation of consumer services under Head 93 complement the land title modernisation efforts of the Land Title and Registration Office under Head 97.

Across all three heads, the Ministry is delivering a unified, coordinated strategy in direct service of Bermuda and Bermudians, and the government's commitment to responsible choices that produce lasting benefits for its people.

In closing, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the dedicated public officers of the Ministry Headquarters. Their steadfast commitment has been helpful in the Ministry's legislative and regulatory agenda. This budget reflects the responsible choices we are making today to deliver lasting benefits for Bermudian families, and the Ministry remains resolute in its mission to advance affordability, transparency, and fairness across every area of our remit.

Thank you, Madam Chairman, and I will now present the 2026/27 budget estimates for Head 89, Department of Energy.

The Chairman: Minister, let me just take a minute to notify the listening public on where we are.

We are currently in Committee of Supply for the consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27. The heads being debated today are the Ministry of Home Affairs, Heads 89, 93, and 97.

Thank you, Minister. You can continue.

HEAD 89—DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I am pleased to present the budget for Head 89, the Department of Energy, as detailed on pages B-312 through B-314 and C-8 of the Approved Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure.

Madam Chairman, I want to first ground the presentation with the mission. The mission of the Department of Energy is *To support the development and implementation of policy and legislation for Bermuda's space, energy, and telecommunications sectors, ensuring that these industries develop in a manner that is secure, sustainable, and economically beneficial for the country.*

Madam Chairman, three conditions are embedded in the mission of the Department of Energy: security, sustainability, and economic benefit. Each one is directly connected to what people of Bermuda pay every month for electricity, what they pay for mobile connectivity, and whether the infrastructure that supports modern life in Bermuda holds when conditions change.

Security means a grid that does not fail, telecommunications infrastructure that does not go dark, a regulatory environment that does not leave investment exposed to uncertainty. Sustainability means reducing the structural dependence on import fossil fuels that has defined Bermuda's energy economy for generations, and it also means building towards an energy future that does not leave the next generation paying for the choices this one failed to make.

Economic benefit means that the work of this department translates into real and measurable outcomes for Bermudian households and businesses, lower costs, stronger capacity, and a competitive jurisdiction in emerging global markets. This is the investment in the conditions that determine the quality of life for every person living in Bermuda.

Madam Chairman, the department pursues three specific objectives to fulfil that mission.

The first is to reduce Bermuda's reliance on fossil fuel imports while maintaining a careful balance between energy security, sustainability, and affordability for households and businesses.

The second aims to facilitate the responsible growth and development of the space and satellite, energy and telecommunication sectors through the preparation of updated policies, legislation, and regulatory frameworks that support innovation, investment, and long-term national resilience.

The third is to provide education, outreach, and policy advice on energy, telecommunications, and regulatory matters to government, industry, and the public, ensuring informed decision-making and supportive effective implementation of the national policy.

Madam Chairman, those three objectives are the organising logic of everything that follows. I'll return to them throughout this presentation, but it's important to note that every section maps directly back to them.

Madam Chairman, the department provides policy leadership, legislative support, and regulatory oversight across Bermuda's energy, telecommunications, space, and satellite sectors. It advises the Minister on initiatives that strengthen affordability, sustainability, and modern digital connectivity while maintaining a stable and transparent regulatory environment that encourages investment and innovation. Through legislative reform, stakeholder engagement, and public outreach, the department collaborates with the Regulatory Authority, other government ministries, statutory bodies, and industry partners to advance our national priorities.

Madam Chairman, this mandate oversees four interconnected sectors simultaneously: energy, telecommunications, space, and satellites. Each one is connected to existing or forthcoming regulatory obligations, and each one is important and relevant to the economic and social well-being of the people of Bermuda.

The national priorities this department is charged with are specific: reducing reliance on imported fossil fuels, easing the cost-of-living pressures, positioning Bermuda as a competitive jurisdiction in emerging global markets.

Fossil fuel imports are a structural vulnerability. Every barrel of oil that powers this Island's grid is priced at global market, and Bermuda does not control or and cannot influence these markets. Every spike in global oil prices is transmitted directly to the electricity bills of Bermudan households. That transmission is automatic and unavoidable under the current structure. Reducing that dependence is an economic imperative, and this department is the instrument through which that imperative is addressed. The department operates through a single business unit detailed on [page] B-313 and is supported by five key positions under the head of administration.

Madam Chairman, the department's energy total budget allocation for the 2026/27 fiscal year is \$795,000. This represents an increase of 51 per cent compared to the 2025/26 budget.

Madam Chairman, the 51 per cent increase is aligned to the following changes. The department's salary line has increased for two distinct reasons. The first is statutory. The director's post carries a legal designation and also an obligation. Whenever the substantive post holder is on leave, an acting director must then be appointed. Accordingly, an additional \$5,000 has been allocated in the salary line to accommodate acting pay costs associated with that statutory obligation.

The second is operational. The department has established an additional salaried position to address the expanding workload generated by its growing role across the energy and telecommunications sectors. That position carries a salary allocation of \$139,000.

Madam Chairman, it is important to note that the additional position does not represent a new

funding requirement on the public purse. It was transferred from an existing funded position within the Ministry of Home Affairs. The funding was reallocated to the place where it was needed most. As such, it was moved to a department whose mandate has grown substantially and whose capacity must keep the pace of that growth.

Madam Chairman, the budget has also introduced a \$50,000 bursary award. This is a new investment. It proposes to strengthen national workforce capacity in the energy, fuels, and telecommunications sectors and related regulatory environments. Accordingly, the Ministry has fulfilled its statutory obligation for acting pay and address the operational needs through reallocation rather than new spending with a workforce investment with a specific and documented purpose.

Madam Chairman, the department's total projected revenue for the upcoming fiscal year, as detailed on page [B-]313, is \$14.112 million. This compares to \$15,385 million in the previous year. The decrease is approximately \$1,272,000, representing an 8 per cent reduction year on year.

Madam Chairman, the most important thing to understand about the reduction is related to its cause. The primary driver is a policy decision that this Government made deliberately and has executed deliberately and sustained deliberately. In July 2025, the Government reduced the monthly mobile telecommunications fees from \$12 to \$6 per device.

Madam Chairman, in practical terms, this Government recognises that mobile connectivity is no longer a luxury, but rather it is a critical service. Bermudians use it to communicate, to conduct businesses, to access services, to maintain basic connectivity, and it is the connective tissue of everyday life. Every device that carries that service was subject to a \$12 monthly fee. That fee now has been halved: \$6 per device per month. For a household with multiple devices across a full year, that is a material reduction in a fixed household cost. The people of Bermuda receive direct, immediate, and ongoing financial relief due to this reduction, and the Government accordingly has received less revenue.

Revenue

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Madam Chairman, let me now provide the full revenue picture for the record. Carrier fees remain the largest single revenue stream for this department, projected at approximately \$9,713,000 for the 2026/27 fiscal year. This category includes integrated communications operating licence [ICOL] fees [and] spectrum band fees. It continues to account for the majority of the department's revenue and reflects the strength of Bermuda's electronic communications sector.

General fees are projected at approximately \$4,100,000, representing a decrease from the previous year. This category includes cellular licencing fees,

amateur radio licences, marine small craft licences, and other regulatory fees. The reduction in this category is driven primarily by the cellular handset fee structure change. Commercial fees remain stable at approximately \$106,000, covering aircraft and marine radio licensing. Mass media fees, which include broadcasting licences, are projected at \$27,000 reflecting a modest reduction compared to the previous year. The electricity sector licensing revenue is projected at approximately \$166,000, representing a slight decrease year-on-year.

Madam Chairman, the revenue base for this department remains firmly anchored in the carrier and telecommunications related fees. Those fees continue to provide the majority of the income generated by this department, and the projected decrease reflects a deliberate pricing adjustment within the cellular sector.

Regulatory activity remains strong, and the revenue-generating function of this department is intact. What has changed is the price that Bermudian households pay for their mobile service.

Madam Chairman, the department's capital allocation appears on page C-8 as \$350,000 in support of the development of a community solar project. This initiative is intended to expand access to renewable energy by enabling households and businesses that are unable to instal rooftop solar to participate in and benefit from locally generated clean energy.

Madam Chairman, I want to spend an adequate time on this allocation because of its significance and its ability to extend beyond the dollar figure. It is a structural response to a structural barrier. Bermuda's energy transition is underway. A fundamental inequality runs through the current model of renewable energy access. Rooftop solar is a primary mechanism through which individual households and businesses have reduced their reliance on the grid electricity and lowered their electricity costs. It requires a roof that the occupant owns or that a landlord is willing to modify or that the building structure can accommodate. Many persons in Bermuda rent. Rooftop solar is not their decision to make, and so many people who live in apartments where a roof exists that is shared infrastructure but managed or owned by others. Many people live in public housing developments, and therefore rooftop installations are not feasible in those environments. Where Bermuda's clean energy transition does not reach the households that can least afford it, the transition is not equitable. The community solar project removes that structural barrier.

Madam Chairman, under the community solar model being crafted by the department, a centrally located solar installation will generate electricity. Households and businesses that cannot instal their own rooftop systems can participate in it and benefit from such generation. The barrier of ownership is therefore removed, and access to clean, locally generated electricity is extended to those who have historically been excluded from it.

During the upcoming fiscal year, the \$350,000 capital allocation will be used to advance the design, site identification, technical assessment, and initial development phase of the project. This work includes feasibility analysis, grid integration studies, procurement support, and the preparation of the commercial and regulatory framework required to implement a community-based solar model suited to Bermuda's energy system and land constraints.

The project is designed from the outset to be replicable. It is a pilot; however, its architecture anticipates scaling. If the evidence from the pilot supports broader deployment, the model can be expanded in subsequent phases. [The] more households participate, [the] more clean energy access entering the grid and [the] more Bermuda's energy costs are insulated from global fossil fuel price volatility. The Ministry believes that this is the foundation of equitable, clean, and clean energy future for the people of Bermuda.

Staffing

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Madam Chairman, the Department of Energy's staffing details are provided on page B-313 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure. The department comprises five full-time positions, each essential to delivering on its multifaceted mandate. Those positions are the director, an energy policy analyst, a programme development officer, an electronic communications officer and the renewable energy and innovation officer.

At present, one position is currently vacant. Recruitment is underway to ensure the department fully operates at full capacity. In this upcoming year, the Ministry is focused on ensuring a full complement of staff crucial to sustaining continuity in ongoing projects, fulfilling statutory obligations and providing high-quality policy advice, regulatory oversight and programmatic support to the Minister and the Government.

Madam Chairman, the staffing structure of this department is lean, and is lean by design. But this Government has taken deliberate steps to ensure that the structure matches the mandate. The revised structure includes the addition of the renewable energy and innovation officer. This post was created specifically to strengthen the department's capacity in renewable deployment, emerging technologies, and the implementation of key initiatives supporting Bermuda's energy transition. As Bermuda accelerates its transition towards renewable generation, the technical expertise to guide that transition must exist within the public service. This post is how expertise is built and retained.

A total salary allocation for the five positions is \$634,250. That figure represents the majority of the department's budget. It reflects a deliberate decision to prioritise specialist in-house technical and policy expertise over external consultancy.

Madam Chairman, alongside the immediate staffing structure, I will speak to the longer investment that this budget also introduces.

The Energy Scholarship and Internship Programme. This programme is targeted at workforce development and succession planning. It is administered by the Ministry of Home Affairs through the Department of Energy. Its purpose is to build Bermudian capacity in direct response to the department's expanding mandate across energy policy, sustainability, innovation, space, and satellite regulation. The programme combines scholarship awards with mandatory paid summer internships. It also provides academic financial support paired with structural performance-based public service experience. The programme supports a minimum of two Bermudian scholarship recipients. Each award is up to \$25,000 for a total bursary allocation of \$50,000. Funding is dispersed in accordance with the government financial requirements, and the programme delivers 8- to 12-week summer internships with structured learning objectives, mentorship arrangements, and performance assessments.

Madam Chairman, the disciplines eligible under this programme reflect the full scope of the department's mandate: energy policy development, emerging energy systems, space and satellite regulation, programme delivery, engineering, environmental science, telecommunications, public policy, economics, business or statutory regulatory studies relevant to the regulation, and development of Bermuda's utility sector.

The challenge that Bermuda faces in building the workforce this transition requires is not a single discipline challenge. It spans across these technical, regulatory, policy, and commercial domains. The programme is structured to address all of them.

Madam Chairman, the value that this programme offers cannot be captured in the scholarship amount alone. Recipients will be offered opportunities for summer internships, exposure to departmental projects, and mentorship during their course of study. Upon completion of their programme, bursary recipients may be considered for employment within the department, subject to the availability of posts and normal recruitment processes. This approach is designed to reduce long-term [reliance] on external expertise, strengthen institutional continuity and capacity, and ensure the department can retain qualified Bermudian professionals to support its evolving mandate.

Bermuda cannot build an energy future by only importing the expertise to manage it. Thus, every dollar invested in developing Bermudian talent in this sector is a dollar invested in reducing the long-term cost of external consultancy and building institutional knowledge that stays on this Island.

The Ministry believes this programme develops the next generation of energy, telecommunications, and regulatory professionals that this transition demands. It is how the capacity that this department will need in 2023 gets built and considered today.

Madam Chairman, the programme runs from February 2026 through March 2027, covering design, advertising, selection, and evaluation phases. Governance is provided by a scholarship selection and oversight committee to ensure transparency, fairness, and alignment with succession planning goals. Multi-channel advertisement and clear eligibility criteria are built into the design. Together, the strengthened staffing structure and the bursary programme position this department to meet current operational demands while actively developing the workforce Bermuda will need for the decades ahead.

I need to pause, Madam Chairman.

Performance Measures

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: The department's performance measures, Madam Chairman, are outlined on page B-314 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure, and they establish clear numerical targets for service delivery, public engagement, and policy outputs for the 2026/27 fiscal year.

Madam Chairman, in the area of service responsiveness, the department is targeting resolution of 80 per cent of its queries within two working days of receipt. When a question is put to the department by the public, by a regulated entity, or by a government stakeholder, an answer follows within two working days 80 per cent of the time.

Public Engagement

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: The department plans to deliver four public information sessions on energy and telecommunications matters during this year. These sessions are structured opportunities for the public to engage directly with the work of the department, to understand the policy landscape, and to ask questions about decisions that affect their daily lives and their household costs.

Policy and legislative output are another pillar. The department is targeting the submission of five policy recommendations to the Minister during the year, alongside which two legislative amendments and four cabinet memoranda will be required.

Project Delivery

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: The department plans to advance five project initiatives during the fiscal year. These initiatives will include key programmes supporting renewable energy development, policy reform and sector development, service policy, legislation, and delivery.

Madam Chairman, I now turn to what this department delivered during the reporting period. This record is substantive, and it deserves to be stated in full.

Madam Chairman, the Government took a deliberate step to address cost-of-living pressures facing Bermudian households and businesses. The monthly mobile telecommunications fee, as I mentioned previously, was reduced from \$12 to \$6 per device and was effective on the 1st of July in 2025. While the Department of Energy, Madam Chairman, continues to oversee the collection of telecommunications-related revenues, the Government determined that providing tangible, ongoing cost-of-living relief to the people of Bermuda remains a central priority. This measure represents a deliberate policy choice to place the interest of the public ahead of revenue growth. That choice is reflected in the revenue figures in this brief. The reduction on mobile fees is documented here. The reason for it is also documented, and the outcome of it is a relief for every household and businesses carrying a mobile device and is a point of exercise. The regulatory authority and the revenue base are maintained. Where policy permits relief to be delivered directly to the people, it will be delivered.

Madam Chairman, the LED community outreach initiative was launched in 2023. Its purpose was to support energy efficiency, reduce household electricity costs, and to promote practical energy saving behaviours among Bermudian residents. The mechanism was direct—to distribute the LED light bulbs to those who are vulnerable in our community and to give households through partnership with local charities and community organisations. This delivered immediate and tangible savings through reduced electricity consumption [and] increased awareness of energy efficient technologies that deliver long-term financial and environmental benefits.

Madam Chairman, in November 2025, this initiative reached a successful conclusion. The department completed the distribution of all remaining LED inventory to the public. The final phase of distribution took place at the second annual Living Green Expo at the Botanical Gardens, where bulbs were provided directly to members of the public. Additional distributions were made through public officers and governmental departments, including the Office of Youth Affairs, the Department of Financial Assistance, and the Department of Child and Family Services.

The community organisations that participated in this effort are the Mirrors programme, the Women's Resource Centre, the Salvation Army, Meals on Wheels, the Eliza Dolittle Society, Big Brothers Big Sisters, HOME, the Gina Spence Program, St. Mark's church, Holy Trinity church, St. Paul's AME Church, and Focus Counselling Services. Madam Chairman, I record the appreciation to each and every one of those partners. Standard LED four-packs reached families most in need across the island because of the effort of the organisations in partnership with the department. The relationship between the public education, community infrastructure, and household relief is demonstrated clearly in this programme.

Madam Chairman, I now turn to the outcome in numbers. Each four-pack of the LED carries a projected household savings of approximately \$1,000 over its lifespan. Cumulative savings for residents are projected to reach approximately \$37 million—\$37 million in projected savings—delivered through community partnership, public sector coordination, and a department that understood the needs of the communities in order to save costs.

Madam Chairman, additional benefits of the programme include reduced waste; [reduced] heat, which lowers air conditioning [and] energy use; and the reinforcement of energy-conscious behaviours among participating households. Final distribution tracking and impact reporting will be completed by March of 2026 to document outcomes and lessons learned from the programme.

Madam Chairman, public education and outreach efforts were expanded throughout this period to promote energy conservation, energy efficiency, and renewable energy adoption, helping households and businesses make informed decisions and reducing cost-of-living pressures. The LED initiative is one component of that broader outreach effort.

Madam Chairman, during the past year, the Department of Energy participated in targeted regional and international energy forums. The purpose of these engagements is aligned to technical capacity building and knowledge sharing. This aims to position Bermuda within a regional and international clean energy community where knowledge, partnerships, and financial opportunities are concentrated.

Madam Chairman, in May 2025, the department participated in the Caribbean Renewable Energy Forum [CREF] 2025 in Miami. This is the region's premier platform for advancing clean energy. The delegation positioned Bermuda's electricity sector reforms within the regional dialogue; engaged on the proposed Integrated Resource Plan [IRP], renewable energy expansion, and transport electrification; and contributed to discussions on regulatory authority expressions of interest for offshore wind development. The department participated in technical exchanges on the regulatory and investment frameworks required to unlock utility-scale renewable projects.

Madam Chairman, in October 2025, the department participated in the Green Overseas energy transition community workshops in Saint Eustace, which convened under the European Union-funded Green Overseas programme. The workshop focused on utility-scale renewable energy for island grids, including electricity, mixed design, solar integration, battery energy storage systems, and the technical challenges of maintaining stability in isolated networks. This engagement directly supports Bermuda's work to increase renewable penetration while maintaining grid reliability and managing cost impacts.

During the workshop, the department delivered a formal presentation on Bermuda's airport solar

project, outlining the strategic role, rationale, procurement approach, regulatory coordination, and grid integration planning with Bermuda's constrained land environment. Technical sessions and a site visit to a solar photovoltaic and battery hybrid plant provided direct insight into renewable variability management, storage systems and services, hybrid control systems, [and] grid-forming inverter technologies. These are specific technical challenges that Bermuda will face as it increases renewable penetration on the island's grid. Understanding how other island jurisdictions have managed these challenges is directly applicable to Bermuda's future planning.

Madam Chairman, these engagements also facilitated direct discussions with strategic partners and advisors on financing mechanisms for renewable energy projects, potential legislative amendments to strengthen affordability and regulatory effectiveness, and collaboration on opportunities to advance Bermuda's clean energy transition.

Participation in these conferences strengthened the department's institutional capacity and knowledge and expanded access to technical expertise and peer experience and reinforced Bermuda's visibility and credibility within the regional and international clean energy community.

Madam Chairman, during the reporting period, the Energy Policy Steering Committee remained actively engaged and continued to provide structured practical guidance to the Ministry as Bermuda advances the next phase of its energy policy development and reform agenda. The committee has played an important role in strengthening the policy by ensuring that recommendations are evidence-based, credible, and aligned with Bermuda's unique realities as a small, isolated grid with limited land availability and no interconnection to neighbouring jurisdictions.

Madam Chairman, Bermuda is an isolated grid. There is no cable connection to neighbouring jurisdictions. There is no fallback supply when generation is disrupted. Every policy decision in this space must be made with that constraint clearly and consistently in view. Decisions that will be manageable on an interconnected grid can be catastrophic on an isolated one. The committee exists to ensure that technical reality remains the foundation of every policy recommendation.

Madam Chairman, in October 2025, the committee received a technical presentation from the executive director of the Hawaii Green Infrastructure Authority on innovative and equity-focused financing models to accelerate clean energy adoption. The presentation provided valuable insight into tools, including on-bill repayment mechanisms, revolving loan structures, and community investment models designed to expand access to renewable energy and efficiency upgrades. This was targeting low- to moderate-income houses, renters, and non-profit organisations.

Hawaii is an island jurisdiction that has navigated many of the same structural challenges. They,

too, have an isolated grid, a constrained land base, a population that includes households unable to access rooftop solar, and the challenge of scaling renewable deployment without placing additional upward pressure on the electricity tariffs. The tools that Hawaii has developed to address these challenges are relevant to Bermuda. This engagement produced practical knowledge with direct application to Bermuda's future planning.

Madam Chairman, in January 2026, the committee undertook a structured discussion on Bermuda's three core energy policy pillars: reliability, affordability, and sustainability. The committee affirmed the direction of the Ministry, which noted that reliability must remain non-negotiable. Bermuda relies on self-supply under all conditions, including extreme weather events. Any policy direction that compromises the grid's stability is a policy that places Bermuda at risk, and so the committee was unambiguous on this point—that reliability is the foundation upon which everything else is built.

Affordability equally must remain central to all decision-making. Project selection and policy direction must be grounded in overall systems cost and least-cost planning principles, not isolated project-level metrics. A project that reduces emissions but increases household electricity bills is not a success by the measure this Government applies. The committee reinforced that every decision in this sector must be tested against its impact on what households ultimately pay.

Sustainability was framed broadly. Renewable generation, energy efficiency, and demand-side management. The committee was clear that sustainability must be achieved without compromising reliability or increasing financial pressures on households. These three pillars do not rank in sequence, but they are simultaneous obligations.

Madam Chairman, the committee also emphasised what is described as the critical policy-to-planning-to-regulation chain. Policy informs the direction. Planning translates direction into a roadmap. Regulation gives the roadmap legal and operational effect. When policy targets are unrealistic, the chain breaks. The integrated resource planning model assumptions are distorted. Projects that emerge from that process can fail to meet regulatory approval thresholds. Therefore, good policy is policy that can be implemented.

To address this directly, the committee established a Renewable Target and Land Availability subcommittee. This subcommittee is tasked with identifying feasible onshore and marine renewable energy opportunities while ensuring early alignment with planning, zoning, and permitting considerations. The objective is to ensure that the targets set in the National Energy Policy reflect what Bermuda can actually deliver given its land constraints and the regulatory environment.

The membership of the Energy Policy Steering Committee reflects the breadth of expertise that this mandate requires. Current members include Mr. Simon

Clinton, consultant to the Department of Energy; Mr. Craig Simmons, local economist; Ms. Regina Ferguson of the Ministry of Public Works; Dr. Geoff Smith of the Department of Environment and National Resources; Stuart Kriendler of the renewable energy industry; Ms. Sonya Clarke of the Department of Workforce Development; Ms. Meglena Yaneva of the Department of Planning; Dr. Jeffrey Steynor of BELCO; Mr. Athanasius Smith, energy consultant; and representatives of the Blue Planet Alliance, Mr. Francios Rogers and Mr. Kneyone Murray. The committee meets regularly and is chaired by the director of the department. That structure ensures that policy advice flows directly to the Ministry from a body within the technical range, sectoral breadth, and institutional independence to provide it with authority.

Madam Chairman, the Integrated Resource Plan is the foundational document of Bermuda's long-term and electricity planning. It charts the course for future electricity generation, infrastructure investment, and the integration of renewable energy technologies within Bermuda's power system. Without a finalised IRP, long-term decisions about investment, procurement, and renewable integration are made without settled framework that should be anchoring them.

Madam Chairman, the current IRP proposal was first published in 2023 and has not yet been finalised. Under the existing legislative framework established by the Electricity Act 2016, the IRP is proposed by the electricity utility and is subsequently reviewed and approved by the regulatory authority. That framework was designed with a specific logic, ensuring that technical input from the utility who has oversight for the grid shapes the planning assumptions. The second effect of that structure is what we are now addressing, a process where the utility proposes to the regulator and the results require negotiation between the two, and to date [these] have proven cumbersome. It has contributed to delays in finalising the plan that Bermuda's energy future requires.

Madam Chairman, the proposed amendment to the Electricity Act 2016 will shift responsibility for the development of the Integrated Resource Plan to the regulatory authority. Under the revised framework, the regulatory authority will lead the preparation of the IRP. The electricity utility provides the technical data, modelling input, and operational information to support such a process. This adjustment strengthens the regulatory oversight, it improves the efficiency of the planning process, and it places the responsibility for the plan with the body whose mandate is to ensure that the electricity sector serves the public interest. It ensures that Bermuda's long-term electricity planning framework remains aligned with the national energy policy and the Island's transition towards a more sustainable and resilient energy system.

Madam Chairman, electricity costs represent a significant component of the cost of living in Bermuda. It is a financial reality for every household that receives

an electricity bill. Reducing those costs is a central priority for this Government, and the development of such amendments to the Electricity Act 2016 is the legislative mechanism through which this priority is pursued.

Madam Chairman, I want to be transparent about both the ambition and the complexity of this work. The development of these amendments has required careful consideration and extensive consultation with stakeholders. That care is a responsible exercise of a mandate that directly affects what the people of Bermuda pay.

Madam Chairman, a key element of the Government's journey of reform in this sector is the ministerial directive that was issued to the Regulatory Authority of Bermuda in May 2025. Under section 4 of the Regulatory Authority Act 2011, that provision grants the Minister responsible for the Authority the power to issue directives that establish policies for the regulated industry sector. I am sorry. That declaration that communicates policies for the regulated sector . . . The directive was communicated to the Regulatory Authority ahead of its publication as part of the Ministry's ongoing collaborative approach and was made available for public review through the *Official Gazette*.

Three priorities were central to that directive. First [was] enhanced transparency. The Regulatory Authority was directed to publish annual reporting on its strategic plans, consumer protection efforts, governance structures, and public consultations. The public interest is served when regulatory decisions are visible, accountable, and explained.

The second related to capacity building. The directive required that the Regulatory Authority develop the requisite resources in-house and develop a resource development plan aimed to bolster local technical expertise, particularly in renewable energy and grid modernisation. Building Bermudian capacity inside the regulatory structure is a companion objective to build it inside the public service.

The third relates to a comprehensive review of Bermuda's electricity transmission and distribution model to explore the integration of fair pricing structures aligned with consumer grid usage and to identify cost savings opportunities. As set out at the time of the directive's publication, this aimed to ensure that regulatory actions align strategically with the Government's objectives, promoting affordability and efficiency into the modernisation of this essential service.

Madam Chairman, to support the legislative programme, the Ministry engaged with advisors from Castalia to provide specialist policy and legislative advisory services. Castalia was a consultant engaged under the previous administration when the Act was first enacted in 2016. The focus of this engagement is to right-size the reforms and the regulation of the sector and to identify practical tools, regulatory mechanisms, and legislative options that contribute to reducing electricity costs for Bermudian households and businesses. This work includes evaluating policy instruments and

market mechanisms that improve affordability, enhance regulatory transparency, and ensure that Bermuda's electricity framework supports the Government's wider cost-of-living objectives.

The Castalia advisor's work is expected to conclude in April 2026. Following completion, the Ministry will review the findings and incorporate appropriate recommendations into the proposed legislative amendments.

Madam Chairman, a specific priority within this legislative programme is the advancement of the amendments to section 35 of the Electricity Act 2016 aimed at strengthening the legislative basis for identifying and implementing operational efficiencies that reduce electricity costs and mitigate future price increases. It also seeks to maintain service quality. This work is particularly important in the context of the proposed changes to the IRP process. The department has reviewed correspondence from both the utility and the Regulatory Authority and has assessed the risks and benefits. This legislative item therefore requires detailed technical and legal review, ensuring that the reforms support affordability and do not weaken existing cost control mechanisms.

Madam Chairman, every amendment that this Government brings forward on electricity legislation will be tested against one question before it when it comes to this Honourable House. It is: Does the change operate in the best interests of Bermuda and Bermudian businesses and residents?

Madam Chairman, it is noted that during the 2025/26 budget, the Ministry presented its plans regarding broadcasting reforms. The Ministry has not lost sight of this objective and can confirm that the department has developed an initial broadcasting reform policy document as part of its work to modernise Bermuda's electronic communications and broadcasting framework.

During the initial review, it was identified that further development and insight will be required to ensure that the policy reflects international best practises, evolving regulatory models, and lessons learned from comparable smaller jurisdictions with liberalised and technologically converged broadcasting sectors.

Madam Chairman, the Ministry issued a request for proposals to obtain external expertise to review, strengthen, and update the draft policy. The objective of this exercise is to ensure that the final framework is evidence-based, forward-looking, and aligned with global standards while remaining appropriate for Bermuda's context, market size, and regulatory environment.

The selected consultant will refine the policy, incorporate stakeholder considerations, and prepare the document for release to the public as part of the formal consultation process. The procurement process has now been completed, and the Ministry is currently reviewing the submissions received from the proponents. Once the evaluation concludes and a preferred

bidder is selected, the department will proceed with the external review and refinement phase, after which the updated broadcasting reform policy will be issued for public consultation.

Madam Chairman, Bermuda's broadcasting landscape has changed substantially since the regulatory frameworks that govern it were designed. The convergence of telecommunications, broadcasting, and digital media has created an environment that the existing legislative structure was not designed to address. This reform process ensures that Bermuda's broadcasting regime is fit for the environment it operates in now and for the environment that it will operate for in the next decade.

Madam Chairman, I now turn to the year ahead. The Department of Energy enters 2026/27 with a defined and accountable set of priorities. I will address each in turn, first beginning with the National Electricity Sector Policy public consultation.

Madam Chairman, the work of the Energy Policy Steering Committee on Bermuda's updated National Electricity Sector Policy is substantially complete. The policy will be released in two weeks following its Cabinet approval and begin public consultation. This is a significant milestone in Bermuda's energy governance. A National Electricity Sector Policy is a foundational framework within which all other energy decisions are made. Regulatory decisions, investment decisions, planning decisions, and renewable energy targets all add up to and allow for there to be a clear, current, Government-approved policy context to anchor it. The release of this policy for public consultation marks the transition from development to delivery.

While this phase of work is nearing completion, the committee's mandate continues. The committee will now focus on providing recommendations to support the development of the updated National Fuels Policy and address other priority areas set in its terms of reference. These include advising on alignment between national policies and the Integrated Resource Plan, identifying policy gaps, recommended measures to reduce electricity costs and fossil fuel dependence, and supporting implementation readiness across the sector.

Madam Chairman, the Castalia advisory work concludes in April 2026. This is related to the Electricity Act 2016 amendments. Following its completion, the Ministry will proceed to incorporate the findings into the proposed Electricity Act Amendment Bill.

The legislative priority is clear, and these amendments will strengthen affordability, improve regulatory oversight, and reform the IRP process to advance the appropriate stage of the legislative agenda.

Madam Chairman, this work has been in preparation for good reason. Legislation in the electricity sector has direct and immediate consequences for households and their costs. It is important that we get it right more than it is important that we just get it done

quickly. The evidence is being built, and the amendments will follow that evidence.

Madam Chairman, moving to the community solar capital development, the \$350,000 capital allocation will move from planning into active development during this fiscal year. Feasibility analysis, grid integration studies, site identification, [and] procurement support all assist in understanding the commercial and regulatory framework for a community-based solar model. Every element of the development phase is directed towards a single outcome, a community solar project that is viable, deliverable, and scalable. It is our intention that the pilot succeeds, which will allow for the model to expand access to clean energy through the findings of this project, and it will provide a foundation of subsequent phases of deployment.

Madam Chairman, the Renewable Energy Initiative [is] in collaboration with the Bermuda Housing Corporation. Madam Chairman, in partnership with the Bermuda Housing Corporation, the Ministry will advance renewable initiatives in the upcoming year. The Government has taken deliberate steps to ensure that the benefits of Bermuda's clean energy transition are accessible to all members of the community, including renters and residents living in apartment-style housing where traditional rooftop solar installations are not feasible. The Department of Energy has been working in partnership with the Bermuda Housing Corporation to explore practical solutions that reduce electricity costs for leaseholders and renters living in public housing developments. Discussions between the two entities confirmed a shared commitment to identifying mechanisms that allow residents to benefit directly from renewable energy technologies while avoiding financial arrangements that place additional burdens on vulnerable households.

Under the proposed programme, the Ministry will allocate \$200,000 through a grant agreement with the Bermuda Housing Corporation to support a pilot renewable energy initiative. The initiative will facilitate the installation of balcony-mounted solar PV systems with selected housing developments. These systems are designed specifically for apartment-style buildings and can be installed without the need for rooftop infrastructure, making them particularly well-suited to public housing environments.

The Bermuda Housing Corporation will play a central role in administering the programme by coordinating resident engagement and facilitating the installation process, while the Department of Energy will maintain initiative oversight and provide technical coordination. This collaborative model ensures that the programme can be delivered effectively while reimagining alignment with the Government's policy objectives.

This partnership represents an important step in expanding equitable access to renewable energy technologies to those who least can afford it. By targeting these households that have historically had limited ability to participate in rooftop solar programmes, the

initiative supports the Government's broader goals of improving energy affordability, reducing electricity consumption, and ensuring that transition to cleaner energy benefits all Bermudians.

Earth Station Regulations and Space and Satellite Policy

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: In line with the Bermuda's space and satellite strategy, the department will continue to advance the development of earth station regulations and a supporting licensing framework. This work is designed to enable new commercial activity while ensuring compliance with Bermuda's international obligations.

During the upcoming year, the department will complete public consultation on the policy document outlining the proposed earth station framework. Following consultation and finalisation of the policy, the Government will proceed with the necessary policy and legislative steps to facilitate the establishment of a formal licensing regime for earth stations.

Madam Chairman, the Ministry continues to advance Bermuda's space and satellite policy framework as part of a broader strategy to develop new high-value economic sectors. The space economy is a growing sector. It is technically demanding, jurisdictionally competitive, and increasingly consequential to the global economy. Bermuda's objective is to position this island as a credible, well-regulated jurisdiction in that space, one that attracts responsible commercial operators, generates meaningful economic activities, and contributes to Bermuda's long-term diversification.

Broadcasting Reform

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Madam Chairman, I will now move to broadcasting reform. Madam Chairman, during the upcoming year, the Ministry will advance the next phase of broadcasting reform following completion of the external policy review currently underway. Once the revised broadcasting reform policy document has been finalised, it is envisioned that the Ministry will release the document for public consultation to obtain input from industry participants, content providers, telecommunications operators, and the wider community.

Following the consultation period, the department will refine and finalise the policy to reflect this feedback and confirm the direction for the broadcasting regime. Subject to ministerial and Cabinet approval, the Ministry will then proceed with the legislative phase, preparing the amendment to relevant legislation to give effect to such updated broadcasting framework. This assists and helps to modernise the licensing and regulatory provisions and ensures that the legal structure supports a converged communications environment, technological innovation, and a sustainable broadcasting sector.

This staged approach is evidence-based, consultative, grounded in appropriate legislative foundation, and will position Bermuda's broadcasting regime to remain relevant and effective in an evolving digital landscape.

Madam Chairman, the Department of Energy will continue to play a central cross-government role by supporting inter-ministerial initiatives that advance national priorities in renewable energy, energy efficiency, and electric mobility. These efforts are essential to strengthening Bermuda's long-term energy resilience, reducing emissions, and supporting sustained cost-of-living relief for households and businesses.

Madam Chairman, the breadth of this cross-government remit is substantial. The department regularly connects with the Ministry of Public Works and Environment on energy infrastructure planning, with the Department of Planning on land use for renewable projects, with the Department of Workforce Development on skills and capacity, with the Regulatory Authority on legislative compliance, [and] with the Bermuda Housing Corporation on equitable access to clean energy, all to show that the work of this department does not happen in a silo. It happens at the intersection of nearly every major policy priority this Government seeks to advance.

In the upcoming fiscal year, the department will focus on delivering the practical reforms and targeted initiatives across energy, telecommunications, space, and satellite sectors. This includes providing policy leadership; legislative support to the Minister; collaborating with the Regulatory Authority, government partners and industry stakeholders; and advancing national priorities that support the pillars of affordability, strengthened regulation, and enhanced resilience.

Madam Chairman, as the department's responsibilities continue to expand, work is progressing to ensure that the department's structure, staffing, and internal functions remain aligned to its evolving mandate. The work of this department is necessary, and we recognise that Bermuda's policy and regulatory frameworks must remain fit for purpose. They must be responsive to emerging technologies and capable of supporting national resilience in an increasingly digital and interconnected world.

The department's work is guided by a foundational principle to ensure that Bermuda pursues an energy transition that is both ambitious and practical, one that reduces reliance on imported fossil fuels but also safeguards grid stability, maintains service quality, and ensures that affordability remains at the centre of its decision-making. The Ministry recognises that these are ambitious targets, but they must be delivered on behalf of the people of Bermuda. Practical progress grounded in evidence, tested against cost, and built on Bermudian expertise is what is required. This department holds the ambition to transform Bermuda's energy future and the discipline to get it done correctly.

Madam Chairman, through continued engagement with the Regulatory Authority, the Energy Policy

Steering Committee, industry stakeholders, and the wider public, the department will remain committed to delivering evidence-based policy solutions that reflect Bermuda's unique constraints and serve Bermuda's long-term national interests.

In closing, Madam Chairman, I began this brief with a mission, and I now return to it to close. The mission of the Department of Energy is, *To support the development and implementation of policy and legislation for Bermuda's space, energy, and telecommunications sectors, ensuring that these industries develop in a manner that is secure, sustainable, and economically beneficial to the country.*

Madam Chairman, over the course of this brief, I have presented the budget of the department that is doing exactly that work, an allocation that reflects a lean but capable structure, a revenue picture shaped by deliberate choice to prioritise household relief over government income, a capital investment designed to extend equitable access to clean energy, a workforce programme built to develop the Bermudian professionals that this transition demands, a legislative agenda grounded in evidence and tested against household costs, a programme of international engagement that builds technical capacity and regional standing that Bermuda needs, a set of upcoming priorities that are specific, funded, and accountable.

Madam Chairman, over the coming year, the department will continue to support the Ministry in the discharge of its statutory responsibilities across the related industries while we advance key reforms to the electricity sector, telecommunications policy, and regulatory processes that directly affect price stability, consumer protection, and long-term investment confidence. The department will also continue to provide cross-governmental support to ensure that there is renewable energy expansion, energy efficient initiatives continue, and electric mobility programmes continue further to reduce fuel dependence and improve affordability over time. Security means that the grid holds so that people of Bermuda can rely on the infrastructure that sustains modern life.

Sustainability also means a pathway away from fossil fuel dependency [that] is planned, funded, and underway. The focus remains to ensure that every Bermudian has a route to access [a] clean energy future in an island that is building and developing lower costs, Bermudian expertise, and decisions made in this department and in this House that translate into real and measurable relief for every household on this island. That is the mission, and that is the measure. That is what this budget is built to deliver,

And, Madam Chairman, I extend my sincere appreciation to the dedicated team at the Department of Energy under the leadership of Mr. Adrian Dill for his professionalism, technical support, and commitment to public service. The work of the department continues to strengthen Bermuda's standing as a forward-looking

jurisdiction positioned to lead the clean energy, modern electronic communications, and emerging industries.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Minister, I just want to notify the listening public that we are in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27. The Heads that are being debated today are 89, 93, 97, the Ministry of Home Affairs. Just for the sake of the listening audience, this debate will conclude at 8:50. Thank you. My apologies; 7:50 is the debate time. Sorry if I rattled everyone.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Rattled the team.

The Chairman: At 7:50 pm.

HEAD 97—LAND TITLE AND REGISTRATION DEPARTMENT

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

In keeping with the theme of this year's budget, "Responsible Choices . . . Lasting Benefits for Bermudians," the budget estimates for Head 97, the Land Title and Registration Office [LTRO], can be found on pages B-315 to B-317 and C-16 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure.

Madam Chairman, the mission of the Land Title and Registration Office is, *To maintain a secure, transparent, and accessible register of land ownership and interests that reinforces public trust, supports legal certainty, and contributes to sustainable land management in Bermuda.* We are a cornerstone institution of property governance playing a vital role in both the modernisation of land administration and the economic development of our jurisdiction.

Madam Chairman, we operate a single registration programme within business unit 107030, found on page B-315 of the approved Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure. The single registration programme comprises one primary area, land title management. The mandate is to establish, maintain, and safeguard a secure, accurate, and up-to-date register of land ownership and interests by providing a centralised system for recording, verifying, and protecting property rights. It ensures legal certainty and transparency in all land transactions. Through effective land title registration and adjudication processes, it facilitates economic development, supports land-based investments, and aids in dispute resolution and strengthens the public confidence in property ownership. In doing so, it aims to modernise Bermuda's land administration systems by leveraging digital technologies and enhancing customer-focused delivery.

Madam Chairman, since opening its doors in 2018, the Land Title Registry Office has registered 3,505 parcels of land, which is approximately 15 per cent of the 23,458 parcels in Bermuda.

The department continues to preserve historic records of land ownership in hard copies and electronic scanned copies. The present-day records of land ownership are maintained and expanded with each registration under the Deeds Registry and the Land Registry. The department aids the transparency and certainty in land transactions by providing a reliable, means of verification of the vendor's and mortgagee's ownership of properties.

2025/26 Key Objectives and Responsibilities

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Madam Chairman, the Land Title Registry Office continues to record property transactions which correspond with unreleased registration triggers under the Deeds Registry. During the year 2025/26, 200 transactions were received in the Deeds Registry. These transactions included transfer notices, mortgages, voluntary conveyance, alien acquisition and corporate acquisitions, and disposals. During the same period, 803 applications were received in the Land Registry. There has been steady progress in the transition to a title-based system as 75 per cent of all applications submitted to the LTRO are submitted to the land registry.

Madam Chairman, during the past year, the department provided a robust public search service catering to various information needs of the public. In response to requests from the public, financial institutions, and real estate professionals, the Land Title Registry completed 137 applications for search for registered parcels. Additionally, the department facilitated in-house searches of records held at the LTRO by members of the public, law clerks and attorneys. The staff at the Land Title Registry Office also conducted searches in response to email requests for official copies of documents, requests for copies of the Land Title Registry Index Map [LTRIM], and searches of the judgment register.

Madam Chairman, there have been updates on its strategic priorities. Madam Chairman, the Land Title Registry Office remains committed to stakeholder education. The department hosted two workshops spanning a total of 12 hours of session time. A workshop was held with major financial institutions to strengthen their understanding of the Land Title Registration Amendment Act 2018. The second workshop was an interdepartmental initiative between the Accountant General's Department, the Department of Land Title and Registration, and the Office of the Tax Commissioner. This work facilitated a deeper understanding of the workflow and processes of each department as well as providing an interactive session on the use of the post registration's LTRO forms. The department will continue to host our annual professional departments, annual workshops for attorneys-at-law, surveyors, and realtors.

In response to stakeholder feedback, we have expanded our professional education programme to

include targeted training for conveyancing attorneys on the requirements of the title-based registration system, responding directly to the identified gaps in the quality of applications that were received. Existing attorneys' practice guides will be updated, and guidance material for the public will be created. And we will hold community outreach activities to increase public awareness of the title registration process and our services.

Safeguarding of Historical Records

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Madam Chairman, the LTRO has maintained the provision of archival quality preservation of Bermuda's historic and land ownership records. The introduction of the Land Title and Registration Act of 2018 has resulted in the integration of previously hard-to-sell properties into the real estate market. Members of the public whose deeds have been lost or destroyed are not able to mortgage or sell their property after receiving a registered land title.

Madam Chairman, the Land Title Registry Office continues to support other government departments through data collaboration, reinforcing our growing value as a national data asset.

Key partnerships include the Land Valuation Department for appraisals; the Land Tax Law development; the Office of the Tax Commissioner for land tax collection; the Department of Land and Surveys for public property registration; the Bermuda Monetary Authority for housing market monitoring, and the Cabinet Office for multi-agency research and infrastructure planning. These partnerships support both physical and operational, and long-range policymaking across government.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Madam Chairman, the budget allocation for the LTRO is outlined on page B-316 of the Budget Book and totals \$1,873,000 for the 2026/27 fiscal year. This represents an increase of \$216,000 or a 13 per cent increase compared to the original estimate for 2025/26. The increase can be attributed to salary uplifts for public officers and to an increase in the department's insurance premiums. The allocation of additional funding for overseas training and an additional consultant has also contributed to this increase.

A detailed breakdown of the current account estimates is found on page B-316 as follows:

- Salaries, on line 1, is the largest expenditure item, totalling \$1,394,000, including an increase of \$78,000 and 6 per cent above the revised 2025/26 budget.
- Professional services, shown on line 6, are allocated at \$154,000 for the fiscal year 2026/27. This covers the cost of retaining the existing consultant and hiring another consultant to

assist with reducing the backlog of first registration applications.

Madam Chairman, during the fiscal year 2024/25, the department proactively implemented an AI system called DocDash as an interim solution to address the backlog of land title applications while preparations for a new electronic land title registration system were underway. The department allocated \$71,000 for the development of the DocDash programme.

Madam Chairman, the initial phase of the DocDash project entailed the creation of a document extraction tool, specifically designed to interpret and extract data from the land title deeds. This phase was successfully deployed, developed, and implemented within the land title offices, subsequently verifying the extracted information that was generated by DocDash.

The second phase of the project focused on high-volume transfer of these verified extracts from the DocDash platform into the land folio platform. During this stage, significant challenges emerged in integrating DocDash with the legacy land folio infrastructure.

The Chairman: Minister, just one minute while we change Chairs. Thank you.

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

The Chairman: Good evening, we are resuming in Committee for the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the [fiscal] year 2026/27. We are currently debating the budget for the Ministry of Home Affairs, Heads, I believe, are 89, 93, and 37. And I would ask that the Minister resume with Head 97, I believe she was on it.

Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I think you may have said Head 37, but yes, 97 is the Head I am currently on, which is the Land Title and Registration Office.

Madam Chairman, I will go back a little and speak to the second phase of the DocDash project, which focused on high-volume transfers of the verified extracts from the DocDash platform into the land folio system. During this stage, significant challenges emerged in integrating DocDash with the legacy land folio infrastructure. Specifically, the automation of batch transfers of substantial quantities of verified extracts into the land folio system proved difficult. These integration issues are largely attributable to the fact that the land folio developed for the department in 2007 is now 19 years old. And although DocDash provided substantial support throughout the transition, outdated electronic land folio Registration Systems hindered the full realisation of AI capabilities.

The lessons learned from the DocDash system informed the RFP specifications for the new system. As a result, dedicated funding for the interim AI solution was not allocated for the 2025/26 period, but the

officers continued to diligently ensure the completion of work through manual processes. The Land Title Registry office remains committed to modernising systems and looks forward to the successful rollout of the new electronic Land Title Registration Platform, which will be aided by AI capabilities.

- Line 7 rentals show \$171,000 to cover the annual lease of the Land Title and Registration office at Milner Place.
- Line 9 repairs and maintenance totalled \$75,000, which includes a cleaning contract for \$16,000, and a software maintenance licence for \$59,000, to support the existing electronic land title registration system.

Revenue Overview

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Madam Chairman, the estimated revenue for the Land Title Registration office for the 2026/27 fiscal year is \$414,000, as indicated on page B-316 of the Budget Book. Estimated revenue is in keeping with the historical trends of between \$400,000 and \$500,000, depending on the real estate market conditions, which are independent of the department.

Revenue projections reflect external property market conditions and are not a measure of our productivity. But the Land Title Registry Office is directing investment in additional staff capacity and the new electronic registration system to reduce the application backlog, improve processing times, and strengthen service delivery. As the new system comes online and processing efficiency improves, the Land Title Registry Office anticipates that improved turnaround times will encourage greater voluntary registration, which over time will support sustained revenue growth.

The Land Title Registration revenue is dependent on the number of transactions taking place in the property market. These transactions included the sale of property, mortgages, and leases of condominium units. During the 2025/26 fiscal year, the department processed various types of applications and provided numerous services. Applications that were processed included, but [were] not limited to, first registration, transfer of land applications, registrations of mortgages, and registration of subdivisions. These services offered by the department included searches of land ownership records and the issuance of copies of records kept by the department.

Madam Chairman, during the [fiscal year] 2025/26, the department's largest source of revenue was first registration, applications, and transfers of property after registration. A total of 438 first registration applications and transfer applications generated revenue of \$328,000. Overall, the fiscal year 2025/26 saw over \$460 million exchanging hands between purchasers and vendors in the real estate market. One hundred and seventeen of the applications submitted to the Land Title Registration Office related to the sale

of property valued at over \$1 million, attracting registration fees of \$1,300 per transaction. This is the highest tier in the department's fee schedule.

Madam Chairman, the sale of properties valued at \$500,000 to \$1 million accounted for 134 of the applications submitted to the department. Eighty-four of the applications submitted to the department corresponded to the sale of properties valued between \$200,000 to \$500,000. The second-largest revenue-generating activity for the department was the search and inspection of the register and records held by the department. This generated a revenue of \$21,000.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Madam Chairman, the LTRO's capital allocation appears on page C-16 and totals \$500,000. This sum was carried over from the 2025/26 fiscal year to support the acquisition of a new modern land title registration system. No funds have been expended from the allocated \$500,000, and the department anticipates completing this procurement within the next fiscal year.

Staffing

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Madam Chairman, staffing details for the LTRO are outlined on page B-315. The LTRO currently has 13 full-time equivalents, and since last year, the office manager position has been filled via a reassignment within the service. The department's —

The Chairman: Excuse me, Minister. I believe that the employees, the full-time equivalents, are on page B-316, and you previously spoke about the \$500,000, but I am not going to take you backwards. I will just go . . . because I was looking for it when you called off a figure and I couldn't find it.

Okay, you were on [page] C-6? I was looking at the wrong page.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

We currently have three vacant posts out of the 13 full-time equivalents, which are still found on page B-316. Review of job descriptions for the remaining positions has commenced, which include a senior land title officer, a land title officer, and a land title legal officer, so that the recruitment process can proceed in the new year.

The land title legal officer trainee continues the pursuit of a legal education, demonstrating the Department's commitment to developing remedial expertise and to departmental succession planning.

The department will continue to retain the services of an existing consultant whose expertise in land title examination and application authorising remains pivotal to ensuring the efficient processing of land title

applications and providing timely responses to client queries.

To strengthen internal capacity and to promote long-term sustainability, the consultant will eventually be replaced once a senior land title officer has been recruited. This transition will support workforce development within the department and align with the Government's objective of reducing reliance on external consultants by developing in-house expertise.

Performance Measures

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Madam Chairman, the department's performance indicators are detailed on page B-317 and reflect both public value and operational accountability. With the achievement of the 2025/26 performance measures, new indicators have been introduced to reflect the department's current work activities.

Key performance highlights, Madam Chairman, for 2026/27 include:

- Land Title Registry adoption, where 75 per cent of all incoming applications are processed through the Land Title Registry System, reflecting continued momentum in transitioning from the Deed Registry.
- Application acknowledgement remains at 100 per cent for all first registration applications, ensuring that they are acknowledged and received within five working days of submission.
- Consumer service targets 100 per cent of registered information queries responded to within 48 hours.
- Dispute resolution continues to exceed targets with 95 per cent of land disputes resolved within statutory timelines.

We have set a new target to reduce the outstanding application backlog by a minimum of 20 per cent during the 2026/27 fiscal year, through the combination of increased staffing capacity, the engagement of an additional consultant, and the anticipated deployment of the new electronic land title registration system.

Madam Chairman, since its opening in 2018, the department has received a total of 5,762 applications. Of this figure, a total of 3,336 applications have been completed. This leaves a balance of 2,404 applications still outstanding. The following provides the number of applications outstanding by year:

- 2018—3;
- 2019—12;
- 2020—58;
- 2021—90;
- 2022—458;
- 2023—447;
- 2024—594;
- 2025—623; and
- 2026—117.

Madam Chairman, during the 2025 calendar year, a total of 949 applications were submitted to the Land Title Registration Office. Of this total, 326 applications were completed. Six hundred and twenty-six applications are still outstanding and await completion.

Since the start of 2026, a total of 161 applications have been submitted to the Department, of which 44 are completed, and a balance of 117 remain to be processed.

The LTRO staff remain steadfast in the performance of their duties and satisfaction of key performance indicators. The Ministry will continue to support the efforts of the department in reducing the backlog by supporting increasing capacity and the acquisition of the new land title registration system.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Madam Chairman, switching to the plans or transitioning to the plans for 2026/27.

Madam Chairman, Bermuda stands at the forefront of AI use in land registration. At present, a limited number of jurisdictions globally are using artificial intelligence specifically for land registrations. Plans have commenced to replace the existing electronic registration system, land folio, with a brand new state of the art land registration system. The procurement process has begun to acquire a new electronic land system with AI capabilities.

The request for proposals was published on the 15th of December 2025. The deadline for questions was Friday, 9th of January 2026. The questions submitted by the proposed vendors were answered in the addenda issued on Thursday, 22nd of January 2026. The RFP submission deadline was Thursday, 5th of February 2026, and seven applicants responded to the RFP. The submitted proposals are currently being evaluated with the intent of selecting a successful vendor by May of this year. The RFP document indicates a phased implementation with a go-live date during the third quarter of 2026/27.

The project cost of a new electronic land registration system is \$1 million. The successful vendor will be required to provide a solution that meets the department's current and future needs. The project cost also includes migrating the existing land database from land folio to the new electronic system.

Madam Chairman, in alignment with the Government's strategic plan and public policy priorities, the implementation of a new electronic land title registration system will afford members of the public with benefits, including improvements in the convenience and efficiency of government services. The digitisation of government services will be expanded through this new electronic registry platform. The new land title registration system will also provide greater access through an online service and enhance service delivery through modern technology, such as the ability to conduct these searches online and make payments online.

Madam Chairman, in the year ahead, we look forward to the phased implementation of the new electronic land title registration system.

The benefits of the new system will be enjoyed by key stakeholders in the real estate property markets, such as attorneys, financial institutions, and realtors. These benefits include, but are not limited to, comprehensive reporting on real estate purchasing trends, property ownership details, and property value information trends. Property ownership will see a significant reduction in the time between submitting applications and the notification of changes in land ownership to the Office of the Tax Commissioner and the Department of Land Valuation. This directly assesses the current delays in post-transaction tax notifications, which has been identified as a priority concern.

The implementation of the new land title registration system will yield the benefits of streamlined departmental workflows with brief and simple steps and shorter overall processing times. The new system facilitates automation of current manual administrative tasks. This also supports the issuance of receipts, issuing of requisitions, notifications of collection of deeds, and issuing of confirmation emails for the collection of deeds.

The electronic registration system is anticipated to accelerate the process and provide improvements to the application process lead times. It will be conducted through a phased introduction of the new registration process. This will allow the release of additional legislative triggers in addition to the first registration.

Madam Chairman, the registration process with the new registration system will not be fully automated. The functions of the department will still be carried out by a combination of manual and automated processes. The use of AI will support staff and not replace them. But rather the AI technology will enable faster analysis of property deeds, extraction of key data, and reduction of human error through this automated validation. The AI process of reading documents and generating the applicable entries based on key identifiers is a key module. Staff will review and finalise the analysis and title entries and forward the applications to the mapping and final authorisation stages.

Madam Chairman, as part of our broader systems modernisation strategy, we will also advance the migration of our land records database to a cloud-based system. This transition is integral to ensuring data integrity, business continuity, and enhanced system security. The new electronic land title registration system has been specifically procured to support cloud deployment. And the successful vendor will be required to demonstrate compliance with the Government's Data Protection and Information Security standards. This initiative aligns with the Government's commitment to digitise eligible public services and build long-term resilience into our operations.

In conclusion, Madam Chairman, I wish to extend sincere appreciation to the staff of the Land Title and Registration Office for their continued commitment to public service. This team has risen to the challenge of meeting growing demand while navigating the transition from legacy systems to the next generation of digital land administration.

The budget supports not only the modernisation of land records but also the modernisation of how we protect what matters most to people. It is their homes, it is their land, and their inheritance. We are investing in modernised systems, strengthening the internal capacity in the department, and maintaining transparent and accountable operations to build a land administration system that serves not just for today's property owners but future generations.

Thank you, Madam Chairman. This now concludes the presentation of the 2026/27 Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the Ministry of Home Affairs.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Heads 89, 93, and 97, as we review the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026 for the Ministry of Home Affairs and its attendant Heads?

I recognise the Member from Constituency 20. Member, you have the floor.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and thank you to the Minister for a very comprehensive presentation. I think we have, what, an hour and a half or thereabouts?

The Chairman: Yes, you have approximately an hour and a half, yes.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Okay, thank you. I think everyone will be very pleased when this comes to a conclusion. This is the final—

The Chairman: Final hour and 25 minutes.

Hon. Michael Fahy: The final Heads

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael Fahy: So, I am going to try not to take all the time at all, and just—

The Chairman: I am sure you will do a good job.

Hon. Michael Fahy: We will see where we go.

The Chairman: I am sure you want to get answers.

Hon. Michael Fahy: I am sure we will get where we need to.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael Fahy: As I said last year, this is primarily a policy ministry, Madam Chairman. It is not like some of the other ministries that have huge budgets and the like. It is really one, as the Minister has said, that crosses any number of different policy areas across the government. There are obviously lofty departmental objectives, and the Minister has shared them in her initial statements.

A couple of things that I did not hear, and I am hoping that the Minister can opine on it when she answers, is that this Ministry of Home Affairs actually has a number of different boards.

The Chairman: Are you speaking under the Ministry Head?

Hon. Michael Fahy: I am indeed. Yes, sorry, I should have been clearer. The Ministry of Home Affairs HQ, Head 93.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Hon. Michael Fahy: And the mission statement is pretty clear. *Empower Bermuda residents by promoting affordability and prosperity through transparency and proper property ownership and rights, consumer protection, energy sustainability, and focused legislative change.* So, it is quite broad.

In respect of that, to have focused legislative change, there are a number of boards and committees that assist the Ministry. And I am just going to read those. This is from the Home Affairs website that I looked into. And we heard a few comments throughout the presentation on a number of these, but I think for the listening public to hear all of those that come under it. The Broadcasting Commission, the Consumer Affairs Board, and the Cost of Living Commission, which we heard meets bimonthly. The Debt Licensing Authority, the Regulatory Authority Board, which we can get into a bit. The Rent Advisory Panel, the Rent Advisory Panel Tribunal. The Telecommunications Commission and, there is also, we heard this afternoon, the Energy Policy Steering Committee, all offering advice to the Ministry and a couple of departments under that Ministry.

And what I would like to know is how often each of those statutory government boards actually meet. We did hear that the Cost of Living Commission meets bimonthly. And in relation especially to the Energy Policy Steering Committee, how many meetings have they held since inception? What are their major measurable outputs?

The Minister read out many names on that particular Committee. There are a lot of people attending. Sometimes, when you have a lot of people attending, you might not get as much done. But either way, I would like to understand how many meetings they attend on

a regular basis. And what specific advice has been forthcoming from that committee in respect of the Integrated Resources Plan? And I will get into that a bit later.

In respect of sticking to the department's objectives to provide strategic leadership (this is objective number one), policy direction, legislative and financial operations, oversight of departments and sections within the Ministry; and provide oversight of the relationship between the landlord and tenant through effective policies and legislation to ensure equitable standards and fairness.

The Minister mentioned the landlord and tenant reform in her presentation. And perhaps the Minister can opine a bit more in respect to the anticipated timeline for the publication of a new draft Bill. Because, from all accounts, there were a lot of changes that were suggested. And the Minister did mention in her statement the document that was released following the public consultation summary, and the next steps. I have it here, the Landlord and Tenant Bill document that I think was useful and gave some very good feedback.

The interesting thing that comes of this, and bear with me if you will, Madam Chairman, because I am going to relate it to some of the information that we saw in the performance measures, sticking with Head 93, page B-311. These are the Ministry's performance measures. And I think I have got the right one here. And I apologise to the Minister for not having the correct one earlier in the week. I just simply did not receive it. But that is okay. I have them now. And it is not the Minister's fault.

The Chairman: Are you talking about the errata?

Hon. Michael Fahy: Exactly right.

The Chairman: I think all of us were emailed the errata.

Hon. Michael Fahy: No, we have looked into it. A few of us did not get it.

The Chairman: Oh, okay

Hon. Michael Fahy: But that is not with intent.

The Chairman: All right, yes.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Not with intent.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Michael Fahy: So, I am grateful for that.

And I mentioned that because I did make a statement on this. And the Minister said, *Oh, everyone has received it.* And it was not the Minister's issue. It has been fixed, so that is the issue for us.

And you will see that it says complete CARICOM process, and the Green Paper will get to all

of that. But the point I want to get to is the Landlord and Tenant point.

And it says here that the number of rent inspections will be a targeted outcome of 350. And the number of rent commission appeals is going to be five. And the reason this is interesting is that what this particular document says, The Landlord and Tenant Bill, I am referencing it because the Minister certainly did, is that it says, "Based on your consultation feedback, the Ministry will: . . . Strengthen enforcement provisions, particularly Rent Commissioner powers and penalties for operating illegal or unsafe rentals."

Now, when you take that statement it does not add up with respect to the performance measures, in my opinion. Because it is recognised that there are serious issues that need to happen with the Landlord-Tenant Act, which is what the feedback from any number of stakeholders was. It is a difficult area. It is not an easy thing to fix. I think one of the Acts has been around since 1973 . . . there have been changes, that's the Rent Control Act. They have been around a long time. So, reform is absolutely required.

The Chairman: So, your question, Member?

Hon. Michael Fahy: So, my question is, Does the Minister think that those should be re-amended in respect of those performance measures, given what is likely to happen in the Landlord Tenant Act? If there is going to be more enforcement, the Ministry said that is what they are going to do, then you are going to need more people.

Now, I raised this very similar issue in last year's debate when I was looking at these specific performance measures. And, Madam Chairman, when you look at the rent inspections, again, you will see that the original forecast for 2025/26 was 2,500, and the revised forecast is 312. The next one is 350.

The Chairman: And where is that?

Hon. Michael Fahy: That is page B-311.

And at the time, I said last year, I said 2,500 was a target that seemed to me to be completely unreachable. And so it is; it is unreachable by a vast number. So, I am glad to see that the targeted outcome for 2026/27 is nowhere near the original number of 2,500. But now we are at a stage where maybe, in fact, 350 is not the right number, because they have to do more enforcement pursuant to their own document after the public consultation. So again, there is going to be an awful lot of work required.

The Chairman: So, are you asking whether or not they intend to align that better?

Hon. Michael Fahy: Yes. Thank you. Madam Chairman. That is exactly the point.

The Chairman: Okay, thank you.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Is to try and make sure that these numbers make sense for next year as well.

And keeping on some of these, while we are on the page, page B-311, to prevent you from having to jump around, we see as well the number of . . . No, let me make this clear. The Minister did say that it is not about volume. It is about the quality of investigation. It is about the quality of the work being done. I accept that. It is, again, just the number. And how many does she think it may increase by, given what has been said in that other paper?

In relation to the number of consumer complaint investigations, I will get into that. But the same point is being made here. You will see that the original forecast for 2025/26 was 2,000. I made the point extensively last year that I thought that was a number that was completely unattainable, given the number of officers that were employed. And when you start breaking it down, they did a pretty reasonably decent number of 1,374. That is a lot. And I will get into that when I look through the notes of what the Minister was saying. There is a number of 1,500. Again, given the amount of work that is anticipated with Consumer Affairs, is that number, again, reasonable?

Now, just sticking with that theme, I am going to jump around just a little bit, because, again, it is a policy ministry matter here.

The Chairman: Yes

Hon. Michael Fahy: So, there is probably, hopefully—

The Chairman: So, you will have to go back and forth.

Hon. Michael Fahy: I will.

So, again, I will link this to the department objectives where it provides strategic leadership, et cetera. And something that I am not quite following particularly well is the news that a good portion of what Consumer Affairs work is, is likely to move to the Regulatory Authority. I believe what was said was, in the first instance, by way of a one-year long pilot programme.

And the questions that arise from that are as follows: Are the staff who are currently within the Consumer Affairs Department . . . how many of those would likely move across to the Regulatory Authority? Does funding move across with that particular programme for those staff? Because if it does not, then one has to assume that it becomes the direct responsibility of the Regulatory Authority.

And if the Regulatory Authority's mandate is to make sure that fees are fair and the like, does that mean a consequential rise in Regulatory Authority fees to pay for those staff? And in terms of that happening, it does not necessarily reflect in the Budget Book in respect of Consumer Affairs actually moving. At least it

does not seem to me. So perhaps the Minister can opine on that.

And is this something that the Regulatory Authority, which is independent to a certain degree (and I say that because the Minister can give directions), is that something that the Regulatory Authority has agreed to? Or is this being done by a ministerial direction? I do not know. And the Minister did not make mention of a ministerial direction.

The Chairman: So, you are asking that question, right?

Hon. Michael Fahy: Has there been any direction given? Or is it something that is a collaborative effort to make this change?

I say that, and I ask that question because there is an awful lot for the Regulatory Authority to be doing this year. And it seems to me that taking on the Department of Consumer Affairs, I think, except for housing and other things like Rent Commission, is not included.

So, just sticking with that theme, in terms of some of the performance measures, I am just going to jump to what comes to mind since we are talking about the Regulatory Authority. And we are talking about some of the initiatives that we have heard about.

I'm going to take us to page B-314, Madam Chairman, and that is the Energy performance measures. Okay. And for the performance measures in relation to the number of legislative amendments tabled, the target outcome for 2026/27 is two. The original forecast for 2025/26 was three. The revised forecast is two. The target outcome is two. The number of policy recommendations submitted to the Minister this year was five. Then it was revised to four, and it is going to be up to five again. And I am just reading these out. The number of project initiatives was originally forecast at five, the revised forecast was four, and the target outcome was five.

I think there is more than that, to be fair, and especially when it comes to the number of legislative amendments to be tabled, or could be tabled, I suppose. Because what I heard was that there is going to be some . . . perhaps some legislation based on a fuel policy, because I think it was one of the subcommittees. I think it was a subcommittee . . . The Energy Policy Steering Committee has finished work on one area, and they were going to be given fuel policies to look at, which may lead to legislative amendments.

We have legislative amendments coming for broadcast reform. We have amendments coming to the Electricity Act. We have potential amendments coming to the Telecom[munications] Act. That is a lot. And again, I am wondering, and I know what the Minister would say, but I am wondering whether this is overly ambitious, given all the items that have been identified.

Another was that there is going to be a legislative regime introduced for earth stations, presumably for satellite networks in Bermuda. So, it just seemed . . .

and in two weeks' time there is going to be a National Electricity [Sector] Policy released. That is an awful lot of consultation; an awful lot of work. And then a lot of it looks like it may end up being potentially with the Regulatory Authority in addition to Consumer Affairs.

There is a lot being piled on and taken out of the Ministry itself. There will not be much left in this Ministry if it does go all the way. And we do not necessarily get it reported on by the Regulatory Authority here.

Let me jump back, if I may, to some of the items going back to HQ. If we look at page B-309, I am making this point again this year. If you look at the salaries line, Madam Chairman, the estimate on salaries is \$1,727,000. And the Professional Services bill is \$1,732,000. It is, again, a Ministry that has a large number of consultants. It is a consultant . . . I have used this word a couple of times, but I cannot think of a better one: It's a consultant bonanza in this place. When you have professional services of such a high number, are we biting off more than we can chew?

I find it interesting that it just happens to align with last year's salary estimate of \$1,732,000 itself when nothing turns on it. But it is a Ministry of consultants. So, some people are doing very well.

In terms of . . . again, turning to department objectives. We heard the objective of to advance consumer protection through public engagement, education, and effective regulation. And that is a very busy department.

We have talked about enforcement. I just have a couple of questions there. Oh, I did hear, I think, the Minister make mention that there would be water regulation, perhaps. Could she expand on that? What's the intent behind water regulation? Is that going to turn to the RA for review? And what are we looking to regulate there? Is that sewage through the city? Is it Watlington Water Works, or some other entity? Is it regulating water truckers? I do not know the answer to that. Maybe the Minister can opine on that.

In terms of . . . sorry, I am just going through the questions that came to mind as we heard the presentation today. The performance measures, again, I am going to go to page B-311. There was a whole raft of measures that were read out in respect of the number of court proceedings. And I was not quite clear on the number of proceedings (I think under Consumer Affairs) that were referred to the DPP.

There were a number of rent control matters dealt with. There were 18 court proceedings, I think, that I captured. But how many were, in fact, referred to the DPP? And how many were declined to be prosecuted in respect to the work being done under the Consumer Affairs and rent area of that?

In terms of the vacation rental by owner, I think there were 53 licences issued . . . sorry, 53 applications, and 41 were issued. What is the total number of licences that have been issued since the inception of the legislation for vacation rentals by owner? And forgive me, I should know, but I do not. Is this an annual

process? Was it 53 this past year? Or is that 53 new applications? Is there a breakdown between ongoing applications versus new applications?

And obviously, that is an important number, given that we have a housing crisis, and there is always this rumour that Airbnb's and the like are actually having an effect on housing stocks. I think these are good numbers to know.

Again, just going back to the department objectives, some very quick questions. To develop deepened relations with CARICOM and its member states, and to explore greater economic and cultural opportunities of mutual benefit. Madam Chairman, the Green Paper . . . and forgive me, I must not have heard it in the House as being tabled, but it has been tabled in the House, the Green Paper. I have already made comments on that Green Paper, and I have posed a couple of questions to the Minister already in respect to the timelines.

However, I will pose them again in respect of the publication of the Green Paper, whether it fills the mandate of the Green Paper as a debate for another day. But is there . . . what is the date upon which the Minister believes the Green Paper consultation will close? And it is important we get clarity there. I have asked this question before, and forgive me, Minister, if I mis-paraphrase it. I am sure you will tell me if I have got it wrong. But I believe what the Minister said was until . . . essentially, until such time as we think that that consultation process has gone, has happened. I think that—

The Chairman: Just for your knowledge, the Green Paper was tabled on the 11th of March.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Yes. No, I am aware.

I challenged the Minister, and I was unaware that it had been. I must not have been paying attention that day, which is quite possible.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael Fahy: With that said, you then have that process that we've talked about over, and over, and over again, the importance of following that process of, 1) the Green Paper; and then, 2) the publication of a White Paper. And I think, again, a more definitive timeline would be helpful so people in Bermuda know what we are actually working towards. Because, as you know, Madam Chairman, that White Paper, when it is published, as has been undertaken, will include or should include that final decision on . . . based on the feedback that this is what we are going to do.

Now, arguably, the Green Paper makes it pretty clear. But on that note I will say for the record that it is very important that, whether or not we agree with the Green Paper, or whether it is seen as a sales pitch or otherwise, it is important that people do participate. And for that, I will enjoin the Minister in trying to get the

message out that people do have their voices heard and that they do participate in the process because it is desperately important. Again, people can opine on the contents of that in due course.

The next very wide department objective is to advance enhanced safeguards for affordability for all Bermuda residents. And that, obviously, we have heard a lot about. And the Minister gave in her presentation information about the Cost of Living Commission. And she also spoke about the basket of goods. And she gave us a figure that it may have saved the consumer \$381,000.

The question I have here in relation to that basket of goods . . . and, by the way, I want to make it clear: I am not suggesting this is happening. But I would like some information as to how do we know that it is not, and that this is this. The providers, wholesalers, and retailers have pledged 10 per cent and 10 per cent on this particular basket of goods. What is being done to ensure, that in order to cover any discount, that other goods are not just simply going up in price?

And I would like some information on that, I think. Because people talk and they say things, and there is no way that everyone is just going to go and increase costs in different baskets that are not included in the basket of goods. But how do we ensure that that is actually happening or not happening?

The Chairman: Your question?

Hon. Michael Fahy: So, my question is: What is the Ministry doing to ensure that other prices within grocery stores and wholesalers that are engaging in the programme of the 10 per cent and 10 per cent are not simply raising prices in other areas to cover their loss?

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael Fahy: Yes

The Chairman: Other goods are not going up conversely?

Hon. Michael Fahy: Correct.

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Whether that is 1 per cent or 20 per cent. I think it is important to know.

The Chairman: All right. It's a fair question.

Hon. Michael Fahy: In terms of the app, there is an app that the Minister mentioned where people can get on to cross-reference prices. How is that app being updated so that people know that the information on there is, in fact, accurate? That is, I think, a key point.

In respect of what we heard again tonight, or this afternoon, about the initiatives that the U.S. Consul

General assisted the Ministry in creating introductions with different suppliers and wholesalers overseas. I did ask similar questions of the Minister this past week, from her Ministerial statement. But I think it is worth repeating, because it is all well and good to make introductions. But the question that eventually arises is: What is the actual measurable outcome of these meetings? What I think could happen . . . and we are not asking for commercial details of what it is. But have relationships actually . . . when they do form, are they being utilised with those introductions? Have they been successful? Otherwise, it is just talk. All right.

And I mentioned that again. I am just using number five there, about enhanced safeguards and finding affordability for Bermuda residents, because it is based on what the Minister said in her presentation.

The Chairman: You saw my face, huh?

Hon. Michael Fahy: I did. I know you are going to hold me to account.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael Fahy: I know you are going to say he is stretching.

The Chairman: Right.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael Fahy: I get it. But as I said, it is a policy Ministry.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael Fahy: *Well, hurry up*, my colleague says. But it is important that we get this information.

In terms of . . . let me look. Bear with me for a moment. Oh, in terms of the Electricity Act, I think the amendments are coming in two weeks. And then there is a consultation period, I think a further consultation period. Forgive me if I got that wrong. But if there is a further consultation period after release, could the Minister opine and give us dates for when that consultation period will come to an end?

The Chairman: Excuse me. Are you talking about energy now?

Hon. Michael Fahy: Sorry. I am jumping around. I am going through the notes that I have taken.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael Fahy: I will turn back to . . . that is Head 89, Madam Chairman. Thank you for helping me along.

Page B-312. And this relates to reducing reliance on fossil fuels, which is how the Minister linked that in with her presentation.

In terms of energy, sticking with that, there is This community solar project that the Minister referred to. And I believe that is on the Capital Acquisitions page . . . I will take you to it. And I believe the sum that is being put aside is \$350,000.

What page are we looking at here? Sorry.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: [Page] C-8.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you.

The Chairman: It says, community solar project.

Hon. Michael Fahy: That is the one. Thank you very much. That is the community solar project. I was looking too far into the Book.

That number, I am wondering how that figure was actually arrived at? It is for a community solar project. What is the anticipated number of individuals or homes that this pilot project, scaling pilot project, is looking to deal with in the first instance? So, we have heard that it is a scalable project. It is something that, if it works as a pilot, will be utilised throughout the Island with the intent to assist those who do not have the ability to install their own solar facilities. So, what is the number of individuals or homes it is looking to assist?

With that in mind, I would assume, and maybe the Minister can opine on it . . . What is the anticipated reduction in people's energy bills as a percentage if they are going to be using this particular solar project? And if it is a shared facility, there must be some form of restrictions placed on it in terms of use by the community. So, in other words, house one might limit out at a certain period of time of the day. How does that work in terms of the access?

Now, I accept it is a pilot programme, but I am sure that when you are putting together an RFP and things like that, there are some parameters that would be considered.

Sticking with—

The Chairman: So, Minister, I mean, Shadow Minister, can I ask you just for clarity? Are you asking how many people are going to be in the pilot programme? Or are you asking how many people . . . if this programme does run, how many people they anticipate being able to take on?

Hon. Michael Fahy: I can ask both.

The Chairman: Okay, fine.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you for adding a question.

The Chairman: It wasn't clear.

Hon. Michael Fahy: That's okay.

In the first instance, it is how many will be in the pilot programme? Correct. And then, in these types of programmes, how many do they intend to help, in terms of those accessing? So, the way I see it, you have a solar plant, and it is anticipated to connect to how many homes? A dozen? Two dozen? Three [dozen]? We do not know. That is just helpful information.

In respect of sticking with . . . let me get you to it. Still on energy. This is [page] B-312. And one of the things that we kind of skirted over, actually, Madam Chairman, is the issue of the space and satellite.

The Chairman: Before you ask your question, just let me advise you and the listening public that we have just under one hour left in this debate. In particular, we have approximately 55 minutes.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Okay, thank you very much.

You will note on page B-312, Madam Chairman, that one of the items the very busy Department of Energy has to deal with is facilitating the growth of the space, satellite, energy, and telecommunications industries in Bermuda through the development of updated policies and procedures. And that took me to the Paper that was produced by the Government called the "Bermuda National Space Strategy 2020–2025." I have it here, and I know the Minister would be aware of it. There is an annex that sets out, for the listening public, a heck of a lot of stuff that is anticipated to be done.

And based on what this department's objective is, I am wondering if the Minister can opine on . . . we have heard that there is going to be some legislation for some space infrastructure in Bermuda. Has there been any further strategy in respect of space insurance? How many private space companies have made enquiries of the Ministry since the publication of this Paper to set something up in Bermuda?

We have a whole bunch of advisory groups that are subdivided. And if you will bear with me, I would like some information on those subgroups. So, I am going to read directly from it because I cannot remember these, because there are four or five of them.

The Chairman: Okay, you may.

Hon. Michael Fahy: The ITU Spectrum and Regulatory Provisions Working Group, Earth Stations Regulations Working Group, Space Sustainability Working Group, Space Insurance Working Group, Small Satellites Working Group, and STEM Education Working Group.

Has there been any work done by those groups in the last five years? And how many meetings have they had? And what are the likely outcomes of those meetings in respect of giving advice to the Government

to attract companies that will provide communications and satellites?

The Paper also goes on about "Earth Observation" for remote sensing. And it discusses the following: "Management of ocean resources"; "Disaster [prevention] and preparedness"; "Natural resource management"; "Coastal mapping, and erosion prevention," all of which can be supported by satellites. And has any work been undertaken there?

This issue with satellite use. You recall that we have a slot that was secured. I think there are a couple. And I do note that this is something . . . the only reference that I could find in relation to the potential slots was, in fact, believe it or not, actually in the Green Paper that makes mention . . . And if I can read from that, it says that one of the reasons that . . . or one of the opportunities, I should say, of joining CARICOM as a full member is to create new industries. And that is, communications and satellite capacities, and essential infrastructure for the region. In collaboration with Barbados and CARICOM, we could obtain support from international organisations in collaboration with CARICOM partners, to jumpstart the space mandate and create new economic opportunities that benefit our Country and the Region more broadly. Very broad, it is not mentioned once in the other Paper about space management.

So, I hope the Minister can opine more on that, as not much was said in her presentation in respect of space management satellites, other than the earth stations, which was a passing mention. And because it seems to me that there is a real opportunity here, based on this Paper, for real revenue opportunities.

Can the Minister opine or has her Ministry opined any further on increasing the space industry's contribution to Bermuda's economy as a percentage of GDP?

The original objective was to attract five companies to Bermuda that fit within the desired space ecosystem. Has that happened? Have people been turned away? Can the Minister advise, again under the department's objectives . . . I will just read them again: *To facilitate the growth of the space satellite industries and update marketing materials.* How updated are the marketing materials with respect to the space industry? Are the regulations up to date? I do not think they are. I think that is something that is being worked on.

Have there been any international conferences hosted in the last two years to develop this industry in Bermuda? And if not, why not? How much work has gone on with the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation to facilitate venture capital opportunities for space startups? Is there a stakeholder working group? That was supposedly chaired by the Bermuda Business Development Agency to monitor growth in this area? And if there has been growth, what is it? And report on any progress to the space and satellite policy advisory panel.

I am going to leave it there, because I could go on and on and on and on. There is an awful lot that has been said here, and it does not appear that any of it has happened. And I can readdress it after the Minister has an opportunity to respond to at least those questions.

The Chairman: Can I just at least remind you . . . and I know you're asking her if she is using the Business Development agencies to get information in order to advance . . . I would say, business in that area.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Correct.

The Chairman: If that is what you are asking.

Hon. Michael Fahy: That is one of the questions I have asked.

The Chairman: Only because I want to make sure we are not crossing over into the other Ministries.

Hon. Michael Fahy: So agreed.

The Chairman: Yes. Okay.

Hon. Michael Fahy: I mean . . . Well, that is interesting, Madam Chairman, because this is a Ministry that has lots of crossover.

The Chairman: And that is why I have given you the leeway, because you have made it up . . . it is the Ministry of Policy. That is what you called it.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Correct.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael Fahy: Correct. That is exactly right.

Now, with that said, I think I've made my point quite quickly on that.

Going to the . . . again, just looking at the mission statement: *To reduce reliance on fossil fuel imports, [while] balancing the security, sustainability and affordability of energy in Bermuda.* The question here arises in respect of the amendments to the Electricity Act and the feedback that will be coming from that. And my concern is, one, we have an integrated resource plan that was first put out in 2023. We have heard that the discussions or negotiations between the Regulatory Authority and the electricity provider have been (sorry, I did not write the phrase down) . . . have been difficult and time-consuming. And I understand that.

But with respect to that point, by now (it is now 2026) an integrated resource plan, I hope, is coming. But will that be further delayed as a result of the amendments to the Electricity Act? Because what the Minister said is that the amendments will include a reversal, if you will. And what I mean by that is, it will be the Regulatory Authority [RA] that puts out the IRP, [Integrated

Resource Plan], for people to respond to. That is how I have understood it, rather than the provider putting it together in the first instance. That the RA will work with them to get the numbers and things correct. Is it likely that the IRP will be pushed back to a further date, as yet unknown? Or is there a date for expected publication? And is it tied to any feedback on the Electricity Act? And if those amendments do come, will that mean a restart of the IRP process based on the new legislation? Or will we see an IRP prior to the finalisation of that legislative package?

Just turning now, if I may, to . . . let's have a look. I will jump now to the Land Title and Registration [Department], Head 97. Now, there were a number of figures that were given by the Minister in relation to this particular Head, and I would just like some clarity on that.

When the Minister read out the number of outstanding applications or documents for decision within the land title management registry, it seemed to be quite a glut of numbers in the middle period. So, I think it was 2022, 2023, 2024. The numbers were much larger than they were from, say, 2018. Obviously, that is a much further time back compared to, say, 2026. Perhaps the Minister can opine on what is the reasoning for that. I could not write the numbers down quickly enough, but I do recall that they were kind of in the middle there, larger numbers. That would sound as if, again, that there are still 2,000 applications outstanding.

You will note, Madam Chairman, that the department objectives say that they will be reduced by 1,000 within 12 months. But, given the number of applications that continue to be made, it is almost difficult to catch up. And what is the knock-on effect in terms of revenue to the Government for the lack of speed in relation to processing these applications?

Something that, I have to confess, took me back a little bit, is the issue of the electronic registration system. And it is expected that this will be in place by 2026. The money was not used from the last budget, so it is to be used this time round. But I seem to remember what the Minister said was that the system is about \$1 million. It is budgeted for half a million. Maybe I am missing something, which is possible in terms of that number. So, when the RFP was put together, what number was given? Is it a parameter in the RFP that says, *We have \$1 million to spend, design us a system that is going to cost \$1 million?* Is it an RFP that says, *We have half a million, design us a system that is half a million?*

The Minister said that there were some seven entities, I think, that supplied information in response to the RFP. And a decision will be made very shortly to select that vendor. The question that comes here is: When that system is put in place, what will the difference in the processing speed of these applications be compared to now? And is that processing number included in the backlog number of 1,000 per 12 months?

And the reason, of course, that is important is that we are now in February. Next time around, next February, how much further are we still behind? Still partly a manual process, as well. Despite the fact that we will be using AI. But what is the measurability of this in terms of this new system?

I am just amazed. And we heard that there were lessons learned because DocDash had some issues, and it was 18 years old! I am not following if the legislation was in 2018. It has not been 18 years that have passed. So why were we using DocDash in the first place? And when we have the desire to have this kind of electronic registration—

The Chairman: Is that a rhetorical question or is it—

Hon. Michael Fahy: That is a real question.

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Where did DocDash come from?

The Chairman: Okay I mean—

Hon. Michael Fahy: I mean, it does sound like a rhetorical question. But it is interesting, as it is an 18-year-old programme. Why are we using it at all? I do not understand if, in fact, the deal is to kind of roll things along quickly, because when this was rolled out, it was a great promise made. Lots of promises were made about how this was going to transform and make things easier. And that we would get our documents back quickly. And I can tell you lots of anecdotes. But this is not the place for that, about how long some of the stuff is taking. The Minister read out some figures herself. It's too long.

And given that, the staffing number, you will note on page B-316 . . . it was originally envisaged that there would be 13 staff. It was still revised down to 11. The original number for 2024/25 was 11. It was then projected to be 13. It is down back at 11. And the estimate this year, 2026/27 is 13. We were given the job titles for that. But, presumably, they are the same job titles as last year. Because it was envisaged that staffing would increase to get to this backlog. Are the same staff titles to be recruited? Or is it new? Because I do not recall from last year.

Again, sticking with page B-316, and you look at 2026/27, the Minister said, in respect of professional services, it was the hiring of an additional consultant. So just to confirm, I suppose there are two consultants in there at the moment, given the figure. And what exactly is their role? Presuming . . . I am going to presume it has to do with the implementation of the new system that we do not yet have. So perhaps the Minister can opine on that.

If you give me one minute, I will just go through and look at my notes again to make sure I have the questions.

The Chairman: Sure.

I will just remind the listening public that we are in the Committee of Supply for the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27. We are currently debating the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the attendant Heads are 89, 93, and 97.

And the Shadow Minister is putting his questions forward for the Minister to answer.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you. I am jumping right back to the beginning because I missed this question.

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Michael Fahy: And again, this relates to—

The Chairman: Page?

Hon. Michael Fahy: —Head 93, [page] B-308, and about reducing costs to the consumer.

And again, it goes back to the diversification of imports. What barriers specifically are in place for suppliers? Because one of the statements the Minister made was in respect of this meeting with those individuals that were introduced by the U.S. Counsel General, that the discussions related to the types of barriers that are in place for suppliers. Is that—

The Chairman: Okay. What line item are you?

Hon. Michael Fahy: Well, I am going simply again to the HQ mission statement of *promoting affordability and prosperity and energy sustainability and focusing on legislative change*. When the Minister was giving her brief, she spoke specifically about the diversification of imports.

The Chairman: All right.

Hon. Michael Fahy: And that they discussed barriers that were in place for suppliers. And I would like to know what barriers were identified that are in place for suppliers.

Now, that is important because, of course, Madam Chairman, one of the issues that arises in Bermuda in respect to lowering costs is just about the number of people that we have here. It is very difficult, as we know, for suppliers to buy at a real wholesale rate. And that is the reason many of these suppliers have given over the years. So, what is going to change with respect to finding new suppliers? Are there proposals on the table to give lower costs with [fewer] numbers of people? Because the more people you have, the more buying power you have, which is normally how it works.

I think for the moment, I will take my seat and may very well rise again at this time if I have more questions.

The Chairman: At this point in time, there are approximately 35 minutes remaining in the debate.

Are there any other persons who wish to speak to Heads 89, 93, and 97?

There being none, I will call on the Minister to begin answering some of the questions put to her.

Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I first thank the Honourable Shadow Minister for his questions and the attention to both detail and the breadth of the brief that was presented.

I will begin with Head . . . the Ministry Headquarters.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: We will begin with the Ministry's Headquarters. The Honourable Shadow asked about how often the Boards meet. He listed the number of Boards that are currently under the Ministry's remit.

The Cost of Living Commission meets most regularly, which is bi-weekly. The Consumer Affairs Board is going to meet monthly. The Debt Collection and other Boards, including the Rent Commission, etc., as the substantive matters that are tabled in the Consumer Affairs Board become relevant. That is the point at which those bodies are commissioned and meet to discuss the matters within their purview.

In terms of the specific advice, the Consumer Affairs Board provides advice on trends as well as complaints. They also have insight and input for the Management Services Review that was conducted relating to the consumer-focused portions and sections, and to non-housing related sections under the current Ministry that is under the Ministry Headquarters, namely Consumer Affairs.

There was a question from the Honourable Shadow [Minister] about the rent inspections and the numbers, and questioned if they were, in fact, reasonable, actual, and based on what we believed or estimated would be taking place in the upcoming year. And I think it was against the backdrop of the . . . I guess, relating to rent inspections specifically. It was against the backdrop of the Landlord and Tenant [Act] consultation and reform efforts. The Ministry will, as with any law, and a law of that age, and the fact that it is no longer fit for purpose or fit for the market, you did speak about the fact that we have a housing challenge. And so, the Ministry, in enacting the piece of legislation, will seek to provide a period during which new policy provisions will be able to be onboarded. And those who are in the rental market, or the housing market, will be advised. As when any kind of law comes online, there is a notice period for which those who are market participants can prepare themselves. The same would be true.

And so, it is our hope that, coupled with the communications efforts, this will align with the reforms of this 50-plus piece of legislation and the 50-plus rent control, domestic premises, and rent control provisions that [are] no longer fit the current state. And, for all intents and purposes outliving its usefulness in the current housing construct. And so, it is anticipated that the period of transition before enforcement and any sort of punitive penalties are enacted will be overseen by the technical officers who will be responsible for investigations.

So, the numbers, to our estimation, are accurate. We are hoping that persons will be informed, equipped, and, with the support of the Ministry, be best suited to support what that looks like. It is also intended that, in deep collaboration with the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities, an alignment of the Government services and sections will take place to ensure that the oversight is not out of reach, but under the appropriate remit that it is responsible.

And so, the pilot is seeking to consider and explore that. So, when we talk about non-housing related provisions, that would include those that may be in scope or being considered by the Ministry of Housing and Municipality and its consultation process.

In terms of the coming legislative amendments for the Ministry of Home Affairs, I think, in contrast to 2025/26 to 2026/27, the Ministry has taken note of both the overarching desire to lower affordability and has taken a closer look at the cost of living in Bermuda.

The Cost of Living Summit [identified] the pillar which the public shared with the Ministry. [It] was most important for them to have greater oversight, greater communication, and greater regulation, noting the direct impact on their household's cost. And so, the Ministry has looked at the policy and the different intersections with the different Ministries and departments outside the Ministry of Home Affairs.

So, we actually see ourselves more as a project manager. And you rightly noted that we are a policy-heavy section, and a lot of which do not have a foregone roadmap, or other governments worldwide that have successfully navigated affordability. And so, the Ministry is doing a lot of research to ensure that the decisions it is taking are right-sized, appropriate, and not just a cut-and-paste and placed in our contacts. And so, the frequency of the Cost of Living Commission in particular is informed by that fact. And also, the legislative amendments will be transitioned and will also be appropriate.

We are starting with the policy, then moving to legislative amendments. We have successfully refined and also thought about the policy and legislation that will be forthcoming. And so, for the estimated number of legislative changes, we anticipate that the bulk of the policy will be done, and perhaps in a future fiscal year, it will be included. So rather than have a number and then be invited to answer why it has not been accomplished, we recognise the journey this particular year

has had, in contrast, and have amended our targets accordingly. And so many of the legislative amendments will be tabled this year . . . the brunt of the work was done previously, which we hope to refine and do whatever consultation is necessary. And then engage with the Chambers, noting that we do not control the Chamber's pace, but we do work with Chambers to be able to enact the relevant legislation we need to advance.

The question regarding sewage and water, and the extent to which we are including it. Again, the Ministry of Home Affairs was informed, or its work has been informed by the Cost of Living Summit. The Cost of Living Summit said that the public wanted the Government to have greater oversight over the cost of what they would consider critical services and essential goods. And so critical service is water. Water is critical. Just as telecommunications is, which is regulated under the Regulatory Authority, and deepening the regulation and oversight that affordable goods or essential goods, as it is currently written in legislation, have the requisite oversight, transparency measures, and all areas of the supply chain are in scope when we are managing affordability.

There was a question relating to the grocery tracker app. And so, this app was previously commissioned. And the app is seeking to provide a level of transparency on the same affordable goods at present, relating to essential goods and the extent to which they are within the scope and regulation of the current Cost of Living Commission. And so, the cost of living . . . or the app in particular, the date for it to be written out has not yet been confirmed.

But in concert with the Cost of Living Commission and in forecasting our intended activities for this upcoming fiscal year, it was noted to be in scope. It was also included in the Throne Speech in 2025. And so, the same is true. And we see it coming into greater focus in the upcoming fiscal year.

The question, and I think the Honourable Member may have tabled the same question during the time of my U.S. trade show presentation, U.S. trade engagement. And the reality is that the current wholesalers and retailers shared with the Ministry through the commission focus group that because of our size the ability for them to call Tysons, the ability to call the larger providers because the number of intended purchases was limited. And so, when you talk about the barrier, that is one barrier that this engagement and introduction sought to support. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is an entity that would interact with the poultry pillar under its remit, and the equivalent agricultural sectors and provide a level of both connectivity for the large but also the smaller and medium-sized businesses. And they have extended this availability.

I would say that in particular one of the major retail grocers on the Island was unaware and had never been engaged with such an entity. And so that speaks to the fact that we are leaving no stone unturned.

I think it speaks to the success, again, of an affordability roadmap that was not yet defined, that the Ministry is engaging with and advancing for the first time in this way. Yes, there were previous affordability and grocery relationships, but to be able to explore even new partnerships that exist in our construct is appropriate. And the benefit of that is not necessarily in securing absolutely just the cost. In addition to cost, it is also the relationships that were not in existence. The partner organisations that are willing to support our local supply chain, that were not yet known.

And so that is what the Ministry also notes as a success. And the access to trade shows free of cost that ordinarily may not have been in scope, that ordinarily would not have been known to be available to the local retailers and wholesalers. I think that, in and of itself, is successful, noting that the Government is not in the business of selling goods. And facilitating those business relationships is key.

The question around the BDA and the ability for them to support such introductions. Yes, they were, as my Ministerial Statement, as well as my presentation this evening, included that the BDA and the Department of Economic Development was in support of such introduction. They also met with them, when they came on the Island last week. And the facilitation of those relationships is their primary responsibility, and reporting and communication between the Ministry and the quango bodies relating to the specific initiative role is anticipated and with our technical officers.

In terms of the oversight, the Ministry has not, up until this point, had deep price, kind of, relationships with the current retailers and wholesalers. There is legislation. We are enhancing legislation through the price tracker app. But there is also the initiative that the retailers and wholesalers, on behalf of the people of Bermuda, agreed with the Ministry that they will be willing to pursue for a nine-month period. Recognising that they also brought to the Ministry the other business operational costs that compound the cost at the till. This includes outdated import legislation and outdated regulations and sanitary frameworks. Just as the Landlord and Tenant Act is eligible for revision, the same is true, I think, in our other sectors.

And so, the Ministry, in collaboration with other ministries, departments, and sections, specifically on imports, is looking to figure out how we might be able to unlock citrus from Florida. Recognising that there are environmental safeguards in place, we should not underestimate or erode those that have been put in place to safeguard our shores. But likewise, in reviewing the uptick of technology and the ability to do these sorts of checks, photo sanitation checks, et cetera, at multiple borders, we might explore to what extent it is viable. And viable specifically in support of our local wholesalers and retailers.

And so, the costs of these goods that were afforded for the nine-month period have been communicated to the Ministry. We do have engagement to track

not only the price and the units of the items in the basket that have been sold, the original price, and the affordable basket price, with associated SKU numbers. We are also provided with general information and challenges from the retailers and wholesalers who may, at the same time that they are giving this relief on behalf of the public, also come and provide general feedback as to global supply chain challenges and/or general updates in terms of how the programme and initiative are going.

Also, on Head . . . I just want to make sure I have answered all the questions for Head 97.

The Chairman: We have now reached the 20-minute mark remaining in Committee of Supply for the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27. And the Minister is continuing to answer questions. Are there any other [Members] who wish to speak to the Heads? I believe it is 89, 93, and 97 in the meantime.

I recognise the Member from constituency 20. Member, you have the floor.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you, Madam Chairman. While the Minister is finding her place, these are just follow-ups from her answers.

So, I just get clarity on it. In relation to the app, I understand it has not been rolled out, and when it is rolled out it will deal only with essential goods. I think that is the position. In relation to . . . so, maybe the Minister can just confirm that understanding.

As well, when I was asking about do the regulations include sewage or is it water trucks? When we talk about water, does that include the regulation of water truck pricing? That is a specific question in relation to that. Is that the anticipated idea?

Another question that relates to all of this that I had asked was, and the Minister said that they do not have the specific pricing details, but equally, can the Minister give any indication if the Ministry believes that prices are going up in other areas while prices are being held at a certain lower point on that essential basket of goods?

Perhaps as well, what the Minister might consider, and it is a direct question in relation to how to lower the price of goods is, Will the Minister's Government consider ending the sugar tax? That would be something that perhaps the Minister could take to her Cabinet to lower costs.

And something more specific, and it turns to the Solar Energy Project that the Minister made reference to, would the Minister consider working with the Minister of Housing to have perhaps that pilot programme put with some of the new modular housing that we heard [about] in the last debate, that is intended to lower the price and cost for Bermudians?

Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Heads 89, 93 or 97?

There being none, I call on the Minister to continue.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Based on these supplemental questions that have just come, I will say to the Honourable Shadow Minister that the sugar tax was not in the Ministry's remit. And so your comment is noted.

Consideration of the housing and, I guess, align it with the Housing and Municipalities Ministry, specifically the Bermuda Housing Corporation. Yes, there has been collaboration with the technical team relating to those who clearly are in need of affordable homes. And then being able to compound that savings or reduced monthly expenditure through more affordable energy costs is something that the Ministry is seeking to refine. And that is the very premise of the partnership with the Bermuda Housing Corporation.

Before I finished I had gone into the supplemental questions on or the initial presented questions on Ministry Headquarters, which is Head 93. And there were questions relating to the timeline of the draft Bill for the Landlord and Tenant Act. We are currently awaiting Chambers to provide the most updated iteration following that consultation. So, I believe it was posted in January of this year. And Chambers is seeking to conduct the entire process of the combining of the two Acts, which is for all intents and purposes, and as a learned professional, I am sure you can imagine that that is quite a comprehensive role. And to ensure that the provisions are the right size and make sense for our construct, and that any repealing and replacing can be appropriately done. And so, they have not given us a timeline, but we are hoping in July of this year we will be able to table that Landlord and Tenant Act 2026.

The summary was released. I think we just went through that. We also discussed the number of rent inspections and the extent to which the appeals were deemed to be right. And if we believe that we would in fact have the 350, I think I spoke about previously, the transitional provisions that would be included in the future act. And we do maintain those numbers at present.

The staff of Consumer Affairs has been collaborating on the MCS review of the Consumer Affairs section. And also noting that the Regulatory Authority also has a consumer protection awareness pillar in its remit. And if we are streamlining services, there is currently a process through which the public might be able to get relief, get answers to their questions, that is now spread across multiple entities. And so, the spirit behind the intended pilot is to be able to streamline the access and leverage the infrastructure technology. We did note that we are only able to get certain forms online or digitise them. There are mechanisms that quango bodies have that the governmental organisations or departments do

not necessarily have access to. And so, the intention is to support one, the public, by having one place they may go to at Consumer Affairs, have a telecommunications complaint, and they are referred to the Regulatory Authority.

And our Consumer Affairs unit has been on the front lines, and the RA does not currently have a front-facing consumer pillar in their day-to-day operations. And so, the goal is to be able to, under the remit of the Ministry of Home Affairs, have one place where members of the public can get their questions answered about consumer-related concerns. And be close to the place where disputes are being resolved for those regulated entities. So currently, energy, telecommunications, and mobile services . . . broadband services, sorry.

The intention is also for the one-year pilot to provide the requisite information so that the Ministry knows what a future, more permanent transition would look like. The funding would be based on the current staff that has been allotted. We did speak to the \$150,000 that is been allotted to that transition, or to the pilot programme in particular. And any subsequent budgeting will be in future budget years. But again, the intention is to be able to streamline the public's access to services that will provide them both information and also the appropriate mechanism for any sort of action to take place for the sections under its remit.

The Regulatory Authority at present in Law has sectoral delineations. So, the cost for these different sectors would not currently contemplate consumer cost in this way. And so, the Ministry has that in scope. And it is anticipated that future budgets may see a cost if it is deemed to be a permanent transition . . . or a legislative amendment. But if we are in aid of affordability, it may seem that we can reallocate and find funding to support whatever the intended transition is.

No, direction has not been given, but rather we are working with the Regulatory Authority relating to this transition. They have shared ideas that they intend to formally present to us. And the same is true for our spirit in aid of the public, in aid of consumer protection, having a place where members of the public can get both relief and any sort of action that may need to take place for the sectors under its remit would have a close proximity to them for any sort of remedy.

The RA . . . I think I have got those questions. You also talked about the Ministry Headquarters, CARICOM, and the date. I think previously in this Honourable House, I have noted that we are engaging with the public. We do not want to rush any sort of consultative process. But we are intending to collaborate and get feedback. I do, you know, echo your sentiments that more people need to go to caricom.gov.bm. Because we want, not only the history of Bermuda, and also the intention of the consultation to be reflective, not just reflective in one type of way. So, we do want to have diverse feedback, which will be further solicited through future communications efforts by the Ministry by way of

town halls and forums, and third-party organisations in support of CARICOM and/or with a particular portion of CARICOM as their primary skill set.

So, the Caribbean Development Bank, for example, has said that they are willing to support, you know, any sort of communication efforts. And other Caribbean partners are saying they would be happy to communicate, you know, the position relating to what is included in the Green Paper in our contacts, coming down to support any sort of education campaign that will be associated.

So, the key is to get engagement. The engagement will inform the next steps. And we do not want it to drag out. But likewise, we want to have comprehensive feedback relating to the CARICOM Green Paper. You rightly noted that it does include the space opportunity and the fact that space has been in contemplation in Bermuda since 2018. And this is not new, but rather a way to deepen and further enhance that sector that currently is not developed.

Moving on to Energy, since we did move to satellite.

The Chairman: Minister, I am just letting you know, you have 10 minutes remaining. Go ahead.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Thank you. How many meetings has the EPSC [Energy Policy Steering Committee], the Policy Steering Committee, had? They have had 10, which my budget brief did include. These meetings both reviewed the progress on the National Electricity Sector Policy, noting that it underpins this sector.

The policy, when enacted in 2018, what informed the legislation . . . sorry, in 2016. It was informed by the 2015 National Electricity Sector Policy. And so the Ministry recognises that legislative changes are anticipated. We wanted to ensure that the policy was sound and that any sort of amendments would emanate from it. And so similar to the process in 2015, 2016, we similarly are refining the 2015 policy to ensure that any future legislative amendments for the RA Act or the ECEA Act are reflective of a thoughtful piece of policy that has been consulted both with stakeholders and the Ministry.

The Chairman: So, thank you, Minister.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

HOUSE VISITORS

The Chairman: For two seconds, I just want to recognise the Senator and Minister of Justice, our Attorney General, who are in the Gallery, as well as Senator Lindsay Simmons.

Welcome, Members.

[Desk thumping]

[Committee of Supply continuing]

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Thank you, Madam Chair.

So, in response to the question around the IRP and the updated energy policy and the EPSC meetings, the EPSC makes up stakeholders of the current electricity sector, which may or may not be in constant contact with the regulator. It includes the regulator. It includes the local utility. But it also includes other market participants. So, the relationship to their input on the energy policy, which would inform the legislation, is that we want stakeholders to be involved in what the national electricity policy is. Because it would be just that.

Considering the evolution from the current iteration of the National Electricity Policy, enacted or brought forth in 2015, was not really reflective of the entire sector. And now, with more information that we know, not only its impact to have a dashboard view of not only bulk generation, but also residential usage. And the impact that it has on both cost and any sort of affordability changes, and legislative amendments. This is the spirit of the National Electricity Sector Policy, in addition to enhancing the technical capacity on the Island, which currently relies heavily across all three entities on external consultants.

So, in terms of what they have been doing, all of that, to include the National Electricity Sector Policy, and also insight into enhanced collaboration.

The telecommunications and broadcasting committees meet on an ad hoc basis when complaints are lodged by the public and there is something to adjudicate. The same is true for some of the other committees that are under the Ministry's remit.

And the Community Solar Project, the question was about the budget. The funding is for scoping to develop the framework. Scoping and feasibility will be provided when the pilot programme is finalised. The budget for \$350,000 and the work that is being done in collaboration with the Bermuda Housing Corporation on the modular units will be incorporated into this programme.

So, I spoke earlier to the fact that the space sector had been in view and in contemplation since 2018. This is an evolution, likewise, in that we have the uptick of international companies who are coming to our Shores, the connectivity with space and satellite, and with subsea cables.

Hon. Michael Fahy: So, if I may, just a point of order.

The Chairman: Your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. Michael Fahy: I know it is not with intent, but the space part of legislation was, in fact, part of the one Bermuda Alliance's efforts, secured one of those slots.

The Chairman: Thank you. So, she is inadvertently misleading the House? Yes. Okay.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Yes.

The Chairman: Okay.
Continue.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

There is no current space regulation or legislation. And so, what we are seeking to do is to evolve the sector. The Honourable Shadow Minister rightly noted the breadth of what the sector could look like. And so that is actually the spirit of what we are currently seeking to advance. And in consultation with consultants, there was discussion about the fact that we have a number of consultants in remit. Yes, because we do not have any expertise legally that knows it. So, we want to ensure that what we are seeking to advance has not only been looked at by those who are sector experts. There is an Earth Station Committee, which I believe was created previously, but they too have engaged and supported the development of this satellite communications framework, and to ensure that there is regulatory certainty for the industry participants.

The framework is intended to enable Bermuda to support various licensing opportunities associated with satellite network operators and earth station infrastructure. There is connectivity, I was starting to say, between subsea cables, in fact, and satellite connectivity. And so, this is the ability and what is in scope in the intended regulation.

Public consultation on the earth station licensing framework will be completed this year. And then there will be legislative steps thereafter. This creates regulatory certainty for operators like Starlink, et cetera, who are operating in our Shores. But also allows for new international businesses to begin doing business in Bermuda and diversify Bermuda's economy while also meeting that international framework, standards, obligations, et cetera.

The only working group which we are advancing right now is on the Space and Satellite Advisory Panel. There may have been previous iterations because of what was being reviewed at the time. I know there was a space camp that was also done in 2019. And so, at present, we are seeking to refine the legislation and regulations relating to space and satellites. And therefore, the Space and Satellite Advisory Panel is the only subcommittee at present in support of this work.

And this is aligned to even the interest that Bermuda has received from the UK Space Agency, which we know is looking to set up an earth station in Bermuda to both monitor space debris, and also in support of what NASA currently is doing on the Island to monitor satellite and rocket launches.

And this is deemed to be prudent in advance of marketing the opportunity. We do not want to invite people to come when we do not actually have our house in order. And so, we want to ensure that the regulatory framework has been considered. We have allowed not only the industry to opine but rather have received support from sectoral experts and those who are operating in this field. We do not have this advance at present.

It also aligns with the Ministry's intention with the \$50,000 bursary for students to ensure that we can build and grow capacity to consider careers both in earth and satellite stations, as well as—

The Chairman: Minister, wind up your sentence because you will need to be moving your Heads within the next few seconds.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: I think that concludes, for the most part, the substantive matters relating to the Honourable Shadow [Minister's] questions. The final question, I believe, was around—

The Chairman: Minister, I need you to move your Heads.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: I will move these Heads immediately.

The Chairman: You have run out of time.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: I am happy that the time has expired.

Okay, Madam Chairman, I move that Heads 93, 89, and 97 be approved as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Heads 89, 93, and 97 be approved. Are there any objections to that?

There are none.

So moved.

[Motion carried: The Ministry of Home Affairs, Heads 89, 93 and 97 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2026/27]

The Chairman: I will call on the Minister . . . Oh, the Minister of Finance is here. He snuck in behind me. Okay.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: Well, not quite because you have other Heads to move, Minister.

[Laughter and inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: Yes, we are not doing that.

Hon. E. David Burt: I forgot about that. There is the Appropriation Act to move, my bad.

Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. That was about to be a problem.

Madam Chairman, I move that the following Heads be approved as printed: Justice, Heads 4 and 75. Non-Ministry Departments, Head 1, Cabinet Office and Digital Innovation; Heads 51 and 61. And Ministry of Finance, Head 49.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Heads 4, 75, 1, 51, 61, and 49 be approved. I have left out none, right? Don't want to miss any.

Hon. E. David Burt: Heads 4, 75, 1, 51, 61, and 49.

The Chairman: Are there any objections to that?

There are none.

So moved.

[Motion carried: Justice, Heads 4 and 75; Non-Ministry Head 1; Cabinet Office and Digital Innovation, Heads 51 and 61; and Ministry of Finance Head 49 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2026/27.]

The Chairman: Continue.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I move that the current account estimates, the capital development estimates, and the capital acquisition estimates be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the current account estimates, the capital acquisition estimates, and the capital acquisitions be approved.

Your third one I do not have, Finance Minister.

Hon. E. David Burt: Okay. My recital says, and I will repeat again, I move that the current account estimates—

The Chairman: I got that.

Hon. E. David Burt: —the capital development estimates and the capital acquisition estimates be approved.

The Chairman: And I move that the capital acquisitions twice, the capital development estimates be approved.

Are there any objections to that?

There are none.

So approved.

Continue.

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Chairman, I move that the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the financial year 2026/27 be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the financial year 2026/27 be approved.

Are there any objections?

There are none.

So approved.

[Motion carried: The Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the financial year 2026/27 were considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed.]

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Chairman, I move that the approval of the Estimates be reported to the House.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the approval of the Estimates be reported to the House. Are there any objections to that?

There are none.

So moved.

House resumed at 7:53 pm

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

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

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

The Speaker: Good evening, Members. Are there any objections to the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditures for 2026/27 being reported to the House?

None.

Any objections to the supplementaries being reported to the House?

None. Thank you.

That brings us to a close of the matters we have been dealing with today but also brings us close to the budget debate.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh, no, not yet.

The Speaker: Oh, that's right.

Hon. E. David Burt: I do not want to see it before that, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes, I have got a little piece to do before I move forward. Yes

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: Yes, no problem. All right.
Premier.

BILL

FIRST READING

APPROPRIATION ACT 2026

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I am introducing a Bill entitled the Appropriation Act 2026 for its first reading with the Governor's recommendation signified.

The Speaker: Any objections to that?

None.

Premier?

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move in accordance with Standing Order 28(5)(1) that under provisions of Standing Orders 41, 12 and 42 that the remaining stage of the Bill entitled the Appropriation Act 2026 be taken forthwith.

The Speaker: Any objections?

None.

[Inaudible interjection]

BILL

SECOND READING

APPROPRIATION ACT 2026

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill entitled the Appropriation Act 2026 be now read the second time in this House.

The Speaker: Any objections?

There are none.

Continue.

[Motion carried: the Appropriation Act 2025 was read a second time.]

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move clauses 1 through 6 inclusive together with schedules A, B, and C as printed.

The Speaker: Any objections?

None. Good.

[Motion carried: Clauses 1 through 6 together with Schedules A, B and C passed.]

The Speaker: Premier?

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I move that the preamble be approved.

The Speaker: Any objections?

None.

The preamble has been approved.

BILL

THIRD READING

APPROPRIATION ACT 2025

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the Appropriation Act 2026 be now read a third time by its title only, which, of course, for the listening audience is the actual Bill that passes the spending of the budget, of which the Government has spent 56 hours debating with the Opposition.

The Speaker: Any objections to being read by the third time by title only?

None. Good.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the said Bill do now pass.

The Speaker: The Bill has been read by title only and is now passed.

[Motion carried: The Appropriation Act 2026 was read a third time and passed.]

MESSAGE TO THE SENATE

APPROPRIATION ACT 2026

ESTIMATE OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026/27

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move the following message be sent to the Senate: To the Honourable President, Members of the Senate, the House of Assembly, has the honour to forward herewith the undernoted Bill for concurrence of your House, the Appropriation Act 2026. Copies of the Estimate of Revenue and Expenditure for fiscal year 2026/27 are also forwarded for the information of your House.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Now, that brings us to a close of the debate that we have taken the last 56 hours of our sittings to deal with. So, we thank all Members for their participation.

And we can now move on to the next item on the Order Paper. And it is item number 3, consideration

of the Government Authorities Fees Amendment Order 2026.

And the Junior Minister is going to present it.

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

Mr. Speaker, with the Governor's recommendation and in accordance with section 36(3) of the Bermuda Constitution, I move that consideration be given to the Draft Order entitled the Governments Authorities (Fees) Amendment [Order] 2026.

The Speaker: Are there any objections?

There are none.

Continue, Junior Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Proposed to be made by the Minister of Finance in exercise of the power conferred by section 4(1) of the Government's Authorities (Fees) Act 1971.

The Speaker: Continue.

DRAFT ORDER

GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES (FEES) AMENDMENT ORDER 2026

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, the [Government Authorities \(Fees\) Amendment Order 2026](#) seeks to increase the fees provided to those dedicated individuals who serve our government authorities under the First Schedule of the Government's Authorities (Fees) Act 1971.

There are currently 114 government authorities to which these fee increases will apply. These fees have remained static since 2006—for some 20 years. This increase in fees for board members and chairpersons has been aligned with the overall CPI movement since 2006. Accordingly, both fees will be updated in line with this increase, which will ensure we keep pace with inflation and the rising cost of living.

The amendment order implements a straightforward adjustment to the per meeting and its fee structure. Chairperson is \$100, which is current right now from 2006. And a new tier fee will be in 2026 will be \$160. Members went from \$50 to \$80.

Mr. Speaker, while we are mindful of the public purse, we must also be mindful of the value of good governance. Individuals serving on these authorities oversee critical infrastructure, social programmes, and economic sectors. These contributions are vital to the effective functioning of Bermuda.

This adjustment is a modest but significant gesture of respect for the commitment to public service. This Government remains dedicated to ensuring our boards are robust, diverse, and appropriately supported as they do the work of the people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Junior Minister.

Does any other Member wish to make a comment at this point?

MP Pearman, you have the floor.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Honourable Junior Minister for his presentation on the Government Authorities (Fees) Amendment Order 2026, which is adjusting fees in relation to the 1971 primary Act.

As the Minister said that there are two fees being adjusted. Both are going up by 60 per cent. One is for those who chair certain public boards. The other is for those who are members of certain public boards. All of those boards are set out in Part B of the First Schedule of the primary Act, which runs about seven pages, and I don't propose to set them all out.

But by way of example, there are things such as the Bermuda Arts Council, the Dental Board, the Consumer Accounts Board. They are the sort of boards that are populated by countless Bermudians who are often giving quite a lot of time in service for much less than their time is likely worth.

And so, we thank them and we support this Order presented by the Honourable Junior Minister. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to speak?
Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will not belabour the points, as we might have an early evening, as we will have a long Friday.

I am not sure if any of my Members on the opposite side are speaking on the motion to adjourn, but, Mr. Speaker, let me just provide clarity. Grateful for the Opposition support.

Just as a note for the calculation of these, Mr. Speaker. The increase in fees, the increase of the CPI since the last time these matters were adjusted in 2006, has been 55 per cent. We applied the 55 per cent figure to the \$80. It came up to \$77.75 per meeting. And we decided to round that up to \$80 and then made sure that the chair was double as that has been the way that it's been since this [Act] was put into place.

So, I just wanted to make sure that we had the full accounting so people would understand as the reasons why we arrived at the figure which we arrived at. But it's good to know that everyone's on all the same page. And so, I guess if there's nothing further, then someone will just have to send a message to the Senate.

The Speaker: There you go.

Junior Minister, you just close out.

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

I move that the said draft Order be approved, and that a suitable message be sent to the His Excellency the Governor.

The Speaker: No objections to that.

The said Order has been approved, and the appropriate message will be sent. Thank you.

[Motion carried: The Draft Order entitled, the Government Authorities (Fees) Amendment Order 2026 was approved.]

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Let me make sure I get it right this time and don't move it to [adjournment] before I do the work I'm supposed to do.

The Speaker: Yes, no problem.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 14

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I move that standing order 14 be suspended to enable me to introduce two Bills to the House of Assembly.

The Speaker: Any objections?
None.
Continue.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 14 suspended.]

BILLS

FIRST READING

CORPORATE INCOME TAX AGENCY AMENDMENT ACT 2026

ECONOMIC SUBSTANCE AMENDMENT ACT 2026

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I'm introducing the following Bills for their first reading, so they may be placed in the Order Paper for the next day of meeting. And those Bills are the Corporate Income Tax Agency Amendment Act 2026 and the Economic Substance Amendment Act 2026.

The Speaker: Thank you. Any other on your paper there? None.

Want to move us to adjourn? Thank you.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that this Honourable House do now adjourn until Friday, the 20th of March.

The Speaker: Does any Member wish to speak to that? MP Robinson?

VIOLENCE—FATAL SHOOTING IN SOUTHAMPTON

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes, good evening to my colleagues and to the listening audience.

I rise on a sombre note today because there was unfortunately a fatal shooting in my constituency, in my area, and in my neighbourhood. And it would be remiss of me to not get up and express the shock and the grief on behalf of my constituents and myself and my family who, for a long time in an area, have not seen this level of atrocity for some time. And this is not going to be a lecture or an exercise in finger pointing. This is just going to be me bringing this forward to this Chamber, this Honourable House, to Members, to colleagues who have no doubt all experienced or have concealed families who have experienced this sort of loss.

And we have done a lot of debating in this House for very important and critical things for the community. And I just wanted us to also reflect on the fact that people are losing their loved ones in this vicious cycle. And it doesn't matter which side of the aisle, or which end of the Island they come from.

This young man was a father of two young boys who went on a drive and now have to return to this horrendous news. And the entire constituency, myself included, who heard the gunshots, who witnessed this happen where our children play, where my mother walks through the tracks to get to the bus to go to work . . . It is extremely nerve racking, and it is extremely unsettling. And I don't want it to come across like, well, this has become real because it's in my backyard, because it's been real for so many Bermudians and so many neighbourhoods who have experienced this not once, not twice, but many, many times over for certain areas. And it is . . . I don't even want to use the word distressing, but it is extremely disheartening the amount of people we have lost. And a lot of times we get caught up in whether some are innocent or some are guilty or whatever.

But at the end of the day, when I saw that young man's body put in the back of that ambulance, I said to myself, there is nothing that's worth that. There is nothing that can justify that, regardless. And we are such a small community. We are all related, we are all connected in a certain way, shape or form. And so I just wanted to make an appeal to this Honourable House that we continue to join hands with one another against this violence, against these acts, and that we continue to try and showcase from the very top of the Island that we are not in any way, shape or form condoning or

displaying any of that sort of behaviour or any sort of encouragement towards that. And that we try to embody by going out amongst our folks and encouraging them, if they see something, to say something.

In this particular case, [there were] reports made about a suspicious vehicle. But sometimes we look at things and we [think] it's not a big deal. You know, this is probably just somebody visiting. But as the Police Commissioner said in the press conference, they would rather check out something that is benign than to not get a report. And it could have been something that may have prevented an act of violence.

So again, we all have solutions to how we believe we can tackle this. We all have opinions on how I think we can tackle this. But at the end of the day, we also have to look at the fabric of our community and where that is and how that's leading to a lot of these unfortunate events, because we are not as close as we used to be.

And as we look across the way to larger countries where we've seen a lot of the divides stem from political ideology, I think Bermuda can be proud in the sense that, although we do have a divide politically, it is not influencing or causing violence in our community, which gives us an opportunity to show unity, continue to show unity when it comes to these things and to make sure that we're doing our part in trying to prevent some of these. And that means early intervention.

These two young boys [who] have lost a father, are going to be something that the village must watch out for; we have to look out for. Because that's part of the cycle that is constantly being played out in our streets. And unfortunately, a lot of folks believe that they may be safe because it hasn't necessarily hit their neighbourhood. But understand that this is something that has played out in somebody's workplace, has played out in broad daylight on a Sunday, when families are home. This young man was gunned down in front of friends and family.

And it is the fear that I felt hearing those gunshots and not knowing where my wife was or where my son was because they were outside and rushing out to get him. I cannot imagine what it is like for a family to find out that those gunshots have found one of their loved ones.

And so now that we have come to this point where the acts are becoming more and more brazen and more and more violent, more and more methodical in their approach, I believe that we have to respond with more unity, more solidarity, more love in the face of these tremendous atrocities. And I will start by saying that even though some colleagues and I may disagree, I wish nothing but health and safety to their families, to them, to those who are connected to them. And I wish nothing but security for my colleagues in this House and for the constituents that they represent.

And I think that if we can lead in the community with that bipartisanship . . . and I'd like to take the time to also thank MP Leroy Bean for extending his services

to the members of my constituency when it comes to counselling and therapy that they may need for adults and for children, because at the end of the day, it's really us as a community against this.

And if we can find common ground with one another, I'm sure that we can show that example and find common ground with each other outside of this Chamber. And I think that maybe it's wishful thinking. I mean, how many speeches have been given? How many articles? How many statements that we've all given? It's clear that we all have a similar goal, which is to eradicate this violence and to stem the tide of the loss and the grief.

But I feel like we have to continue to try. And even if that means imparting a kind word to one another in front of some young people who are looking at us, potentially showcasing little things that may ripple into a bigger thing or going into our constituencies and sitting off and talking with some of these guys, because we have a lot of idle hands in Bermuda, and maybe we can all work together in our constituencies to make them just a little less idle.

I know MP Chris Famous is a great person to look at when it comes to that. And [there are] a few of my colleagues as well, Honourable [Member] Vance Campbell is another good one, to give people an opportunity. Because that's what I think the community wants, hope and opportunity and solidarity between us on this.

And with that, again, I wish safety and health to my colleagues. And hopefully we can work together to do whatever we can.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP. Well said.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

No other Member?

Thank you, Members, for your participation, not only today but throughout this budget session. And now that we have brought it to a close, we look forward to seeing you on Friday for a regular business day.

So, with that, the House now stands adjourned until Friday at 10:00 a.m.

[Gavel]

[At 8:13 pm, the House stood adjourned until 10:00 am, Friday, 27 March 2026.]

[This page intentionally left blank.]

**BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
20 MARCH 2026
10:03 AM**

Sitting Number 33 of the 2025/2026 Session

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

The Speaker: Good morning, Members.

Once the Sergeant has us in order, the Clerk will lead us in prayer.

PRAYERS

[Prayers read by Mr. Somner, Clerk]

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members, the House is now in session.

[Gavel]

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

[Minutes of 11 March 2026]

The Speaker: Members, the Minutes from the 11th of March have been circulated. Are there any amendments required? There are none.

The Minutes of the 11th will be printed as confirmed. The Minutes from the 13th and the 16th have been deferred.

[Minutes of 11 March 2026 confirmed; Minutes of 13 and 16 March 2026 deferred]

MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR

The Speaker: There are none.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER
OR MEMBER PRESIDING**

APOLOGIES

The Speaker: The following Members have indicated they will be absent today: MP Fahy and MP Jamahl Simmons will both be absent today.

MESSAGES FROM THE SENATE

The Speaker: There are none.

**PAPERS AND OTHER
COMMUNICATIONS TO THE HOUSE**

The Speaker: We have five papers this morning. The first is in the name of the Premier and Minister of Finance.

Anyone introducing them for him?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes. Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

**CORPORATE INCOME TAX (TAX REFUND
RESERVE FUND) AMENDMENT
REGULATIONS 2026**

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the Corporate Income Tax (Tax Refund Reserve Fund) Amendment Regulations 2026, as made by the Minister of Finance, in exercise of powers conferred by section 50A of the Corporate Income Tax Act 2023.

The Speaker: Would you like to do the second one?

**ECONOMIC SUBSTANCE AMENDMENT
REGULATIONS 2026**

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the Economic Substance Amendment Regulations 2026, as made by the Minister of Finance, in exercise of the powers conferred by section 11 of the Economic Substance Act 2018.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The third is in the name of the Minister of Tourism and Transport.
Minister.

**MERCHANT SHIPPING (FEES) AMENDMENT
REGULATIONS 2026**

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Speaker, good morning.

I have the honour to attach and submit for the consideration of the Honourable House of Assembly the Merchant Shipping (Fees) Amendment Regulations 2026, proposed to be made by the Minister responsible for Maritime Administration in exercise of the powers conferred by section 250 of the Merchant Shipping Act 2002.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The next is in the name of the Junior Minister of Justice. Yes.

PROCEEDS OF CRIME (ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING AND ANTI-TERRORIST FINANCING) AMENDMENT REGULATIONS 2026

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for consideration to the Honourable House of Assembly the Proceeds of Crime (Anti-Money Laundering and Anti-Terrorist Financing) Amendment Regulations 2026, proposed to be made by the Minister responsible for Justice in exercise of the powers conferred by section 49(3) of the Proceeds of Crime Act 1997 and section 12A of the Anti-Terrorism (Financial and Other Measures) Act [2024].

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

The final paper this morning to be introduced is 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 5: INVESTING IN PEOPLE UPDATE

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 5: Investing in People Update.

The Speaker: Thank you.

PETITIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS AND JUNIOR MINISTERS

The Speaker: We have seven Statements this morning.

The first is in the name of the Minister for Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport. Minister.

GOVERNMENT CAMPING FACILITIES, UPDATES AND IMPROVEMENTS TO

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you. Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to provide this Honourable House with an [update on improvements](#) being made to the Government camping facilities at Darrell's Island and Paget Island, which fall under the management of the Department of Sport and Recreation.

Mr. Speaker, these Islands have long served as special recreational spaces for Bermudians. For generations they have hosted youth camps, church retreats, school trips, family gatherings, and community programmes. They represent an important part of our outdoor recreation offering and reflect this Government's commitment to ensuring that Bermudians have access to meaningful recreational opportunities in our natural environment.

Mr. Speaker, over the past several years, the Department of Sport and Recreation has received valuable feedback from users who regularly use and utilise these facilities. After reviewing this feedback, the department identified opportunities to improve the facilities, expand access, and enhance the overall camping experience.

In response, several upgrades and improvements have been implemented to better meet the needs of the public.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to begin with Paget Island, where a significant improvement has been made with the addition of a new camping facility. This renovated three-bedroom cottage can accommodate up to 12 campers and includes a full private kitchen equipped with a refrigerator, stove, and deep freezer, as well as a private bathroom. This cottage facility provides a comfortable option for smaller groups such as families, staff retreats, leadership groups, and small organisational programmes.

With the addition of this cottage, Paget Island will no longer operate strictly as a single-use Island. Instead, it will now be able to accommodate multiple groups simultaneously, significantly improving access and maximising the use of this unique public space.

This new accommodation complements the Island's existing facility known as the Barracks, which remains available for larger group bookings of up to 50 campers. The Barracks provides access to a large commercial-grade kitchen, a dining hall, and washroom and shower facilities.

This space continues to be ideal for Girl Guides, Scouts, Duke of Edinburgh Award participants, school trips, church retreats, and other large community groups.

Mr. Speaker, now turning to Darrell's Island, the department is pleased to report on the completion of improvements to the bathroom and shower facilities, which have been fully refurbished. Importantly, these upgrades now include separate accessible accommodations for individuals using wheelchairs, ensuring that our facilities better reflect Bermuda's commitment to inclusive recreation.

In addition to these improvements, the camping experience at Darrell's Island has also been expanded. The Island has grown from two rustic camping areas to seven unique rustic sites, each named to honour Darrell's Island's historic role in the early days of trans-Atlantic aviation.

Mr. Speaker, across the Government Islands programme, we have expanded the total number of available camping sites from 6 to 12, significantly increasing the opportunities for community groups and families to enjoy these spaces.

We have also maintained affordable pricing to ensure that these recreational opportunities remain accessible to the public. Rustic camping sites will be available for \$60 per night, while dormitory accommodations will be available for \$85 per night.

Mr. Speaker, these improvements respond directly to the feedback we received from the public, many of whom expressed the need for greater availability, improved facilities, and more flexible options for different types of groups wishing to utilise the Island.

To complement these improvements and make the booking process more accessible and transparent, the Department of Sport and Recreation will be reopening the online booking system for the Government Islands on April 6, 2026 at 9:30 am on www.sportsandrec.bm. Beginning on that date, members of the public will be able to make reservations online for Darrell's Island, Paget Island, White's Island, and Ports Island camping season. The online system will allow residents to view availability, review facility options, and submit booking requests in a more efficient and convenient manner.

Mr. Speaker, these improvements reflect the Government's continued investment in recreation and our commitment to ensuring that Bermudians have access to safe, well-maintained, and meaningful outdoor spaces. Through the work of the Department of Sport and Recreation, we are ensuring that these historic Islands remain vibrant places where young people can learn, families can gather, and community groups can connect with Bermuda's natural environment.

Mr. Speaker, this Government remains committed to ensuring that Bermuda's natural spaces remain accessible to Bermudians first, while strengthening opportunities for recreation, community engagement, and youth development.

I would also like to thank the dedicated staff of the Department of Sport and Recreation for their continued efforts to maintain and enhance these facilities, and I encourage the public to take advantage of these wonderful spaces once bookings reopen in April.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Would you like to do your second Statement?

BERMUDA'S 2026 CARIFTA DELEGATION

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to invite this Honourable House to join me in a moment of great national pride as we celebrate the exceptional young men and women [selected to represent Bermuda](#) at the upcoming 2026 53rd CARIFTA Games and 39th CARIFTA Aquatic Championships. This year, our athletes carry a powerful mandate, guided by the inspiring CARIFTA theme: "Passion Drives Performance."

Mr. Speaker, the CARIFTA Games remain the premier regional showcase for junior athletic talent in the Caribbean. This year, the spirit of Bermudian excellence will be on full display across two jurisdictions. Our Track and Field team is set to travel to St. George's, Grenada, to compete at the Kirani James Athletic Stadium from April 4 to 6. Simultaneously, our Aquatics team will head to Martinique from April 3 to 8, where they will compete at the Pierre Samot Community Aquatic Centre in Le Lamentin and—

[Laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: That's my French . . . I need my momma to give me this one.

[Laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: —and along the beautiful Anses d'Arlet coastal area for the open water events. Pardon my French, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Speaker, while some of our athletes may have met the challenging qualifying standards early in the season, it is in the spirit of dedication and collective achievement of the entire team that we wish to celebrate and acknowledge them today. Every name on this roster represents hours of gruelling discipline, early mornings, and a steadfast commitment to personal and national excellence.

Mr. Speaker, it is my distinct pleasure to announce the Track and Field delegation who will carry our flag:

[In the] Under-17 Girls category:

- Ms. Amara Samuels [competing] in the 100m and 200m;
- Ajana Patton, competing in the Triple Jump;
- Kelise Wade competing in the 400m;
- Riana Robinson competing in the 1500m;
- Brooklyn Myers competing in the 3000m; and
- Elena Bortoli competing in the 1500m.

Our Under-17 Boys include:

- My constituent, Mr. Sanchez Smith competing in the 3000m;
- Zydon Lightbourne Furbert [competing in] the 400m and 200m; and
- Nazir Johnson [competing in] the 800m.

Representing our Under-20 Girls are:

- Tatiana Sousa competing in the Javelin; and
- Arima Turner competing in the 100m and 200m.

And rounding out the squad for Track and Field in the Under-20 Boys category are:

- Miles Outerbridge competing in the 100m and 200m; and
- Mr. Gianluca Bortoli competing in the 5000m.

Mr. Speaker, the excitement continues in the pool, where our Aquatics delegation has seen remarkable growth. We are sending 19 qualifying swimmers this year—a significant increase that underscores the rising tide of talent within our swimming community. This elite squad will compete in a—

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: I was wondering where the National [Swim] Coach was.

This elite squad will compete in a staggering 110 individual events and eight team events, spanning six core disciplines: Individual Medley, Backstroke, Freestyle, Breaststroke, Butterfly, and Relays.

Mr. Speaker, the team selected to represent Bermuda in Martinique are as follows:

- In the age 11–12 Category: Colette Durkin and Madison Fox;
- In the age 13–14 Category: Rory Shepherd, Scarlett Spurling, and Dominic Wright; and
- In the age 15–17 Category: Ms. Gaby Cechini, Elanna Fulton, Marleigh Howes, Maggie Mewett, Connor Hupman, Logan Jones, Joseph Lau, Teagan Mewett, Violet Smith, Katherine Wheddon, Gabriel Maranzana, Noah Maranzana, Jorgia White, and [Axel] Wernbo.

Mr. Speaker, I am cognisant that these athletes did not reach this stage on their own. Behind every qualifier is a dedicated network of coaches, parents, and technical officers, who we would like to thank. The Department of Sport and Recreation also provides the essential framework and foundation for their success. This Government remains steadfastly committed to investing in one of our most valuable assets—our youth athletes—ensuring they have the world-class facilities and support necessary to compete against the very best of our region.

Mr. Speaker, as this delegation prepares to depart, I ask this Honourable House and the entire community to rally behind them. These young ambassadors are the vanguard of resilience and sportsmanship. We look forward to their performance and, more importantly, to the immense pride they will undoubtedly bring to Bermuda.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, the next Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister for Cabinet.

Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes, sir.

REVIVAL OF THE CYBERTIPS PROGRAMME

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, today, I rise to speak about an issue that touches every family in Bermuda. The digital world is now a central part of how our children live, learn, and connect. It is where they build friendships, explore ideas, and express who they are. It also brings new risks and challenges that previous generations did not face in the same way.

This is not simply a story about screen time or technology. It is about ensuring that our children are safe, confident, and prepared to thrive in a world where digital life is part of everyday life. Across the world, we see increasing concerns about cyberbullying, harmful content, misinformation, and the use of personal data. At the same time, we know that digital tools open up powerful opportunities for learning, creativity, and future employment.

Our responsibility is not to fear this world, nor to ignore it. We must equip our children, support our families, and ensure the right protections are in place. That is why today I am announcing the [relaunch of the Cybertips Programme](#).

Mr. Speaker, we are at a defining moment in our Island's digital evolution. Bermuda is moving forward and embracing a future defined by FinTech progress, digital growth, new industries, and new opportunities. But while we look at the big picture of progress, something else is quietly happening in our homes and our schools. Our children are growing up in a digital world that is moving faster than the systems around them, and we are now seeing the impact of that.

The Bermuda Adolescent Mental Health and Wellness Report 2023, which surveyed over 2,500 students, found that nearly one-third of our young people, or [33].3 per cent, are experiencing moderate to severe depression. Over 25.0 per cent are dealing with anxiety. These figures are not just alarming; they are higher than the global averages.

Mr. Speaker, when we look deeper, we see how the digital world shapes how they feel, how they see themselves, and how they cope. We see long hours on screens. As Minister Furbert recently told this House, we have learned that in our primary schools, 61 per cent of students spend more than five hours a day on screens. Even more concerning, 78 per cent of parents report that this time is entirely unmonitored.

Limited supervision is not due to lack of care, but to parents adjusting to new challenges they did not face growing up. Children use devices to escape, affecting sleep and self-esteem.

Cybertips is returning, not just as a website, but as a national digital safety network. Digital threats may be invisible, but they are just as harmful. We are developing a practical, supportive system that meets families' needs without overwhelming or judging parents.

Mr. Speaker, Cybertips is about helping people make better decisions in a world that is not slowing down. We have a two-pronged approach to this re-launch.

1. Supporting Parents and Families

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The first prong focuses on parents. Many parents feel unsure, even powerless, when it comes to the digital lives of their children. We want to change that. We want parents to understand the risks and their rights. For example, I want every parent to know that our [Personal Information Protection Act], or PIPA, specifically section 16, prohibits any digital programme from collecting data on a child under 14 without verifiable written parental consent. The revived Cybertips will provide parents with the education and tools to reclaim their role as digital stewards and exercise these rights.

Most parents may not even be aware of these types of rules, but it matters that they know what tools they have to protect their children. It reminds us that parents, guardians, and caregivers are not bystanders in this space. They have a role. They have authority and the revived Cybertips programme will help them step into that role with confidence.

2. Supporting Children and Young People

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The second prong focuses on our children. We will not do this by restricting them from the world they live in, but by preparing them for it. We will equip them with the knowledge and judgment they need to:

- protect their privacy and understand their digital footprint;
- recognise harm, whether it is bullying, manipulation, or misinformation;
- question what they see online and make thoughtful choices; and
- think before they post, understanding that what they do online can follow them into the future.

This is about building confidence, not just caution. We want our young people to participate safely and make the most of the opportunities available to them.

Mr. Speaker, I have also met with some parents who advocate for total bans on smartphones or removing access to social media altogether until a certain age. I fully understand and respect these personal choices. It comes from a place of care. I have committed to ensuring that their voices are heard and that these options remain available for parents to consider.

Our role as a government is not to make that choice for every family. Our role is to ensure that every

family can make that choice with a full understanding. Some will choose limits. Others will choose guidance. What matters is that those decisions are informed. We want to provide education that helps children and parents use technology wisely rather than fear it. We must prepare our students for a workforce that requires high-level digital skills, so they are not disadvantaged in the global economy.

Mr. Speaker, as the Cybertips programme develops, it will grow with the world around it. We are already talking with partners to discuss how to introduce training for emerging technologies. These include tools such as using artificial intelligence ethically, checking their accuracy, and protecting privacy. We want Bermudians not just to use these tools, but to understand them, to question them, and to use them responsibly. We want Bermudians to be the masters of AI, not just its passive subjects.

We also have longer-term goals to establish a new standard for our community organisations across Bermuda. We want to introduce a Cybertips-trained approach that works with schools, organisations, and community groups. This will lead to a certification for organisations that work with children.

When a parent sends their child to a day care, a sports club, or an after-school programme, this certification will show that the organisation has put in place safe online practices. It will show that their staff are trained to recognise the red flags of digital harm. Parents will know that the people responsible understand digital risks and are equipped to respond to them. This provides reassurance that support is not just limited [to] in the home but is shared across the community.

Mr. Speaker, this is not just a programme. This is a shift in how we think about digital life. We must recognise that the online world is not separate from real life but a part of it. If we want to protect our children, we must meet them where they are. We must meet them with guidance, clarity, and care. This is about the minds of our children. It is about their confidence, their sense of self, and their future.

Reviving Cybertips is about making sure that as Bermuda moves forward, we do not leave our children and parents to navigate this alone. We want a future where children are not only protected online, but confident in navigating it. We want parents to feel informed, not overwhelmed. We want our communities to be equipped to respond to new challenges with clarity and care.

As Bermuda continues to set the pace in progress, we must be mindful to build a community where digital advancement is matched by digital responsibility.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, the next Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister of Youth, Social Development, and Seniors.

Minister.

RENTAL SUPPORT SERVICES (EMERGENCY SUBSIDY) PILOT PROGRAMME—HARDSHIP FUND—UPDATE AND IMPACT

Hon. Tinee. Furbert: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to provide this Honourable House with an update on the operation and impact of the Government's [Rental Support Pilot Programme—Hardship Fund](#), as administered through the multidisciplinary committee in collaboration with the charity HOME.

Mr. Speaker, the Hardship Fund exists to provide targeted, emergency financial assistance to individuals and families facing immediate risk of homelessness, destitution, or severe hardship, while ensuring that public funds are applied responsibly and in conjunction with case management and wider social supports.

Mr. Speaker, the Hardship Fund is administered through a multi-disciplinary committee, comprising representatives from government departments and community-based service providers. The committee reviews referrals on a case-by-case basis, applying professional judgment to determine urgency, appropriateness, and sustainability of assistance. This approach ensures that decisions are balanced, evidence-based, and focused on preventing harm while promoting longer-term stability.

Mr. Speaker, this Hardship Fund programme was launched in March 2025, and the committee has received 141 referrals from partner agencies and service providers seeking assistance for individuals experiencing financial hardship.

Of these referrals

- One hundred and sixteen referrals were approved and funded representing a total of 82.2 per cent of those individuals who had applied to the fund.
- Twenty-five referrals were not approved due to eligibility constraints, duplication of support, or incomplete documentation.
- Eleven families were experiencing medical emergencies, including situations involving life-threatening or time-sensitive hardship circumstances requiring immediate financial intervention.
- Seven families were facing hardship related to their young children, including urgent needs such as school clothing and nursery assistance to help ensure family stability.
- Twelve referrals were received for individuals who had been approved but required short term support until their benefits were activated.

These statistics reflects a referral approval rate of approximately 82.2 per cent, demonstrating an active demand for the programme.

Mr. Speaker, housing needs accounted for approximately 50.7 per cent of financial disbursements, this is a total of \$75,139. Payments to private landlords accounted for 43.4 per cent, which is a total of \$64,327, while payments to the Bermuda Housing Corporation accounted for 7.3 [per cent] of payment allocations, which is \$10,812. Utilities accounted for 2.1 [per cent] of disbursements, which represented \$3,238. Grocery support accounted for 3.4 per cent, which represented \$5,124 of the total disbursements.

Mr. Speaker, some referrals were declined where alternative supports were available or where requests were assessed as financially unsustainable.

Mr. Speaker, as of February 18, 2026, the committee reported that

- a total of \$134,439 had been expended from the Hardship Fund; and
- a remaining balance of \$13,561 was available at that time.

These figures reflect a steady drawdown of funds in response to proven emergency needs, with careful monitoring to ensure sustainability.

Mr. Speaker, the assistance approved by the Committee has been practical, targeted, and time-limited, and has included requests such as:

- rental deposits and first-month's rent to prevent homelessness;
- short-term rental support where income loss was temporary;
- funeral assistance in cases of bereavement where no other support was available;
- utility payments to prevent disconnection;
- emergency grocery and basic needs support; and
- transportation and vehicle-related assistance where directly linked to employment retention.

In several cases, referrals were not approved where the committee determined that

- the request fell outside the scope of emergency hardship;
- the level of need exceeded what the Fund could sustainably provide; or
- case management or alternative supports were more appropriate.

Mr. Speaker, beyond individual assistance, the committee has consistently identified systemic issues requiring policy attention, including

- the need for clearer definitions of "hardship" to support consistency in decision-making;
- challenges related to rental deposits; and
- access to affordable housing.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, this pilot programme has emphasised the need to obtain more [accurate] data collection to inform long-term programme planning; and the value of enhanced coordination amongst stakeholder social partners. These insights are helping to inform ongoing policy development and broader housing and homelessness strategies.

Mr. Speaker, the statistics before this House demonstrate that the Hardship Fund is not a substitute for long-term social policy, but a critical safety net for Bermudians facing immediate crisis.

The Government remains committed to

- ensuring public funds are used responsibly;
- supporting individuals and families at points of acute vulnerability; and
- strengthening the systems that reduce the need for emergency intervention over time.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the members of the multidisciplinary committee and our community partners for their continued diligence, professionalism, and compassion in carrying out this important work.

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 5: INVESTING IN PEOPLE UPDATE

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I have previously reported to this Honourable House on Bermuda's Economic Development Strategy 2023–2027, including updates on

- business retention and expansion;
- business attraction and investment promotion; and
- entrepreneurship and small business development.

These updates show steady progress: stronger representation in key markets, better conversion of interest into investment, and expanded support of Bermudians starting and growing businesses. This reinforces the clear message that economic growth is fuelled by participation and opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to [Strategic Priority 5: Investing in People](#), which underpins progress across the other priorities. This priority recognises that Bermuda's success depends on Bermudians having the skills, qualifications, and professional networks to take part in the economy we are building.

Pursuant to the National Workforce Development Strategy, the Department of Workforce Development strengthened coordination of workforce planning through the National Workforce [Development] Advisory Board, which was established in 2024, an action item from the Economic Development Strategy. The Board brings together employers, training institutions, unions, and the Government to align planning and training with industry needs.

In 2025, the Hospitality sub-committee was created to strengthen workforce readiness for that

sector's growth, including the anticipated reopening of Fairmont Southampton. More recently, Members will be aware of the Hospitality Summit held in February and the Hospitality Career Fair held this week.

The Summit brought together key stakeholders for a frank and useful discussion about current and projected staffing demands, emerging skills gaps, workforce pipeline challenges, visitor expectations, and sector priorities. This, in turn, led to the Career Fair just held on Wednesday. The Career Fair gave an opportunity for 170 job seekers to explore employment and career pathways within Bermuda's hotel and restaurant industry.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to its current focus on the hospitality sector, the Department of Workforce Development has established programmes such as Bridge to Work, Graduate Apprenticeships, and On-the-Job Training to expand access to work experience and provide a structured entry into employment. Initiatives also include career coaching, employability training, and targeted financial support for short-term certification courses leading to paid work experience and industry-recognised certifications.

These efforts reflect a successful implementation of the Youth Employment Strategy, another Economic Development Strategy action item. More than 320 youth (those aged 18 to 26) were supported through training, internships, apprenticeships, and personalised employment services in 2025 alone. Taken together, the different programmes delivered under the Youth Employment Strategy have directly supported approximately 450 to 600 youths since implementation began.

Mr. Speaker, technical and vocational pathways were also revitalised through the re-launch of the National Certification and Apprenticeship Board (NCAB). Workforce Development has expanded apprenticeships with employers and introduced new short courses aligned with international standards to enhance technical career paths. The department is working with the NCAB to streamline national certification processes and expand competency-based training to ensure the Bermudian workforce remains competitive and aligned with international standards.

Mr. Speaker, skills development must be matched by talent retention and efficient immigration systems. In 2025, the Government issued a position paper on workforce retention focused on Permanent Resident Certificates and [potential] residency changes, and consultation feedback is informing next steps. Since the 2025 Work Permit Policy took effect, and with updated policies on Partner Residence and Permission to Reside, combined with recruitment, applications have become closer to being processed within published timelines.

Alongside workforce systems, Government has also refined incentives that encourage job creation. Following a review of the Economic Development Act 1968 and the Incentives for Job Makers policy (another

Strategy action item) an updated policy was issued in 2025. The updated policy introduced a scoring framework that enables companies with fewer than 10 Bermudian-status employees to apply for concessions.

Mr. Speaker, building digital capability remains essential. Over the period, the Economic Development Department (EDD) supported skills development through grants and partnerships. These provided internships, mentoring, professional development, and knowledge-sharing through technology and FinTech webinars. The focus was on digital skills and innovation.

First, EDD advanced grant-funded initiatives to build digital skills and test new ideas. This included the Video Game Design Challenge, CyberSmart, a cyber-hygiene pilot delivered with the Ministry of Education and a local technology education partner. It also included innovation sprints led by the Bermuda Innovation and Technology Association (BITA) to test and refine disruptive ideas.

Second, EDD sponsored key e-entrepreneurship and innovation platforms, including the technology category of the Business Awards and Global Entrepreneurship Week. These investments help strengthen Bermuda's start-up pipeline and reinforce the message that supporting Bermudian innovators is not separate from economic development: it is central to it.

Third, EDD delivered direct community training that supported this same priority. In 2025, the Fintech Training Programme produced 35 graduates across two cohorts and, for the first time, incorporated a structured internship track for [The] Berkeley Institute students in partnership with the private sector. Also, the Bermuda Coders Initiative, which remains free to residents until 2027, has seen over 500 Bermuda-based participants across its technology tracks. These two skills development pipelines are now positioned to scale through the Department of Workforce Development.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, Strategic Priority 5 is about ensuring Bermudians are prepared to lead and benefit from economic growth through stronger skills, clearer pathways, and effective support systems.

This priority strengthens delivery across the Economic Development Strategy 2023–2027, including investment, entrepreneurship, and workforce readiness.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, the next Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister of National Security.

Minister.

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

The Speaker: Good morning.

PUBLIC SAFETY AWARENESS SEMINARS

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Good morning, colleagues and listening public.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to advise this Honourable House and the public of a series of [Public Safety Awareness Seminars](#) being sponsored by the Ministry of National Security.

These seminars are part of the Ministry's ongoing work to promote prevention, preparedness, and practical public safety awareness across our community. They are intended to give residents useful, real-world guidance that can help them protect themselves, their families, and their homes.

Mr. Speaker, personal safety depends on awareness. It means understanding how to reduce risk, how to stay alert to what is happening around you, and how to respond calmly and wisely when faced with a threatening situation. These seminars are intended to give residents practical guidance in each of these areas. Those who attend will learn (and have learned) essential strategies to secure their homes, situational awareness techniques that can be applied in everyday settings, and best practices for responding in active threat situations.

Mr. Speaker, these sessions are being delivered by Sensei Bobby Smith, a respected security expert with considerable experience in personal safety training and community engagement. Importantly, the seminars are free of charge. They are open to adult members of the public, and no prior experience or training is required.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to share that several of these seminars have already taken place, and the response from attendees has been very encouraging. This week, sessions were held at St. David's Primary [School] and Francis Patton Primary School, and there are more sessions to follow. The seminars have been well received, with participants finding them practical, relevant, and empowering.

The remaining seminar dates and locations are as follows:

- Monday, 23 March 2026 at 6:00 pm at Dalton E. Tucker Primary School;
- Wednesday, 25 March 2026 at 6:00 pm at Victor Scott Primary School;
- Wednesday, 15 April 2026 at 6:00 pm at Northlands Primary School;
- Wednesday, 29 April 2026 at 6:00 pm at Somerset Primary School;
- Monday, 4 May 2026 at 6:00 pm at West End Primary; and
- Wednesday 6 May at 6:00 pm at St. David's Primary.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of National Security encourages adults across the Island to take advantage of this opportunity to improve their personal safety awareness and preparedness. Members of the public who wish to attend may register online at

martialarts.bm/personalsafety, where they may also find seminar details, including times, dates, and locations of upcoming sessions.

Mr. Speaker, these seminars represent a simple but important step toward enhancing community awareness and preparedness. When individuals understand how to recognise risks, secure their homes, and remain alert to their surroundings, they contribute directly to a safer Bermuda for everyone.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of National Security will continue to support initiatives that promote prevention, awareness, and community partnership in the interest of public safety.

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.

INAUGURAL “DOLLARS AND SENSE” TEEN FINANCIAL LITERACY EXPERIENCE

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Mr. Speaker, I rise to inform this Honourable House of the successful delivery of the inaugural “[Dollars and Sense](#)” Teen Financial Literacy Experience, hosted by the Consumer Affairs section under the Ministry of Home Affairs on March 19 and 20, 2026.

Mr. Speaker, this initiative, delivered in recognition of Consumer Awareness Month, provided secondary school students at the S2 and S3 levels with an immersive, interactive introduction to real-world financial decision-making. The experience was designed specifically for young people aged 13 to 15, the stage at which financial habits begin to take root and at which early intervention has the greatest long-term effect.

Mr. Speaker, we recognise that Bermuda is one of the most expensive jurisdictions in the world. The cost of housing, groceries, electricity, and transport places extraordinary pressure on households across the Island. That pressure does not wait for young people to reach adulthood before it begins to shape their choices. It is already present in their household decisions, and in the choices our students are making every day: purchasing online, managing phone bills and contracts, and spending on entertainment.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Home Affairs determined that financial education could not remain an afterthought. But it rather had to be treated as a component of the Government’s broader affordability mandate. The Affordable Bermuda Agenda addresses the conditions that make life expensive through its roadmap which features consumer education. This Dollars and Sense programme addresses the capacity of

Bermuda’s next generation to navigate those conditions with knowledge, confidence, and the protection of their consumer rights.

Mr. Speaker, over the course of two days, approximately 210 students from Bermuda’s secondary schools participated in a fully simulated financial life experience. Each student was assigned a realistic personal profile, including income, family circumstances, and a set of financial obligations. They rotated through interactive stations representing the core financial responsibilities of adult life: housing and rent, utilities, transportation, insurance, groceries and essential goods, banking and savings, credit and [debt] management, and unexpected expenses.

Mr. Speaker, students were required to make decisions in real time. They had to balance competing demands on a fixed income. They faced moments where a single choice affected everything that followed. The simulation did not offer them a correct answer. But rather, it required them to weigh the trade-offs, manage risk, and experience the consequences of their decisions within the exercise.

Mr. Speaker, we know the attention span of our youth, and therefore, we opted for this interactive format. It was a live experience within a controlled environment. The students were not told how to use the money or what to think about the money, but rather, they were given the experience of making these decisions and living with the consequences.

Mr. Speaker, the Dollars and Sense programme was conceived and delivered by the Consumer Affairs section, which sits within the Ministry of Home Affairs’ Headquarters. Consumer Affairs serves as the Government’s primary resource for consumer protection, market oversight, dispute resolution, and consumer education.

Mr. Speaker, what we know is that consumer protection begins with consumer understanding. A young person who enters the wider-world knowing their rights, understanding their contractual obligations, and recognising when a transaction does not meet fair standards is a young person less likely to be exploited and more likely to participate with confidence. That is the foundation on which an informed and resilient consumer base is built.

Mr. Speaker, Consumer Awareness Month, observed annually in March, exists to highlight the importance of understanding consumer rights and responsibilities and to foster transparency and fairness within the marketplace. Dollars and Sense is the most direct expression of that purpose this Ministry has delivered to date.

Mr. Speaker, the Affordable Bermuda Agenda is the policy framework through which the government continues to address the cost of living, household resilience, and equitable access to opportunity. It includes duty relief on essential goods, supply diversification through international trade engagement, the residential rent registry, the Grow, Eat, \$ave programme,

legislative reform, and a range of interventions designed to reduce the structural cost pressures that Bermudian families face.

Mr. Speaker, financial literacy sits within that framework. Affordability will not be achieved through one policy or one initiative. Affordability is every policy, every Ministry and all segments of our community working together. Reducing the cost of groceries through import diversification means less if families do not understand how to budget effectively. Rent protections mean less if tenants do not know their rights. Duty relief means less if consumers cannot evaluate whether savings are being passed on at the point of sale.

Mr. Speaker, Dollars and Sense connects the policy architecture to the people it is designed to serve. It equips the next generation with the knowledge to benefit from the affordability measures that this Government is putting in place.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the Consumer Affairs team for their vision and leadership bringing this programme from concept to delivery and the Cost of Living Commission members who also will attend this forum in support of its value. I wish to express thanks to the participating schools: The Berkeley Institute, CedarBridge Academy, [The] Bermuda Institute, The Adult Education [School], Mount Saint Agnes [Academy], Somersfield Academy and Bermuda Centre for Creative Learning and the educators who facilitated the student participation. We also wish to thank the partners of Paradise Mobile, Pocket Change BDA, HSBC, Pronto, Mailboxes, Bermuda Housing Corporation, PTB [Public Transportation Board] and World Distributors, who contributed to making this inaugural experience possible.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the students themselves, who yesterday I interacted with and their engagement was serious, thoughtful, and at times genuinely impressive. They brought energy and commitment to the exercise. They asked questions. They challenged the assumptions and they took it personally when a financial decision did not go as they expected. This is precisely the level of engagement this programme was built to produce.

The Ministry of Home Affairs intends to build on this inaugural effort. The Dollars and Sense programme, Mr. Speaker, will be evaluated, refined, and expanded with the aim of reaching a broader cross-section of Bermuda's student population in the future. Financial literacy education at this age represents an investment. It reduces future demand on social safety nets, and it strengthens household financial management. It builds a more informed consumer base, and it produces adults who enter the marketplace prepared rather than exposed.

Mr. Speaker, the Government made this commitment to tangible progress. That commitment will extend to the adults we are raising. The young people who participated in Dollars and Sense left with something they did not have when they arrived: a first hand

understanding of how financial decisions shape the quality of a life. That understanding, once gained, does not leave, but compounds into future generations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, that brings us to the conclusion of the Statements this morning. We will now move on.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The Speaker: There are none.

QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: We have questions from the Statements this morning, but we also have written questions that are on the Order Paper, so we'll deal with the written questions first and then go to these questions from the Statements.

The first set of written questions this morning were for written response, and I just need to confirm that . . . and that was from—oh, sorry. The first set is from Opposition Leader Smith.

Opposition Leader Smith, your questions in reference to the education have been deferred until May 1. Okay? You have been informed, right?

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes.

The Speaker: Thank you. Okay.

The second set this morning are from the Opposition Whip in regard to education as well, and they were for a written response. Have you received your written responses? Yes?

[No audible response.]

QUESTIONS ANSWERED IN WRITING

EDUCATION GRANTS TO EXTERNAL BODIES

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Will the Honourable Minister please inform this Honourable House of the actual expenditure details for Education Grants to external bodies for the past five years, showing each body and the grant received?

GRANT REQUESTS FROM EXTERNAL BODIES

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Will the Honourable Minister please inform this Honourable House of the total grant application amounts requested by external bodies for the past five years, showing each body and the grant requested?

**BREAKDOWN OF SCHOOL UPGRADES,
RENOVATIONS, AND COSTS**

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Will the Honourable Minister please inform this Honourable House of the breakdown by school for upgrades and renovations for the past five years, showing details of the work undertaken and the associated cost.

The Speaker: Correct. Thank you.

The third question this morning is from MP Tucker to the Junior Minister for Justice, who is the spokesman for Education, and this requires an oral response.

So, MP Tucker, would you like to put your question now to the Junior Minister?

**QUESTION 1: PAYMENTS TO MEMBERS OF
PARLIAMENT FOR WORK ON THE OFFICE OF
THE PUBLIC GUARDIAN**

Ms. Robin Tucker: Yes, good morning. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So, my question today is, Will the Junior Minister please confirm the name of any current or former Member of Parliament who were paid for any work on the development of the Office of the Public Guardian and the total amount that has been paid to them to present date?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Junior Minister.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The answer to your question, MP, the Ministry of Justice employed Ms. Ianthia Simmons-Wade for the period of 1 April 2022 through 31 March 2023 at \$5,000 per month. The total amount paid to Ms. Ianthia Simmons-Wade was \$60,000.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Ms. Robin Tucker: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes.

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Ms. Robin Tucker: Can the Junior Minister please confirm what appointment process was used to engage Ms. Simmons-Wade for the paid work for the Office of the Public Guardian?

The Speaker: Junior Minister.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: MP, I will have to refer to the substantial Minister and hopefully to get that answer back to you.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Okay, Members, Members, Members. Do you have a supplementary?

Ms. Robin Tucker: I do, Mr. Speaker. I have a second supplementary.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Ms. Robin Tucker: If the Junior Minister can also let the House know what deliverables were produced as a part of that \$60,000 contract, especially given we still don't have an Office of the Public Guardian.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Junior Minister.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Thank you, MP.

Again, I will have to refer to the substantial Minister to get that answer for you. You're welcome.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Any more questions?

Ms. Robin Tucker: I—

The Speaker: It would be your second question. You asked for two supplements. It would be a second question.

**QUESTION 2: PAYMENTS TO MEMBERS OF
PARLIAMENT FOR WORK ON THE OFFICE OF
THE PUBLIC GUARDIAN**

Ms. Robin Tucker: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So, the second question is, Will the Junior Minister commit to producing a full breakdown of all expenditure related to the development of the Office of the Public Guardian?

The Speaker: Junior Minister.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Thank you again, MP. I will consult with the substantial Minister to get a response to that answer.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Ms. Robin Tucker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay, thank you.

The next question this morning, again, is for a written question seeking an oral response. And that question is to the Minister for Youth, Social Development and Seniors.

And it's from the same MP. MP Tucker, would you like to put your question to the Minister?

QUESTION 1: OVERSIGHT FOR APPROVING OVERSEAS THERAPEUTIC SCHOOLS

Ms. Robin Tucker: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

So, my first question is, Will the Honourable Minister please advise what specific criteria, safeguards and oversight mechanisms the Ministry and/or Department of Child and Family Services uses when selecting and approving overseas therapeutic schools for Bermudian children, including how such institutions are accredited, evidence-based, culturally appropriate and subject to adequate child protection standards?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you. Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for MP Robin Tucker for asking these questions because it gives me an opportunity to share with the public as well, even though I do mention it in my Budget Statement every year.

Mr. Speaker, the therapeutic schools used by the Department of Child and Family Services under the Overseas Treatment Programme must meet several criteria before any child is admitted into the programme being offered, including the school must be licensed by the state organisation responsible for the oversight of the therapeutic boarding schools and, where applicable, the country or county they are in.

The school must be accredited by a recognised accrediting body. Currently, the accrediting bodies accepted by DCFS Bermuda are the Council on Accreditation and the Joint Commission. The school must be approved by the US Department of Homeland Security to accept or receive international students. The school is interviewed, assessed, vetted and must complete all documentation requested by the Department of Child and Family Services. The vetting assessment records programme description, resident life, activities, staffing, behaviour, restraint policies, student rights, medication storage and administration, and communication frequency. Once this process is completed and all criteria is satisfied by the department, the school is approved to accept children in the overseas therapeutic programme. This process is completed on an annual basis.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Ms. Robin Tucker: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Again, thank you to the Minister for her response and for pointing out that she has made certain responses during her Budget Statement.

That then brings up another question for me as to . . . I mean, publicly we all know that there were some schools where our children had been abused and those types of things, and we had one child that had passed

away. So, my question then in response to the Minister's response to my initial question was: Were any of the schools that were the subject of public issues . . . Did they all follow the same protocol that she just outlined?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, yes.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary?

Ms. Robin Tucker: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

So, can the Minister then sort of give us some assurance as to where the downfall was because obviously there has been a lot that is been publicly reported. So, if those checks and balances have been in place, then where did we go wrong? Or what happened?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I definitely cannot speak to private children's matters on the House floor. If there is a specific question in regard to a policy, I can get that answer, but I do not know where the MP is going with that question.

Ms. Robin Tucker: Can I provide some clarification as to where I am going? Is that okay, or no?

The Speaker: Okay, I will give you a little leeway. Let's see how far you go. You cannot go too far.

Ms. Robin Tucker: No, I am certainly not trying to stir a pot that does not need to be stirred. I mean it is just in response to the Minister's initial response to me that all the checks and balances are being done. So, I am just trying to get some clarification as to whether the checks and balances are being done and what went wrong when we had several reports of issues that have occurred in these schools. So, I am just trying to get some understanding as to where things have gone where they should not have.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I think what she was basically trying to ask is, Is it a system failure rather than an individual you are trying to relate it to, a child, personal situation? She is just trying to make sure the system is tight enough.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: We cannot mitigate all risk. In certain circumstances . . . I mean, there are a variety of circumstances that may exist. I can only repeat, Mr. Speaker, that the programmes are accredited. They go through evaluation. They go through assessment. They go through re-evaluation if that is necessary. But knowing the sensitive information as it relates to some of

these cases, it is difficult to speak to what those risks could be.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Do you have a supplementary?

Ms. Robin Tucker: I do.

The Speaker: I will take the Opposition Leader's first, but his is specifically to her response. And then I will follow yours too.

Ms. Robin Tucker: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. Mine was as well, so just to check . . .

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Hon. Ben Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
Mr. Speaker, would the Honourable Minister be able to let us know whether there have been any specific updates to the policy since these incidents happened?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Yes.

The Speaker: Okay.
Supplementary from . . . Okay. All right. If it is your response, you will do that.

Hon. Ben Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
Would the Honourable Minister be able to let us know what specific updates were done to protect the children after the incidents?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, maybe if the Member . . . If I answer the next set of questions the Member has, it might provide some clarity.

The Speaker: Okay. The answer could be in the . . . The Member has a second question that she would prefer to do.

MP Tucker, do you have a supplementary still on that?

Ms. Robin Tucker: No, Mr. Speaker. My supplementary was the same as the Opposition Leader's.

The Speaker: Okay.
Would you like to put your second question now?

QUESTION 2: OVERSIGHT FOR APPROVING OVERSEAS THERAPEUTIC SCHOOLS

Ms. Robin Tucker: So, my second question was, Will the Minister provide . . . Sorry. Would the Honourable Minister please confirm what monitoring is conducted once a child is placed overseas to ensure their safety, including physical and psychological safety, well-being, and educational progress? This is a different question than what was asked in the supplementary. I just want to point that out, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, weekly, when a child is placed in a therapeutic school or programme, the responsibility of the local site is conducted by the coordinator of the programme, a senior social worker under the guidance of the assistant director and/or the director. Weekly calls are made with the therapist working with the child. Monthly written reports are submitted to the coordinator for inclusion in the Protect Me case management system. The calls are either voice or video or a mixture of both.

Every six months, the director visits the child to lay eyes on them and have a one-on-one talk to ensure they are feeling safe and meeting their treatment goals. It is also an opportunity for the programme to indicate any challenges that they are having with any aspect of the programme. In accordance with the child protection policies, all schools are required to act as mandatory reporters whenever each report is filed. The director is immediately notified. Children receive the coordinator's phone number, and the facility has contact numbers for the department and the director, allowing communication at any time.

Programmes embrace cultural sensitivity and incorporate religious and cultural recognition within the programme. And, Mr. Speaker, also what has been new that has been implemented is the litigation guardian framework, Mr. Speaker. And if there is a child . . . As they are going through care orders within the court, they have access to a litigation guardian who also remains the voice for the child.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Do you have a supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Ms. Robin Tucker: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I do.
First supplementary is, I would like to know if during the conversations that the children are able to have, are the parents—in terms of the updates that are provided, I should say . . . Are the parents updated, or are they involved in any part of the process?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Robin Tucker: Well, just, Mr. Speaker, if I may, I asked sort of either/or, or both, if the Minister can sort of answer directly. Are the parents updated, or are they part of the process? Two different questions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: The parents are updated, and the parents are part of the process, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: [Microphone off]

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Of course. Yes.

The Speaker: [Microphone off]

Hon. Tinee Furbert: I just want to clarify, Mr. Speaker, particularly knowing the demographics or concerns or issues with children in care, [that] sometimes we have parents who are not involved.

The Speaker: MP King, you want to put a supplementary?

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

The Speaker: It has to be related to the responses. Yes. It will relate to the responses.

Mr. Robert King: Yes, yes, yes, indeed.

Regarding the facility that was previously mentioned by MP Tucker, that is West Ridge Academy, West Jordan, Utah, where the person died?

The Speaker: Ah . . . Well—

Mr. Robert King: —But I will continue.

The Speaker: Well, just restate it so I can follow you where you are going.

Mr. Robert King: No, no, no. I was just making sure that that was the facility. But the question that I have is this.

The Speaker: That would have been on question number one, though.

Mr. Robert King: Okay.

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: This is her second written question.

Mr. Robert King: So, the supplementary question I have regarding the facility where the young person died is—

The Speaker: What I am saying . . . That would have been a supplementary to her first question.

[Crosstalk]

Mr. Robert King: On the second question, that is right. It is a supplementary.

Regarding the facility's placements . . .

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Okay, talk to me.

Mr. Robert King: Yes. Understanding that [regarding] the facility in question, there were serious concerns about suicide risk and risk of harm to the children—

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. That information is incorrect.

The Speaker: The Minister has indicated that that comment may not align with what actually happened. So, I would say, unless you have got something substantially to prove it, just answer the—

Mr. Robert King: Absolutely, and that is why I am taking this seriously.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Members! Members, let me control the House, please. Thank you.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Robert King: Yes, Mr. Speaker. And I can understand why this is a sensitive issue, especially because of children. And our duty is to make sure that they are protected. So, the question I am having is, Since the unfortunate death of a Bermudian child that was sent to an overseas facility, what increased measures are being taken to ensure the safety and security of those young persons as a result?

Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
We no longer use that facility.

The Speaker: Thank you
Okay, no further . . . Do you have a supplementary?

Ms. Robin Tucker: Yes, just my second supplementary, I believe. [I have] just a very straightforward one. I would like to know what process or mechanisms exist

for a child to report concerns or abuse directly to Bermuda authorities. I appreciate they are on litigation guardians, but I am just wondering if that is the sole process or if there is another sort of process to assure that the child has complete privacy and the like.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I will repeat. Weekly calls are made with the child [and] the staff of facilities. There are monthly written reports. There is also reporting to the overseas therapeutic committee programme. There is opportunity there. There is opportunity (when parents do participate) that they participate in family sessions. When there is a guardian involved, there is opportunity for reporting then. There are ample opportunities for reporting, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

You had two supplementaries. That is your two supplementaries.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, that brings us to a close of the written questions that were for today.

We now move on to questions from Statements that were given today. The first Statement [is] by the Minister of Tourism and Transport, Culture [and Sport]. The Members have questions for you. The first is from MP Robinson.

Would you like to put your question?

QUESTION 1: UPDATES AND IMPROVEMENTS TO GOVERNMENT CAMPING FACILITIES

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes, good morning, Mr. Speaker, and good morning, colleagues. Thank you so much.

My first question is just whether or not these upgrades will lead to any potential raises in rental fees for these two Islands. We welcome the upgrades but just want to assure families that the rental fees will not go up as a result.

The Speaker: I know you indicated a price but go right ahead.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Speaker, I know the Honourable Member may have arrived a little late this morning, or you were not listening. But the fees were clearly—

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Well, well, well . . . That is all right. That is all right.—

Hon. Owen Darrell: —The fees—

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: —That's all right. That's all right.—

Hon. Owen Darrell: The fees were clearly laid out in the Statement, Mr. Speaker: \$60 for a single spot and \$85 for a group spot.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: I just want to be clear. I arrived before everybody today. Thank you.

[Laughter]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: I was the first in. Yes. I heard the—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: I heard the fees that were listed. It just did not stipulate. If you knew the fee, then you would know whether it was an increase or whether it was staying the same. Right? So, I just wanted to be sure, though they were listed: Was that an increase, or were they just the same? That was the only . . . And I am taking it from the Minister's answer that there are no—

The Speaker: You fixed it. You heard the \$85. You just want to know if it has been an increase.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes, correct.

The Speaker: All right. Minister.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: That is all right. I take it from his answer it is not, so it is fine.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: —the fees indicate a slight increase.

Some Hon. Members: Ahh!

An Hon. Member: Oh!

Another Hon. Member: The early bird gets the worm.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Any supplementary? No supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes, supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

[Laughter]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Could the Minister define what a *slight* increase means? Just for the listening public that are at home.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Speaker, in the interest of time, I will endeavour . . . Before this Question Period ends, I will get the exact amount for you, Mr. Speaker.
Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you. Thank you.
Second question?

QUESTION 2: UPDATES AND IMPROVEMENTS TO GOVERNMENT CAMPING FACILITIES

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes, Mr. Speaker. My second question is, Will the upgrades (that are welcomed) cost any additional maintenance fees to the Government to maintain Paget and Darrell's Island?
Thank you.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the Honourable Member from the other side. But just . . . And this was not in my Statement. But just for information purposes, each one of these islands has its own caretaker, Mr. Speaker, and it has been this way for many years. So, the beauty of hiring those caretakers is they come with an array of skill sets in the maintenance area. They are also seamen and the like. So, while these upgrades were done through Government and they were budgeted for, any additional upkeep or maintenance will not incur any additional fees because they will be the responsibility and the remit of the caretakers that have long been part of these islands. So, other than the normal, which was talked about in the budget debate, salary uplifts, there are no additional fees for this upkeep.

Thank you.

The Speaker: All right.
No supplementaries? Okay.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

HOUSE VISITOR

The Speaker: Before I take the next question, I would just like to acknowledge in the Gallery, former Senator and Attorney General, Philip Perinchief. Nice to see you in the Gallery this morning.

[Desk thumping]

[Question Period, continuing]

The Speaker: Minister, your same Statement has a question from MP King.
MP King?

QUESTION 1: UPDATES AND IMPROVEMENTS TO GOVERNMENT CAMPING FACILITIES

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

Regarding the refurbishments to the camping sites on the islands, is there consideration for this becoming a part of the Bermuda tourism strategy as well? Will overseas organisation and visitors be allowed to rent the premises as well for—

The Speaker: Ah! Ah! One second. One second.
Members!

An Hon. Member: Hey!

The Speaker: Thank you.
Continue.

Mr. Robert King: That is my question.
Thank you.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Speaker, while I do appreciate that question, the Honourable Member from the other side may not know, but the reason that I made a statement on camping facilities is it is a very, very popular thing for Bermudians to do in the summer. And I can guarantee you that once this portal opens, as I said in the Statement for Bermudians first, there will be no space left for tourists to enjoy the camping facilities of these islands. They are very popular amongst, as I said in the Statement, families, especially around the holiday times: Cup Match, the Queen's birthday—well not Queen's, Heroes Day, and all of that.

So, yes, if there are some availability maybe midweek and somebody would like to organise a tour to one of the islands, then absolutely. So be it. But as it stands for these islands, most people would know that if we are opening up the portal on April 6, I can guarantee you there will be many calls in the middle of April questioning the lack of availability because of the popularity of it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Mr. Robert King: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Robert King: Understanding the increase in fees and the work that is being done—and I imagine that there is going to be further refurbishments, et cetera, is it anticipated that with the fare increases and the increase in usage that essentially the islands will be self-funded through the increased fees and use?

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure I quite understand the question. But self-funded? No. The islands have been there for many years. The Government has budgeted for many years to maintain them. It is a recreational facility that we are maintaining.

An Hon. Member: It is a park.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Yes, it is like a park. It is no different. It is minimum fees for administration purposes, but absolutely not. The fees that are being charged for families and locals to enjoy these recreational areas will never cover the cost of what we are doing. It is a government-subsidised facility like many other facilities, parks, and beaches around this Island. So, the answer to that question is no.

The Speaker: [The] second supplementary? Fine. Okay.

Minister, that is the end of questions for that Statement.

The next Statement this morning that has questions is from the Minister of Cabinet [Office]. Your Statement this morning.

MP Tucker, would you like to put your question?

QUESTION 1: REVIVAL OF THE CYBERTIPS PROGRAMME

Ms. Robin Tucker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is very basic. I just wanted to know . . . Well, first of all, I will say I think it is great that the Cybertips programme is relaunching. My question is, When is it going to be officially relaunched?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: And thank you for that question. We are currently looking at proposals that we have received, and once we make that decision, it will be moved forward. The intention is to have this launched by the beginning of the fiscal year.

The Speaker: Thank you.
[Do you have a] supplementary?

Ms. Robin Tucker: No, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Minister, that is the only question on that Statement. We will now move on.

Minister for Youth, Social Development, [and] Seniors, there are questions for you first from MP DeCouto.

Would you like to put your question?

QUESTION 1: RENTAL SUPPORT SERVICES (EMERGENCY SUBSIDY) PILOT PROGRAMME—HARDSHIP FUND—UPDATE AND IMPACT

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, good morning, Mr. Speaker. Good morning to the listening audience and thank you to the Minister for her Statement.

It was stated that in some instances referrals were not approved where the level of need exceeded what the fund could sustainably provide. My question is, What does that mean? What would it mean for the level of need to be sustainably provided by the fund?

Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I can give an example. If someone was in rental arrears of \$100,000 and the fund is only \$100,000, that that would be a reason why they would not. I do not know all the specific cases; I am not part of the multidisciplinary team. But that would be sort of an example where their ask exceeded the availability of funds.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Could the Honourable Minister advise us. Do they consider partial assistance in cases such as that? Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Yes, Mr. Speaker, they do.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Second supplementary?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

For people who are in acute need but are not approved, such as in those examples, where are they expected to go?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I would need more clarity in regard to the type of acute need.

The Speaker: Second question? You used your two supplementaries. Second question now.

**QUESTION 2: RENTAL SUPPORT SERVICES
(EMERGENCY SUBSIDY) PILOT PROGRAMME—
HARDSHIP FUND—UPDATE AND IMPACT**

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, second question, Mr. Speaker.

Someone who is in the kind of emergency that requires the support of this fund, but it is deemed unsustainable for this fund, where are those people supposed to turn to for assistance under these programmes or under the government programmes?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, if the Member was more specific in regard to the need, I am sure I could assist further.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Someone shows up with a need to pay the rent to keep a roof over their head, such as in the example that the Minister provided. They come to this emergency funding, and it is deemed not sustainable for this fund. Where do they go next? What government services should they go to next in this example?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, thank you for that clarity.

The Government still runs the short-term relief benefit programme, as well as assistance through financial assistance.

The Speaker: Is there a second supplementary to that question or a new question?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: New question, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Third question.

**QUESTION 3: RENTAL SUPPORT SERVICES
(EMERGENCY SUBSIDY) PILOT PROGRAMME—
HARDSHIP FUND—UPDATE AND IMPACT**

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Has the Honourable Minister considered having the size of this emergency fund increased?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, considering, as I reported in February, our last data of February 2026, all of the funds have not been utilised.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

To clarify, I want to make sure I understand this. The Minister is saying some people are turned away because there are not enough funds, but not all the funds have been used.

[Inaudible interjection]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Okay. So, some people have been turned away because there are not enough funds, but not all the funds are used.

[Inaudible interjection]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Okay. That would be the question.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: There are probably limitations on an individual, but . . .
Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I did mention in the Statement that community partners also assist, so the multidisciplinary committee will direct the person, depending on what the need is, to different nonprofit charitable organisations or community partners.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, Mr. Speaker. With due respect to the Minister, that did not answer my question. The question was, is it true that there are still funds left over, even though some people are turned away because there were not enough funds?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I think every person who has been a part of this programme is most gracious and thankful that this programme exists, which did not exist before. Mr. Speaker, we have helped 114 persons through this hardship programme. This has been a pilot programme, Mr. Speaker. And once the committee gets back to me with their annual report, we will review if there is a shortfall of funds that were potentially requested, and we will review what that looks like for the people of Bermuda.

The Speaker: Have you used up all your questions? Thank you. Okay.

Minister MP Tucker would also like to put questions to you.

MP Tucker.

Ms. Robin Tucker: Mr. Speaker, am I able to ask a supplementary question based on the response to the last question?

The Speaker: Yes, you can. Okay. Put your supplementary; then we will move on to your question. You could have jumped a little quicker and indicated it, but there it is.

Ms. Robin Tucker: I beg your pardon.

The Speaker: Go ahead. Go ahead.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Ms. Robin Tucker: I will be sure to correct that next time.

So, the question I have is . . . The Minister mentioned that she is anticipating receiving a report. I just wondered if that report is going to be made public, or if not, if she would consider at least tabling [it] so we can all see it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: If it is tabled, it becomes public.

Ms. Robin Tucker: Sorry. Okay. If she would be willing to make it public, I will leave it at that.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I will commit to bring the information back to this House with updates as it relates to the Rental Support Hardship Programme.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Now, would you like to do your questions?

QUESTION 1: RENTAL SUPPORT SERVICES (EMERGENCY SUBSIDY) PILOT PROGRAMME— HARDSHIP FUND—UPDATE AND IMPACT

Ms. Robin Tucker: I would indeed. And thank you to the Minister. I do appreciate that response.

So, I have two basic questions. One is [that] I am curious to know how the \$140,000 was identified to be sufficient for the pilot programme. If the Minister can just tell where that \$145 [sic] allocation—how that was arrived to.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, this was a programme that did not exist before. We have the opportunity through many ministries for submissions of grants. I wanted to make sure that there was opportunity for persons in our community to have access to emergency funds so that they do not have to wait a month if they are in an emergency. And so, we arrived at that number after doing our calculations in regard to what our budget could withstand.

The Speaker: Okay.
Supplementary?

Ms. Robin Tucker: No, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second question?

Ms. Robin Tucker: Yes, second question.

The Speaker: Okay.

QUESTION 2: RENTAL SUPPORT SERVICES (EMERGENCY SUBSIDY) PILOT PROGRAMME— HARDSHIP FUND—UPDATE AND IMPACT

Ms. Robin Tucker: Can the Minister sort of tell us if there is a timeline established for the pilot? And if so—actually, I want to know if there is a timeline established before determining whether this particular initiative will become permanent because she mentioned it is a pilot programme. So, to what extent will it remain a pilot programme before it becomes permanent, if that is the intention?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, we have committed to sustain this programme with the grant of \$140,000 in this financial year. I have reported already I have not seen the annual report to be able to gather recommendations of what this would look like going forward. And once I have that information, then I can make a determination in regard to how we will continue with this programme. But it is being sustained throughout 2027/28, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay.
Supplementary? None?

Ms. Robin Tucker: No, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. No further questions.
Minister, MP King also would like to put questions to you.
MP King.

**QUESTION 1: RENTAL SUPPORT SERVICES
(EMERGENCY SUBSIDY) PILOT PROGRAMME—
HARDSHIP FUND—UPDATE AND IMPACT**

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

Would the Honourable Minister responsible kindly inform this House, Out of the 114 *[sic]* persons who received assistance through the fund, how many of them were able to stabilise their housing situation as a result?

The Speaker: Minister

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a correction on the floor. The Statement said 116 persons, so it is 116 persons. This is a Rental Support Hardship Programme. All 116 persons would have been helped in reducing homelessness due to this financial, this hardship report . . . sorry . . . Rental Support Hardship Programme.

The Speaker: No problem.

Supplementary or new question?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Robert King: Supplementary.

So, out of the 116 who accessed the fund and received services, after one year, how many of those persons actually remained in the same accommodation?

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I cannot answer that without having the annual report.

The Speaker: The information will be contained when the year is assessed, so she cannot answer that right now.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you.

The Speaker: It is contained in the report.

[Do you have a] supplementary or new question?

**QUESTION 2: RENTAL SUPPORT SERVICES
(EMERGENCY SUBSIDY) PILOT PROGRAMME—
HARDSHIP FUND—UPDATE AND IMPACT**

Mr. Robert King: New question.

Understanding that the Ministry of Youth, Social Development, and Seniors is doing much to assist families in this community, and absolutely we are grateful that they do so, we are also mindful of the fact that there are some who might take advantage of the services that are provided and thereby prevent others. What fraud prevention measures are in place to make sure that persons are not receiving funds from the

hardship fund and from other initiatives to safeguard and help families? That is my final question.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I have provided a Statement to this Honourable House in regard to our case management system called In-Form where, all service providers who work with persons who are housing insecure, they work with this case management programme system called In-Form. And they all put their information into the system so that we can have a better account of how each community partner is assisting someone who would report themselves as homeless. So, I definitely invite that Member to set up a meeting with the office so they can learn more about this case management system.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Supplementary?

Mr. Robert King: Supplementary.

The Speaker: Yes.

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Mr. Robert King: So, as part of the process, is there a specific identifying number such as a social security number or a social insurance number that will follow the person who is receiving services from Government or others [or] otherwise to make sure that everything is coordinated?

Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, the In-Form case management system assigns an ID number to the persons who report themselves as homeless, and so it is reported through a personal, confidential ID number.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Supplementary?

Mr. Robert King: Thank you for that.

Regarding the personal ID number, is that a number that is used throughout the government ministries, or is that a number that is specific to the programme that you are referring to?

Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, it is specific to the In-Form case management system.

The Speaker: Third question? No?

Mr. Robert King: Might the . . . Well, final question.

The Speaker: You have used up all your supplementaries on that one, so that will move you on to your third question.

QUESTION 3: RENTAL SUPPORT SERVICES (EMERGENCY SUBSIDY) PILOT PROGRAMME— HARDSHIP FUND—UPDATE AND IMPACT

Mr. Robert King: Yes. Thank you.

Would the Government consider using a specific identifying number for persons who are receiving government services just to ease coordination through service delivery and reception of services?

Thank you. That is my final question.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, we do also align the user or person's birth certificate number as we are helping Bermudians. So, we align their birth certificate number on the case management system.

The Speaker: Thank you.

There are no further Members who indicated questions for any other Statements. However, the Minister of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport has informed me that the information he was seeking for the Member, he has found, and we have still got a few minutes left on the clock.

Would you like to just provide the information?

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for giving me the opportunity to bring some clarity to the questions that were asked from the Honourable Member from the other side.

As was stated in my Statement, there will be a fee of \$60 for all rustic sites, and that is when you are camping outside. The only change for that is that previously White's Island for a rustic site was \$40. We have now streamlined the entire process, so across all islands, the rustic sites will be \$60. So, the increase only comes from White's Island for rustic sites.

As far as dorms, Mr. Speaker, significant work has been [put] into these dorms. The dorms at the islands will be streamlined. It will be an \$85 charge, and that is an increase from \$60. So, [that is] \$85 for the dormitory usage and \$60 for the rustic usage. I hope that brings clarity, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Speaker: So, the increase is that the \$60 was common everywhere except for one island before.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Yes.

The Speaker: And now they are all even.

Hon. Owen Darrell: It is now even—\$60 across the board for rustic.

The Speaker: For rustic, and \$60 was for the buildings, and now they are all—

Hon. Owen Darrell: Eighty-five dollars. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Is that clear enough, Member? Thank you.

Thank you for being so diligent in getting the answers for us so quickly, Minister.

And for any other Minister, Junior Minister, who was supposed to seek answers, we would like to have them as soon as you can forward it to the respective person who asked the question.

With that said, Members, we will now move on. The next item on the Order Paper this morning would be the—one second, just note the time here.

CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY SPEECHES

The Speaker: Would any Member wish to speak to that?

Junior Minister, you are on your feet.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you—

The Speaker: —You have your three minutes.—

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: —Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this has been a really tough month for me in particular because we have lost so many friends. It has been tough. Many friends who, despite our differences, Mr. Speaker, they still trusted me. Mr. Speaker, I mentioned earlier about Bishop Duncan. I know that has already been said. And just to let colleagues know that next week, Sunday, it will be his burial at New Testament Church of God. Unfortunately, I will be off the Island, so if you do not see me there, you know why I am not there.

But this week has been even tougher. I see that Ruthella . . . [I] bring condolence to the family of Ruthella Louise Smith, a young lady who I have been singing with, or sang with, for years in a choir. And she had a very beautiful voice. For those who know her, it was sad to hear that she has passed.

I also bring condolence to the family of Maurice Henry Harvey. Mr. Harvey grew up and . . . but lived in Hamilton Parish. As a matter of fact, the house that he has recently passed in was the house that I grew up [in] as a young boy. Back in North Shore, right down by Midland Heights Church on the back there. He and I and his family were very close.

I also bring condolence to the family of [Clinard] Rozeld Gaiton. I have known him for years. I know that he worked at Bermuda Housing Corporation. His wife and I were very close, and it is sad to read that he has passed recently.

I also bring for another Hamilton Parish person. For some reason, Hamilton Parish has been losing a lot of people here lately. Leslie “Terry” Gibbons—he is from 41 Wilkinson Avenue for those who . . . I think [it] is in . . . I think [it] is in . . . I will associate Member Neville Tyrrell for that. I believe it is Kim’s . . . No. It is either Tinee’s or Bean’s area.

I also bring condolence for another person in Hamilton Parish. That was Robert Irvin Pilgrim. He stayed near Holy Trinity. No . . . sorry, not. Yes. [He stayed at] 43 Trinity Church Road in Hamilton Parish. So, when I see all these individuals who have been passing . . .

Also, my good friend, Mr. Philip Charles Smith—[I] grew up with the young man. He is older than me, I must admit. But we all grew up, him and his brother and I all running over Crawl Hill there. So, I bring condolence to his family.

Of course, Members last week on Friday mentioned about Ms. Wade. Very—

[Timer chimes]

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Time is up?

The Speaker: Thank you. Yes, sir. Thank you.

Would any other Member wish to make a contribution?

MP King, you have your three minutes.

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

I want to extend congratulations to Mr. Wilfred Gonsalves, age 71, of constituency 10 for gold medalling in the Caribbean Pickleball Championships. And I will associate the whole House with that. It was only his second time playing. But he is a phenomenal tennis player. And he did exceptionally well by retaining the gold medal for the Over-60s [Men’s Singles] cutting their tails, the much younger guys.

The Speaker: Any other Member wish to . . . Any other Member?

MP Tucker.

Ms. Robin Tucker: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to associate myself with the condolences sent for Robert Pilgrim, who is to be funeralised today. Robert’s wife, “Susie” Rosatta Pilgrim—she passed away a few months ago. Susie is actually my husband’s cousin. So, I just want to extend condolences to Jeanette, Mitzy, Valerie, Colridge, the entire family, including Clarke and Rodney and everybody else.

On a lighter note, I would like to extend congratulations to the Bermuda Caregivers Alliance. It officially launched today. The Caregivers Alliance is a

support service for people caring for the elderly, disabled, and chronically ill persons. They offer, actually, weekly support groups [and] monthly education workshops. They will have an emergency support hotline. And there is a bunch of other things that are listed on their website.

As we all know, there are lots of chronic illnesses and things that are occurring. And a lot of our families are taking care of loved ones, which obviously puts a higher stress on families that are doing so. One of the things that came off their website that they have said is that studies show that unpaid caregivers experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, and financial hardship, often sacrificing their own health to care for their loved ones. So, it is very exciting that this group has formed to care, that first recognises and then cares specifically for caregivers.

Its founder is Lisa James. She is the founder and the chair. And the co-founder, I am really excited to say, is an OBA colleague, Mr. Maurice Foley. He is the co-founder and the deputy chair. So, again, it officially launched just today. And I would also like to associate all the OBA team, particularly MP Linda Smith, and the entire OBA team, to wish them well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: MP Famous, welcome back.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, colleagues.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to associate with the comments for Mr. Gaiton. On behalf of the BAC, we had a board meeting the other day, and we started off with a moment of silence for Mr. Gaiton. And several members spoke of their interaction with him. The overwhelming sentiment was that he was a consummate gentleman and a professional, a staunch Christian, Calvary [Gospel Chapel]. And he was the property manager of the building that BAC currently is at. He was also a pond dog because one day (I did not know him.) he stopped me and told me that his brother was my grandfather’s godson.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know. I am calling off some names. I do not know if they were mentioned earlier, but if they were, I will associate. Mr. Gary Ascento of Devonshire, [Heritage Road], specifically, a cousin to the Sergeant-at-Arms. He was a master spray painter.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Christopher Famous: Also, he was a very good painter. He did a lot of the bus stops that we have in Devonshire that look very clean. And overall, [he was] a good man. He had a daughter, Garena, and several

other family members, his life partner, Ms. Dallamae Swan.

Also, Mr. Speaker, Mrs. Shirley James—she was the wife of the late Dr. Clarence James. She was also a resident of [constituency] 11 in Devonshire. There was a write-up; I am sure MP Swan will talk about her as a golfer.

The Speaker: Yes, it has been done before. So, you can associate. Yes.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Oh, okay, cool.

But I say that in the sense that Mrs. Shirley James was always one that welcomed me in her home, showed me her paintings, and talked about how her efforts with Dr. Clarence James helped bring integration in Bermuda.

I know this has been done already, but I was not here—Ms. Cheryl Ming Wade, originally of Devonshire. And it was a very good turnout yesterday for her. The Devonshire church was overflowing.

And finally, Mr. Speaker, Elliot School—a few weeks ago, they had a Black excellence exhibition highlighting the contribution of Black Bermudians. And I want to thank them and Ms. Liverpool of Devonshire who spearheaded that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

MP DeCouto, you have your three minutes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to associate myself with the remarks for Mrs. James. And I will leave it at that because I know—

The Speaker: Yes. They were done.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: —it has been spoken about eloquently.

I would also like to associate myself with prior remarks on the sports award winners, Caitlyn Bobb and Sebastian Kemp, particularly Sebastian, and to wish him well on what we hope will be his journey to the Olympic games to represent our Island, among other athletes.

And I would like to congratulate international cyclists Nic Narraway and Kaden Hopkins for their seventh and ninth place finishes, respectively, at the 2026 Pan Am Road Cycling Championships in Columbia in the time trials. And those listening know that young Kaden is only a month off of a crash and an injury, so I am glad to see him back in the saddle and getting good results.

So, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

MP Robinson.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would first like to associate with previous congratulations given in this House to the Bermuda Lawn Tennis Association. I wanted to congratulate my constituent Michael Wolfe, who is the president, for his great work that he is doing. I am not going to go too much into it. It has already been done.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: And [he is the] neighbour of my Opposition Leader. Yes, you cannot forget that.

But also, just to shift gears to give condolences, I will associate the Member from [constituency] 31 on this, which is for Thomas “Bongy” Brown, as we know him. And he is, in my humble opinion, one of my favourite family members. And, you know, he has recently passed away, and I wanted to give my condolences to his children. I will associate the Member from constituency 7, Robin Tucker, on this. You know, the family is pretty torn up about it. And, obviously, with somebody who has such a large personality and was always, you know, the life of the party, it is always sad when you see them deteriorate, in a sense, and pass on. So, I wish peace and everything to the family, and I just wanted to stand up and have him recognised today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish . . . MP Swan.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would like to be associated with the condolences to [the family of] “Bongy.” Growing up as a 16-, 17-year-old, going out to clubs and stuff, nobody could cut a rug better than Bongy or Glenn Baseden. They were the best of the best. Those guys could have gone on and done it professionally. They could dance. When they got on the floor, people just stood and watched. Rosetta from down on White Hill was in that crowd as well. And just looking at Bongy’s picture, I just felt compelled to share how gifted [he was], because that is a gift that he certainly had. And that personality that the Member from Southampton spoke of—knowing [him] as a young man, he embraced it on the dance floor. So, as one that watched him and admired him growing up, I just pray that he rests in peace and is dancing.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Does any other Member wish to make a contribution? None other?

Before we move on, I would just like to add my remarks to those that are expressed by the Junior Minister prior in regarding to Ruthella Smith. I have known Ruthella since we . . . nineteen . . . well, what? . . . 50-

odd years ago, 1956, 1970, when we both started Berkeley together. She was my classmate throughout my time at Berkeley, and the personality we knew today was how she was then. She was always a kind and sweet person. Yes, she did have a voice, and I have heard her sing often. So that voice will be missed. But her presence itself will definitely be missed amongst her family, her friends. And on behalf of my class, I would like to extend our condolences to her family.

With those remarks, we will move on.

MATTERS OF PRIVILEGE

The Speaker: There are none.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

NOTICE OF MOTION FOR THE ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE ON MATTERS OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

The Speaker: There are none.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

The Speaker: There is one Bill to be introduced this morning by the Minister of Home Affairs.
Minister.

GOVERNMENT BILLS

COST OF LIVING COMMISSION AMENDMENT ACT 2026

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Good morning again, 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 Cost of Living [Commission] Amendment Act 2026.

The Speaker: Thank you.

OPPOSITION BILLS

The Speaker: There are none.

PRIVATE BILLS

The Speaker: There are none.

NOTICE OF MOTIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Speaker: The first Order today is the second reading of the Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2026, in the name of the Junior Minister of Finance.
Junior Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
With the Governor's recommendation, I move that the Bill entitled Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2026, be now read the second time.

The Speaker: Are there any objections to that? There are none.
Continue, Junior Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I move that the Bill entitled the Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2026, be now read the second time.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Go ahead. Continue. Continue.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you. I don't know why . . .

BILL

SECOND READING

CUSTOMS TARIFF AMENDMENT ACT 2026

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, from time to time we hear about the cost of living in Bermuda, and there are some tools that the Government does have. And this is a continuation of one of the tools that we have used in the past as far as reducing some of the customs tariffs. So, Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, are requested now to consider the Bill entitled Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2026.

The Bill proposes to amend [the] Customs Tariff Act 1970, the principal Act, with measures that lower the duty rate on building materials and supplies, eliminate customs duty on selected motor vehicle parts, lower the duty rate on selected goods deemed to be essential commodities, lower the duty rate on fresh flowers, eliminate customs duty for diesel and fuel oils used by BELCO for the production of electricity, introduce duty relief for goods for local professional instrumentalists, and introduce duty relief for goods for participants in the Bermuda Day Parade.

The measures of the Bill affect both the First Schedule and the Fifth Schedule to the principal Act. This legislation is a primary tool in this Government's mission to lower the cost of living and stimulate economic development by reducing the duty on imported goods.

This Bill builds upon the \$3.9 million in duty savings realised between July 1, 2025 and January 31, 2026 for building materials.

Expanding Relief

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The Bill introduces a relief for an additional five tariff codes. This expansion specifically targets electrical equipment and optical fibre cabling. These measures are projected to deliver \$397,000 in additional cost relief for both residents and contractors.

Mr. Speaker, there has been a need to provide absolute context regarding the Government's pledge in the Budget Statement 2025/26 that duties will be eliminated on all motor vehicle parts compared against the corresponding statement in the budget brief 2025/26 to provide wide range reliefs on parts and supplies.

Mr. Speaker, the need for this duty relief initiative was in recognition of the strain that vehicle repair costs can place on families and businesses. To that end, this Government wanted to encompass as broad a range of products as possible for motor vehicles of Chapter 87 of the [\[Bermuda Customs Tariff \[2026\]\]](#), namely motor cars, trucks, buses, and motorcycles.

Mr. Speaker, this meant that all motor vehicle parts referenced were to capture those parts that were specifically provided in Chapter 87. This means that the parts must be identifiable as being suitable for use solely or principally with the vehicles of Chapter 87. Also, the parts must be excluded due to any provisions of notes to Section XVII of the Customs Tariff. These parts are classified to headings of Chapter 87, Heading 87.08, which are four-wheel vehicles. This heading covers parts and accessories for motor vehicles of headings 87.01–87.05, generally four-wheel vehicles, which I mentioned. The parts classified to this heading include bumpers, windcreens, brakes, gearboxes, drive axles, suspension systems, radiators, mufflers, clutches, steering wheels, as well as other items.

Heading 87.14, two-wheel and speciality. This covers parts and accessories for motorcycles, bicycles, and wheelchairs. Headings 87.11–87.13. The parts classified to this heading include frames, forks, wheel rims, spokes, hubs, brakes, seats, as well as other items.

Mr. Speaker, besides the goods falling to heading 87.08 and headings 87.14, this Government also wants to ensure that other items that are clearly identifiable as motor vehicle parts, which are spread throughout the Customs Tariff, would also benefit from relief. Goods such as tires, complete engines, transmissions, shafts, gears were captured by the duty relief in 2025.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to [be] clear that while the vast majority of motor vehicle parts are duty-free, not all motor vehicle parts can be imported duty-free. Let me explain. Many items that might be used as motor vehicle parts are considered parts of general use. That covers such items as nuts, screws, [and] bolts that can

be used for all types of purposes not just on motor vehicles. Similarly, other goods of supply nature such as batteries and spark plugs cannot be demonstrated at the point of import to be used solely or principally for motor vehicles (or Chapter 87).

Mr. Speaker, the duty relief introduced in 2025 for motor vehicle parts covered goods for 65 different tariff codes that have resulted in duty savings of \$2.7 million today. This Bill will build upon reliefs introduced in 2025 by adding 12 additional tariff codes covering pumps, filters, cabling, and ignition equipment. Based on the prior year's data, this will reduce costs by a further \$497,000.

Mr. Speaker, after adding the additional parts in this year's amendment, the list is considered complete, and we will review other things from time to time.

The Government is significantly expanding the basket of essential goods to protect household budgets. Since 2022, the essential commodities initiative has saved Bermudians \$11.9 million. There are some new food items. The zero per cent duty rate now applies to staples including fish, seafood, meats, fruits, and vegetables.

Household and Infant Care

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Relief is expected for hygiene products and infant care items. Mr. Speaker, it is estimated based on prior years' data this will cut Bermudian household costs by \$3.9 million. Mr. Speaker, following representations from florists in Bermuda and to support our hospitality sector, duty charged on imported fresh flowers will be reduced from 25 per cent to 5 per cent. This reduction in duty rate will impact on six tariff codes and based on prior years' import data, will result in duty savings of \$224,000.

Community and Cultural Support

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I now return to the measures of the Bill affecting the Fifth Schedule to the principal Act. In an effort to assist Bermuda-based musicians, this Bill seeks to provide 100 per cent end-use duty relief on instruments that need to be purchased and imported from abroad by local professional instrumentalists. Eligible goods under this relief must also be used by local professional instrumentalists, which means an islander who plays or teaches other persons to play a musical instrument for consideration—100 per cent zero duty.

Mr. Speaker, one of the most cherished public holidays during the year, both for residents and visitors is the annual Bermuda Day Parade, featuring dance groups, bands, majorettes, decorative floats and Gombey troupes. This event has also been impacted by the rising cost of living and price of materials and costumes for the event continue to increase. As part of the costumes and materials are imported . . . Sorry. As many of the costumes and materials are imported,

participants might pay the duty on these imports. The Minister, the Honourable Member Owen [Darrell] consulted with the Ministry of Finance in an effort to see if duty relief could be made available in order to assist participants in the Bermuda Day Parade.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill seeks to provide 100 per cent end-use duty relief on the costumes and accessories, together with costumes and float-making materials for participants in the Bermuda Day Parade. However, the duty relief does not extend to vehicles or tools. The eligible goods must be introduced for the use of actual participants in the Bermuda Day Parade and must be put in that use. I am sure the Minister will work with the participants on how actually to apply and get things done.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill proposes to amend end-use CPC 4703 and CPC 4705. The Bill eliminates the final four cents per litre of customs duty on diesel and fuel oils used by BELCO for electricity products. Total tax removal, Mr. Speaker. As you are aware, a concessionary duty rate has existed on diesel and fuel oils used by BELCO to produce electricity for over 40 years. For the majority of that time, the rate duty was 9.5 cents per litre. In April 2015, the duty rate was amended by the One Bermuda Alliance Government to 14.5 cents. This was then followed in April 2016 by a further increase in the rate to 20 cents per litre by the One Bermuda Alliance.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall that in July of 2024, this Government initiated the first reduction to the tax by 60.0 per cent to 8 cents per litre. Then in July of 2025, the tax was further reduced to just 4 cents per litre, an 80.0 per cent reduction in the tax since 2023. This Bill proposes to remove the remaining 4 cents per litre on that tax.

Household Savings

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: This elimination has saved the average household \$375 per year. The revenue impacted by this particular decision will reduce customs revenue by \$2.2 million.

Just to summarise some of the impact, Mr. Speaker, is that building materials, which is five additional tariff codes, will reduce the duty by \$397,000. Motor vehicle parts, which will affect 12 additional tariff codes, will have savings impact on the community of \$497,000. Essential commodities, which is fish, meat, produce, hygiene, [and] infant care, will have a savings on the community of \$3.9 million. Fresh flowers, which will reduce from 25 per cent to 5 per cent, will have an impact of \$224,000. Electricity [and] fuel, which is the final 4 cents per litre, will [result in] savings [of] \$2.2 million. Total annual relief will be \$7.2 million.

Mr. Speaker, on the measures of the Bill in Committee. Thank you. Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to speak?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the [Junior] Minister for bringing this Bill forward.

I would like to point out that the [Junior] Minister was kind enough to provide a detailed breakdown of the duty changes, which allowed us to examine it in quite some detail and to confirm that, yes, we are very happy to support these changes.

I am also compelled, though, to point out, with respect to the fuel tax cuts for BELCO, Mr. Speaker . . . And I do not necessarily want to reflect on prior debates, but as you know, Mr. Speaker, and as the other Members of this House know, we in the One Bermuda Alliance firmly believe that when it comes to the energy costs facing Bermuda today, there must be a more targeted and more effective way to help those who need help the most.

So, while, Mr. Speaker, we are, I guess, reluctantly happy to take these fuel tax cuts on board, we know that there is a reference to the \$300-odd that the average person is saving from them. Many people who do not actually need the relief will be saving much more money than that, and there are those out there who could be saving much more money. But like I said, Mr. Speaker, I did not wish to reflect too much on debates we have had at length in this House and not to detract from the overall support from the One Bermuda Alliance for these amendments to the Customs Tariff Act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Does] any other Member wish to speak?
Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it would be remiss of me if I did not speak on this particular matter, as, of course, the substantive Minister of Finance, I get the pleasure of working along with [Junior] Minister Wayne Furbert in dealing with these particular matters. But, of course, Mr. Speaker, as the Junior Minister has laid out, there is a very extensive array of customs duty reductions, and it just builds on the history of which this Government [that] has said that we are going to make taxes more fair, to reduce taxes where we can, and to make sure we provide support for persons across the country when it comes to dealing with the cost of living.

The expanded list of items for customs duty is in keeping in line with our pledge and promises under the Affordable Bermuda Agenda, where we put together a plan led by the Minister of Home Affairs in order to make sure to tackle this. The Ministry of Finance is responding by doing our part in the significant duty reduction of which we are seeing across the board. And so when you look at the savings that are estimated by [Junior] Minister Furbert, who stated that there are significant savings that will come from this to households on the array of customs duty reductions that are put in

place—and some, Mr. Speaker, as you can see, are relatively significant, especially when we are talking about cleaning products and others, where there are going to be some significant cuts in duty rates—we certainly hope that those will feed through to consumers.

So, we are grateful for, clearly, the work that has been done from the department inside of Customs. And this is just another example of this Government delivering on its promises to continue to reduce the cost of living and the cost of doing business in Bermuda.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

Any other . . . Minister.

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

As the Minister responsible for cost of living or stewarding cost of living in Bermuda, it would be likewise remiss of me not to provide contribution and support for this Bill.

The Government owns and honours the responsibility to ease the burden for the ordinary Bermudian as it relates to their day-to-day expenses. And this Customs Tariff Amendment Act [2026] represents a cost lowering and an effort to systematically . . . And [it] also identifies and responds to the needs that the community has shared with us that they have relating to the expansion of commodities and essential goods to include healthier items, not just reducing it or restricting it to the 33 that were essentially there before.

Mr. Speaker, this also represents an opportunity to lower the electricity costs for Bermudian families, noting that in a day where everyone is on their phones, everyone's on technology, and the increased demand that we have on technology to provide not only clarity for students who are needing to use a computer to do their homework, it likewise needs power in order to ensure that they can get access to the websites and resources that they may need.

And so, while the Government does not control the entire electricity sector, what it can do, and what this amendment demonstrates is that when the public expresses a concern, this Government, Mr. Speaker, has been focused on its response to their specific concerns. And so, the 4 per cent does represent part of the solution, recognising that there are some laws that have been structurally not benefiting Bermuda. And specifically, to what and how the Government can work with the private sector to address relating to all essential goods, quite frankly . . . And so, the Government is in support. I am in support of this Bill noting what it does for Bermudians.

It also addresses a cultural pillar, which means that the experience, not only their cost, but the experience that Bermuda is having in terms of their way of life and the way that we are going to be able to, in the upcoming May 24 celebration, have greater contribution to culture. And so, I do honour the intentionality behind

it and what it would do for quality of life here in Bermuda.

And so, we recognise that families should not have to be rationing and feeling as though they are battling between what they can do to have a meaningful life and also have essentials for their homes. And so, I do honour the addition and expansion.

The [National] Breastfeeding [Committee], Mr. Speaker, had reached out to have support for the addition of breast pumps, noting that we had previously had formula on the essential goods. And so, I am pleased that we have today also included that in response to what they shared as a need and a concern through their advocacy.

I do recognise that, you know, this is not a silver bullet, but it does demonstrate that this Government is committed to easing the burdens for families, responding to the concerns that are raised by those in the community, and is willing to not create a greater burden but rather reduce it in support of their needs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

Minister Hayward.

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

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to lend my support to this Bill. I thank the Junior Minister, the Honourable Wayne Furbert, for bringing this Bill to the floor of the House and the Minister of Finance, the Honourable David Burt, for ensuring that we continue to progress initiatives that actually lower the cost of living and the cost of doing business in Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, we hear over and over again that Bermuda is one of the most expensive places in the world to live. We hear over and over that there are things that need to be done to reduce the economic stress on businesses and families. And, Mr. Speaker, today is a policy measure, changes to law, that is directly in response to that. In alignment with all the other things that we have heard during the budget process that would actually increase individuals' purchasing power and reduce the cost of doing business in Bermuda, this is another direct measure—the reduction of customs fees for targeted and selected items.

I do not get the argument when persons say this is not targeted. If you reduce the customs duty on all of the participants in the May 24, [Bermuda Day] Parade, you cannot get more targeted than that. Mr. Speaker, as a former participant in the May 24, [Bermuda Day] Parade, this parade is probably one of the most culturally significant events we have, close to Cup Match, where the entire community comes out to enjoy. But oftentimes we hear the plight of dance groups and participants in the parade struggling to generate the necessary funds so that they can fully participate. This is a direct result that would help from young to old in

our community. Hopefully, we now see we are easing the burden on parents who want to ensure that their children participate in the parade, but also community groups that want to actively participate in the parade.

Oftentimes when I meet with the business community, Mr. Speaker, the challenges of the cost of doing business in Bermuda continues to rear its head. And as a result of that, we continuously advocate policy initiatives that ultimately reduce the cost of those individuals participating in our economy. And you see today direct measures that will benefit businesses operating in Bermuda. Both large and small businesses will benefit from the changes that we are making today.

The changes we are making today are deliberate. They are precise. And they will ultimately benefit the community as a whole. But when we start to talk about households, one of the largest expenditure items after rent is utility. And we are making a direct effort to reduce utility.

Another large expenditure is around food items. And we have been making meaningful effort to continue to reduce the price of goods in our grocery stores.

Mr. Speaker, it has to be seen today that the Government continues to make deliberate efforts to support the people of Bermuda. All residents of Bermuda will benefit from our changes. We talk about the challenge with the affordability of housing. So, as a response to that, we are lowering duty rates on building materials and supplies.

Mr. Speaker, we know that [for] most families to function in Bermuda adequately, you need some sort of motor vehicle. But we know the cost of maintenance and upkeep to those vehicles. So, as a response to that, we are eliminating custom duty on selected motor vehicle parts. Hopefully when you go get your car serviced and you see that bill, you see a reduced rate because of efforts that we have put in place as a government.

We talk about essential commodities, and we know the work that the Minister responsible for Home Affairs is actually doing to ensure that we have a more affordable Bermuda. And this is one measure that supports those particular efforts, ensuring that there is a supply of adequate essential goods that households can purchase that remain affordable, that progress lower than the rate of inflation.

Mr. Speaker, every month individuals look at their BELCO bill. Some months are better than others, but most months are painful. And if the Government can do something directly to alleviate some of the pressure on households, it is us reducing the fuels associated with that—that is on top of reductions of taxes that we have already reduced. And so, the Government is doing all that it can to support the lowering of fuel prices in Bermuda.

And then we talk about how we support our creatives, our artists, and reducing the tax on instruments for local professionals and those teaching in that

particular sector, [it] will go a long way to improving our capacity to develop more artists in Bermuda and support our creatives even further.

Mr. Speaker, when the Government puts forward measures that undoubtedly support the entire community that we will all benefit from, we should collectively applaud that. Yet, we still hear criticism. Notwithstanding that, notwithstanding the noise, the Government will continue to progress this agenda, and the Government will continue to put matters in place that make Bermuda more affordable.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution? Any other? No?

Minister.

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

Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill be committed.

The Speaker: Deputy Speaker.

Thank you.

House in Committee at 12:21 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

COMMITTEE ON BILL

CUSTOMS TARRIF AMENDMENT ACT 2026

The Chairman: Good day, Members. We are in Committee of the whole [House] on the Bill entitled the [Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2026](#).

Junior Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes, thank you, Madam Chairman.

First of all, I would like to also thank Mr. [James] Amos and Mr. Lema and the Chambers for the hard work. As they know, I was on top of them every five minutes to ensure that we had this thing correct. I was not on top of Chambers; I was on top of Customs, to make it very clear. And these two individuals, working with, of course, Lucinda Pearman, Collector of Customs, was able to work with Finance to get the things done that we wanted to get done.

Madam Chairman, there are only four clauses, so I will move all four clauses.

The Chairman: The Junior Minister is moving that we consider clauses one through four.

Are there any objections to that?

There are none.

Junior Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

This Bill seeks to amend the First and Fifth Schedule to the Customs Tariff Act 1970, the principal Act.

Clause 1 provides the citation for the Bill.

Clause 2 repeals and replaces the First Schedule in the Customs Tariff Act 1970 by the contents of the Schedule to this Bill. The First Schedule is published on the Bermuda Government portal at the following website [address]: www.gov.bm/schedules-customs-tariff-act-1970.

Clause 3 amends the Fifth Schedule to the Customs Tariff Act 1970 by inserting new CPC 4247, (Goods for local professional instrumentalists) and CPC 4248 (Goods for participants in the Bermuda Day Parade). Clause 3 also amends the Fifth Schedule by amending the duty rate in both CPC 4703 (Goods of tariff code 2710.192 (Diesel)) and CPC 4705 (Goods of tariff code 2710.194 (Fuel oil)).

Clause 4 provides the commencement of the Bill.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to clauses 1 through 4?

There are no other Members.
Junior Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Madam Chairman
As I said, I move clauses 1 through 4.
I move that the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: Just a minute.

You move that clauses 1 through 4 be approved?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes.

The Chairman: Yes.

It has been moved that clauses 1 through 4 be approved.

Are there any objections?
There are none.
The Schedule [is] next.

[Motion carried: Clauses 1 through 4 passed.]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I move that the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the preamble be approved.

Are there any objections?
Schedule.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: And Schedule. Sorry.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Schedule be approved.

Are there any objections?

There are none.
Last.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: 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?
There are none.
So, moved.

[Gavel]

[Motion carried: The Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2026 was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed without amendment.]

House resumed at 12:25 pm

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

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

CUSTOMS TARIFF AMENDMENT ACT 2026

The Speaker: Members, are there any objections to the Bill entitled the Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2026 being reported to the House as printed?

There are none.
The Bill has been reported as printed.

Premier, before we move on to the next item, I am going to suggest that it is almost 12:30. Would you like to just break for lunch now and we will come back and start the second item?

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the Honourable House now adjourn for lunch until 2:00 pm

The Speaker: Are there any objections?

There are none.
The House now sends adjourn for lunch until 2:00 pm.

[Gavel]

Proceedings suspended at 12:26 pm

Proceedings resumed at 2:00 pm

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

The Speaker: Good afternoon, Members. I trust everybody had a good lunch. Looks like others are still trying to enjoy theirs.

The House is now back in session.

[Gavel]

The Speaker: Members, we completed the first Order this morning, the Customs Tariff Amendment Act. We are now going to consider Item No. 2, which is the consideration of the Government Fees Amendment Regulations 2026.

And the Minister of [Public] Works will lead the Ministry of Finance. Is that correct?

Hon. Jache Adams: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good.

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Speaker, with the Governor's recommendation and in accordance with section 36(3) of the Bermuda Constitution, I move that consideration be given to the draft Order entitled, the Government Fees Amendment Regulations 2026, proposed to be made by the Minister of Finance, in exercise of the power conferred by section 2 of the Government Fees Act 1965.

The Speaker: Are there any objections to that?

There are none.

Continue.

DRAFT REGULATIONS

GOVERNMENT FEES AMENDMENT REGULATIONS 2026

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present amendments under the Government Fees framework that reflect a deliberate and practical approach by this Government to improve how we support key sectors and deliver public services.

Mr. Speaker, the first set of amendments relates to fees under Head 1, the Agriculture Act 1930. These changes remove a number of fees currently paid by registered farmers in connection with the importation of essential inputs such as pesticides, crop plants, and growing media used in food production. In practical terms, Mr. Speaker, farmers will continue to follow the same application and inspection processes to ensure that all safety and environmental standards are upheld. What changes is that they will no longer be required to pay the Department of Environment and Natural Resources fees for those steps.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to be clear. The removal of these fees represents a recognition that if we want to see increased domestic food production, then we must consistently look for opportunities to reduce friction and lower costs wherever it is reasonable to do so.

For many farmers, margins are tight. Input costs, logistics, and uncertainty all add pressure. While the removal of these fees will not, on its own, transform the economics of farming, it is one of a series of practical steps aimed at making the environment more supportive of those who are producing food locally.

Mr. Speaker, this measure is also targeted. It applies only to inputs used for food production and does not extend to non-food agriculture activities such as ornamental plants or commercial potting products. This ensures that the relief provided is aligned with our broader objective of strengthening Bermuda's food security.

Mr. Speaker, these amendments are not being introduced in isolation. They form part of ongoing engagement with the Board of Agriculture and the Bermuda Farmers Association. And sit alongside other initiatives already underway, including the rollout of an online crop theft reporting application to better protect livelihoods. The addition of trained personnel within the Department of Environment and Natural Resources to provide stronger, more responsive support, and the recruitment of a consultant agronomist to bring added expertise to the sector.

We are also moving forward with a pilot initiative that will empower trained farmers to manage feral chickens on their farms using safe, controlled methods. At the same time, we are ensuring the continued full operation of the existing Agricultural Service Centre while actively progressing the development of a new modern facility, with site clearance already underway.

Finally, this initiative also supports the Ministry of Home Affairs' broader efforts to reduce the cost of living by helping farmers lower their operational costs and strengthen Bermuda's domestic food supply. Together, these steps reflect a steady and considered approach, not one single intervention but a series of coordinated actions to support the sector over time.

Mr. Speaker, the second set of amendments relates to fees under Head 80, the Water Resources Act 1975. These changes are intended to modernise the licensing system, making it more practical and efficient for both the public and the Government. At present, water licences are issued on a five-year basis, with a flat fee of \$90 for residential licences and \$550 for commercial licences. Under the revised structure, residential licences will remain unchanged, ensuring that households are not impacted. For commercial licences, however, we are introducing a more flexible annual fee of \$90. Over a five-year period, this results in a modest overall reduction from \$550 to \$450, while also allowing businesses to manage payments on an annual basis rather than upfront.

Mr. Speaker, I do not present this as a major financial shift. The savings are modest. However, the change reflects a broader principle. Where efficiencies can be achieved through modernisation, such as the introduction of online applications and payments, those efficiencies should be passed on. It also reflects a practical understanding of how businesses operate, providing greater flexibility in how fees are paid. For clarity, Mr. Speaker, these licences generally apply to properties, residential or commercial, that access water through private wells or other regulated sources. Most

households that rely on rainwater collection systems will not be affected.

Mr. Speaker, taken together, these amendments represent small but purposeful improvements. They are part of a wider effort by this Government to reduce unnecessary costs, modernise service delivery, and support those contributing to Bermuda's economic and social resilience. They will not on their own solve the challenges facing farmers or businesses, but they are consistent with an approach that values steady progress, practical solutions, and responsible decision-making.

And, Mr. Speaker, it is through these kinds of measured, deliberate steps, taken consistently over time, that we will build a stronger, more sustainable Bermuda.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you. Thank you, Minister.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

MP DeCouto.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Minister for the presentation.

Yes, we in the One Bermuda Alliance are certainly in support of this Bill. We have, for quite a while now, been calling for better support for the local agricultural industry, and we are glad to see the government join us in recognising the need for increased local food production and in assisting farmers in tangible and, yes, targeted ways. I noted that, Mr. Speaker, and I am so pleased to see that.

[Inaudible interjection]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, you did. Thank you.

So, certainly, I do support. I have a question for the Committee about the well fees, but I am very happy to support that . . . sorry.

Well, I do wonder if there is an accompanying regulation or amendment, because I did notice that the Minister spoke about converting a five-year fee to an annual fee for commercial well licences, and I am, frankly, not sure where that gets written down and handled, Mr. Speaker. So, any information on that would be much appreciated, but, yes, certainly, support—

The Speaker: Put your question [forward] now that you are on your feet to see if you can get an . . .

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: So, that would just be my question as to what the changes are in the laws and regulations, where is that happening to convert from the five-year to the annual lease term for commercial licences?

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Does] any other Member wish to make a contribution? None other?

Minister.

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do thank the Honourable Member for his question.

What I will say is that the Water Resources Act [1975] allows for fees for up to five years and is set at the discretion of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. Therefore, no changes to the Water Resources Act are required . . . as well as the Environmental Authority's discretion.

The Speaker: [Microphone off]

Hon. Jache Adams: That is it. Yes. Sure.

The Speaker: [Microphone off]

Hon. Jache Adams: Sure.

And so, with that, Mr. Speaker, I move that the said draft Regulations be approved and that a suitable message be sent to His Excellency the Governor.

The Speaker: Are there any objections?

[No audio]

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 23

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: That is correct. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend Standing Order 23. I have the honour to attach and submit for the consideration of the Honourable House of Assembly, the Health Insurance (Standard Health Benefit) Amendment Regulations 2026, proposed by the Minister responsible for Health under section 40 of the Health Insurance Act 1970.

[No audio.]

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: And also, Mr. Speaker, I move that consideration be given to the draft Regulations entitled Health Insurance (Standard Health Benefits) Amendment Regulations 2026, proposed by the Minister responsible for Health under section 40 of the Health Insurance Act 1970.

The Speaker: Are there any objections?

There are none.

Continue, Minister.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

DRAFT REGULATIONS

HEALTH INSURANCE (STANDARD HEALTH BENEFITS) AMENDMENT REGULATIONS 2026

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce the Health Insurance (Standard Health Benefits) Amendment Regulations 2026, which provide for the increase in the Standard Premium Rate effective 1 April 2026, as previously outlined in the 2025/26 Budget Statement. This adjustment represents the first change to the rate in over four years and is a vital step to ensuring the financial solvency of the health care system and the stability of the only acute care hospital in Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, this increase aims to ensure that, when the residents of Bermuda require emergency care, surgery, or other life-saving treatments, our hospital has the staff, equipment, and resources needed to deliver the care. Practically speaking, this adjustment is about fairness for the health care professionals who continue to provide frontline support, post-pandemic, to sustain the Mutual Reinsurance Fund [MRF], and an intentional move towards long-term resilience in the health system.

Mr. Speaker, the present adjustment must be conceptualised [in the context of] history for a fuller understanding. The Standard Premium Rate was last increased on the 1 November 2021, when it was set at \$400.31 per month per member. Since that time, nearly four and a half years later, that rate has remained unchanged. During the most volatile economic period induced by the pandemic, the Government made a deliberate decision to shield residents from increases in the Standard Premium Rate.

To shield families from the rising tide of global medical cost increases, the Government froze the SPR [Standard Premium Rate]. Instead, funds from the excess borrowing fund were used to provide temporary support and maintain stability within the health financing system. Had the Government followed standard inflationary trends during this period, residents would have seen incremental increases, but the freeze provided relief for policyholders since 2021.

Mr. Speaker, while the Government refrained from adjusting the SPR, health care costs have not stood still. Across the world, medical inflation continues to rise. It affects the cost of clinical care, medical equipment, pharmaceuticals, and hospital operations. Bermuda is not immune to these pressures, and these adjustments are critical to maintaining quality care within the health system, especially at the Bermuda Hospitals Board.

Mr. Speaker, the nurses, technicians, and support staff of the BHB are essential assets to our health system. The hospital is only as functional as the professionals who operate it. And the recent conclusion of the negotiations with the Bermuda Public Services Union resulted in a salary uplift of 18.23 per cent, along with a cost-of-living allowance, covering the period April 2022 through October 2025. The retroactive payments,

totalling \$38 million, recognise the dedication of nurses, clinicians, technicians, and support staff who sustain Bermuda's health care system every day. These retroactive payments will be issued in two equal instalments. The first was paid on 30 January 2026, and the second will be due by 30 April 2026, in accordance with the negotiated agreement.

Mr. Speaker, ensuring that our frontline health care professionals are compensated is essential to maintaining a strong and resilient health system. While the Government has already funded the first \$19 million, the remaining balance requires structural adjustments to the health financing system through an adjustment to the Standard Premium Rate.

Following an independent actuarial review, it was determined that an increase of \$39.24 per member per month is necessary to maintain the integrity of Bermuda's health financing system. Accordingly, the Standard Premium Rate will increase to \$439.55 per member per month, effective 1 April 2026. The Standard Premium Rate forms part of the premium structure across health insurance policies in Bermuda, and as such, this adjustment may be reflected in both public and private insurance premiums. For clarity, Mr. Speaker, the \$39.24 per member per month represents the increase directly associated not only with salary uplifts, but also the funding needs of the Mutual Reinsurance Fund. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasise that the adjustments to this Fund will not apply to members on FutureCare.

Mr. Speaker, the Mutual Reinsurance Fund is a cornerstone of Bermuda's health system, supporting high-cost and hospital-based services, and ensuring that risk is shared locally and broadly across the population. It allows essential treatment to remain available when individuals face catastrophic illness or complex medical needs.

In light of this context, our decision was not taken lightly. If the MRF is not stable, the system cannot remain stable. A shortfall in this fund would compromise the access of every insured resident to essential hospital-based services. Therefore, unfreezing the SPR was a responsible, protective, and proactive decision.

Mr. Speaker, I have made it clear that the SPR adjustment is the sustainable path forward to maintaining hospital services funded through the MRF and meeting the contractual obligations to the very staff who keep our hospital functioning. And this adjustment restores balance to the system and ensures that the resources required to sustain hospital services remain available.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, Bermuda has only one acute care hospital, and that hospital must remain strong. It must remain properly resourced and capable of delivering the critical services our people depend on for emergency care, surgery, diagnostics, and treatment for serious illness. Every day, our residents rely on the professionals of the Bermuda Hospitals Board to

provide that care. The simple fact is that the government must ensure that the system which supports that care remains financially sound and continues to function for the benefit of our people. Our duty is not only to manage today's costs, but to safeguard the system on which every resident of Bermuda may one day depend.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

MP Cannonier, you have the floor.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Thank you and good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, colleagues, and to Bermuda.

We recognise the need, and the need that was present four years ago, to freeze the SPR, and so we also recognise the need now to be sustainable moving forward. So, there is not much more to say about this. We thank the Minister for her work and let us get on with it.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Minister.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Member for his contribution and support.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the said draft Regulations be approved and that a suitable message be sent to His Excellency the Governor.

The Speaker: Are there any objections to that?

There are none.

It has been approved, and the said letter will be sent to the Governor. Very quickly, nicely done. I'm not grumbling.

[Motion carried: The Health Insurance (Standard Health Benefits) Amendment Regulations 2026 were approved.]

The Speaker: The next item would be in the name of the Minister of Health.

Minister, would you like to start your second item?

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill entitled the Health Insurance (Mutual Re-insurance Fund) (Prescribed Sum) Validation Act 2026 be now read the second time.

The Speaker: Are there any objections to that?

There are none.

Continue, Minister.

BILL

SECOND READING

HEALTH INSURANCE (MUTUAL RE-INSURANCE FUND) (PRESCRIBED SUM) VALIDATION ACT 2026

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and Honourable Members will realise when I read this, why we switched the order of the debate.

I rise again today to introduce the Health Insurance (Mutual Re-Insurance Fund) (Prescribed Sum) Validation Act 2026. This Bill seeks to validate payments made from the Mutual Re-insurance Fund from November 2021, the last time we increased the SPR.

By way of context, Mr. Speaker, this measure addresses an administrative gap. When the Standard Premium Rate was increased on the 21st of November, the corresponding legislative amendment required to support adjustments to the prescribed sum under the Mutual Re-insurance Fund was not enacted at that time. This Bill therefore serves to recognise, regularise, and validate those payments retroactively.

Similar to the [Regulations] just passed, the Health Insurance (Standard Health Benefit) Amendment Regulations 2026, this Act ought to have been brought forward in November 2021 alongside the premium increase. Honourable Members will recall that 2021 was an extraordinary period during which it was critical that our health system remained properly funded and operational. Payments from the Mutual Re-insurance Fund were therefore made with the Cabinet's approval to ensure that key institutions, including the Bermuda Hospitals Board, the Health Insurance Fund, and the Bermuda Health Council, could continue to carry out their essential functions. The Bill before the House validates those payments made from November 2021 onwards until such time as an updated prescribed sum order issued under section 3A(2A) of the Health Insurance Act 1970 comes into force, namely on 1 April 2026.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Does any other Member wish to speak to that?
MP Cannonier.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you once again.

Just, I guess, really just a question then. I am trying to make sure I understand. I understand the reasoning of why we did the former Bill *[sic]* before this. Just trying to . . . oh, Regulations. Sorry. But just trying to understand so I am clear. This increase could still have been done had we not increased the amount, correct? Is that correct to say? So, and the contribution for the Health Council and those things, we still could have

done that prior to having to wait till we increased the Standard Premium Rate, correct? Yes?

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Hi, Mr. Speaker—*Hi, Mr. Speaker?*—Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Let me just try to clarify that. So, we have just passed legislation to increase the SPR effective on the 1st of April. The last time we did the increase was in November 2021, but administratively, we did not go through the exercise to regularise it.

Do I need to remind everybody where we were in 2021? We were in the middle of COVID-19. So, unfortunately, it was an administrative gap, and we did not come back to deal with it. So, what we are doing now is to validate the activity that took place from the 21st of April. Sorry, November 2021. We are just validating those payments.

Thank you.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: Was that a point of order you did or a point of information you were giving?

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: Oh, you were back on your feet. Because we are in the House. We cannot go back and forth. So, you are finished?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I'm done.

The Speaker: Are you done? Okay. Well.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Okay.

The Speaker: Yes, we are done.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Thank you very much. We are done.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: This is actually a Bill. It is not a Regulation.

The Speaker: Yes. So, you can move it to Committee now.

An Hon. Member: You didn't ask for other speakers.

The Speaker: Oh, yes.

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

The Speaker: No one else wanted to move.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Does any other Member—

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

The Speaker: Yes.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

No one else!

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: Premier, they are to your back. I had the sight, no eyes indicated they wanted to move that time. There was not an eye that looked up.

Minister.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Okay. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker, on that note, I move that this Bill be now committed.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Deputy [Speaker].

House in Committee at 2:23 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

COMMITTEE ON BILL

HEALTH INSURANCE (MUTUAL RE-INSURANCE FUND) (PRESCRIBED SUM) VALIDATION ACT 2026

The Chairman: Good afternoon. We are now in Committee of the whole [House] for the Bill entitled the [Health Insurance \(Mutual Re-insurance Fund\) \(Prescribed Sum\) Validation Act of 2026](#).

I call on the Minister of Health.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Madam [Chairman], I would like to move clauses 1 and 2, please.

The Chairman: It has been moved that we consider clauses 1 and 2.

Are there any objections to that?

There are none.

Continue, Minister.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Yes, Madam Chairman.

The Bill seeks to validate payments made from the Mutual Re-insurance Fund from the 1st of November 2021.

Clause 1 provides the title of the Bill.

Clause 2 validates payments made out of the Mutual Re-insurance Fund to the Bermuda Health Council, the Bermuda Hospitals Board, and the Health Insurance Fund from 1 November 2021 until such time as a new order made by the Minister [pursuant to]

section 3A(2A) of the Health Insurance Act 1970 comes into force.

And as I have indicated from the Bill that we just debated, it will be on the 1st of April 2026.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to clauses 1 and 2?

There being none . . . Minister.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I move that the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that we approve the preamble.

Are there any objections?

There are none.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Madam [Chairman], I move that clauses 1 and 2 be approved.

The Chairman: It is moved that clauses 1 and 2 be approved.

Are there any objections?

There are none.

[Motion carried: Clauses 1 and 2 passed.]

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: 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?

There are none; so moved.

[Gavel]

[Motion carried: The Health Insurance (Mutual Re-insurance Fund) (Prescribed Sum) Validation Act of 2026 was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed without amendment.]

[Inaudible interjection]

House resumed at 2:26 pm

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

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

HEALTH INSURANCE (MUTUAL RE-INSURANCE FUND) (PRESCRIBED SUM) VALIDATION ACT OF 2026

The Speaker: Members, are there any objections to the Bill being reported to the House as printed?

There are none.

Thank you.

We will now move on to Item No. 5, the consideration of Supplementary Estimates (No. 2) for the financial year 2025/26. The Junior Minister of Finance will be introducing this one.

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

In accordance with Standing Order 43(4) and 43(5), I move that the Supplementary Estimate (No. 2) for the financial year 2025/26 be approved.

The Speaker: Are there any objections to that? None. Continue.

BILL

SECOND READING

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATE (NO. 2) FOR FINANCIAL YEAR 2025/26

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to give a brief introduction, and then there are basically only two ministries: The Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Health. So, I will do the Ministry of Finance first, and then the Minister of Health can do her part.

So, Mr. Speaker, this Schedule identifies two items totalling \$21.4 million to be included in the Supplementary Estimate (No. 2) for 2025/26, all on current account.

Supplementary Estimate (No. 2) [for] 2025/26 supports the additional cost of the Government employer overhead with respect to the Public Service Superannuation Fund (PSSF) contributions. This increase in PSSF contributions to the Government, as the employer, is directly related to the negotiated salary increases for all public officers in both the 2024/25 and 2025/26 fiscal years.

Along with the increase in PSSF contributions for the same years, the supplementary also includes further support to the Bermuda Hospitals Board as the BHB staff negotiated a salary agreement. Honourable Members will recall that the criteria for determining debatable supplementary estimates require all items on the current account be debated if the total current account spend of a Ministry shows an increase of greater than 10 per cent, or \$250,000, when compared to the original estimate; all capital items are debatable.

Applying the criteria, Mr. Speaker, I have described the two current accounts items above. I would therefore move approval of the items as follows: current account [items] 1 and 2.

As I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, I will speak first to Finance. Mr. Speaker, the 2025/26 approved estimates for employer overheads for the Public Service Superannuation Fund (PSSF) are \$31.3 million. As the employer—

[Crosstalk]

[Pause]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: You want me to continue?

The Speaker: Continue, you can continue.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Based on projected spending, the total government spending for PSSF contributions is estimated to be \$34.3 million. An overspend of \$3.1 million. The overspend is primarily due to higher contributions resulting from increased salary rates for all public offices in the 2024/25 and 2025/26 fiscal years, as a result of negotiated pay award agreements with the union.

Salary award amounts were evaluated at approximately \$20 million per year. The increase in the contribution rates from 9.5 per cent to 10.2 per cent for the uniformed services and from 8.0 per cent to 8.7 per cent for all other contributors. The Ministry has identified savings from other departments within the Ministry; therefore, a supplementary estimate is required, which is a total of \$2.4 million.

Thank you. I turn to the Minister of Health.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Minister of Health.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise to provide further details with respect to Supplementary Estimate (No. 2) as it relates to the Ministry of Health. This provides \$19 million to the Ministry of Health for the Bermuda Hospitals Board. This funding is required to meet the retroactive payments owed to the—

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: Wait one minute. We want to confirm something here.

[Pause]

The Speaker: Junior Minister, because of what was going on there, we sort of missed where we were at that time. Can you just move us straight into Committee and all this will be done in Committee?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes, Mr. Speaker . . . House . . . I move that the Supplementary Estimate (No. 2) for the financial year 2025/26 be approved. The House goes into—

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I move that the House goes into Committee of Supply.

The Speaker: Go into Committee and then all the Members can discuss the different pieces of it.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I move that the House go to the Committee of Supply.

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: All right. Yes, I said that, but anyway . . .

The Speaker: Yes. All right.
Deputy [Speaker.]

[Pause]

House in Committee at 2:33 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATE (NO. 2) FOR FINANCIAL YEAR 2025/26

The Chairman: Members, we are now in the Committee of Supply for [Supplementary Estimate \(No. 2\) for Financial Year 2025/26](#) to consider items 1 and 2.

I will now call on the Minister of Finance. I think it is being carried by the Junior Minister to ask to consider item one.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Right. I just make sure. I am doing [item] number two but—

The Chairman: Oh, you are doing [item] number 2?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Do you want me to read it all over again?

[Crosstalk]

MINISTRY OF FINANCE

HEAD 11—ACCOUNTANT GENERAL

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Sorry, item number 1. Do you want me to read it over again, Madam Chairman?

The Chairman: I will ask the Members if they need the benefit of hearing the preamble.

Do you need the benefit of hearing the preamble from the Junior Minister for item number 1?

[No audible response.]

The Chairman: Okay. If you . . . it is the same thing, so if Members are okay, continue. Just give a real brief summary, stating which item it was—

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: So, I had mentioned, Madam Chairman, that the employer's overhead was a total of \$31.3 million.

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I also mentioned that, based on projected spend, the total government spend to PSSF contribution is estimated at \$34.3 million, an overspend of \$3.1 million.

I mentioned that the overspend is primarily due to higher contributions as a result of increased salary rates for all public offices in the 2024/25 and 2025/06 fiscal years from negotiated pay award agreements.

And finally, I said that the increase in the contribution rates from 9.5 [per cent] to 10.2 [per cent] for the uniformed services and from 8 [per cent] to 8.7 [per cent] for all contributions.

The Ministry has identified savings for other departments within the Ministry; therefore, the supplementary estimate required is \$2.4 million.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to item 1, Head 11?

I recognise the Member from constituency 25. Member, you have the floor.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, thank you, Madam Chairman, and thank you to the Minister.

You know, we did certainly in prior debates go through the general principles and a lot of the details of these increases. But I do have one question which is . . . we know that the various new agreements were negotiated prior to last February which would have been prior to this budget upcoming presented. So, I do have a general question as to why the full amount of what those benefits would have cost was not actually included in the originally approved budget for 2025/26. And that is for item number 1, Head 11.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Head 11?

There being no other Members, Junior Minister, would you like to respond, please?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Madam Chairman, I will. I do not have the answer right now, but I will be glad to—

The Chairman: Undertake to get it.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: —get that for the Minister.

The Chairman: Okay.

So, Junior Minister, can I get you to move Head 11 so that it can be approved?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Madam Chairman, I move that Head 11 be approved for—

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: It has been moved Head 11 be approved.

Are there any objections?

There are none; so approved.

[Gavel]

[Motion carried: The Ministry of Finance Head 11 was approved and stands part of the of the Supplementary Estimate (No. 2) for financial year 2025/26.]

The Chairman: That takes us to item 2 under the Ministry of Health. We are considering Head 24, the Current Account Support to the BHB for the salary agreement.

Minister.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I rise to provide details regarding Supplementary Estimate (No. 2) for Head 24 be now taken under consideration.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Head 24 be taken under consideration.

Are there any objections to that?

There are none.

Continue.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

HEAD 24—CURRENT ACCOUNT SUPPORT TO THE BHB

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, this supplementary estimate provides \$19 million to the Ministry of Health for the Bermuda Hospitals Board. This funding is required to meet the retroactive payments owed to BPSU-represented employees at BHB following the conclusion of negotiations and the agreement on salary adjustments and timelines for retroactive payment to November [2021]. Honourable Members will know that this \$19 million represents half of the \$38 million owed in retroactive salary adjustments.

Madam Chairman, our hospital staff have carried a tremendous load for many years. They have worked through some of the most demanding periods our health system has ever faced. And they continue to show up for this community every single day. When we say that we value our health care workers, that must be reflected not only in the words but in action. Making sure that they receive the payments owed to them is an important part of that commitment.

Madam Chairman, these retroactive obligations were not finalised when the annual budget was prepared last year. As Honourable Members will appreciate, that is exactly why the supplementary estimates process exists. And that is to allow the Government to meet obligations that arise after the budget has been set and to do so transparently and with the approval of this Honourable House.

Madam Chairman, the \$19 million requested will allow the BHB to meet its commitments to its employees without placing pressure on patient services or day-to-day operations. The updated salary level has already been incorporated into the board's financial planning going forward.

Madam Chairman, our hospital workforce deserves to be treated fairly, and they deserve to be made whole. This Government has made clear that we will honour our agreements, and this allocation reflects that commitment. It supports the people who support all of us, and it strengthens the stability of our health system. I commend the supplementary estimate to the House and ask Honourable Members for their support.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to item 2, Head 24?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I am so sorry, Madam Chairman—

The Chairman: I recognise the Member from constituency 12. Member, you have the floor.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: My apologies.

Madam Chairman, \$19 million. Wow! But we recognise it needed to be done at some point in time, you know, the piper will call. It is not lost on me that we are doing this now under the midst of hospital workers having quite a challenge with not having received increases. So, we recognise that the Minister has moved on this here. It is something that is needed, and it is a hefty amount, but I recognise at this point in time in our history, and us not having come to some conclusion prior to this, that it has needed to be done. So, thank you very much for the clarity from the Minister on this.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members . . . who wish to speak to item 2, Head 24?

I recognise the Member from constituency 29 and the Deputy Premier.

Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

Well, I am glad that the Honourable Member who just took his seat, ended where he did, because I recall not that long ago Members opposite were saying

how we need to take care of the hospital staff, because you remember there is a lot of angst. So, I am glad to hear at the end of his statement that he did support it. So, I just want to make sure that the people of the country know that not long ago the Opposition were really beating the drum for us to make sure we take care of the hospital staff. So, I am glad that they are on even par with the Government with regard to this \$19 million.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to item 2, Head 24?

I recognise the Member from constituency 9. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Vance Campbell: Picking up where the Member who just sat down left off, I would like to know from the Minister if measures are in place to address the wage concerns of the workers at the hospital on a consistent basis, as opposed to leaving it to linger for so long?

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to item 2, Head 24?

I recognise the Member from constituency 17. Member, you have the floor.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Taking up where the previous Member left off, Madam Chairman—

[Laughter]

Hon. Jason Hayward: —I just want to say that 2019 would have been the last period of time in which hospital workers would have received an uplift. At that point in time in 2019, the hospital would have been under some type of financial pressure, and as a result it was a very tough negotiation. I know that for a fact because I led those negotiations, and they had not received an increase. At that point in time, both the Bermuda Public Services Union and the BIU came together to negotiate for all of the workers rather than two separate bargaining units.

I would note that this Government certainly has the best interests of the workers at hand. But what you also find is that there's sometimes a piggyback approach. The public service leads with their salary increases, then there is a lag in increase as it pertains to the increases of other quasi-government organisations or government-funded organisations get. And part of it is not because of a lack of support for the workers. Sometimes it is a timing issue as it pertains to negotiations. Each and every one of those workers are represented by a union that sits at the bargaining table and negotiates with management as it pertains to their salary uplifts. I believe that is the reflection of the scale of the uplift. The Honourable Member Cannonier said,

Wow. You know what he is wowing? Funds going into the workers of this country. Targeted, targeted—

An Hon. Member: One more time.

Hon. Jason Hayward: —targeted funds. Funds going to those persons who have worked for it, who deserve it, and who actually need the funds. And so, it is the Government showing its responsibility to the workers of this country. It is part of our social contract. It is part of what we support. And that is collective bargaining. And when items are negotiated at the bargaining table—

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Your point of order, Member.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, the Honourable Minister is misleading the House. When he mentioned that, I said *Wow*, he was referencing the fact that it was so much. I was saying, *Wow*, because it took so long.

[Inaudible interjections]

An Hon. Member: No, you weren't!

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.
Continue Minister.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jason Hayward: Okay. But the reality of the matter is that those workers were on the front line of our national defence as it pertained to the COVID-19 pandemic. And they deserve every single dollar that they actually received. And so, I am not sure why one would open with *wow*. But what I would say—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: [Point of] Information, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Do you accept his point?

Hon. Jason Hayward: Not at all.

But I would say that there is a demonstrated history of commitment and this Government, honouring what has been negotiated at the table, on behalf—

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Your point of order, Member.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, the Honourable Member is misleading the House once again when he refers to *wow* and the total amount. This Government could have brought a supplementary last year for this. And the year before for this. It is supplementary.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Point of order, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Your point of order, Minister.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: The Honourable Member is misleading the House, albeit unintentionally. The negotiations, as I indicated in my brief, only ended at the end of last year, prior to the budget. The budget had already been passed. And then negotiations commenced. And they entered into negotiations that ended last year November. So, there was no opportunity for us. This is the first opportunity we have had to bring a supplemental because the budget of 2025/26 had already been passed.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: Continue, Minister from [constituency] 17.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jason Hayward: So that is exactly the point I made. And so, I do not expect the non-unionists to understand collective bargaining. As a result, it is reflected in the comments that I actually made today. But it does show a commitment from this Government to the workers of this country who are genuinely appreciative of all the work that they had contributed. And this is not the end of the road, because collective bargaining agreements are living documents. And they will continue to enhance benefits and salaries on behalf of the workers of the BHB. And the Government will continue to honour those agreements that were actually made.
Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, [Minister].

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to item 2, Head 24?

There being none, Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Yes. Madam Chairman, taking off from where the previous Member spoke. Far be it from me to try to recant history, insofar as what happened in 2021 when they were negotiating the BPSU,

even the last increase for the BPSU workers was agreed because, of course, my Honourable Member of Parliament, and ministerial colleague, was the one who led those negotiations. But in any event, he has already provided enough detail as to how negotiations take place. And as such, that concludes my submissions for the Supplementary Estimate (No. 2) with respect to Head 24.

The Chairman: Yes, so would you like to move that it be approved, Minister?

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Yes, Madam Chairman.
I move that Head 24 be now approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Head 24 be approved.

Are there any objections?
There are none; so approved.

[Motion carried: The Ministry Health Head 24 was approved and stands part of the of the Supplementary Estimate (No. 2) for financial year 2025/26.]

The Chairman: I can call on the Junior Minister—Yes, thank you.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I move that the Supplementary Estimate (No. 2) for the financial year 2025/26 as printed be put to the House.

The Chairman: Thank you.

It has been moved that Supplementary Estimate (No. 2) for the financial year 2025/26 be approved and reported to the House as printed.

Are there any objections to that?
There are none; so approved.

[Gavel]

[Motion carried: The Supplementary Estimate (No. 2) for financial year 2025/263 was considered by the Committee of Supply and passed without amendment.]

[Pause]

House resumed at 2:49 pm

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

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATE (NO. 2) FOR FINANCIAL YEAR 2025/26

The Speaker: Members, are there any objections to the Bill being reported to the House?

There are none.

We now move on to Item No. 6, which is the second reading of the Corporate Income Tax Agency Amendment Act 2026 in the name of the Minister of Finance.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 29(1)

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that Standing Order 29(1) be suspended to enable me to move that the Bill entitled the Corporate Income Tax Agency Amendment Act 2026 be now read a second time.

The Speaker: Are there any objections?
There are none.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 29(1) suspended]

The Speaker: Continue, Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

BILL

SECOND READING

CORPORATE INCOME TAX AGENCY AMENDMENT ACT 2026

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Government, I rise this afternoon in this Honourable House to debate and introduce the Bill entitled the Corporate Income Tax Agency Amendment Miscellaneous Provisions *[sic]* Act 2026.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill proposes amendments to the Corporate Income Tax Agency Act 2024 and related pieces of legislation to make certain miscellaneous updates.

Mr. Speaker, by way of background, the Corporate Income Tax Act has now been enforced for two years, and the Corporate Income Tax Agency Act was enacted in 2024 to support this administration. With the transition period now complete Bermuda has fully entered the operational phase of the corporate income tax regime. As the regime moves forward, several components have required refinement to ensure the framework remains aligned with international standards, reflects practical implementation needs, and provides clarity for both taxpayer's *[and]* administrators as a system becomes fully embedded.

Mr. Speaker, this amendment Act makes changes to the Corporate Income Tax Agency Act 2024 to clarify the source of funding available to the Agency and to strengthen its financial management framework. Specifically, the amendment confirms that income generated from any reserve or specified fund established

under regulations made pursuant to the Corporate Income Tax Act, including investment income, may be used to support the Agency's operating expenses.

The amendment also requires the Agency to establish and maintain a general reserve account into which any annual operating surplus may be transferred up to a maximum of 50 per cent of the Agency's approved budget expenses for the following financial year.

Mr. Speaker, this reserve is intended to provide financial support to help manage potential fluctuations in revenue or operational needs. Any surplus funds beyond this threshold will be transferred to the Consolidated Fund unless otherwise directed by the Minister while any deficit that exceeds the balance of the reserve account may be supported by the Consolidated Fund to ensure the continued operation of the Agency.

Mr. Speaker, further, these changes [and] consequential amendments are proposed to the Corporate Income Tax (Tax Refund Reserve Fund) Regulations 2025 to ensure sustainable funding for the Agency and its work. It is proposed that the Regulation be amended to allow the use of monies accruing from investments made under the Tax Refund Reserve Fund to support the Agency's ongoing operations.

Previously, the Minister had the discretion to direct that investment returns or income from the Fund be used to finance the Agency. Under the proposed amendment, the default position will be that investment income from the Fund will automatically be paid to the Agency to support its operations and will no longer require ministerial direction. However, the Minister's authority will be preserved, allowing such investment income to be redirected to the Consolidated Fund where necessary.

Mr. Speaker, further consequential amendments to the Tax Credit Act 2025 are also proposed to ensure the legislation remains aligned with the updated framework. The Tax Credit Act establishes several qualified refundable tax credits, including the Community Development Tax Credit, [CDTC] which was designed to support charities. The Community Development Tax Credit, as currently enacted, limits eligibility to donations made to charities that are required to submit audited financial statements.

Representatives from the charitable sector have noted that, if this remains, it could create an unintended incentive for taxpayers to favour larger charities that are required by law to file audited financial [statements]. Whereas smaller charities are not required to file audited financial [statements], and this may inadvertently place smaller charitable organisations at a disadvantage when it comes to raising funding.

While the original inclusion of the audit requirement was intended to promote transparency and accountability, tax advisers have indicated that removing this requirement for the purposes of the credit would not represent a substantive change to the overall policy framework.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I wish to emphasise that the Government remains confident that the closing income tax framework upholds Bermuda's strong commitment to global compliance and transparency while maintaining the Island's respected reputation internationally. The progress achieved thus far has made possible through the invaluable contributions of the International Tax Working Group whose expertise and dedication continue to play a central role in advancing this important initiative and continuing to advance this important initiative.

I would like to sincerely thank everyone at the Ministry of Finance, the Corporate Income Tax Agency, along with our dedicated advisors for the time, effort, and expertise they have contributed to this work. I also extend my appreciation to the drafting team of the Attorney General's Chambers for their support during this process.

And of course, I note, Mr. Speaker, that this is income tax legislation. I recognise that we are joined here by colleagues from the drafting department, including the Chief Parliamentary Counsel. I wish to repeat my condolences to the draft department on the passing of their colleague, Gwen [Nawa] Johnson, who played a significant role in the development of all corporate income tax-related legislation. And noting that her professionalism and commitment will be remembered with deep gratitude by the Ministry of Finance, and all of us here today.

Mr. Speaker, this concludes my introductory remarks on this particular matter, and I look forward to hearing comments from colleagues.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

MP DeCouto, you have the floor.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So first of all, as is well known, we in the One Bermuda Alliance fully support the mission of the Corporate Income Tax Agency, and we fully support the efforts of this Government to be in full compliance with the international regulations, and we fully support the changes that are in this Bill.

If I am taking some pauses here, Mr. Speaker, there have been some floor amendments flying around. So, I have been—

Hon. E. David Burt: One amendment; it has one word.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Well, it just showed up on my desk about 30 seconds ago, Mr. Speaker, so you have to appreciate that.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: So, with respect to the funding of the Corporate Income Tax Agency again, Mr.

Speaker, you know we have discussed at length in the past how that was going to be designed to be funded through the interest income. And so, we recognise how these are all the various moving pieces of legislation coming together to support and enable that, we are in support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution? Any other? No?

Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

With that I move that the Bill be committed.

The Speaker: Thank you, Deputy [Speaker].

[Pause]

House in Committee at 2:56 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

COMMITTEE ON BILL

CORPORATE INCOME TAX AGENCY AMENDMENT ACT 2026

The Chairman: Members, we are in Committee of the whole [House] for the Bill entitled the [Corporate Income Tax Agency Amendment Act 2026](#).

I call on the Minister of Finance and Premier Minister.

Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

[Pause]

Hon. E. David Burt: Sorry, Madam Chairman, please . . . okay. Never mind. Here's the correct one. Thank you.

[Pause]

[Crosstalk]

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Chairman, stand by please.

The Chairman: Certainly.

I will remind the listening public that we are in Committee of the whole [House] for Corporate Income Tax Agency Amendment Act 2026.

[Pause]

Hon. E. David Burt: Got it. Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: You are welcome.

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Chairman, it is my error, so let me proceed.

Madam Chairman, I would like to move clause 1, the House—sorry, the Committee takes under consideration clauses 1 and 2.

The Chairman: It has been moved that we consider clauses 1 and 2.

Are there any objections to that?

There are none.

Continue.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, clause 1 provides the title of the Bill.

Clause 2 provides the interpretation provision of said Bill.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Are there any persons who wish to speak to clauses 1 and 2?

There are none.

Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I move that clauses 1 and 2 be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that clauses 1 and 2 be approved.

Are there any objections?

There are none.

So approved.

[Motion carried: Clauses 1 and 2 passed.]

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I move that clause 3 be taken under consideration at this time.

The Chairman: It has been moved that clause 3 be taken under consideration.

Are there any objections to that? There are none.

Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

Clause 3 amends section [10(1)] of the . . . to add a new source of funds to the Agency, that is, monies to be allocated to the Agency under the rules of the general reserve fund established under section 10A and the tax reserve fund established under section 50A of the Corporate Income Tax Act 2023.

However, I do note that there is an amendment at this point in time.

The Chairman: Yes.

AMENDMENT TO CLAUSE 3

Hon. E. David Burt: The amendment is to delete and replace the text that does exist there. The only thing the amendment does have is adding one particular word as the word tax “refund” reserve fund was missed, and so that word “refund” has been added where it says “tax reserve fund.” So, that is the only change that is.

So, the amendment will read in full that in clause 3 . . . And that amendment has been submitted—

The Chairman: Yes. I have the amendment in front of me.

Hon. E. David Burt: Absolutely.

That says in clause 3 by deleting paragraph D and substituting the following (and I quote):

“(d) any moneys allocated to the Agency under the rules of the general reserve fund established under section 10A and the tax refund reserve fund established under section 50A of the Corporate Income Tax Act 2023 for the purposes of the Agency in meeting its operating expenses.”

So, that is the amendment to the clause that exists, and I put . . . I move that that amendment be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the amendment to clause 3 be approved.

Are there any objections to that?

There are none.

So moved.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

And I move now that clause 3 as amended be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that clause 3 as amended be approved.

Are there any objections to that?

There are none.

Continue.

[Motion carried: Clause 3 passed as amended.]

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I will now . . . ask that we take under considerations clauses 4 through 6.

The Chairman: It has been moved that we consider clauses 4, 5, and 6.

Are there any objections to that?

There are none.

So, moved.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, clause 4 provides for a new section 10A which creates a general reserve fund to which the surplus of the Agency in any financial year will be transferred.

This section establishes the general reserve fund as a contingency fund rather than a permanent source of funding for the Agency. It is intended to serve as a supplemental backstop to be used with government consultation [under] limited circumstances to cover urgent, unplanned expenditures without requiring additional loans or grants from the Ministry of Finance and to offset shortfalls where income from the main tax refund reserve fund declines, for example due to lower interest rates, allowing the Agency to maintain a fully funded budget without additional government support.

Clause 5 provides for the consequential amendment of the Tax Credits Act 2025 by removing the requirement for charities to have audited financials for donations for those charities to qualify for the community development tax credit. And of course, by doing so it eliminates incentives that may favour larger charities for donations, enabling the Agency to administer the Community Development Tax Credit more fairly and effectively.

And clause 6 provides for the commencement.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to take under consideration clauses 4, 5, and 6?

I recognise the Member from constituency 25. Member, you have the floor.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

And I just . . . We are going quite quickly today, but I did want to take this moment to say thank you to the CEO of CITA [Corporate Income Tax Agency], to the financial secretary, [and] to the legal teams that are obviously pulling together all of these intricate rules, regulations, and laws to make this available and working for Bermuda. We are certainly appreciative. We had the opportunity for a detailed briefing from the relevant people last night, which has enabled us to come to this debate with confidence to fully support.

So, I do have a question. You know, we have heard about [how] the funds can be invested and then the returns from the investments being able to support the operations of CITA, the Corporate Income Tax Agency, and I would seek some information about how those funds are being invested. What kind of investments? And what kinds of returns and in dollar basis are they receiving for those funds?

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to clauses 4, 5, and 6?

There being none, Minister, Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: As we are in Committee, can I possibly ask the Honourable Member to repeat his question? Did he have a question—

The Chairman: Sure. Yes, he did.

Hon. E. David Burt: —because I am looking for the answer. But I don't have an answer, so I might just answer it off the fly.

The Chairman: Right.

Can you repeat the question so that you can get your answer—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes. And of course, the context is it is about using funds invested by CITA, the return of those investments to fund CITA. So of course, we ought to develop some confidence that those funds, the returns of those funds, should be sufficient to support CITA. So, I would like to know, How are they planning to invest those funds and what sort of dollar returns are we expecting to see in broad strokes of course, Madam Chairman?

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you.

Hon. E. David Burt: I mean these funds are typically done like the other short-term funds that we do. So simply, [they are] typically money market funds that are done because we ensure that no capital is at risk. And so, of course, interest rates fluctuate, but that is around the amount that we do. So, these are short-term funds that are not clearly put into risky investments and typically done [as] US money market funds.

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you.

Hon. E. David Burt: Seeing nothing further, I move that clauses 4 through 6 be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that we approve clauses 4, 5, and 6.

Are there any objections to that?

So approved.

[Motion carried: Clauses 4 through 6 passed.]

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I move the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the preamble be approved.

Are there any objections?

There are none.

Go ahead.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you.

I move [that] the Bill be reported to the House as amended.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Bill be reported to the House as amended.

Are there any objections to that?

There are none.

So approved.

[Gavel]

[Motion carried: The Corporate Income Tax Agency Amendment Act 2026 was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed as amended.]

House resumed at 3:07 pm

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

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

CORPORATE INCOME TAX AGENCY AMENDMENT ACT 2026

The Speaker: Members, are there any objections to the Bill entitled the Corporate Income Tax Agency Amendment Act 2026 being reported to the House with the necessary amendment?

There are none.

The Bill has been reported.

We will now go on to the next item on the Order Paper, which is Item No. 7, and it is entitled the second reading of the Economic Substance Amendment Act 2026. And, again, in the name of the Minister of Finance.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 29(1)

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I move that Standing Order 29(1) be suspended to enable me to move that the Bill entitled the Corporate . . . I am sorry . . . entitled the Economic Substance Amendment Act 2026 be now read a second time.

The Speaker: Any objections?

There are none.

Continue, Premier.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 29(1) suspended]

BILL

SECOND READING

ECONOMIC SUBSTANCE AMENDMENT ACT 2026

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Government I rise this afternoon in this Honourable House to provide a second reading brief for the Bill entitled the Economic Substance Amendment Act 2026.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill proposed to amend the Economic Substance Act 2018 to transfer responsibility for the administration, monitoring, and enforcement of Bermuda's economic substance regime from the Registrar of Companies [ROC] to the Corporate Income Tax Agency.

Mr. Speaker, by way of background the Economic Substance Act 2018 was enacted as part of Bermuda's response to implementing updated requirements of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation Development (OECD) and the European Union [EU] in relation to their work to address the shifting of profits by multinational enterprises to low- or no-tax jurisdictions. The concerns in this regard centred on arrangements that allowed entities to benefit from such jurisdictions without maintaining a meaningful economic presence within them.

Mr. Speaker, in response, the Act introduced requirements for companies, partnerships, and limited liability companies engaged in certain relevant activities to demonstrate adequate economic substance in Bermuda thereby reinforcing jurisdictions' commitment to transparency and international tax compliance. At present, the Act is administered and monitored by the Registrar of Companies, which also oversees enforcement through powers provided under the Registrar of Companies (Compliance Measures) Act 2017.

Mr. Speaker, this amendment Act provides for the transfer of these responsibilities to the Corporate Income Tax Agency thereby aligning the administration oversight enforcement of the economic substance regime with Bermuda's evolving international tax governance and administrative framework.

Mr. Speaker, this transition is a natural extension the Agency's responsibility. Making the transition at this time allows for greater operational administrative effectiveness and efficiency in handling both corporate and tax matters and reinforces Bermuda's ongoing commitment to compliance and transparency. The legislative amendments are necessary to give full effect to this transition. They will replace all statutory references to the Registrar of Companies with references to the Agency, introduce updated operational provisions, and repeal or restructure provisions that are no longer applicable under the revised framework.

Mr. Speaker, these amendments will also enhance administrative safeguards required to support the effective functioning of the regime—and that would be the economic substance regime under the Agency. In keeping with Bermuda's ongoing international tax

cooperation obligations, the legislation once enacted will be shared with the OECD Forum on Harmful Tax Practices and the European Union Code of Conduct Group for business taxation.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I wish to emphasise the Government remains confident that the corporate income tax framework upholds Bermuda's strong commitment to global compliance and transparency while maintaining the Island's respected reputation internationally.

I extend my sincere appreciation the teams within the Ministry of Finance, the Corporate Income Tax Agency, as well as our advisors for work in advance of this initiative. And I also wish to acknowledge the Attorney General's Chambers' drafting team for their continued support throughout this process.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

Does any other Member wish to speak?
MP Pearman.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you. (Am I on? Yes.) Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[I have] just a couple of very quick points that are really philosophical as much as anything. One is [that] we on this side and indeed some of the Government have long questioned the role of the Registrar of Companies, what that role should be, and whether it should be a repository for information as it was sort of creeping towards becoming a quasi-regulator. And we note that this Act is in fact taking some of those obligations, which were housed in the Registrar of Companies and is now moving them over to the Corporate Income Tax Agency. And I can see why that might be a more logical fit, although again philosophically it is not necessarily easy to see why this logically slots in there. But I mean, that is a minor point—merely an observation.

And no doubt the ROC, the Registrar of Companies, will be happy not to have this burden. And just as we said when burdens were being introduced to the Registrar of Companies, we very much hope that by introducing additional burdens to the Corporate Income Tax Agency that with those burdens come the necessary resources to ensure that those obligations and duties can be performed, not only resources of manpower but also resources of finances because the CITA is now going to be asked to do a number of things. Again, it is merely a philosophical observation.

Secondly, just on economic substance, as the Premier noted it is important that a jurisdiction such as ours, an international financial centre, has to keep at the forefront of this. There are other parties beyond our shores who are very much involved in all of this, and we want to ensure that we maintain our well-deserved reputation for excellence on the global stage.

Thirdly, and this is really more personal to me as a lawyer or litigator—having taken the time to read

closely this Bill, there are certain powers that were with the ROC that are now moving to the Corporate Income Tax Agency. But having read the powers afresh, some of them were, to put it mildly, eyebrow-raising in their scope, and what I am assured is that these regulatory powers obviously are just passporting from one regulatory Agency to the other. So, they are already on the books. I am also told that they exist already for the BMA [Bermuda Monetary Authority], and so were it not for that fact that this is already something that is already well settled in Bermuda, I would wonder how some of these more draconian of powers sit against constitutional rights to due process. But that is a conversation for another day in a courtroom far, far away.

So, Mr. Speaker, thank you for the presentation by the Honourable Premier and Minister of Finance. I recognise that the CEO (if I have the right title) of the Corporate Income Tax Agency is in the room. As my colleague, MP Doug DeCouto, said on the last Bill, we on this side and others were given the opportunity to have an advanced briefing and to pose questions [to] the CEO of the CITA and also the financial secretary and others last night, and we are grateful for that opportunity. When we have Bills of such significance on the international stage, I think it is vital for all of those in Parliament, both this House and the other place, to be able to understand the logic and reasoning behind the Government and its policy driving decisions and to be able to pose our questions in that context. And so, I would offer a heartfelt and sincere thanks for that opportunity, which was very much appreciated.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

MP Dickinson.

Mr. Curtis L. Dickinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation makes sense. I understand the concerns expressed by the Member from constituency 22 (I believe it is) around moving this responsibility from the ROC to CITA. Having sat in the seat as Minister of Finance when this responsibility actually sat inside the Ministry, it makes eminent sense to move the responsibility for areas around economic substance and tax to a place that specialises in tax.

My sense is that there will probably be some degree of synergy here in as much as the Corporate Income Tax Authority already has to deal with external bodies: EU, US tax, UK. This is probably not that much of a stretch for them, and I am sure that the resources required currently sitting inside of the ROC will move with the responsibilities. And so, in that sense this makes sense.

With respect to concerns for the ROC, the ambit, the remit, of the ROC has been growing ever since I got into politics in 2018. And I am sure that anyone with an objective eye would take a view that they have

probably been overwhelmed over the course of the last year with all of these mandates that come from everybody and their cousin. And so, the idea of shedding some responsibilities to a place where they probably better sit it is one that makes eminent sense.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Does any other Member wish me a contribution? None other?

Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I think I see some questions that were asked. I will do my best to try to answer them before I move that the Bill be committed.

The first one I do think was a question that said, What was the reduction ROC funding arising from the transfer [of] the economic substance in international tax exchange? Those were covered in detail during the budget debates, but the ROC budget reduced by \$810,000 between 2025/26 and 2026/27. This included a reduction to reflect the transfer partially offset by additional investment to manage the cost of managing the recently transferred into the Registrar of Companies beneficial ownership register from the BMA and the transition to legitimate interest access.

And the concern raised regarding tax identification numbers on the overhead of implementing . . . And the response is that CITA has been made aware and will review this as they look to make sure that we have the best tax administration in the world. Great.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With those questions answered, I move that the Bill be committed.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Deputy [Speaker].

House in Committee at 3:17 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

COMMITTEE ON BILL

ECONOMIC SUBSTANCE AMENDMENT ACT 2026

The Chairman: Members we are in Committee of the whole [House] on the Bill entitled [Economic Substance Amendment Act 2026](#).

I call on the Minister of Finance and Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I move that the Committee do take under consideration clauses 1 through 6.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Committee consider clauses 1 through 6 of the amendment Act.

Are there any objections?

There are none.

Continue.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Clause 1 provides the title of the Bill.

Clause 2 provides for the interpretation provision for the Bill.

Clause 3 amends section 2 of the principal Act by providing for the insertion of the new definition of “Agency” in the correct alphabetical order.

Clause 4 amends the principal Act generally by providing for the deletion of the word “Registrar” wherever it appears and to replace it with the word “Agency.” The effect of this amendment will be to substitute the Corporate Income Tax Agency in place of the Registrar of Companies as the public authority with responsibility for administration enforcement and the jurisdictions economic substance regime.

Clause 5 provides for the insertions of sections 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, and 4E in the principal Act to provide for the functions of the Agency regarding the inspection of registered entities; the power of the Agency to carry out regulation and inspection of a registered entity; the power to require information and documents; the power to require a registered entity to produce documents and to give assistance to the Agency; the power for the Agency to enter and inspect premises, and to inspect documents found on the premises; to issue a notice to comply after inspection; and further to issue a notice to comply with economic substance requirements. These provisions transposed equivalent powers from the Registrar of Companies compliance measures to the Agency as the Agency does not currently have such powers in relation to economic substance and their nexus—and they—

The Chairman: Necessary.

Hon. E. David Burt: —are necessary for it to effectively administer the economic substance regime.

And finally at this point in time, Madam Chairman, clause 6 amends section 6 the principal Act to allow the Agency to act as the competent authority. And this amendment is necessary to clarify the interaction between the Minister of Finance and the Corporate Income Tax Agency insofar as it pertains to information sharing and disclosure to other foreign tax authorities in respect of economic substance non-compliance.

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to clauses 1 through 6?

There are none.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

I move that clauses 1 through 6 be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that clauses 1 through 6 be approved.

Are there any objections?

There are none.

So approved.

[Motion carried: Clauses 1 through 6 passed.]

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I move that the Committee take under considerations clauses 7 through 14.

The Chairman: It has been moved that we take under consideration clauses 7 through 14.

Are there any objections?

There are none.

Continue.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much.

Madam Chairman, clause 7 provides for references to be made to the Agency by removing “his duties” to “its duties.” This is a conforming change to the Agency as a statutory corporation rather than individual. The remainder of the clause causes the relevant confidentiality provisions of the Agency’s incorporating Act to apply with respect to its handling of economic substance information.

Clause 8 inserts a new section 8 to provide for no action, suit, prosecution, or other proceeding to be brought or instituted against an officer, employee, or agent of the Agency. These are equivalent protections to those currently enjoyed by the Register of Companies under the Companies Act 1981 and are necessary to ensure that the Agency must carry out its duties as it relates to economic substance without fear of reprisal.

Clause 9 amends section 12 by providing for the Agency to be able to publish the appropriate guidance on the Agency’s website. The clause also provides that existing economic substance guidance published in the past by the Registrar shall remain valid.

Clause 10 repeals and replaces sections 13 and 14 to ensure the Agency has the power to impose civil penalties for the breach of economic substance requirements and also provides for the procedure to be used in imposing civil penalties. These penalties are in substitution for substantially similar penalties under the Registrar of Companies (Compliance Measures) Act 2017. And it is necessary to insert the new text under clause 10 since the Agency will not be able to rely upon the existing penalty provisions [in] the Registrar of Companies (Compliance Measures) Act 2017, and the Agency must have the ability to enforce compliance through the civil penalty regime.

Clause 11 inserts sections 14A, 14B, 14C, [and] 14D to enable the Agency to impose default fines; to provide for default fine or civil penalty not to apply in

case of a conviction; to provide for a person to appeal to the court against the decision of the Agency, to impose a default fine or civil penalty; to give the Agency the power to apply to a court where a registered entity fails to comply with a third notice.

As with clause 10 these provisions mirror substantially [the] provisions under the Registrar of Companies (Compliance Measures) Act [2017] and are enacted to give the Agency the benefit of equivalent powers currently enjoyed by the Registrar of Companies with respect to economic substance compliance and enforcement.

Clause 12 provides for consequential amendment to the Registrar of Companies (Compliance Measures) Act 2017 to remove the references and provisions that are no longer necessary given the transfer of these functions and responsibility to the Agency.

Clause 13 provides a transitional provision to ensure continuity and the validity of any notice, penalty notice, or fine issued by the Registrar under the Registrar of Companies (Compliance Measures) Act 2017 prior to the commencement of this amending Act.

And clause 14 provides the commencement provision stating that this Bill will come into effect on 31 March 2026.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Are there any other persons who wish to speak to clauses 7 through to clause 14?

There being none . . .

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I move that clauses 7 through 14 be approved and stand as part of the Bill.

The Chairman: It has been moved that clauses 7 through 14 be approved.

Are there any objections?

There are none.

[Motion carried: Clauses 7 through 14 passed.]

The Chairman: The preamble.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I move that the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the preamble be approved.

Are there any objections?

There are none.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I move 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?

There are none.

So moved.

[Gavel]

[Motion carried: The Economic Substance Amendment Act 2026 was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed without amendment.]

House resumed at 3:26 pm

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

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

ECONOMIC SUBSTANCE AMENDMENT ACT 2026

The Speaker: Members, are there any objections to the Bill entitled the Economic Substance Amendment Act 2026 being reported to the House as printed?

There are none.

Members, that brings us to an end of what is on the Order Paper for today.

We are going to our third readings now and the first third reading this afternoon, the Customs . . . no . . . Who is doing the Customs?

[Crosstalk]

Hon. E. David Burt: I will.

The Speaker: Okay.

Premier. Thank you.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 21

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that Standing Order 21 be suspended to enable me to move the Bill entitled the Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2026 be now read a third time by his title only.

The Speaker: There are no objections.

Continue.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 21 suspended.]

BILL

THIRD READING

CUSTOMS TARIFF AMENDMENT ACT 2026

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move the Bill entitled the Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2026 be now read for a third time by his title only and passed.

The Speaker: The Bill has been read a third time by title only and is now passed.

Thank you.

[Motion carried: The Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2026 was given a third reading and passed.]

The Speaker: Next should be the Health . . . the Government Fees one . . . you [are doing] the Government Fees. Yes?

Hon. Jache Adams: Oh, I thought you said Health.

The Speaker: No, no. The Health one.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Yes, yes.

Okay, I saw you jump up; I was looking for the Minister of Health.

Hon. Jache Adams: Oh no. Sorry.

The Speaker: You are doing that Bill?

Hon. Jache Adams: Yes.

The Speaker: Okay.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 21

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Speaker, I move that Standing Order 21 be suspended to enable me to move the Bill entitled Health Insurance (Mutual Re-insurance Funds) (Prescribed Sum) Validations Act 2026 be now read the third time by its title only.

The Speaker: Are there any objections to that?
There are none.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 21 suspended.]

The Speaker: Continue.

BILL

THIRD READING

HEALTH INSURANCE (MUTUAL RE-INSURANCE FUNDS) (PRESCRIBED SUM) VALIDATIONS ACT 2026

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a third time by its title only and passed.

The Speaker: The Bill has been read a third time by title only and is now passed. Thank you.

[Motion carried: The Health Insurance (Mutual Re-insurance Funds) (Prescribed Sum) Validations Act 2026 was given a third reading and passed.]

The Speaker: Premier.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 21

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that Standing Order 21 be suspended to enable me to move that the Bill entitled the Corporate Income Tax Agency Amendment Act 2026 be now read the third time by its title only.

The Speaker: Any objections?
There are none.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 21 suspended.]

BILL

THIRD READING

CORPORATE INCOME TAX AGENCY AMENDMENT ACT 2026

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill entitled the Corporate Income Tax Agency Amendment Act 2026 be now read for a third time by its title only and passed.

The Speaker: The Bill has been read a third time by its title only and is now passed.

[Motion carried: The Corporate Income Tax Agency Amendment Act 2026 was given a third reading and passed.]

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 21

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I move that Standing Order 21 be suspended to enable me to move the Bill entitled the Economic Substance Amendment Act 2026 be now read the third time by its title only.

The Speaker: Any objections?
No.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 21 suspended.]

The Speaker: Continue.

BILL THIRD READING

ECONOMIC SUBSTANCE AMENDMENT ACT 2026

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill entitled the Economic Substance Amendment Act 2026 be now read the third time by its title only and passed.

The Speaker: The Bill is read a third time by title only and is now passed. Thank you.

[Motion carried: The Economic Substance Amendment Act 2026 was given a third reading and passed.]

The Speaker: Premier.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move this Honourable House to now adjourn until Friday, 27 March, at 10:00 am.

The Speaker: Does any Member wish to speak to that? No?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: MP, do you want to speak on the motion?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Were you on your feet just now—

CONCERN OVER UNSCHEDULED PARLIAMENTARY SITTING

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, I am on my feet for the just the announcement that we will be meeting next week.

I had agreed with the . . . Just as a point of note—and I want this House to record this—I did get up and say that if there are any other regulations that were tabled today, we are willing to go through the Order Paper to clear them. We questioned this—whether or not we were going to have to meet next week. There was nothing to say that we would be meeting next week. We have colleagues who have made arrangements since which . . . well before that because we were only known to be going in this time.

Now all of a sudden at the last minute we are hearing that we are meeting next week, when we tried to discuss this matter beforehand. It has been difficult

to say the least throughout the whole budget debate to make sure that we have things in order. And so, my concern is that we are here now saying that we are going to meet next week, and we do not even know what we are meeting next week for. So, it would be nice to hear something from the Government at least letting us know what we are supposed to be doing next week because we said we didn't mind clearing the table.

The Speaker: Premier, would you like to comment on that now or have a private conversation with the Opposition before we leave today?

Hon. E. David Burt: I will not comment on this now. I believe there is someone who wants to speak to the motion to adjourn, Mr. Speaker. Under the provision of the House, we move that the House comes back next week and I'm happy to note that there's three items on the Order Paper that are for consideration next week that we will do and if there's further items, I will happily speak to the Opposition on those. Thank you.

The Speaker: All right.

MP Swan, did you want your 20 minutes?

GOVERNMENT-OWNED PUBLIC GOLF COURSES NEED TO BE SELF-SUSTAINING

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I don't need that much time.

Mr. Speaker, I just felt it necessary to make some comments that are percolating in the public domain about public golf courses as it relates to membership that exists at Port Royal and the rate increases that have caused some consternation.

[Crosstalk]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And, Mr. Speaker, I just felt it . . . without getting into too much of it because I don't feel 100 per cent but I would just like to say that any course that talks about membership isn't necessarily public. I declare my interest. I'm a product of public golf at Port Royal. For the last 56 years I presided over Bermuda Government Golf Courses, in 1985 in a capacity of general manager for eight years. I was a . . . I managed a quango for some years following and I had the honour to be the chairman of Bermuda Government Golf Courses for a period of time up until 2024 for when illness came and I felt it best to step away.

I feel it necessary to say that over time, I will just put this in context here. If I go back to the early 1970s when there was no membership at Port Royal Golf Course as a public golf course, it was very much considered a daily fee golf course. Persons like the late Noel Van Putten, who recently passed away, was one of the architects of getting a club there. The model that was used was looked at in Scotland where a public golf

... the birthplace of public golf, offered a membership so persons galvanised there.

But the government ethos of public golf has been, and I know this and I look across at my first auditor, I look right at him, so he will tell me that we were, we were challenged to have expenditure and income equal. That's a mighty challenge. And when I opened up St. George's in 1985 and we were able to achieve an operating surplus at that particular time with all the different categories of rounds that we were able to generate. We had arrangements with Club Med. We had arrangements with the St. George's Club. And then we had daily-fee people. And we had folks from all around and we did outreach to get a number of people playing golf. We encouraged people from East End Yacht Club and St. George's Cricket Club and St. David's Cricket Club, Spanish Point Boat Club. All around the Island to come and participate.

Let's fast forward to today and what we've seen is persons confusing daily fee golf, public golf, with the membership that they might have. Port Royal Golf Course to sustain itself—and Ocean View [Golf Course]—must be because they are public municipal golf courses. If you want a membership golf course, like I played Bayonne [Golf Club], and I played Somerset Hills [Country Club], and Winged Foot [Golf Club], the upper echelons, as it were. If it cost you \$5 [million], \$10 million to run that course and you only want a hundred members, you divide that hundred members by the operating costs and that's what your fee [is]. And it's determined by your ability to pay.

The model that as chairman I went away with a team to study, was the best example of public golf that exists on the planet, I believe, is Bethpage. And like them we host world-class tournaments. And thankfully the times when we introduced world-class tournaments, the government supplemented and subsidised that.

An Hon. Member: Ah!

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Right? And the edict that's come down has been these courses have to like, when I had the mandate: income must equal expenditure. Because you can't have a government who's trying to balance the budget and then expect other entities to be operating at a deficit.

I always had the challenge when I did preside over a world-class golf course at the same time it hosted a world-class event was that Bermuda was going to be under the spotlight and we needed to make sure that when the cameras set on us that we provided a world-class product. And we did. Year in and year out. It was challenging.

I want to say that under the current Chairman, Mr. Jason Wade, and his team of golf course superintendents, I'm going to tell you. I even said it publicly. It is the best I've seen the course after the tournament throughout. But it comes at a price. And I'm not going

to get into too [many] details. And I'm going to say this: I believe what the trustees are attempting to do—I know this—is that they are trying to strike the right balance. You can't have a quote-unquote “membership” for a public municipal golf course that takes up the lion's share of tee times on Saturdays and Sundays. Because that economic model hinders you from making a decent return on your investment, to get the fees in to cover the expense of running the operation.

And so ... and what happens is, and let's go to the mind-set. The mind-set of ... and nobody understands the mind-set of public-private and resort and ... and ... municipal better than me. I have been excluded from courses and asked to leave golf courses because of the colour of my skin. And I've been denied access to golf even in this country because of that, by Riddell's Bay, I remember ... a course that used government funds to be developed. So, I have some idea.

But I believe in public golf. I declare my interest. For 10 years I plied my trade at Port Royal teaching golf under Port Royal Golf Developmental [programme], “Kim Swan Golf,” where I didn't get many lessons from quote-unquote “members.” Probably could count them on the hand. But I produced the young people who became the champions of Port Royal by an outreach that went beyond. Going out to the young accountants, the young lawyers, the young actuaries in Bermuda and teaching them how to be competent and teaching them how to socialise in the game. Especially women. I hang my head on the fact that in the 1980s, I ... myself and my team, we made sure that women were equal partners in a sport that went out of its way to prevent them. I've been to a golf course and told, *she can't come. You can, she can't.* That's not right.

And that mind-set permeates even in this country to some extent. I'm saying that I certainly believe that the opportunity to get optimum rounds for ... where a course that is hosting the PGA on the weekends exist with them being able to get more “pay as you go” like at Bethpage during the optimum tee times. And the course has a responsibility too. You can't sell one tee time every eight minutes when the opportunity like we had, we were trained to optimise people at Castle Harbour. We had a hotel full of people we had to get on. You need to sell two tee times every eight minutes, front and back, for two hours and get 120-odd people on the course. And then turn it over and do the same thing, if you can, in the afternoon.

There's no ... what I believe what the trustees are trying to do is to get the members to say, listen—and they can negotiate this with them. I'm giving them some ideas. They can say, *Listen* ... in the 10 years when I used to run the Port Royal Golf Developmental programme, I used to take unsold inventory in the afternoons and have tournaments. Take young students, put them with young adults and teach them how to ... introduce them to the game.

And when you take a membership of \$2,000 or \$3,000 and divide that by the number of times that

these persons are playing, you can't pay people, staff. Man, it costs . . . you know, because people are netting their rounds down to almost \$20. They got that figured out. You can't make that work, mathematically. And the government just cannot subsidise it. Especially . . . continue to subsidise it. Especially when the opportunity to introduce a model that will work exists. And we've got people coming in great numbers on the cruise ships who will pay the freight. And what that . . . and what happens then when you can optimise your revenues during those peak times, it allows you to offer rounds to locals that are more affordable.

I go to the Bethpage model. Every . . . Bethpage has five golf courses; the Black Course hosted the PGA, the US Open, and the Ryder Cup. We went there to look at their model. And they have four other courses. If you are a resident of New York state, you get a discounted rate by virtue of being a New York resident. You can book an early tee time by virtue of being a New York resident. That's the epitome of a public municipal golf course. Persons don't want that. They want private membership at the expense of public. You can't have that.

And let me tell you this: Port Royal would have never produced a Kim Swan, a Dwayne Pearman and a Darren Swan and all these boys coming up—there is Oliver Betschart and Kenny Leseur, who I taught. Samson Douglas—if it had the model that existed down in Warwick and Riddell's Bay or other courses in this country. No, because I was grateful for the ethos of Walter King who partnered us up. And Hubert Smith who was the president of Ocean View and on the first board of directors who says, *We have got to cater to everybody*. And that's the ethos that persons . . . so they are getting there . . . they are tickled up.

And if you are going to have a \$700 increase on a rate, divide that by two rounds a week for 52 weeks of people who play four. You still . . . that increase cannot allow that course to be self-sufficient. And it can be because it has a global presence now. And that's what we need to . . . to . . . to recognise. And it's a bitter pill to swallow. I'm going to tell you this. When I came on the board in 2020, the mind-set of membership versus the mind-set of the board of trustees—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Mr. Owen Darrell, who's the Minister today, was the chief of staff [and] gave me some tickets. I had to give a trustee a ticket to get in the gate.

Some Hon. Members: No. No. Hello!

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: I think a chairman here might have been on the board because people coming from overseas just saw members and they looked past the people who were responsible, who could be sued,

who lost sleep over the course. In the spirit of openness and public, I fought against that and it changed today and there's an equal partnership and I thank Mr. Vincent Hollinsid and my deputy that I put there to negotiate with them. Because I understand the model. I played golf at Sunningdale, Wentworth, Saint-Nom-la-Bretèche, Puerta de Hierro, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Oliver's Golf Club.

I know what it's like to have somebody come to you with a machine gun and look at you. I know that mind-set too well. I know what it's like to be escorted out of a country only because . . . and I tell you what. The mind-set . . . so you hear me talk about mind-sets. I've lived long enough to understand it, and I give thanks for the people who trained me in this space, Black and White, local and foreign.

The trustees are trying to make the courses self-sufficient. Be a part of coming up with a solution. I'm going to throw out one solution. I got this from West Palm Beach, Florida in 1976. We could play any golf course as a student for free, providing the pro told you that you could play. And the golf coach told us, *Do not call him and expect to play before three o'clock*. And we played some great courses. And I will never forget the late Bob Klein who used to tell me down at the Fountains, the Jewish course, down in Lake Worth. He said, *You can play all you want except Thanksgiving to Easter because all my members are there. And you can come and work in the bag room, but you won't be playing any golf. Days are shorter*. That's what private clubs . . . that's the mind-set of a private club, of a member's club, I love . . . I love private members' clubs, Mid Ocean, I love it. I won the Junior Championship there in 1974. One of the highlights of my life being there winning the Colonel Clarke.

But Port Royal is a government-owned, municipal, daily fee course first and foremost. And long may it live that way! Because I wouldn't be here making this speech today had it not been so. And the history that allowed Ocean View to have a membership I understand that very well too. I was the one who was tasked by Quinton Edness to go there and bring it into government fold so the members club didn't die, because of the historic context of it.

We, persons of African descent, couldn't play any other course except before nine o'clock in the morning. [We] had to be off and [if] it wasn't for Ocean View and the inclusive people that we have always been, Ocean View was open to everybody. [Grew] out of military golf in the 1890s, military golf courses that existed at Boaz Island, Admiralty House, Ocean View and the St. George's Garrison. And then private club, then the Mid Ocean was built in 1920/21 and then Devereux Emmet built another seven of them between 1921 and 1930, the majority of them, up and down this country. Golf, to help the economy, to help tourism. So, I'm grateful for that.

Let us not confuse that if a government . . . and let me close by saying this through the late Reggie

Tucker (who lived where my constituency is today) and Louis Rafael “Kid” Corbin (who comes from my constituency) and Walter King who went to school in St. George’s and was the caddie master down at Castle Harbour and came up to Port Royal. Public golf . . . Port Royal, was one of the best government social initiatives ever. It was opened in 1970 in tandem with the opening of the Southampton Princess. And I had to fight to get persons to recognise its 50th anniversary. And in 2024, I had a celebration for the 50th anniversary . . . 54 years. And I got ill right after that.

Let us not ignore the fact that Dr. Walwyn Hughes, who I had the honour of sitting with in the Senate, (right?) was the Director of [Agriculture] and Fisheries. When that cause came under Works, Ralph Marshall, one of my mentors, was one of the first persons on the on the board as a member of Parliament. Right? George Wardman, who had an influence in my development, from Coral Beach, and all that was very much a part of all that. Good government initiative, public golf, municipal golf, [there] is nothing wrong with coming up with the right formula to make it self-sustaining, and I believe that’s what the what the trustees are attempting to do.

And I want to say this, I’ll close with this: When I presided over the board, I made it an important thing to get those audits caught up and to get someone in there. And I worked with the then Permanent Secretary Mr. Rochester to make sure that we had someone from government coming there and putting these systems in place so that we can get up to 2020 from 2016 and then get the things working. As chairman of the Audit Committee, today I’m come . . . I know that that is well in train. And that’s important.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Very important. So, when people throw out things and say things and get people all exercised, I believe what persons are trying to do is get it where we can optimise the amount of revenue potential for a government-owned public daily fee facility that along the way offered some membership. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Does any other Member wish to . . . MP Tucker, you have the floor.

CALL FOR NATIONAL MINIMUM TRAINING STANDARD FOR THOSE WHO INTERACT WITH NEURODIVERSE CHILDREN

Ms. Robin Tucker: Mr. Speaker, I promise everybody I will be brief. But I would like to talk a little bit about something that I had been made aware of through social media on Facebook. Evidently there was a child on a bus that had, sort of, was overwhelmed with perhaps sensory information, or what have you, and so they

acted out on the bus. Which is a big reason why I want to get up and speak today.

As I’ve already mentioned in this House previously, I have a neurodivergent grandson. And he is quite little and so these types of things are very near and dear to me, broadly. So neurodivergent children obviously have to rely on adults and others to follow through on their, you know, to deal with their best interests and understand their specific needs. Some children are able to be functional especially those that have been diagnosed with autism and other neurodivergent diagnoses. Some cannot speak at all and so they have to rely on others to be able to interpret what it is that they need and be able to meet them, sort of, where they are.

We spoke this morning about the relaunch of Cybertips and all of that and requiring certifications and the like. And . . . which is great. But also, I would like to see mandatory training for people who interact in any way with children who have or have been, you know, that have neurodiversities. It is important in my mind to ensure that we look out for that population especially when we . . . It has been mentioned here previously that there are more and more children who are showing up with autism, ADHD, dyspraxia, dyslexia, and the like. So rather than be . . . I’m going to say . . . I’m going to say pro[active] . . . rather than be reactive, which is not specifically what I mean, just the best word I could think of right now. Because I do recognise that the Minister did mention in her brief during the budget debate that funds had been set aside for training . . . for neurodiversity training. But I think that it would be good for us to be able to get ahead of the curve. We have more people, more children, being diagnosed. So, we really need to focus on, as I said, that population.

We have children who are triggered by their . . . overwhelmed because [there is] too much going on in terms of their sensory responses and things. We have children who are sometimes misinterpreted, their behaviours are misinterpreted because they may be melting down or defiant or what have you. Someone may see a child in a grocery store and they are having what would appear to be a meltdown. And people (and I have heard it) have thought the same with my grandson. You know that he is sort of out of control and just allowed to do whatever it is to do. But some of these children have to do all that they can in order to self-regulate and to get themselves into a position whereby they can release the energy or release certain things.

And of course, as I said, they are often misinterpreted especially if you don’t understand what’s happening. Some children you can tell that they have some issues. Other children don’t look like they have, you know, to the naked eye they don’t look like they have issues. And it would be important for people to be able to, especially those who are interacting with children on a regular basis, daily, teachers, bus drivers . . . sports coaches [and] the like to be able to understand that different children show up in different ways, and how to

respond to them. Because they don't all fit in one, you know, tight box and bow.

I have a situation . . . I've had a situation when my grandson was about two years old, he was taken to gymnastics. He is very high energy and so that was one way that was thought that he could burn off some energy and learn socialisation skills and the like. So, he was taken to gymnastics and because he makes a . . . kind of like a . . . he makes a sound (right?) when he gets excited. And at two, almost three years old, he went to one gymnastics class, did what he was supposed to do but because he made the noise, the person who was the coach (or whoever it was) told his parents that he couldn't come back because he was too distracting to the three-year-olds. Okay?

So again, there needs to be an awareness of how we show up and interact with these children. Many jurisdictions right now have . . . make it mandatory to have training for educators. So, places like the UK, Australia, Sweden, Finland, New Zealand, they all have programmes that require teachers, particularly, to have training to deal with children with neurodiversities. So, with that, I would like to actually see Bermuda have a national minimum training standard for anyone interacting with neurodiverse children. Again, this would help us not to be reactive to situations but to get ahead of them and be able to deal with children now and in the future.

So, Mr. Speaker, I will end with this. I'll just say that if we expect our neurodiverse children to thrive, then we must ensure that every adult who interacts with them is fully equipped with the knowledge and the tools that is needed to support them. The training that is required should not depend on luck or goodwill, but it should be, in my opinion, Mr. Speaker, it should be mandatory. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

Minister of Home Affairs, you have your 20 minutes.

STRENGTH IN REGIONAL UNITY: BERMUDA'S PLACE IN THE CARIBBEAN

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

Mr. Speaker, this afternoon I rise noting there has been much commentary in the public domain, some of which I observed in today's newspaper. And the subject matter in particular—my microphone is . . .

The Speaker: I hear you.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: —and some of the subject matter relating to Bermuda's intention to deepen its ties with CARICOM.

And, Mr. Speaker, I couldn't help but be initially taken aback by one the placements because in all the days and years that I've seen a publication, I've never personally seen an op-ed make it into the top fold of a front page of a news product. But I found it to be indicative of a view that we in Bermuda are so different from the Caribbean, and to underscore these narratives that for years and years and for centuries have really sought to divide and conquer when we know for a fact that we are actually Caribbean people.

And I actually went as far as to look back and say, you know, to what extent even are some of our National Heroes also Caribbeans and with Caribbean roots and finding that Dame Lois [Browne-Evans], for example, one that is celebrated in our context, had her husband with roots to the islands. And even Sir Edward Richards likewise from Guyana, or with Guyanese roots. We think about Mary Prince and even her journey which then ended with marrying an Antiguan. And the reality is that the narrative that consistently is perpetuated amongst us to divide and conquer and tell us that we are so much different and even go as far as to suggest that we are chalk and cheese is really one that is a fallacy and rooted in fiction rather than fact.

And so, I invite Bermuda as they read the Green Paper, which the Ministry of Home Affairs has sought to publish and engage in the consultation that has been sought to engage their views, that they see it as an extension of themselves. Because though the narratives may seek to laud the view that we are so much different, the reality is we are alike. The reality is that in the geopolitical environments that we are living in strength in unity and connectivity is what allows for small island states to be successful. It cannot only be convenient for us to have a certain segment of our community having businesses in the Caribbean when us as people are dissuaded from connecting. It cannot be convenient when it meets economic opportunities for a select few when the rest of us will be excluded from them.

We have to ask the question, and I recently had a conversation, and I asked someone, *If I was adopted and I was invited to meet my biological mother, would I ask, What are the benefits?* I don't think so. That is not a human or natural response. But we have been conditioned to respond in a very binary way as if two things cannot be true at the same time.

But, Mr. Speaker, we know for a fact that two things can be true at the same time. There can be benefits and connectivity and there can also be an inextricable link with the Caribbean. Despite what we have been told, despite what the books have attempted to conceal, and despite what we have not been able to be advanced in our education system to empower us as people.

And so, the Green Paper and the discussion around CARICOM despite the prominent status of division that may be peddled amongst us must be combated. It must be confronted with the truth of who we are, the truth of what [is] beneficial for us by way of

connectivity, and the truth of what the future of Bermuda and its people can be.

Mr. Speaker, when we recently travelled to CARICOM, we learned of the efforts to diversify through trade. We learned about the efforts to noting the change in tariffs, the threat of tariffs that took place in the latter part of 2025. And then the now recent changes which have seen war, and then the requirement, the scarcity of oil with islands that are so dependent and Bermuda in particular importing 90 per cent of what it consumes. It invites us to ask, *Is that really what we want to be proud of?* Would it not behove us to learn from one of our . . . what our Caribbean siblings and brothers and sisters have done successfully? Would it not also contribute to teach them ways that we've been able to as a country be successful so that they too can learn from our successes?

I also went back to review back in [the] 1920s when a similar narrative was told to the great Marcus Garvey when he attempted on four occasions to visit Bermuda. And the similar narrative will be true that he was undesirable in the context of connecting with Bermuda. Someone who would have similarities would seek to bring about empowerment for our people was told that actually this is undesirable. And that is always the word that comes up when it is brought or confronted with the notion that we might connect.

And so, the question is, Who does it serve to actually keep us divided when every other organisation and country doesn't actually have the same confrontation, the same concern when we want to join other organisations or even be aligned to others to speak for us? That all of a sudden [it is] more palatable than us having an opportunity to speak for ourselves. From us having an opportunity with our evolved economy to actually contribute in a meaningful way for our benefit through connectivity. And so, the question must be asked, Who does it serve to keep us divided? Who does it serve for us to not have a means and a mechanism and a way to connect through our heritage?

Many say that Bermuda is similar to the other jurisdictions. I often would travel and find people who know of or have connections and roots and histories, the names that we know even in our contacts who are directly connected to the Caribbean. So how could we be chalk and cheese? How could we be so different having travelled on a different route, but how could we be so different when we have the same history?

We have to confront the reality of what is true and it is uncomfortable. I recognise that. It is uncomfortable to be confronted with a select few who have been benefiting from and have sought it beneficial to have connectivity when it is strictly in the context of financial benefit for them and for their family, but when there's an opportunity for collective empowerment there's a challenge. When there's an opportunity for collective identity, there's a challenge. Immediately we are confronted with what are the dollars and cents of

something that actually cannot just be quantified in dollars and cents.

We have an opportunity as people to have a level of self-love and self-actualisation as we seek to embrace. It does not mean that we have diminished our standing and does not mean that we will no longer have relationships. Each of the Caribbean islands have relationships with both the US and the UK. In fact, most recently the UK sought to have an engagement with the Caribbean foreign Ministers, of which Bermuda was not invited, of which Bermuda was not consulted and asked, What are the concerns that you may have? Is that acceptable in our context?

We brag about international business and the relationships that we have but yet where do we speak for ourselves? We have an opportunity to reimagine the future and the strength that we may believe that we have. And so, through the Ministry of Home Affairs' Green Paper and consultation process which invites thoughtful consideration, it invites factual contribution, it invites acceptance of something that cannot be erased. Each week we sit here in Parliament, and we hear about the groups who have gone to CARIFTA which has actually been in existence before CARICOM with no reservation.

Mr. Speaker, you too have gone to parliamentary conferences and have even had an opportunity to feature in these addresses with no reservation, with no demand for a referendum, with no demand or questioning why you would have such standing. Because you were respected and it was deemed to be okay.

So why now is it now a challenge? I find it difficult to reconcile but I find the narratives to have been . . . to have run their course. I find the narrative that only serve a select few to have run their course. And so, we have an opportunity to be different just as we have evolved in time, just as technology has evolved, our relationship too is eligible to evolve.

Bermuda has a lot to offer to the world, and the world also has a lot to offer to Bermuda. But we must not let the fishbowl mentality help us to believe that we are big sharks in a very small world. The Ministry invites thoughtful consideration. It also invites that we . . . as we step into the next season of our evolution for the history books to tell a story of history and not foreshadow what we are re-experiencing. I invite for the history books to show where we were but that our ability to embrace new ideas foreshadow where we will go.

And so, though I was confronted with the narratives that we have seen play out time and time again, this morning in looking at the paper, I also have a hope and a sense of acceptance that we will move from these ideas, Mr. Speaker, than the ones that have been to our demise in the past. The ones that have only served conveniently to the economic benefit of a select few. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Does any other Member . . . MP Linda Smith.

Ms. Linda Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes.

PROTECT BERMUDA: GET INVOLVED

Ms. Linda Smith: Today, everybody is the first day of spring and while it might not look like that outside, I'm sure there are a lot of people knowing that summer is coming are very happy to see what's happening outside today. And spring is supposed to be a time of rejuvenation. And in order to rejuvenate sometimes you have to look at what it is that you need to rejuvenate from and how you have gotten where you are. And as we start enjoying the warmer temperatures in the summer in the sunshine—and hopefully we will actually have a spring this year because last year I think we had about two weeks of spring and then we sprung right into a very hot summer. So, I'm hoping that we're going to have some actual spring this year.

But there have been a lot of accomplishments over the course of the year, and it has been because people have come together and supported particularly elements of our environment which they have made it perfectly clear they find very, very important to them. So, this summer we will be out and we will be enjoying places like Southlands Park. And we will be enjoying the fact that, at the moment at least, the likelihood of it being developed in the way it was originally planned seems maybe further afoot than it . . . further away from us than it was. We don't see any ziplining, but we know that that is on an appeal. But we can enjoy the amenities that we have and we have so many amenities that we do enjoy. And perhaps some of them we actually take for granted.

So when you take a look at some of the development that's going on and some of the questions that haven't been answered and some of the information that hasn't been shared with respect to how some of those developments are going to affect public amenities and the environment, I think we have to continue to ask those questions and to be provocative in our questions and protective of what we have.

I've read on a couple of different occasions that in Jamaica there is approximately 1 per cent left of public beaches, left to the public to enjoy and appreciate and to go on. And we never want to find ourselves in that position. And certainly, over the years there's been a big fight on the part of Bermudians to make sure that we keep our public facilities open to the public because they are public assets. We are 21 miles long and if things become private in great numbers, then we end up with nothing but living in the interior of a place where we are overcrowded and it becomes very difficult to live. So, we are blessed to be here. We are blessed with what we have. We should appreciate it and we should never take it for granted.

And when we talk about some of the challenges and some of the decisions that are coming up,

it's very easy for people to basically say, *Well, look you know I'm . . . I don't get myself involved in that I let other people make those decisions for me.* But life is getting more and more complicated not just in Bermuda but internationally. And so, if you do not take responsibility for your environment and the life that you live and the life that you may live given the changes that are taking place around you, then basically if you say nothing consent is silence. And you have no vote. So, it's important to speak your mind, to do your homework, to check out what is going on around you. There is a saying that is, *If you see something, say something.* And I know we all travel and certainly if you are going through an airport or you're going on a train, or any place, you always hear that over and over again. *If you see something, say something.*

And earlier this week the police had a press conference, and they basically indicated the same sort of thing. And so, we have seen an uptick in the violence and the accidents and some of the things that are going on in our community that upset all of us to the point where the Minister of National Security today announced that there are free public seminars on how to defend yourself. Well, that's something quite new for Bermuda. We haven't had that before. Don't . . . you know, take note of what's going on around you. Take note how it's affecting you and your family. Take note how it is likely to affect your lifestyle going forward. And everything that is occurring around you, be aware and ask yourself, *Is this a good thing? Where is it going? Where is it taking me and how is it going to impact me, my life, my family, my beautiful Bermuda, and overall [my] quality of life?*

So, when you talk about things like the Green Paper on CARICOM, don't expect other people to make those decisions for you unless you don't care. If you don't care, then let other people decide what's going to be your future. Take the time to read it. Decide how you feel about it. Voice how you feel about it. Ask pertinent questions. Ask questions that concern you. Support things that you want to support, or you can support. And a lot of people say, *Well, I don't want to get involved because I don't do politics. That's for somebody else.* Well, you might not do politics, but you have to live your life and politics affects everyone's life.

Mr. Speaker, if you just give me leave, I would like to just read a quote from an American novelist—

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Ms. Linda Smith: —Martha Gellhorn. She's an American novelist and a journalist. And she said, "People often say, with pride, 'I'm not interested in politics.' They might as well say, 'I'm not interested in my standard of living, my health, my job, my rights, my freedoms, my future or any future.'"

So, I encourage everyone: Get involved at whatever level you feel comfortable. But don't ignore what's going on around you whether it be on the street,

in the environment, in politics, in the economy. This life is yours and you have a level of responsibility to live it and take responsibility for what happens to you and your family. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you MP
Does any other . . . MP Famous.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Mr. Speaker,—

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Christopher Famous: —I honestly wasn't even going to talk today.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher Famous: Bob Richards.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Christopher Famous: Yes, yes, yes, right.

HONOURING LEGACY, CONFRONTING MISCONCEPTIONS

Mr. Christopher Famous: Mr. Speaker, yesterday you and I and MP Dickinson, Minister Diallo [Rabain], Minister Haywood—and if I missed anyone else—we attended the funeral, homegoing service for someone I am going to call *a builder of society*. Mrs. Cheryl (nee Ming) Wade. I am going to emphasise from Devonshire who migrated [to] Somerset.

The Speaker: True red and blue by the time life was finished.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. Christopher Famous: She wasn't true red and blue.

The Speaker: True red and blue. True red and blue.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: She led a wonderful life in Somerset.

An Hon. Member: She smartened up.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Mr. Speaker, I don't know if there's precedence to point-of-order the Speaker, but—

[Laughter]

The Speaker: No need to point of order.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I met Mrs. Wade when I first started at BELCO and I was . . . and in those days you had to go into the bank to get your money. It wasn't, you know, the bank . . . we didn't have online banking like now. Mrs. Wade was my personal banker for a number of years. And anytime I went there for financial reasons I ended up being there for about an hour because once the financial part was sorted out—

The Speaker: The conversation then afterwards.

Mr. Christopher Famous: —she spoke about our history, who's connected to who, African spirituality, and our culture. Through Mrs. Wade I was able to put money in the bank and make money off of my money and purchase a house back in 1998. Right?

Yesterday when I read the obituary and it was talking about how she dealt with all her customers I felt kind of jealous because I thought it was just me. But apparently, she did this for tons of Bermudians who are in a much better standing financially and culturally because of Mrs. Wade. And one of the things Mrs. Wade . . . which was emphasised yesterday was that she was unapologetic about standing up for what is right for her people. She did it in the bank. She did it in the Somerset community. She did it wherever she went. So today as I'm reading something from the former Finance Minister and I'm hearing comments from the Honourable Member over here, I'm sitting up there, I'm saying, *Here we go again*. The fear factor. Anything to do with the Caribbean, there has got to be a fear factor.

Mr. Speaker, CARICOM is but a small part of the Caribbean story. CARICOM is only 53 years old. It is a small part of the Caribbean story. Mr. Speaker, a lot of people when they hear about the Caribbean, they immediately say, *Those people, those people*. We don't want those people up here. The irony is the majority of the people in the Caribbean and the whole region are the complexion of the person who just sat down. A person of my complexion are the minority. Persons in the Caribbean look like Dr. Doug DeCouto. So, when they say, *those people*, they try to say, they want to say, *Those Black people*. Not the Caribbean people.

Mr. Speaker, when someone of English heritage goes to England to go look for their family, or whatever, no one ever questions that. No one says, *Why are you going on British Airways?* Someone of Portuguese heritage, or Azorean heritage, goes to Portugal or Azores, no one ever questions why they're doing that. If we would join the . . . if for whatever reasons we would join the European Union, there's people on this side of the table that will be rolling out the red carpet for that. Because anything that's perceived as being northern/White is all right. Anything in the South is wrong. So, we come with these fear factors of, *Oh, if we become full members, you're not going to get to travel to America no more*. That's a fear factor. Untrue. *Oh, if we*

become full members, those people are going to come up here and take all our jobs.

Mr. Speaker, every Caribbean island that is a member of CARICOM controls their own immigration. You and I, and as sophisticated as Bermuda claims to be, could not go to some other country and just start working. Every country has their level of control. Even . . . whatever . . . even Haiti. We couldn't just go there and work, for lack of a better term. Then today I'm reading the newspaper and Mr. Bob Richards, who biologically is as Caribbean as the rest of us, or some . . . more than many of us, used the fear factor of, *Oh, if we join CARICOM, the US is going to be mad with us and that is going to affect our international business, that's going to affect our travel*, and all of that. It's all coordinated. It's not coincidence; it's coordinated.

So, I asked myself, *Okay, let me be objective.* I go to the Caribbean, like others, and I see the people investing in the Caribbean. The most heavy investors in the Caribbean are the complexion of the Honourable Member who just sat down. They are down there making millions of dollars, real estate, business, insurance. Meanwhile, we are being told, *Have nothing to do with the Caribbean.* The economy is going to go down if we join the Caribbean.

So, similar to the Honourable Minister Lightbourne, when do we as Bermudian people understand we didn't fall from the sky. We didn't come from America. We didn't come from England. Some came from Azores; some have Azorean blood. Yes. We, for the most part, came from the Caribbean. And we are constantly being told in high intellectual manners, *Don't have anything to do with them.* So, I go back to the point that CARICOM is a small part of the story. We as a country, same as we need to be talking more about sovereignty, need to be talking more about our Caribbean connections. Not for Angola becoming a part of CARICOM. But to educate our people of who we are. Because we're sitting here, for the most part, as people thinking, *Well, we ain't got nothing to do with those people down there.* Whose people do you got to do with? The slave owners? Who do you have . . . you as a Black person, who do you have biological ties to? *Oh, my great-great-grandma came from Scotland.* So, what about the other ones?

So, I will close up here, Mr. Speaker, Mrs. Cheryl Ming Wade was laid to rest but her legacy of standing up for people would never die as long as persons like MP Dickinson, yourself, and Minister Haywood stand up for our people. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

None other?

Premier.

[No audible response.]

The Speaker: Members, thank you for your contributions today. And it's been a full day even though we are out early, it's a full day in that we cleared what was on the Order Paper. So, I appreciate all of that.

And as we close today, I just ask everybody as I always do on a weekend, just have a restful time, spend time with your family, and enjoy the weekend.

Thank you.

[Gavel]

[At 4:25 pm, the House stood adjourned until 10:00 am, Friday, 27 March 2026.]

**BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
27 MARCH 2026
10:02 AM**

Sitting Number 34 of the 2025/2026 Session

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning, Members.
We will start with prayers.

PRAYERS

[Prayers read by Mr. Somner, Clerk]

The Deputy Speaker: The House is in session.

[Gavel]

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

[Minutes of 13, 16, and 20 March 2026]

The Deputy Speaker: Members, we have Minutes from the 13th, 16th and 20th of March.
Are there any corrections?
There are none.

[Minutes of 13, 16 and 20 March 2026 confirmed]

MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER
OR MEMBER PRESIDING**

APOLOGIES

The Deputy Speaker: The Speaker is absent. The Honourable Wayne Furbert is absent today. And [MP] Dr. Leroy Bean is absent today.

MESSAGES FROM THE SENATE

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

**PAPERS AND OTHER
COMMUNICATIONS TO THE HOUSE**

The Deputy Speaker: There are many. I will begin with the Minister of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport.
Minister, you have the floor.

**MOTOR CAR (RIDESHARING)
REGULATIONS 2026**

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam [Deputy] Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of this Honourable House the Motor Car (Ridesharing) Regulations 2026, as made by the Minister responsible for Transport, in exercise of the power conferred by sections 37 and 102 of the Motor Car Act 1951.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. You have another, Minister.

**MOTOR TAXI (TAXI DESPATCHING SERVICE)
AMENDMENT REGULATIONS 2026**

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the Motor Taxi (Taxi Despatching Service) Amendment Regulations 2026, as made by the Minister responsible for Transport, in exercise of the power conferred by section 37A of the Motor Car Act 1951.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

The next Minister is the Minister of Youth, Social Development, and Seniors.
Minister.

**ANNEX I, ENDING HOMELESSNESS TOGETHER,
PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS**

**ANNEX II, THE PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS,
HOMELESSNESS DATA, STATUS,
PRIORITISATION, AND DELIVERY OF THE PLAN
TO END HOMELESSNESS**

**ANNEX III, NATIONAL HOMELESSNESS ACTION
PLAN 2025–2028**

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the Annex I, Ending Homelessness Together, Plan to End Homelessness, Annex II, the Plan to End Homelessness, Homelessness Data, Status, Prioritisation, and

Delivery of the Plan to End Homelessness, and Annex III, National Homelessness Action Plan 2025–2028.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Minister, you also have a Charities Amendment Regulations.

CHARITIES AMENDMENT REGULATIONS 2026

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Madam Deputy Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for consideration of the Honourable House of Assembly the Charities Amendment Regulations 2026, proposed to be made by the Minister responsible for Charities after consultation with the Registrar and the Committee, in exercise of the power conferred by sections 38 and 48 of the Charities Act [2014], and after consultation with the NAMLC in exercise of the power conferred by section 47 of the Charities Act of [2014].

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

PETITIONS

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS AND JUNIOR MINISTERS

The Deputy Speaker: There are several. I recognise first the Minister of Finance and Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker.

GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE HEALTH INSURANCE SCHEME ENHANCED BENEFITS

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise today to advise this Honourable House of important enhancements to the benefits provided under the [Government Employee Health Insurance Scheme](#), better known as GEHI. These enhancements are about improving access to care for public officers, retirees and their families, and ensuring that GEHI better supports prevention, treatment, and overall well-being.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the changes I am announcing today fall into three areas: annual physical examinations, mental health coverage, and substance abuse treatment coverage. Together, they represent an important strengthening of GEHI benefits. With respect to annual [physical] examinations, GEHI currently provides reimbursement for one annual physical examination per client per year, up to a maximum of \$96. Honourable Members will appreciate that the cost of a physical examination is well above that amount. As a result, many employees and their families have been left to pay substantial co-pays to access a routine

annual exam, in some cases more than \$200. Where that occurs, the cost of preventive care can itself become a barrier, and some persons may delay or forgo an annual examination that could assist with the early detection and management of illness, which can cost GEHI more in the long term.

The Government has already taken steps in this area through changes made to HIP and FutureCare, with the objective of eliminating out-of-pocket costs for annual preventive exams. This enhancement to GEHI follows that same approach. Under the revised benefit, GEHI will now reimburse one annual physical examination per client per year at 100 per cent, within a range of \$250 to \$350 depending on patient complexity.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. E. David Burt: This change will remove the financial barrier created by the previous reimbursement limit and to support greater use of routine preventive care by GEHI clients.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the second area of enhancement relates to mental health coverage. Mental health care is an essential part of overall health care, and access to timely support can make a meaningful difference for individuals and families. It is also an area where there has been increasing public discussion in Bermuda, including from representative bodies such as the Bermuda Public Services Union and the Bermuda Industrial Union, about the importance of mental wellness in the workplace and the need for persons to feel able to seek assistance.

Under these enhancements, coverage for services provided by a clinical psychologist will increase from \$97 to \$170 per visit, for up to 12 visits per year. Coverage for psychiatric consultations will increase from \$100 to \$200 per consultation, for up to 25 visits per year. This increase in coverage strengthens the support available under GEHI and improves [access to] care for persons who require professional mental health services.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the third area of enhancement relates to substance abuse treatment coverage. This is also an important addition to the benefits available under GEHI as substance abuse can have dire consequences for individuals, for families, and for workplace well-being. Access to treatment, where it is needed, should be part of a health insurance scheme that responds to the needs of the people it covers. I was surprised to learn, while attending a PLP branch meeting in St. George's a few years ago, that GEHI did not provide coverage for substance abuse treatment. At that time, I committed to examining the issue, as I agreed that this treatment should be covered. Therefore, I am pleased to share that GEHI will now include coverage for inpatient and outpatient treatment for substance abuse, including treatment related to alcohol and drug dependency. This expanded coverage will

include both local and overseas care. Inpatient care will be covered for up to 90 days, and outpatient care will be covered for up to 20 days, with a maximum annual benefit of \$18,000. This enhancement is intended to ensure that where treatment is needed, there is a defined level of support available through the scheme.

Madam Deputy Speaker, providing better health care support to our public officers and their families is an important strategic imperative in improving retention in the public service. These enhancements, represent a practical investment in the well-being of public officers, retirees and their families, and will be funded through the increased budgetary allocation provided for employee benefits in the budget recently passed by this Honourable House, taking effect on 1 May 2026.

These three areas of improved coverage broaden access to preventive care, strengthens the support available for mental health services, and provides substance abuse treatment coverage where none previously existed. They also continue the Government's progress of improving access to affordable health care while reducing out-of-pocket expenses on our collective path to universal health care.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

That takes us to the next Minister, and that is the Minister of National Security.

Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker, good morning, colleagues, and to the listening public.

BERMUDA'S NATIONAL CYBERSECURITY RISK ASSESSMENT, LAUNCH OF

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise today to advise this Honourable House of the continued advancement of [Bermuda's national cybersecurity](#) posture. Cyber threats do not stand still, Madam Deputy Speaker, and neither can we. As the threat landscape evolves, so too must our understanding of the risks facing our digital infrastructure, our critical services, and our citizens.

Madam Deputy Speaker, building on the foundations laid by the Bermuda Cybersecurity Strategy 2018–2022 and strengthened by the Cybersecurity Act 2024, the Government of Bermuda is now ready to take the next decisive step in evidence-based cybersecurity governance. I am pleased to announce the launch of Bermuda's inaugural National Cybersecurity Risk Assessment (NCRA). This is a landmark initiative in keeping with the Government's Digital Transformation Initiative. For the first time, Bermuda will conduct a structured, jurisdiction-wide assessment of our collective cybersecurity risks, delivered entirely in digital form.

Madam Deputy Speaker, what is the National Cybersecurity Risk Assessment? The National Cybersecurity Risk Assessment is a formal survey instrument designed to gather structured cybersecurity risk intelligence from across Bermuda's public and private sectors. The assessment will capture information on threats, vulnerabilities, current controls, and risk exposure across our organisations, including those operating within our Critical National Information Infrastructure [CNII]. The results of the NCRA will directly inform the development of Bermuda's updated National Cybersecurity Strategy, which the Government is targeting for release in the fourth quarter of this year. This means that for the first time, our national strategy will be built on current, locally-sourced risk intelligence—not assumptions. That is a significant advance in the maturity of our cybersecurity governance.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this NCRA represents a first for Bermuda in another important respect. Previous exercises of this nature have relied on manual or paper-based processes. This assessment will be distributed and completed entirely online, enabling broader participation, faster data collection, and more reliable analysis. The digital platform has been designed to ensure the secure delivery of responses. Respondents can complete the assessment with confidence that their submissions are handled in accordance with the Government of Bermuda's security standards and the obligations set out under the Personal Information Protection Act 2016.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the NCRA is intended to reach as much of the Bermuda cyber community as possible. We are calling on organisations and professionals across all sectors to participate, including

- government ministries, departments, and agencies,
- Critical National Information Infrastructure (CNII) entities and operators,
- financial services, insurance, and reinsurance organisations,
- telecommunications and technology providers,
- health care, energy, and essential services operators, and
- small and medium-sized enterprises with a digital footprint.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the strength of this assessment depends on the breadth and quality of participation. I, therefore, urge all relevant organisations across the Bermuda cyber community to engage seriously and respond fully. The NCRA will be distributed by the National Cybersecurity Unit [NCU]. Respondents will have a period of three months to complete the assessment from the date of distribution. This window has been set to allow sufficient time for thorough and considered responses, while maintaining the timeline necessary to support the development of the updated National Cybersecurity Strategy. The NCRA will be administered on an annual basis going forward. This will

enable the Government to track the evolution of Bermuda's cybersecurity risk profile over time and ensure that our national strategy remains current and responsive to emerging threats.

Organisations wishing to participate, or requiring further information about the assessment process, are encouraged to contact the National Cybersecurity Unit directly. All queries should be directed to the National Cybersecurity Unit by email at cybersecurity@gov.bm. Further details, including the secure link to complete the assessment, will be communicated to stakeholders upon distribution by the National Cybersecurity Unit.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the National Cybersecurity Risk Assessment is not an end in itself. It is a critical input into a larger process: the development of an updated National Cybersecurity Strategy that is grounded in evidence, shaped by the real-world risk environment that Bermuda faces today. This Government is committed to building a secure digital Bermuda—one where citizens, businesses, and institutions can operate with confidence in the safety and resilience of our digital environment.

The Cybersecurity Act 2024 has given us the legislative framework. Our partnership with the International Telecommunications Union is strengthening our operational capabilities through the National Cybersecurity Incident Response Team. The NCRA now gives us the intelligence to make strategic decisions that are truly informed.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I call upon all stakeholders across Bermuda's cyber community to seize this opportunity to shape our national cybersecurity direction. Your participation matters and your insights are essential. Together, we will build a stronger, more robust digital Bermuda.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

I call on the next Minister, the Minister Diallo Rabain. Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker.

GOVERNMENT PUBLIC SERVICE SCHOLARSHIPS, LAUNCH OF

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Madam Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to inform this Honourable House of the launch of the new Government Public Service [Scholarships programme](#). The launch of the programme represents delivery on another 2025 Throne Speech commitment and shows that this Government is deeply committed to Bermudianisation and to preparing Bermudians for brilliant careers at home. The Public Service is a vital part of the country's economic and social well-being, so attracting and nurturing high calibre

talent is of vital importance to fulfil the Government's mission to improve the lives of the people of Bermuda.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Public Service Scholarships programme will support Bermudians to prepare for critical jobs that are hard to fill here in Bermuda and often globally. It expressly links areas of study to specific roles that are needed across the Government, as each year the eligible disciplines are designed and targeted around positions that we anticipate will need to be filled and/or Bermudianised in the foreseeable future. This design and forward planning also support the Public Service succession planning, as it will ensure that we prepare young people to be the best talent available for key positions throughout the Public Service.

Madam Deputy Speaker, ultimately, this new programme is a win-win for both prospective graduates and the Public Service, as it increases opportunities and nurtures talent for critical posts. Madam Deputy Speaker, scholarships will be under offer for up to \$30,000 a year for studies in areas needed to meet critical, future workforce needs. Students who receive scholarships will participate in paid internships during school breaks and will have the guarantee of employment within the Public Service after completing their studies. A five-year commitment will form part of the agreement to support the new graduates. This programme will ensure the Government is able to fill vital roles with trained Bermudians. Applications are now open for the Scholarships programme and Bermudians are invited to apply by 30 April at www.BermudaScholarships.com.

Madam Deputy Speaker, to be eligible for a Public Service Scholarship applicants will have to meet the following criteria

- possess Bermuda status,
- have had at least five years of schooling in Bermuda,
- complete the education programme and training before the age of 65,
- be enrolled in an accredited programme and earning institution ranked "Competitive" (or equivalent) or higher,
- have at least completed an undergraduate freshman year or pursuing a graduate degree; and finally, and
- for public officers already within the [Public] Service, they must have worked as a full-time public officer for a minimum of three years.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when applying, students must provide the required documents such as references, transcripts, proof of status, identification, et cetera. Applicants must also review the list of targeted posts and note the employment commitment upon the completion of their studies.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to encourage Bermudians to apply for this excellent new opportunity. This programme not only offers financial support but creates clear career pathways and helps students to

obtain the qualifications and skills needed to strengthen our public services and enhance the lives of the people of Bermuda. For more information on eligibility, required documents, and the list of posts, visit www.gov.bm/publicservicescholarships. To apply, go to www.bermudascholarships.com.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

That takes us to the next [Statement], that is the Minister of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport.

Minister.

RIDESHARING, REGULATION OF SERVICE

MOTOR CAR (RIDESHARING) REGULATIONS 2026

MOTOR TAXI (TAXI DESPATCHING SERVICE) AMENDMENT REGULATIONS 2026

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you very much. It is with great pleasure that I rise today to lay before this Honourable House the Motor Car (Ridesharing) Regulations 2026 and the Motor Taxi (Taxi Despatching Service) Amendment Regulations 2026.

These [Regulations](#) give effect to the Motor Car (Ridesharing) Amendment Act 2026, which was passed in the Senate on March 18, marking an important step in the continued modernisation of Bermuda's [transport] system. Together, these measures introduce a regulated and structured ridesharing framework, while strengthening and supporting the existing taxi industry.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the introduction of ridesharing in Bermuda has been approached with care, consultation, and deliberate design. At its core, this framework is built on three key principles: safety, quality of service, and fairness across the transportation ecosystem. Safety has been a [foundational] pillar throughout this process. Under the Motor Car (Ridesharing) Regulations 2026, all ridesharing transactions must be conducted electronically through approved despatching applications, ensuring transparency and traceability. Cash payments will not be permitted, ensuring full accountability across all transactions. Operators will be clearly identifiable both digitally and physically, including through the display of a public service vehicle badge, a designated ridesharing licence plate, and official vehicle decals.

In addition, ridesharing vehicles must meet strict insurance and regulatory requirements. Once a ridesharing request is accepted, the digital network will provide the passenger with key information, including the operator's photograph, contact details, vehicle description, and estimated time of arrival. Passengers will also receive an electronic receipt following each

journey, detailing the origin and destination, distance travelled, time taken, and fare charged. These measures ensure that both residents and visitors can use the service with confidence.

In terms of quality, operators will be required to adhere to an established conduct and dress code when providing ridesharing services. A formal Code of Practice will be introduced for ridesharing operators as well as permit holders. This Code sets out clear expectations around professionalism, conduct, and service delivery, with the objective of ensuring that passengers receive a safe, reliable, and consistent experience. The Regulations also introduce clear limits on operator working hours. A ridesharing operator may not operate continuously for more than five hours, nor exceed 10 hours within a 24-hour period. These provisions are designed to reduce fatigue and further strengthen passenger safety.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to be clear that this framework has been carefully designed to ensure fairness and balance with the taxi industry. Ridesharing is not being introduced to replace taxis, but to complement the existing system where gaps exist. To support this, ridesharing operations will be limited by both season and time. Between 1 April and 30 September, ridesharing will be permitted at all times. Between 1 October and 31 March, ridesharing will operate on weekdays between 10:00 pm and 6:00 am, and at all times on Saturdays, Sundays, and public holidays.

There is also provision for the Minister responsible for Transport to vary these dates and times by Order, where necessary, to respond to periods of increased demand, such as major events or seasonal peaks. Importantly, ridesharing fares will align with taxi rates. This ensures there is no undercutting of the taxi industry and reinforces a level playing field across the sector.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Motor Taxi (Taxi Despatching Service) Amendment Regulations 2026 further strengthen this balanced approach by establishing a clear and structured process for how ride requests are handled through approved despatching services. Under this framework, all requests received via the digital network must first be transmitted to taxi operators. Only if the request is not accepted within 60 seconds will it then be made available to ridesharing operators. This ensures that taxi operators are always given the first opportunity to accept fares, while also expanding access to transportation [when] taxis are not readily available.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Deputy Speaker, I hear some noise. So, I want them to listen carefully to this next section.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Some may suggest that 60 seconds is a short period of time. However, this decision was not made arbitrarily. Despatch data indicates that the average response time for operators was 8.22 seconds in 2024 and 9.74 seconds in 2025. This means that the 60-second window provides more than sufficient time for operators to respond. In addition—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: In addition, Madam Deputy Speaker, the general benchmarks indicate that individuals typically respond to a call on their cell phones within six to eight seconds. This approach is therefore both practical and grounded in real data. Approved despatching services will also be required to maintain detailed operational records, including ride activity, operator engagement, and response times. These systems will track vehicle movements while transporting passengers and collect data on demand and service performance, ensuring that the system remains monitored, accountable, and responsive over time.

Madam Deputy Speaker, at its heart, this framework addresses a long-standing issue. There have been consistent gaps in transportation availability, particularly during peak periods, late hours, and times of high demand. This is not a new issue, Madam Deputy Speaker, but one we are now addressing in a structured and responsible way. These Regulations ensure that when taxis are unavailable, residents and visitors are not left without options. Instead, they will have access to a regulated, controlled, and accountable alternative.

There are also clear provisions for oversight and enforcement. Complaints may be made to the Transport Control Department and, where necessary, investigations may be conducted, with the ability to suspend or revoke permits. Breaches of these Regulations may result in penalties of up to \$10,000, reinforcing the importance of compliance within this framework.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mm-hmm.

In closing, Madam Deputy Speaker, these Regulations have been developed with clear intent. They introduce a regulated ridesharing service that is safe and structured, one that establishes expectations for quality, protects and prioritises the taxi industry, and expands transportation access across Bermuda. This is a measured and necessary step forward, grounded in balance, evidence, and the needs of the public.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

I now call on the Minister of Youth, Social Development and Seniors.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Good morning, and thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

HOMELESSNESS, TABLING OF THE PLAN TO END

Hon. Tinee Furbert: It is my privilege and responsibility to provide the people of Bermuda with an update on the progress of the [Plan to End Homelessness](#) and to table for consideration of this Honourable House the Plan to End Homelessness in Bermuda—Ending Homelessness Together which includes homelessness data, status, prioritisation and delivery of the plan, and the National Homelessness Action Plan [2025–2028].

Madam Deputy Speaker, this document represents a significant milestone in the Government's ongoing commitment to addressing homelessness in Bermuda in a coordinated, unified, evidence-based, and humane manner. The vision, Madam Deputy Speaker is that homelessness is ended. This means that everyone has a safe, stable and sustainable place to live and that wherever possible, new cases of homelessness are prevented.

Recognising that no model will eliminate the risk of homelessness, should homelessness occur, systems are in place to ensure that it is rare, brief and non-recurrent. Please be aware that homelessness is not only about a housing plan, but also a step toward reconnection as homelessness is, for some, seen as a form of escape, freedom or can be due to complex personal circumstances.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this Plan has taken approximately two and a half years to develop due to the commitment to gain data and insight from over 400 Bermudians experiencing homelessness, hundreds of hours of [collaborative] input from community experts and partners (both government and non-government), evidence-based research into solutions from over 40 countries around the world as well as those domestically and three rounds of extensive community consultations and the hard work of a Multi-Sector Steering Committee.

The public was consulted through structured engagement initiatives, including town hall meetings and the Government's Bermuda Citizens Forum. Subsequently, a Homelessness Advisory Panel was established, comprising representatives from the public, private, and non-profit sectors, with a mandate to strengthen and refine that work. The resulting Plan to End Homelessness is framed around seven core areas of action, including the rapid reduction of rough sleeping, improved data and monitoring, expanded access to affordable housing, coordinated service delivery, public policy reform, and public awareness. These priorities reflect a future where homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Plan incorporates evidence-based solutions and international best practices carefully adapted to Bermuda's unique social and

economic context. Among its key features, the Plan to End Homelessness establishes a comprehensive definition of homelessness for Bermuda. It is grounded in the European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS), which recognises that a “home” has physical, social and legal dimensions. This plan defines 13 operational categories that refine the circumstances faced by people experiencing homelessness. In practical terms, Madam Deputy Speaker, it ensures that we understand and always reference the state of homelessness as those who are roofless, houseless, are in insecure housing or inadequate housing.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to make is clear to this Honourable House, this Plan includes a “point in time” data as at 31 December 2025 using administrative information gathered through HOME. That data-recorded persons who throughout the year were roofless, including 170 people living rough and 99 staying in a night shelter; persons who were houseless, including 217 in accommodation for the homeless, 33 in a women’s shelter, 24 in accommodation for immigrants, 113 who were due to be released from institutions with no housing in place; persons in insecure housing, including 188 living in insecure accommodation, 130 under threat of eviction, 15 under threat of violence; and persons in inadequate housing, including 89 living in temporary or non-conventional structures. This data relates to specific individuals and is not statistically extrapolated, and the Plan notes it is likely to understate overall prevalence. By way of wider context, the National Homelessness Action Plan also references census-based figures of 82 persons experiencing homelessness in 2010 and 138 in 2016.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Plan adopts a prevention-focused approach, with early intervention and rapid rehousing as the default model, and it calls for systemic reforms across data collection, service delivery, housing supply, welfare entitlements, and statutory protections. The Plan also includes the rapid reduction of rough sleeping, improvements to homelessness data systems, the expansion of affordable housing options, and enhanced public education and awareness.

Madam Deputy Speaker, building on this strategic foundation, the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors have included a four-year National Homelessness Action Plan covering the period 2025 to 2028. This Action Plan translates vision into action. It will establish Government’s clear priorities and provide a structured, phased framework to guide implementation, while optimising the use of existing programmes and resources. The Action Plan is underpinned by prevention-first, trauma-informed, person-centred, and rights-based principles. It emphasises collaboration across ministries and agencies, meaningful inclusion of persons with lived experience, and the use of reliable data to guide decision-making and measure progress.

Madam Deputy Speaker, oversight of the Action Plan will rest with the Ministry of Youth, Social

Development and Seniors, working in close partnership with the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities, and other lead ministries, statutory bodies, non-government organisations, and private-sector partners. Implementation will be supported by a centralised case-management and data-sharing framework, clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and annual reporting to Cabinet on the progress, outcomes, and emerging risks.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the synergy between Bermuda’s Affordable Housing Strategy and the National Homelessness Action Plan is the Affordable Housing Strategy focuses on system-level levers like supply, affordability, suitability, and governance, while the Homelessness Action Plan focuses on crisis response, prevention, stabilisation, and helping individuals move quickly from homelessness into housing. Together, they create a more cohesive pathway from insecurity to security by ensuring that suitable housing exists and that the support is in place to help people.

Madam Deputy Speaker, key performance indicators will be aligned to rapid rehousing, homelessness prevention, housing supply, service integration, and policy reform. A funding framework, including budget estimates and cost-sharing arrangements, will be assessed during implementation of delivery and action plan and brought forward for Cabinet’s consideration as required.

Madam Deputy Speaker, at its core, this work is guided by a simple but powerful principle: that the Plan to End Homelessness is a whole system response and is multi-year in its nature. The plans provide a clear national roadmap to move us closer to that goal, consolidating existing efforts and aligning public policy in a coordinated and sustainable way.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in closing, I want to emphasise, once again, that the challenges before us are significant, but our resolve and collaboration remain unwavering.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I extend my sincere thanks to everyone whose dedication and expertise helped bring the Plan to End Homelessness in Bermuda—Ending Homelessness Together, and the National Homelessness Action Plan to its final edit, especially the many Bermudians with lived experience who shared their courage, insight, and hope. I would also like to thank the Homelessness Advisory Panel, the Homelessness Steering Committee, Ms. Denise Carey, CEO/Executive Director of HOME, the many government and non-government, and community partners who contributed their time, frontline knowledge, and unwavering commitment to ending homelessness in Bermuda.

Accordingly, Madam Deputy Speaker, I commend this document to this Honourable House and formally table the Plan to End Homelessness in Bermuda—Ending Homelessness Together which includes homelessness data, status, prioritisation and delivery of the Plan and the National Homelessness Action Plan

for the information of Members and the people of Bermuda.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

I now call on the Minister of Public Works and Environment.

Minister.

Hon. Jache Adams: Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker.

SINGLE-USE PLASTICS ACT 2026, INTRODUCTION OF

Hon. Jache Adams: Madam Deputy Speaker, there are moments in the life of a country when we must pause, lift our eyes from the immediate, and chart a course that reflects the kind of Bermuda we wish to leave behind. Today is such a moment. For years, Bermudians have spoken passionately about the need to protect our Island home from the growing tide of plastic pollution. Our children have raised it in classrooms. Divers and fishermen have raised it from the sea floor. Environmental groups have raised it in community forums. And now, Madam Deputy Speaker, this Government is taking the next deliberate step.

Later today I will be tabling the [Single-Use Plastics Act 2026](#), a Bill designed not to ban every item overnight, but to establish the legal framework for Bermuda's transition away from the most harmful single-use plastics through consultation, science, and a phased, responsible approach.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Bill before this Honourable House does one essential thing: it creates the legislative structure we need to regulate single-use plastics effectively and sustainably. It empowers the Government to add items to a Schedule only after consultation, only after listening to stakeholders, and only after determining that alternatives are viable for both our environment and our economy. The Schedule of the Bill is intentionally empty today, and that is by design. We are not rushing ahead with bans without first hearing from businesses, environmental organisations, students, seniors, and all those who interact with these products every day. Instead, this Bill lays the foundation on which we will build a careful, well-managed transition that works for the entire country.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to address a concern that often arises whenever the words "single-use plastics" and "ban" appear in the same sentence. Let me be clear: this Bill does not impose an immediate, Island-wide ban on all single-use plastics. That is not the intention, and it will not be the result. What we are setting in place is a gradual, phased programme, one that ensures businesses and consumers have time to adjust, the Government has time to inform, and the country has time to shift behaviour responsibly. If, for example, the consultation process identifies items such

as plastic straws as an appropriate early candidate for restriction, this will only occur after Bermudians have been fully engaged and the timelines are clear and reasonable. Our goal is not disruption; our goal is progress.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Bermuda's pristine beauty is not merely aesthetic; it is economic, environmental, and deeply cultural. Our marine ecosystem is the foundation of our tourism industry, our fishing sector, and the health of our people. Yet around the world, and yes, even here at home, plastic pollution threatens that foundation. Plastic does not disappear. It breaks down into microplastics that are now found in our water, our sand, our fish, and increasingly, in our bodies. This is not speculation; it is established science.

Local environmental leaders have been sounding the alarm for years. Keep Bermuda Beautiful has frequently reminded us that every piece of plastic ever created still exists somewhere in the environment. Their decades of clean-up data demonstrate the growing presence of plastic fragments on our beaches, often originating from everyday convenience items that are used once and discarded.

Similarly, the organisation Beyond Plastics Bermuda has stated publicly that tackling single-use plastics is essential for preserving Bermuda's environmental health for future generations. They have called for bold action from Government and the community alike, emphasising that the challenge is solvable if we approach it together.

Madam Deputy Speaker, today's Bill answers that call. While this Government is proud to bring forward this Bill, I want to acknowledge something important: The desire to reduce harmful plastics has not been limited to one side of this House as the One Bermuda Alliance has been on record in support of reducing single-use plastics in Bermuda.

Madam Deputy Speaker, environmental protection should not be a partisan endeavour. It is a shared responsibility. If we cannot unite around protecting the waters that sustain us, then what can we unite around? This Bill is an opportunity for all of us, Government, Opposition, and the people of Bermuda, to demonstrate that when it comes to safeguarding our environment, we can move as one.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the next step is an exhaustive and transparent consultation period. We will engage

- environmental NGOs,
- retailers and grocers,
- restaurants and small businesses,
- importers and manufacturers,
- waste management experts, and
- the public.

We will invite written submissions, host stakeholder meetings, and explore the availability of practical alternatives. Just as important, we will work to ensure that environmentally friendly replacements are accessible and affordable.

I recognise that we have already engaged in extensive consultations on this issue over several years, and I want to be clear that this work was instrumental in shaping the Bill that will be tabled later today, one that reflects the voices, priorities, and lived realities of those who contributed. The upcoming consultation will build on that strong foundation by helping to determine the pace and sequencing of each phase of implementation. This is not a procedural exercise; it is the engine that will drive meaningful, responsible change. It will ensure, Madam Deputy Speaker, that every step forward is taken with care, maintaining public confidence that this transition is fair, well planned, and firmly grounded in real world conditions.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as Honourable Members can attest, regulation alone cannot change behaviour. That is why the Ministry of Public Works and Environment will also be launching a public education campaign in partnership with environmental groups, schools, and community organisations. We want Bermudians to understand why this transition matters, how it will occur, and what small choices each of us can make that collectively produce long-term results. As KBB has often said, small actions make a big difference. This Bill ensures those actions are supported by policy that matches our environmental values.

Madam Deputy Speaker, today is about groundwork, the kind of groundwork that ensures Bermuda's environmental future is not left to chance. With this Bill we begin the process of reducing our dependence on harmful plastics, strengthening our stewardship of our natural resources, and aligning Bermuda with international best practices in sustainable waste management. This is not the end of the journey. It is the start of a thoughtful, collaborative transition toward a cleaner, healthier, and more resilient Island home. I invite all Honourable Members, and all Bermudians, to join us in shaping the future phases of this important national effort.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

I now call on the Minister of Health.

Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Thank you. Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker.

ROAD TRAFFIC COLLISIONS, PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACT

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise today to address an issue that continues to affect our community deeply. An issue that strains our health system, burdens our emergency services, and brings immense hardship to families across Bermuda. I am referring to the ongoing [impact of road traffic collisions](#). Recent analysis of Emergency Department activity at the King Edward VII Memorial Hospital, covering the

three-year period from January 2023 through December 2025, provides a sobering picture. During that time, more than 3,760 of those visits were the direct result of road traffic collisions. That is more than 100 people every single month. People whose lives were disrupted, often in an instant, due to collisions on our roads.

Madam Deputy Speaker, while many of these individuals were treated and discharged home, far too many required acute hospital care. Nearly 10 per cent of all collision-related patients were admitted to the hospital, staying on average for more than seven days. Others suffered head injuries, spinal injuries, fractures, and other forms of trauma with long-lasting consequences. Tragically, some did not survive. These numbers tell only part of the story. Behind every statistic is a family member, a friend, a co-worker, a neighbour, someone whose life has been altered. These accidents result in physical pain, emotional distress, financial hardship, and in some cases long-term disability. For parents, partners, and children, the consequences extend far beyond the hospital walls.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the data also reveals who is most affected. Young people, particularly young male residents, are disproportionately represented. Individuals aged 18 to 35 account for more than two-fifths of all collision-related hospital visits. These are young adults in the prime of their lives, many of whom are just entering the workforce, pursuing higher education, or starting families. When they are injured, it affects not only their own future but the stability of the households they support.

Madam Deputy Speaker, these incidents also place a substantial burden on our emergency services. Nearly 44 per cent of collision victims required ambulance transport, reflecting the urgent and often traumatic nature of these events. This level of demand affects EMS response times and resource availability for other medical emergencies. [Within] the Emergency Department, trauma teams must be continuously prepared for the most serious cases, including those requiring resuscitation, rapid intervention, and specialised care. Each road traffic accident therefore has broader implications for how the hospital allocates staff, space, and resources.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is important to acknowledge that the vast majority of those injured on our roads, more than 93 per cent, are Bermuda residents. This is not a visitor-driven issue. It is our issue. It affects our families, our communities, and our future. The findings of this three-year analysis make it clear that a coordinated response, which includes all stakeholders, is needed.

Madam Deputy Speaker, road safety is not solely a transportation issue. It is a public health issue. It is a family issue. And it is a community issue. The impact of road traffic collisions is felt not just in the Emergency Department but in living rooms, workplaces, and classrooms across Bermuda. As Minister

of Health, I reaffirm this Government's commitment to working collaboratively with our partners in public safety, transportation, and community organisations to reduce preventable injuries, support emergency responders, and ensure that families receive the care and assistance they need. Together, we can make our roads safer and protect the lives and well-being of the people of Bermuda.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

That concludes all of the Ministerial Statements given.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

QUESTION PERIOD

The Deputy Speaker: I would like to call on the Junior Minister who had responses previously, and I think that you have undertaken to give written responses.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Good morning.

The Deputy Speaker: Your Shadow [Minister] has asked for written responses now, as opposed to you giving oral responses.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Yes. Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have provided the written responses to the MP.

Can you confirm that you received them?

Ms. Robin Tucker: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker, I received them. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Thank you, Junior Minister.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Thank you, Madam [Deputy Speaker].

The Deputy Speaker: I have at least, I think, four people. Right now, I don't see the gentleman, so I will switch to the Rideshare. And I think that Member Robinson from constituency 30 has questions.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

They're already excited about this. That's interesting.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes, okay.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: That's correct, correct. You are, yes. Southampton Strong, you're already know.

QUESTION 1: RIDESHARING, REGULATION OF SERVICE

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: [Madam] Deputy Speaker, good morning, and good morning to the listening audience and colleagues. My first question is, Can the Honourable Minister please notify this Honourable House which insurance companies have prepared insurance policies for rideshare drivers?

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

As was stated multiple times before there were numerous stakeholder engagement meetings with insurance companies. I do not have the exact names of what policy they have in place. That is an operational matter for the insurance companies. But I can tell you that the Ministry has had discussions with them. And just like when you go to the Transport Control Department to register and license your regular car every year, you have to show proof of car insurance, it will be the similar process, that you go to the insurance company. It is not for me to get into negotiations of individuals and their insurance policies. But you will go there, you will get rideshare insurance, and you will produce the certificate to TCD.

But for the matter of completeness, I can say that we have talked with Allshores, we have now talked to BF&M, which has now (since our conversations) come and merged with the two. So, you have Allshores. Initially, it was Argus at the time. So, you can see this has been going on for quite some time.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you. I'm answering the question. Thank you, Mr. MP.

I think that's Carlisle *[sic]*?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Coralisle, yes, them.

Freisenbruch. So, as you can see, we have done significant stakeholder engagements with the insurance. The insurance companies will . . . will . . . I am getting the fulsome answer here so you can . . . The insurance companies will decide amongst themselves what policies they give to individuals.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Do you have a supplemental?

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes, please, Madam Deputy Speaker. Supplemental.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: The regulations are quite clear that a rideshare driver is requiring additional insurance. So, when I asked the Junior Minister [*sic*], I will ask a clarifying question.

An Hon. Member: Minister.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: I'm sorry, Minister. My apologies.

An Hon. Member: Honourable.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Honourable. Honourable Minister. I would ask a qualifying question.

When a rideshare driver comes to register for this additional insurance, where will they be directed or which insurance companies will be given to them as an option to utilise their regulated requirements?

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I think the Honourable Member from the other side has missed some of the previous debates or what was in the Statement. They will only offer ridesharing insurance to their current insured clients.

Remember, for rideshare you have to have a private car first, and wherever you are insured there, then you will get insurance from the same insurer for rideshare.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.
Second supplemental or second question?

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Second supplemental, Deputy Speaker.

Could the Minister please provide a bit of insight for those who may be looking to become a rideshare driver, what these particular fees may be as far as this additional insurance? Because at this time, it seems very cloudy.

The Deputy Speaker: I don't know . . . is that a second question?

[Inaudible interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, I think that's a second question. It's different, slightly different in nature.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Well, it's still on the insurance vein, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I'm trying to get through these regulations here as they are required to get insurance, but it doesn't seem like there is any information available for which insurance companies or what the fees are at this time.

The Deputy Speaker: Member, I still think that that's a second question. You do have three.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Well, I'll move on to a second question then.

The Deputy Speaker: That's your second question?

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: No, I don't want to use my second question for that.

The Deputy Speaker: You don't want to ask that question. Okay.

QUESTION 2: RIDESHARING, REGULATION OF SERVICE

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: So, in the Statement it mentions that the Minister may vary the times and dates for rideshare via an order. Can I get some clarity, or can his Honourable House get some clarity on what the process is for that? Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.
Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: The process will be standard procedures that I will bring to the appropriate place if necessary. And I can give one example going a little further. We are encouraging individuals who have private cars that are wheelchair accessible and provide those services to sign up for rideshare. And if there is a limited amount of those vehicles, and we notice that they are needed throughout the times that rideshare is not eligible, then I will come to this House and make an order so that the wheelchair accessible vehicles can service the individuals who need it year-round. So, there are clearly some times that we will need to do so. And if we see that this is taking off, and the rideshares are being able to pick up the public where needed, and the taxis are still able to get all of their work, then we'll make adjustments.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
Supplemental? Yes.

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker, supplemental. Will this order process be backed by official information given from the despatchers or from the Ministry's own investigation?

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Deputy Speaker, we will bring data to support any such order at the appropriate time. And we will get this data from wherever possible to back the claims of why it may be needed, that would be the despatch services, internal data and the like, and maybe even from cross-ministry discussions, and most importantly, from the individuals of which we serve.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
Second supplemental or third question?

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Second supplemental, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you.
Is there any method of appeal from the industry if they should feel that this order is not necessarily accurate, or that it's not necessarily needed? So . . . I think you got the question there.

The Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam [Deputy Speaker], I might just ask for some clarification on the question. It's a little unclear as to what the question is.

The Deputy Speaker: Member, can you clarify?

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker.
So, as we have seen throughout this process, there have been conflicting data points and opinions between the Minister and the industry in some senses. What I am asking is, if the industry has conflicting data or conflicting reasoning, can they appeal this order for additional varying times or additional rideshare service cars if they have conflicting views?

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. So, I guess he's saying from the data that's collected, and if their data is contrary to, I guess, what your data is, will they have right to appeal?

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam [Deputy Speaker], as I've said throughout this entire process, the Ministry responsible for Transport will be collecting all official data, and we will go through it officially. And if at such time we need to make some orders, all relevant stakeholders and parties will be consulted and informed.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
Do you have a third question, Member?

QUESTION 3: RIDESHARING, REGULATION OF SERVICE

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes, Deputy Speaker, third question.

As we heard from the data that acceptance times weren't really an issue, it was more so the wait times, I am asking how does a 60-second acceptance help with the wait time issue?

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.
Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, the fact that there are more options now becoming available will force the market to act accordingly, and that is the point of increasing additional transportation options while still allowing taxis first preference. [It is] simply how markets work, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
Supplemental?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes, Deputy Speaker.
What is the recourse for a customer if taxi drivers continue to accept these rides? How can they then get in touch with rideshare? What is their recompense if the orders keep getting accepted?

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Deputy Speaker, it is a simple process. Again, taxis will be first. And then rideshare will be opened up to rideshare. Now, if the despatch companies that are monitoring their service levels are seeing that their individuals are not adhering to proper procedures, I think first and foremost it will be the despatch companies that will have a conversation with the people who are doing work for them, because like I said, that's how markets work.

If someone is not adhering to the standards that are put in place, then there are ways that enforcement (as they have been asking for for so long) can be put in place, and the enforcement may come from the despatch company itself. If the despatch company does not have any success, then [there] will be a report, an official report made to the Public Service Vehicle Licensing Board, which will then take the necessary steps under law to discipline any driver, whether it be rideshare or taxi operator.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.
Do you have a second supplemental?

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes, second supplemental, Deputy Speaker.

As the data was displayed in this House that there was a wait time, despite it being a very quick acceptance time, my clarifying question is how, then, can rideshare assist with these wait times if the person is still having to go and get an acceptance and have to wait until the taxi driver does not accept it or that order passes through? Okay.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Got you.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Those that have used similar applications in the past would know that if a wait time gets to the point where it is unacceptable for you, there are options where you can cancel and reapply.

And I can tell you that if we are giving 60 seconds and your wait time gets to a time where you think it unacceptable, you can actually reapply for hire or for another option, which I think with the use of technology will still be far shorter than 37 minutes, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Thank you, Minister.
Do you have a supplemental question?

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes, thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: To his third question?

Hon. Ben Smith: I do.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Ben Smith: Thank you.
So, Madam President, the—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Ben Smith: Madam President, sorry, I apologise.

[Inaudible interjections]

SUPPLEMENTARY

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes, well, I used to talk to him when he was in the Senate.

But can the Minister . . . because he stated that it was about eight seconds for an acceptance. So, with eight seconds for the acceptance, how can the person who is trying to get that ride . . . can they delete in order to get somebody else? And if they do that, wouldn't that just go back to the taxi because taxis would be the first to accept?

So how do they get to the rideshare if they're in the waiting period? Because it's accepted within eight seconds. We already have this delay that we are trying

to get rid of. How do they get to the rideshare if the taxis are accepting within eight seconds?

The Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you. I think my answer for this question is similar to the previous question. If the wait time from the user seems to be unacceptable, they can cancel. They could start the process over. And if it's another 60 seconds, I can guarantee you that two minutes and three minutes is a lot shorter than 37 minutes, Madam Deputy Speaker. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Okay.
Are there any . . . no further supplementals?

[No audible response.]

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

That takes us to the next person who wishes to ask you a question, Minister.

I recognise the Member from constituency 20. Member, you have the floor.

QUESTION 1: RIDESHARING, REGULATION OF SERVICE

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Perhaps the Minister can advise how many instances of enforcement are anticipated with the ride share programme?

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Deputy Speaker, surely the Honourable Member from the other side is not asking me to predict things that may or may not happen in the future. What I can tell you is that we are excited to finally be at the doorstep of offering additional transportation options to members of this country who have for far too long been put in a position where they cannot get reliable transportation options.

So once this starts, Madam Deputy Speaker, I can come back to this Honourable House, maybe a year from now, and give those stats that the Honourable Member from the other side is seeking. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
Supplemental?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you. Yes.

Obviously, the reason I'm asking the question is because before you issue licences and whatnot, you're going to have a plan in place to say *maybe we need extra enforcement officers. Maybe we need other*

things in place to make sure that rules are followed properly. That's why the question is posed.

Surely, they have an idea about the numbers of potential issues, given that they should have an idea of the number of issues that arise with taxis. So, with that said, Madam Deputy Speaker, given the number of licences that will be issued, is there any intent to hire further enforcement officers to make sure that the regulations are in fact followed for the ride share programme?

The Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Deputy Speaker, I think I'm on record saying that the Transport Control Department will be looking at all options that could be necessary, including the possibility of increasing the number of enforcement officers.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Second question, Member?

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you. With that said—

The Deputy Speaker: Or second supplementary?

Hon. Michael Fahy: Supplemental.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Michael Fahy: I don't believe that there was anything in line items in the budget for that statement, so perhaps the Minister can identify where in the budget increased enforcement officers for the Rideshare Programme are identified.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Deputy Speaker, I believe that the budget was debated prior to this Bill being brought to this honourable place. So next budget we will absolutely put a line item in there if that is what is required from the Honourable Member.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, [Minister].
Do you have a second question?

QUESTION 2: RIDESHARING, REGULATION OF SERVICE

Hon. Michael Fahy: I do. Thank you.

Given, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the Ministers rely on a Code of Practice in relation to standards of dress and the like that's within the regulations, and we don't yet have sight of those, will the Minister advise, please, whether the standards of dress as required for

rideshare drivers is going to be the same as that for taxi drivers?

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Supplemental?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you.

And with that said, does the Minister anticipate there to be any enforcement of that dress code in the same vein in which there is no enforcement for the dress code for taxi drivers?

The Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Deputy Speaker, I think the Honourable Member from the other side is . . . you know, it's disappointing that in one vein in a debate that they will stand very strongly on the side of taxi operators and defend them and say that this is going to harm them. But yet, here he is today, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Honourable Member from the other side—

Hon. Michael Fahy: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. Michael Fahy: The Minister is beginning to mislead the House. At no time did we say there should not be enforcement of taxi drivers. That is what we've said from the very beginning.

An Hon. Member: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Deputy Speaker, if I may continue down the vein where I was going, is that what the Honourable Member from the other side is anticipating is, and what he's saying is that, *Well, the current transportation industry doesn't follow the rules, and we are anticipating that the new batch of transportation providers are not going to follow the rules. So we should anticipate, you know, what the punishment should be before we even get to that point.*

I anticipate, Madam Deputy Speaker, that everyone who provides transportation in this country is on board in the modernisation of transportation. They are on board in supporting the tourism industry in this country, and I anticipate that with these new plans, with these new options for transportation, that all public service vehicle users will be prepared, they will be ready,

and they will follow all regulations that are put in place. So, I'm not going to sit here and anticipate what bad behaviours may happen before we actually start.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Second supplemental or third question?

Hon. Michael Fahy: Again, Madam Deputy Speaker—

The Deputy Speaker: Supplemental?

Hon. Michael Fahy: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Hon. Michael Fahy: So, is the Minister saying that he anticipates there will be no infractions and, therefore, no enforcement is required? Is that what I'm hearing?

[Inaudible interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: That was a good effort, Madam Deputy Speaker, by the Honourable Member from the other side. However, he knows full well that that is not what I said.

What I said is that we already have enforcement officers in place. And I did say that I have full confidence in the current taxi industry. I have full confidence in the individuals who will eventually sign up for rideshare and that they have the best interests of Bermuda tourism and locals at heart. And I fully expect that this season will be one of increased and improved transportation options and procedures for everyone in the transportation industry.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Supplemental to the question?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Could the Honourable Minister let us know whether what he is saying is that presently there is no one in the taxi industry that is not following the rules, including the dress code, because he seemed to allude that that was the case.

The Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Deputy Speaker, I will remind the Honourable Member from the other side that the enforcement and the penalties come under the remit of the Public Service Vehicle Licensing Board, and while there may have been a few instances where

traffic officers have had to have conversations with operators, I can tell you that the number of individuals that are brought before the board because official complaints have been made are not as significant as the Honourable Members from the other side would like to make you believe.

So I am here today, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I'm on my feet to applaud the taxi industry and applaud those who are providing transportation options for this country, because as has always been the case, they are some of our top ambassadors for tourism in this country, and I know that they will continue to do so, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

A second supplemental?

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes, thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, would the Minister be able to let this Honourable House know whether there has been any specific request from the taxi industry to increase enforcement within their own industry in the last 12 months?

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Deputy Speaker, point of order. I'm not sure that that information was something that was in my Statement this morning, so I don't think it applies to the questions on my Statement.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

You have a supplemental?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I do have a supplementary. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Minister, do you think that if the OBA, during their last term, would have brought the difficult decision of enforcement to the fore and implemented you wouldn't have to be going through this today?

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: A point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: I don't believe the One Bermuda Alliance was included in the Minister's Statement today. Maybe I missed it.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Maybe I missed it.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: But enforcement was.

An Hon. Member: Ooh!

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. I think that we have exhausted that.

You have a third question, Member?

Hon. Michael Fahy: Yes, thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

[Laughter]

QUESTION 3: RIDESHARING, REGULATION OF SERVICE

Hon. Michael Fahy: The regulations make reference to this issue of the amount of time that rideshare drivers can use the app. I think it says five continuous hours. Perhaps the Minister can share about how that time will be measured across platforms to ensure that drivers are, in fact, not exceeding the five-hour limit.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Deputy Speaker, if the Honourable Member was listening carefully to the Statement, he would have heard that rideshare can only operate through the use of digital applications. And the Honourable Member, I know, is very aware that digital apps can monitor time and they can actually shut individuals out if they need to. So, this will be monitored through the despatch companies.

And if there's an individual that has gone for . . . exceeds five hours, I can tell you that the enforcement that the One . . . sorry, that the Honourable Members from the other side have been so eager to discuss, rather than talking about the options that are now opening up for locals and tourists . . . they will know that this technology is very much capable of monitoring consecutive hours and total hours of operation within a day.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
A supplemental?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Hon. Michael Fahy: Yes, thank you.

I absolutely heard the Minister's Statement. I listened as carefully as I could. But here's the point and the reason I'm asking the question. It is required, if I recall, that the rideshare driver—

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Deputy Speaker, point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. Owen Darrell: It seems that the Honourable Member is seeking to engage in a debate rather than ask questions. So, I would ask that you keep him focused, the Honourable Member focused on asking questions to my Statement.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Michael Fahy: What are worried about? Answer the questions. Then I don't have to give a lot of preamble. Okay?

So, the rideshare users have to register with all of the apps.

The Deputy Speaker: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Is it that they have to register all at the same time? My point is, what's to stop a driver from registering and being online for one app, coming off, going on another app? How is this measured in practice? Is data going to be sought at the end of the day from despatchers and rideshare apps to say how long someone's been on? That's what I'm getting at, so we have an understanding of how that's actually measured.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Thank you.
Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Deputy Speaker, all activity will be monitored through the approved apps.
Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Thank you.
Second supplemental?

Hon. Michael Fahy: Okay. Maybe I'm not being clear. You get five hours on the apps. If you're on one app and you have that app open, presumably that gets measured for that period of time. If you then close that app and go on the second app, what's to stop you from having additional time? How is time measured across three or maybe four different applications in terms of the total time? I'm not following how that is going to get measured in practice and in real time.

The Deputy Speaker: Maybe the better question might be, Are they allowed five hours through each system or a collective five hours regardless of what system they use?

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you. Thank you for your guidance, and that's a great question. I take that on

board and ask that same question. Thank you.

[Laughter]

The Deputy Speaker: I clarified his question for you, Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Owen Darrell: All apps will be downloaded to the operator's device, and they will all be monitored simultaneously.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Okay. That concludes your questions, and there are no other persons.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE DEPUTY SPEAKER

HOUSE VISITORS

The Deputy Speaker: Before I circle back to the Minister of National Security (because someone has a question for you), I'd like to recognise in the Gallery former Member of Parliament Arthur Pitcher and the former Sergeant-at-Arms Albert Fox. Welcome, gentlemen. Thank you.

[Desk thumping]

[Question Period, continuing]

The Deputy Speaker: So that takes me to . . . I think Member King from constituency 10 had a question for you, Minister of National Security.

QUESTION 1: BERMUDA'S NATIONAL CYBERSECURITY RISK ASSESSMENT, LAUNCH OF

Mr. Robert King: Good morning, [Madam] Deputy [Speaker], Members of the Honourable House, and listening public.

The Minister states this strategy will be evidence-based. Can he explain how that is credible when the most critical piece of evidence, the 2023 breach analysis, remains incomplete, understanding that the Joint Select Committee—of which MP Robinson, MP Simmons, MP Scott, and clerk, Mr. Simmons, were members of—whose mandate it was to investigate the cause of the cybersecurity attack, which occurred on September 20, 2023, and make recommendations, has yet to make recommendations and complete the investigation?

So, the question is, How can we have a risk assessment when we don't have the critical information necessary to determine how and in what form it should take place?

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Madam [Deputy Speaker].

I don't see how that deals with my paper, but I'll do my best. The assessment that the National Risk Assessment will do is to try to engage the local community in a localised way of gathering information so that we could better address the cybersecurity threats. The Cybersecurity Act was established by this Government in 2024. Out of that came the National Cybersecurity Unit, and what we are looking to do now is to develop an incident response capability. The Joint Select Committee that was put together by the Speaker of the House, I think that's a matter for the House and not for myself.

The Deputy Speaker: Do you have a second question or supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Mr. Robert King: Supplementary.

It's rather concerning that the Minister would make a statement that basically the Joint Select Committee whose mandate was based on the Speaker's recommendation that the Joint Select Committee should be formed to determine the cybersecurity risks that were faced by the Government and people of this Island should be seen as being something separate from the risk assessment, which is voluntary for the community, and when it comes down to cybersecurity risk affecting this country, that the consultation would not include both. So—

The Deputy Speaker: So, are you asking why?

Mr. Robert King: So, what I'm asking is how can the recommendations and the mandate of the Joint Select Committee to investigate the cybersecurity breach in September 20, 2023, be seen as something separate from what the Minister's statements are purporting?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Madam [Deputy Speaker].

The two things are not separate in and of [themselves]. What this risk assessment is doing is looking at all critical infrastructures to see what are the vulnerabilities that exist in our country that we can address.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
Second supplemental?

Mr. Robert King: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The question I have is, how can we determine what risk assessments are required if we don't know the extent of the breach, the nature of the breach, what information was compromised? How can we have a risk assessment if we don't have the critical information?

It would be the equivalent of a person died in a second-floor apartment. And now you've got a questionnaire that says, you know, maybe you should, you know, if you live in a second-floor apartment, you may get sick, but you don't know. It doesn't make any sense.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Robert King: It doesn't make any sense.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I definitely agree that his analogy doesn't make any sense, Madam Deputy Speaker. But what I will say, and I've said it already, but I will say it again, the National Risk Assessment reaches out to all stakeholders, government agencies, private sector, small and medium-sized businesses, to see what risks there are to the cyber community and to see how we can mitigate those risks.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Thank you.
Do you have a second question?

Mr. Robert King: Supplemental.

The Deputy Speaker: No. You already used—

Mr. Robert King: Second question. That's fine.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

QUESTION 2: BERMUDA'S NATIONAL CYBERSECURITY RISK ASSESSMENT, LAUNCH OF

Mr. Robert King: So, the question I have is, has the Government already conducted an internal post-incident review of the 2023 attack? Why is it not being published? Will it be tabled in this House?

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Robert King: Well, I'll just clean it up. I'll clean it up.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Robert King: Has an internal post-incident review taken place, which is informing the risk assessment of which the Minister is speaking?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. That information is definitely in the public domain.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Thank you.
Do you have a supplemental?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Mr. Robert King: Yes, I do, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Minister states that the information is in the public domain. What specifically . . . what information is in the public domain as relates to the information that was compromised of the government and the citizens? And where might I find that? The supplemental to that would be, where might we find that information?

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Deputy Speaker, it's in the public domain for all to see. I mean, am I being asked which page and which . . . I mean, what is it that I'm being asked, Madam Deputy Speaker?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Well, I did say, yes, and I did say it's in the public domain, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
Second supplemental, Mr. King?

Mr. Robert King: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker.
If the Minister would be so gracious as to inform us where we might find that in the public domain, I'd be grateful.

[Crosstalk]

The Deputy Speaker: Do you have a response?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Deputy Speaker, no, I don't know where it is in the public domain; but it is in the public domain.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Well, let me explain it, because now it seems like we're going to be up here . . . going . . . When something is in the public domain we all have the ability to research—do our own personal research, because it is in the public domain—and find it.

[Crosstalk]

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister. Yes.
Third question?

Mr. Robert King: Madam [Deputy Speaker], [the] Minister is correct, and the Minister of National Security ought to know where it is, understanding that it's part of his Ministry.

The Deputy Speaker: Ask your question.

Mr. Robert King: And one would also think that the Minister would be able to furnish us with the information.

The Deputy Speaker: Just so that you know, when information is in the public domain, a Minister is not obliged to answer the question. But go ahead and ask your third question.

QUESTION 3: BERMUDA'S NATIONAL CYBERSECURITY RISK ASSESSMENT, LAUNCH OF

Mr. Robert King: So, understanding that the Cybersecurity Act 2024 has been in effect, have any persons been penalised, sanctioned or otherwise for contravening the Cybersecurity Act 2024?

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Madam [Deputy Speaker.]

I don't have the information with me, but I am sure that I could find such information, and I would impart it to the learned Member.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Thank you.
Supplemental?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Robert King: Supplemental.

Understanding that the Government has yet to publish the results of the Joint Select Committee on Cybersecurity for the investigation—

The Deputy Speaker: That comes—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Go ahead.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The Member is intentionally misleading. The Government does not publish joint select committees. That is the responsibility of the Legislature.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes. Member, when a committee is struck up in the House, it is the House—

Mr. Robert King: Absolutely.

The Deputy Speaker: The information belongs to the House, and it normally gets tabled in the House.

Mr. Robert King: No, no, you're absolutely right. Thank you for that clarification.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes. Okay.

Mr. Robert King: Yes, that's my final submission. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: That was your final question? Thank you.

Okay. So that brings us now to . . . I had a question on homelessness . . . No.

That brings us to the Health Minister, and Member Robinson, you may ask your question.

QUESTION 1: ROAD TRAFFIC COLLISIONS, PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACT OF

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you, [Madam] Deputy Speaker. And I just wanted to also commend the Minister for the Statement saying that it's a joint and collaborative effort on tackling road safety.

It was mentioned that they would work in conjunction with several ministries and stakeholders. I just wanted to know for clarity whether or not the Ministry of Health is participating in the formation of the upcoming National Road Safety Plan.

The Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Thank you. I thank that Honourable Member for his question, and as has been stated publicly by the Honourable Minister, who is responsible for Transport and everything else . . . Tourism, Transport—

The Deputy Speaker: Tourism and Culture and Sport.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Exactly. He is in the process of developing a National Road Safety Plan, and no doubt, because of the public interest, the public health element will be part of that process.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

That's the final question, and there were no other persons who indicated that they wished to ask questions. So that moves us on . . .

CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY SPEECHES

The Deputy Speaker: I recognise the Member from constituency 28.

Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker and to the listening audience.

This morning, I rise, first of all, to give condolences, Madam Deputy Speaker, to the family of Ms. June Butterfield. While I didn't know Ms. June Butterfield, I actually played football with both her sons, Marco and Jelani. And again, I can understand and share that pain of losing a mother, so I'd just like to send condolences to them, their children, and her other relatives, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, on lighter news, I would first of all like to give congratulations, and I will associate the whole House, to the producers of the Clyde Best film [*Transforming the Beautiful Game: The Clyde Best Story*].—

An Hon. Member: Yes!

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: —that premiered on Wednesday in London. I wasn't able to attend, but my father and my brother did attend, and they did say that it was an overwhelmingly enjoyable, but also informing, movie of his life. We in Bermuda know all too well his story and his struggle, but to see it on film and for the world to see and share his story, which in part is also a Bermuda story . . . so again, I want to say congratulations to all the producers, directors, actors, and everyone that had a part to play in the production of the Clyde Best [film].

Keeping with football, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to also send congratulations to the former team of Mr. Clyde Best, the Somerset Cricket Club Trojans—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: —football team Trojans, Madam Deputy Speaker, who this past weekend, won the first division trophy and got promoted as champions to return back to the Premier Division. And this was adding another trophy to our cabinet to continue the tradition of "Silver City."

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: And hopefully, as we get promoted, we can look to win more trophies next season.

So, congratulations, and I declare my interest—

[Inaudible interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: You want me to cut you off, do you?

[Laughter]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: I declare my interest, Madam Deputy Speaker, as I am the chairman of football at Somerset Cricket Club. So, to the coaches, the players, and all the support staff, congratulations on getting promoted, and we continue to build on that for next season.

Madam Deputy Speaker, also this past weekend was the completion of the Caribbean Pickleball Championships held in Bermuda, which Bermuda won. We beat the . . . I associate the Minister of Sport, I associate the whole House, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Bermuda in the final beat the Cayman Islands. And it was an overwhelming performance from the Bermuda team, and we look forward to building that as they go forward. But congratulations to the event organisers, the teams that participated, but also specifically to the Bermuda team for winning on home soil, the Caribbean Pickleball Championships.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish . . . I recognise the Member from constituency 25.

Member, you have the floor.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I would like to congratulate Warwick Workmen's Club on their successful kite-making and Easter activity for the children. And I'm associating . . . there were many Members of the House there last night. And I want to thank them for doing their bit to provide a health and safe entertainment for the children, and to help teach them how to take part in this critical tradition.

An Hon. Member: Can you make a kite?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: There was a question, can I make a kite? In fact, I had to assist on quite a few. And I would urge all adults to practice these skills and pass them on through their children.

An Hon. Member: There you go.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: So, thank you to the Club for putting on that great event. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 2. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker.

On a sad note, I'd like condolences to be extended to the family (and I'll associate yourself and Member Renee Ming) of Mr. Erwin Jones, especially to his widow, Ms. Winifred Jones. In 2021, they celebrated 70 years of wedded bliss. I have known Mr. Jones since I was a young boy growing up at Port Royal, when he was one of those regular Saturday morning golfers with Mr. Onslow Grant's group and the like, with many others who made their way there. His son, Michael, is a close friend of mine. His daughter is here from overseas. And I know he's lived a fulsome life, but still, condolences to the family as he has passed on.

On a happier note, I'd like to extend congratulations to a young man sitting in the Gallery, who I had the honour of interviewing when he first took on the job as editor of *The Royal Gazette*. He came on "Orders of the Day" in 2016, one of my early shows, with his charm offensive initiative, Mr. Dexter Smith. Probably one of the best decisions he ever made was, as an outstanding athlete, playing for St. George's Cricket Club in Cup Match as he got selected.

The Deputy Speaker: Indeed, indeed.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And he was a very dependable batsman who batted alongside of our illustrious skipper, Wendell Smith, and many other great St. George's players during those winning days for Cup Match that we will return to this year. But I wish him well as he makes his way overseas to take on a new life of retirement. And please keep in touch with Bermuda and any pearls of wisdom that can help us wrestle the Cup in July we welcome with open arms. But all blessings to him and his family.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Minister from constituency 16. Member, you have the floor.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I rise this morning on a happy note. I was a part of the unveiling this past week down at the Victor Scott Primary school of their new mascot. It's a bulldog and his name is Scotty. It was a competition among the students and staff as to what the new mascot would be named. You know, some said "Victor," some said this, some said that. But eventually, "Scotty" won out.

Having been a former student of Victor Scott [Primary], you know, having a mascot really, really helps to promote unity and pride in the school. So, on behalf of former students and faculty alike, you know, I was happy to see that. I see the mascot jumping around and running around and the excitement of the children. So going forward, I know that Scotty the Bulldog, the Victor Scott Primary mascot, will be—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Well, it's kind of a spinoff from "pond dog," you know, because we from Back o' Town are always letting people know how proud we are. You know, being pond dogs. So, this new mascot at Victor Scott [Primary], that's in the heart of the community, you know, just a spinoff from "pond dog" to "bulldog." So, hats off to the faculty and staff that came up with such an idea. And hopefully this would be a source going forward of pride and recognition of Victor Scott Primary School. So, thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 26. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Thank you, and good morning, Acting Speaker . . . [Madam] Deputy Speaker. Good morning to my colleagues as well.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to be associated with the congrats to the Warwick Workmen's Club, who have been doing their kite-making event for quite a few years now. And I'm a proud member of the Warwick Workmen's Club, so I certainly have to congratulate them. And let me say that it was also done in conjunction with the Warwick Parish Council. So, I do give them congratulations for that.

An Hon. Member: You need to declare your interest.

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: I did declare my interest as the chairman of the Warwick Parish Council as well. Thank you.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Madam Deputy Speaker, let me also change gears by asking for condolences to be sent out following the recent passing of Gary Ascento, who is also known as "Spook, Locks," those of us who know him. He lived just off of Hermitage Road, so sort of on the border of Devonshire and Smith's Parish. But I knew him quite well, having canvassed down in that area from 2023 *[sic]* to 2012 and being unsuccessful. But nevertheless, that's another story. But I do want to express condolences personally to his life partner, Della [Dellamae], and his brother, Henry (Hank), the

golfer, people may know him as. And I want to say that both—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: I associate MP Swan. Thank you. And I certainly want to say that both Gary and Della were very, very supportive of me when I ran down in those areas. And if it were left to them only, I would have probably been an MP of Devonshire.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 15, the Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I'd like to rise today to congratulate the senior Men's Football team. They recently travelled to Mexico to do a behind the—they call it—a closed-door match with the Republic of Congo, which is a significant outfit, Madam Deputy Speaker, who are in the final stages of attempting to qualify for the World Cup. And the result was, although it was not a winning result for our Gombey Warriors, it was a hard-fought and an admirable 2-0 performance.

And more importantly, Madam Deputy Speaker, I'd like to highlight today in my congrats, Mr. Maurice Lowe. Mr. Maurice Lowe did take helm of the team on short notice, as we do know that the former coach left just before this tour. And Mr. Maurice Lowe is officially the technical director of the Bermuda Football Association, and he's been such for a long time. And what the technical director does is he is key to the development of football across all ages for Bermuda. And I know that the Department of Sport and Recreation has worked long with the technical director, Mr. Lowe, in putting forth the Long-Term Athletic Development [LTAD] programme that we have in the government's sport policy.

And from the onset, Mr. Lowe has jumped on board of this Long-Term Athletic Development plan. He's put one in place for the Bermuda Football Association. And you can see it add to the development of football throughout the leagues, the development of coaches, not only in the national setup, but throughout the Island, Madam Deputy Speaker. And that includes the different licences that have been required of all football coaches at all levels across football in this country.

So, I want to take this opportunity because a lot of times, while the Island is going to focus on who is at the head or who is applying for the head coaching job, it was the technical director, Mr. Maurice Lowe, who stepped up. He took the team. He performed quite well as the interim coach in the Department *[sic]* of Congo. And most of you . . . sorry, the Republic of

Congo. And most of you would know a lot of those names that play on that team from watching international football on the weekend. And it's a joy to know that our Gombey Warriors, which, you know, a lot of those members were up and coming. New members on that team went over to Mexico, performed well. And it is my hope from a domestic level that in a few weeks I will be on my feet and congratulating a different domestic team, just like the Honourable Member from up the west did, in a few weeks' time.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 10. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I wish to express condolences to the family of Audrey Jeffrey, who passed on March 18 at the age of 95, and also Morag Whitehead, who passed this week at the age of 80. My thoughts and prayers go out to the families of both. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member and Minister from constituency 4. Member, you have the floor.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I would like to send condolences out to two families. Madam Deputy Speaker, Ms. Cecily Tuzo, from Hamilton Parish, who has left us in her 97th year. Her daughter Roselyn (Rozzie), and Robert Symons, are known in the area of Kitty's [Drive]. She will be definitely missed as a staple in Hamilton Parish.

Sending condolences also to the family of Mr. Robert Pilgrim, who, you know, he's the husband of the late Rosatta Pilgrim, who not so recently passed a couple of months ago, and is the father of David and Dennis Pilgrim, also a former employee of BELCO. We'd just like to send condolences out to the family.

This time, Madam Deputy Speaker, I'm standing to my feet to recognise the Youth Mental Health Advisory Board [who] over the weekend, myself with the Minister of Health, the Premier, [and] the Attorney General, had the opportunity to listen to our young people, [and] were very inspired by this group, who comes under the guidance of Christopher Jackson and Dr. Dan Cavanagh, sharing their knowledge in helping with the fight against the stigma of mental health, particularly with our young people. And they shared with us particular changes of policy and legislation that they would like to see that would help our young people of Bermuda. So, we do want to send our congratulations to them. We were very inspired. And heartfelt . . . they

gave a heartfelt presentation, and we just want to continue to encourage them to give public awareness, particularly to our young people as many battle mental health.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to . . . I recognise the Member from constituency 11.

Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker. Morning . . . I don't know if it was done before, if so, I'll associate myself—

The Deputy Speaker: Mm-hmm.

Mr. Christopher Famous: —but there's a lady in Devonshire who's a cornerstone of Watlington Road [*sic*]—

An Hon. Member: Lane.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Watlington Lane. And—

The Deputy Speaker: So, he said he would associate himself because he was not . . . Go ahead.

Mr. Christopher Famous: I'm associating myself.

The Deputy Speaker: Continue Member.

Mr. Christopher Famous: I wasn't here.

She was a cornerstone of Watlington Lane. She was a lady that saw Watlington Lane where the Mings, the Charles', the Pitts all grew their families. And so, I want to associate Minister Weeks with Ms. Brice. She was the grandmother of one of my school friends, Denton Jarrett, and basically the matriarch of her family. She lived to the ripe old age of 103 years old, 102.

The Deputy Speaker: In her 103rd year. How about that?

[*Laughter*]

Mr. Christopher Famous: Yes, okay.

Also, Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to congratulate Bermuda for winning the Caribbean . . . associate myself with Bermuda winning the Caribbean Pickleball Championships because when I saw those Caribbean flags at the W.E.R. Joell Tennis Stadium. Correct? W.E.R. Joell Tennis Stadium. (Is it Pickleball Stadium? Well, I don't know.) But when I saw those Caribbean flags, it tied right back into the whole argument that some people like to disassociate themselves from the Caribbean. So, it's a proud moment, not just to see those flags, but to see Bermuda beat especially the Cayman Islands. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 19. Member, you have the floor.

Hon. Jache Adams: Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Member and Minister.

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you.

I just wanted to take this opportunity to send a special congratulations to Mr. Richard Tucker, who has now been promoted to the General Manager of the Arlo SoHo Hotel in New York. He was recently featured in the *Essence* magazine, Madam Deputy Speaker, and quite near and dear to us and members of our party. And so, I just wanted to send, again, congratulations to his promotion as he continues to higher heights as we have yet another example of Bermudians doing wonderful things on the global stage.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

[*Desk thumping*]

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 36. Member, you have the floor.

Rev. Dr. Emilygail A. Dill: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

And to my colleagues and the listening audience, I'd like to take this opportunity to express our sincere condolences to the family of the late Mrs. Ruthella Smith. Many of you will remember her. She and her sister used to sing together, and they had a recording that was very, very popular when I was a young person. So, I just want to express my sincere condolences to her family, to her church family, as this beautiful, beautiful voice has now been hushed.

On another note, I'd like to offer congratulations, and I'm not sure if anyone else already did, to the organisers of the Brooklyn Tabernacle [*Singers*] experience that took place last night at the Victualling Yard, Dockyard. It was a phenomenal event, well organised, and most importantly, it was a spiritual event that brought together members of our community and those that were visiting on the cruise ship. And a high point was when close to 100 persons came and rededicated their lives to Christ, which is certainly something that our community needs in this time. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, to the organisers, I believe it's the GracePoint Church family, congratulations, and thank you for a job well done.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

[Does] any other persons who . . . I recognise, the Member and Minister from constituency 29.

Member, you have the floor.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise for the House to give congratulations to four young men, Aaron Bean, Hugo Iris, Kyle Williams, and Keino Zuill. These young men completed an historic victory in winning the snooker league this year, and you probably know a couple of those young men are from St. George's. So, I'd just like to give them congratulations. They're probably the newest snooker players in the country, and they've managed to pull off a feat that many people have tried and failed. So, my congratulations go out to them for doing a very good job in winning the snooker league this year. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

There being none, I just want to take the opportunity to express condolences to the Paynter family on the loss of . . . this is a well-known person, especially to the East End, of Sam Paynter, who indeed did pass away this morning. A great cricketer. He has grandsons who have stepped into his shoes, who also have great cricketing skills, and he will be a loss to both the St. David's and the St. George's community. And so, condolences to his family.

That ends Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches. We will now move on . . .

MATTERS OF PRIVILEGE

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

NOTICE OF MOTIONS FOR THE ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE ON MATTERS OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

The Deputy Speaker: I recognise that there are a couple of Bills to be introduced.

I call on the Minister of Youth, Social Development, and Seniors.

Minister.

GOVERNMENT BILL

FIRST READING

CHARITIES AMENDMENT ACT 2026

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Madam Deputy Speaker, I am introducing the following Bill for its first reading so that it may be placed on the Order Paper for the next . . . so it can be placed on the Order Paper, the Charities Amendment Act of 2026.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

I call on the Minister for Public Works and Environment.

Minister.

GOVERNMENT BILL

FIRST READING

SINGLE-USE PLASTICS ACT 2026

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you, Madam Deputy 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 Single-Use Plastics Act 2026. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

OPPOSITION BILLS

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

NOTICES OF MOTION

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Deputy Speaker: I call on the Minister for Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker.

DRAFT REGULATIONS

MERCHANT SHIPPING (FEES) AMENDMENT REGULATIONS 2026

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Deputy Speaker, I move that consideration be given to the draft Regulations entitled the [Merchant Shipping \(Fees\) Amendment Regulations 2026](#), proposed to be made by the Minister responsible for Maritime Administration in exercise of the power conferred by section 250 of the Merchant Shipping Act 2002.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Deputy Speaker, the Regulations for consideration before the House of Assembly today are the Merchant Shipping (Fees) Amendment Regulations 2026. These Regulations amend the Merchant Shipping (Fees) Regulations 2023 to implement a new set of fees for the Bermuda Seafarer Medical Examination Programme [SMEP] provided by the Bermuda Shipping and Maritime Authority [BSMA] and provide for the ability to approve and recognise seafarer training and education courses that may be provided by companies operating and managing ships registered in Bermuda.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in accordance with the Maritime Labour Convention 2006, which entered into force in 2016, it is mandatory for all seafarers to undergo medical examinations to improve and safeguard crew members' personal health and safety.

In 2018, the BSMA established the Seafarer Medical Examination Programme to allow companies' appointed approved doctors [AD] to conduct medical examinations on seafarers and issue Bermuda Seafarer Medical Examination Certificates for seafarers working on Bermuda-registered ships.

Currently, two Carnival brands, Princess cruises and Carnival UK, are enrolled in the programme as approved companies operating separately. ADs are selected in areas where there are large numbers of seafarers from different localities with no approved doctors available. Therefore, approved companies use the BSMA to fill this need to get seafarers' medical examinations conducted at a high standard and issued in a timely manner.

It is at the discretion of the BSMA to offer this programme to a company, and it is required for the company to have the chief medical officer oversee the programme and personnel staff to administer the programme. Madam Deputy Speaker, during the ensuing years since 2018, the programme has evolved and expanded to 33 medical facilities which [are] required to be audited once in a five-year period. This has resulted in an increasing number of administrative tasks and oversight by the BSMA that is required to monitor the programme to ensure good governance and ensure that the programme is working satisfactorily.

The BSMA will soon be implementing a mechanism whereby all seafarers' medical certificates are

issued through their enterprise platform, the Bermuda [Ocean] Shipping Services, or BOSS, as the medical certificates are currently being issued by the approved companies. This will be a significant milestone as, in addition to the revenue generated from the issuance of seafarer medical certificates, it will provide an online solution to the current challenges of tracking certificates across 33 issuing medical facilities, eradicate the potential fraudulent issue of certificates, and ensure that no fee dodging is possible. Utilising BOSS for the programme also provides the scalability to enable the BSMA to expand the programme to include other interested companies and ensures that they remain in control of the programme output, namely the medical certificate.

Madam Deputy Speaker, currently there are no fees charged by the BSMA for the administrative services associated with the programme other than your annual audits normally carried out in conjunction with other scheduled statutory audits. Therefore, following consultation with Princess Cruise Lines and Carnival UK, the BSMA are seeking to implement the fee for specific services.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the approach to maritime training is continuously evolving, and in recent years some shipping companies have been proactive by introducing and opening their own training facilities to provide the required training and support career development for their employees. As a result, the BSMA has identified the need to support specific clients with their respective company mandate to provide and deliver training and certification for seafarers employed by their company. Their overarching objective is to provide well-trained seafarers and officers who will operate and manage their vessels in addition to capacity building and retention of certified personnel.

Madam Deputy Speaker, employed within the BSMA are individuals who have appropriate qualifications, technical knowledge, and experience to audit and assess specific maritime training facilities for the purpose of approving the facility and training, and who can ensure training facilities meet the relevant training standards in accordance with the Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping for Seafarers Convention, the STCW.

Madam Deputy Speaker, to cover the cost of the human resources and to administer the programme, we have also introduced a fee for the approval and recognition of seafarer training and education courses that may be requested by companies operating and managing ships registered in Bermuda.

Madam Deputy Speaker, changes to the regulations include Part 1 of the Schedule, which provides for the ability to charge for the approval and recognition of seafarer training and education courses and any subsequent audits for the purpose of seeing whether or not the statutory requirements have been complied with. In Part 3 of the Schedule, new fees for the issuance of a seaman's medical certificate, an initial fee for

approval of the approved Seafarer Medical Examination Programme, and the annual fee for the administration of the SMEP have been included.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other persons who wish to speak to the Merchant Shipping (Fees) Amendment Regulations 2026?

I recognise the Member from constituency 30. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you, [Madam] Deputy Speaker.

This regulation seems to bring Bermuda in line with what is considered to be international norms, and the Minister seems to be moving in lockstep with the regulatory body. So, due to that, we have no issues with this regulation and look forward to it passing.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: All right.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the [Merchant Shipping (Fees) Amendment Regulations 2026]? There are none.

Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I move that the said draft Regulations be approved and that a suitable message be sent to His Excellency, the Governor.

The Deputy Speaker: I just have to make sure . . . those in favour? Indicate by Aye.

Some Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Those who object?

[No audible response.]

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

So, thank you, Minister. They will be forwarded to the Governor. Yes.

[Motion carried: The Draft Regulations entitled Merchant Shipping (Fees) Amendment Regulations 2026 were approved.]

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Sorry. That takes us to the [Item] No. 2.

I call on the Junior Minister for Justice.

DRAFT REGULATIONS

PROCEEDS OF CRIME (ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING AND ANTI-TERRORIST FINANCING) AMENDMENT REGULATIONS 2026

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I move that consideration be given to the draft Regulations entitled, [Proceeds of Crime \(Anti-Money Laundering and Anti-Terrorist Financing\) Amendment Regulations 2026](#), proposed to be made by the Minister responsible for Justice in exercise of the power conferred by section 49(3) of the Proceeds of Crime Act 1997 and section 12A of the Anti-Terrorism (Financial and Other Measures) Act 2004.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other persons who wish to speak to the Proceeds of Crime [(Anti-Money Laundering, and Anti-Terrorist Financing)] Amendment Regulations 2026?

Are there any other Members?

I recognise the member from constituency . . .

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Twenty-three.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes. [Constituency] 23.

Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Yes. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Thank you.

Yes, we obviously support anything the Anti-Money Laundering Committee brings to the House, most especially as it relates to improving the Proceeds of Crime [(Anti-Money Laundering and Anti-Terrorist Financing)] Regulations 2008. With that being said, Madam Deputy Speaker, this is a fairly dated piece of legislation, and we find ourselves in the throes of our technical submissions for the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Yes.

To that end, we are a bit late to make a number of changes, but, nonetheless, these changes should and ought to be made, most especially as it relates to the inclusion of the proliferation of financing of the weapons of mass destruction in the preventive obligations enshrined therein, most especially we operate a risk-based approach system and that means that not all risks [have always] been included, and in this case the proliferation of the weapons of mass destruction were not included. So, putting them in there is obviously key and core to us passing the CFATF examination.

But I do raise a point of caution, again, in that these Regulations are quite dated, stemming from the UK's Money Laundering Regulations 2007. And they got brought in in [20]08 to accommodate what is called the 4th Round Mutual Evaluation report, which we

actually did very, very well at. But we are going on to a 5th Round with the change in methodology. So, the long and short is that these are quite dated. We should replace them. It's a little late in the day to do that now. But certainly after this examination we should look at the skeleton again.

And I have one comment on [the amendment to] regulation 9, specifically on the requirement to cease business relationships or terminate business relationships. The long and the short, Madam [Deputy Speaker], is that that regulation speaks to how when CDD [customer due diligence] is not completed, that you are required either to not enter a business relationship or that you must exit if you already have one. We are adding on to the back of that condition the final piece that says that we have to take into consideration whether or not to file a suspicious activity report. This is the report that goes to the Financial Intelligence Agency and notifies them of potential money laundering, terrorist financing and, in this case, proliferation financing.

Now what we are adding to that criterion is to say also take into consideration the International Sanctions [Act] 2003. Now the reason this is going to cause a problem in compliance programmes on a going forward basis is because the International Sanctions Act 2003, and its accompanying International Sanctions Regulation 2013 form a framework that is very, very different to AML. A bit like how our anti-bribery and corruption framework is different to AML; a bit like how our insider dealing is different to AML. And when we conflate these two, what we do is we draw in performance expectations.

A great example in this case is the Financial Sanctions Implementation Unit under the Ministry of Legal Affairs, [which] currently issues a guidance note that explains how sanctions work in Bermuda. Well, so does the BMA [Bermuda Monetary Authority]. Now this creates a problem because we have two regulators opining on actually how to do one thing. This is the kind of complication that can be created when you think something is like, *oh, it's a good idea, let's include it*. It's not a good idea. We should have kept them separate.

But with that being said, we are nonetheless in the throes of this experience of the 5th Round. We have to make these submissions. These are good submissions. They will assist us with making sure that our financial services industry is appropriate and fit for purpose. With that, thank you, Madam [Deputy Speaker]. [I will] take [my] seat.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other persons who wish to speak to the . . . sorry.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, I recognise the Member from constituency . . .

Mr. Scott Pearman: Twenty-two.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I had the pleasure of riding up the elevator with the former Member of Parliament from what is now constituency 3, MP [Arthur] Pitcher. He said, talking in the elevator, that I was apparently a lot more loud and forceful in person than I am when speaking on the microphone. He said, *Get closer to the microphone*. So, I'll try and do that.

I don't need to add much because the Honourable Member, Jarion Richardson, MP, has already given a detailed observation of the Bill. I just would like to do three things. That is, one, to thank the Honourable Junior Minister for his presentation and for bringing this.

Secondly, just to say that it is important that we as a jurisdiction and an international financial centre of such well regard remain at the forefront of these international regulatory regimes. They are impressed upon us from abroad. But, nonetheless, the international reality of the global world and the global economy is such that we rightly need to stay at the forefront. And so it's nice to see this.

My third and final point, only because we're not going to Committee, is that the vast majority of these regulations are simply to update the proliferation finance. There are two exceptions, and I just flag them by named clause for the benefit of the listening public and those . . . because they wouldn't necessarily expect to see them, as MP Richardson has explained.

There is an amendment to Regulation 9 at clause 5 of the [draft Regulations] that deals with the International Sanctions Act 2003. That may be unexpected in what is otherwise dealing with proliferation finance. And likewise, there is an amendment to Regulation 11 at clause 7(d) of the [draft Regulations], also dealing with international sanctions. So, I just flag for the listening public, for those who are in this space—and there are lots of people in Bermuda who are in this space—just to be aware that the international sanctions regime is also being addressed in what is otherwise an anti-money laundering, anti-terrorist Bill—or Regulations, rather.

Thank you, Madam Deputy [Speaker].

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other persons who wish to speak to the Regulations?

There being none, I call on the Junior Minister.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I move that the said draft Regulations be approved and that a suitable message be sent to His Excellency the Governor.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any objections?
There being none; so moved.

[Gavel]

[Motion carried: The Draft Regulations entitled Proceeds of Crime (Anti-Money Laundering, and Anti-Terrorist Financing) Amendment Regulations 2026 were approved.]

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. That takes us to [Order] No. 3, which I do believe will be carried over by the—

An Hon. Member: It's being done.

The Deputy Speaker: It is being done?

[Inaudible interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Oh, okay. I wasn't informed of that. Okay.

Thank you very much.

Okay. I was informed of the Charities Bill, but just not that it wasn't being carried over. Okay.

Minister, are you ready? Yes.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Yes, Madam [Deputy Speaker].

STANDING ORDER 29(1)

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Madam Deputy Speaker, I move that Standing Order 29(1) be suspended to enable the House to proceed with the second reading of the Bill entitled the Charities Amendment Act 2026.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved that Standing Order 29(1) be suspended so that the Member can proceed to the second reading.

Are there any objections?

There are none; so moved.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 29(1) suspended.]

The Deputy Speaker: Continue, Member.

BILL

SECOND READING

CHARITIES AMENDMENT ACT 2026

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Madam Deputy Speaker, the purpose of the Bill entitled Charities Amendment Act 2026 before the House today is to amend the Charities Act 2014 to include provisions on compliance officers and revoke references in the Charities (Anti-Money Laundering, Anti-Terrorist Financing and Reporting) Regulations 2014 (AML/ATF Regulations) in order to align the effectiveness of Bermuda's anti-terrorist financing

regime with international standards and to provide for connected purposes.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Bermuda was assessed via a mutual evaluation exercise in 2018 by the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force using the 4th Round Financial Action Task Force methodology. Bermuda received a compliant rating with respect to FATF Recommendation 8 (Rec 8), which provides guidelines on the regulation of non-profit organisations (NPOs).

With respect to the prevention and mitigation of terrorist financing (TF) risk, Madam Deputy Speaker, in 2023 the FATF revised Rec 8 to address concerns that many jurisdictions adopted overly broad or prescriptive regulatory measures for NPOs, which had the unintended consequence of constraining legitimate charitable activities without providing a demonstrable corresponding benefit to the mitigation of potential TF risk.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the revised Rec 8 emphasised that the term "NPO" specifically relates to FATF's definition of NPOs, which is, *a legal person or arrangement or organisation that primarily engages in raising or dispersing funds for purposes, such as charitable, religious, cultural, educational, social, or fraternal purposes, or for the carrying out of other types of good works*. Additionally, the revised standard requires countries to have in place focused, proportionate, effective, and risk-based measures to identify TF risk.

Further, the revised Rec 8 makes clear that NPOs are not reporting entities subject to anti-terrorist financing and reporting obligations appointing a compliance officer and should not be required to conduct customer due diligence as required by financial institutions and designated non-financial business and professions.

Madam Deputy Speaker, currently there are significant provisions in the AML/ATF Regulations that require charities to appoint a compliance officer and impose an obligation for them to submit suspicious activity reports. Rec 8 explicitly cautions against treating NPOs in this way, and without corrective action Bermuda risks a non-compliant rating for this recommendation under the FATF 5th Round Methodology.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in May 2025, a mock review exercise of the Registrar General's readiness for the 5th Round Mutual Evaluation was carried out. The key findings were that under the current charity legislative framework, Bermuda's charity sector was overregulated. Disproportionate measures for compliance requirements are threshold-based rather than risk-based, and misaligned supervision with heavy emphasis on monitoring checks and regulatory compliance as opposed to assessing an actual risk factor.

These findings make clear that the Registrar General's (RGs) regime or framework does not align with the revised FATF Rec 8 standards. However, Madam Deputy Speaker, this non-alignment presented a material risk of non-compliance with Rec 8 and its implementation under Core Issue 10.3 of Immediate Outcome 10, which both require focused, proportionate,

and risk-based measures for TF risk oversight or monitoring of the local NPO sector.

If the AML/ATF Regulations are not repealed and the required amendments to the acting Regulations are not made, then it will be determined by the FATF assessors at the Mutual Evaluation in 2027 that the RG does not have a correct understanding of the intentions or requirements of the revised Rec 8 standards, and has misapplied or wrongfully imposed counterterrorist financing measures that disrupt or discourage activities of the local charities and NPO sector.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the policy intent behind the amendment is to repeal the AML/ATF Regulations and amend the Act and the Regulations to address the overregulation of NPOs regarding the requirements set out by the FATF standards to ensure aspects of the AML/ATF Regulations that remain critical to good governance of charities and NPOs are retained and incorporated into the Regulations. And to further amend the Act and the Regulations to ensure the regulatory framework of Bermuda's charity sector remains robust and upholds international best practice.

The objectives are to do away with the AML/ATF Regulations, which impose obligations on charities that treat them like reporting entities as its provisions are not in line with the intentions of the revised Rec 8; identify those provisions that are still required to maintain a robust charity's regulatory framework and transfer them to the Regulations; and to further strengthen the existing legislation by amending the Act and the Regulations to provide more clarity to existing provisions and introduce new provisions.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Bill seeks to replace the word "supervisory" in the Act with the word "oversight." Revised Rec 8 indicates that the relevant authority responsible for NPOs should be acting in an oversight capacity instead of a supervisory capacity, and this change in language will reflect that. Also, the Bill seeks to remove references to the AML as FATF standards, prioritise ATF measures as NPOs are considered at risk to TF abuse as opposed to ML abuse.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Bill seeks to empower the Registrar General to disclose information to international authorities in relation to investigations into money laundering, terrorist financing, proliferation financing, or other financial crimes. Revised Rec 8 requires jurisdictions to have appropriate points of contact and procedures to respond to international requests about NPOs that relate to terrorist financing or other forms of terrorist support.

Although money laundering, proliferation financing, and other financial crimes are not specific under Rec 8 and FATF does not view NPOs as being an especially high risk for these, other jurisdictions, such as Jamaica, have included provisions in their legislation that support international cooperation. The Bill introduces new civil penalties of an additional \$200 penalty to be added to the existing penalty of \$200 under the Act for failing to submit annual reports and accounts

within 30 days after the initial deadline for submission, and \$200 where a charity has failed to register as an exempt charity under the Act within 30 days of incorporation.

Additionally, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Bill further removes from the Act any reference to the AML/ATF Regulations, includes an additional provision under the Act to state details of salary information of paid staff in such a manner as may be prescribed by the Registrar in light of the fact that there is a clear public interest in salary information for charities being part of the public record, and removes from the Act any reference of the requirement to appoint a compliance officer as this does not align with revised Rec 8.

In closing, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Charities Amendment Act 2026 is the Government's unwavering commitment to enhance the legal framework providing oversight of charities and ensure that the RG's regime effectively upholds international best practices.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I now move the Bill entitled Charities Amendment Act 2026 be read for the second time.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other persons who wish to speak to the Bill?

I recognise the Member from constituency 23.

Member, you have the floor.

Let me just say that I do understand that you guys intend to be brief, and so the hope is that they can go into Committee before lunch. We only have five minutes, so I don't know. I will leave that up to the respective Minister once we . . .

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Madam Deputy [Speaker]. AML is one thing I could speak to for hours, if not . . . but I will absolutely restrain myself.

Specifically, I want to thank the Minister and the professional team at the civil service for the brief that we had yesterday. And I'll keep that brief, but I just wanted to say thank you to them for their cooperation in this matter.

As it relates to this, why charities? It's not just compliance with international norms, Madam [Deputy Speaker], even though we risk rate very low for terrorist financing. The simple fact of the matter is that charities are optimal vehicles for the purposes of collecting money and then moving money towards charitable purposes in other jurisdictions, and that is literally the definition of terrorist financing.

I won't spend too long on that because I think that the Honourable Minister and her civil service team are not only briefed but are in a position to brief others on that. What I would say, though, is it always concerns me about overreach, specifically proportionality. The 2024 National Risk Assessment [on Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing] has been published for some time, and it makes quite clear the matters that we have to concern ourselves with relating to managing the

terrorist financing, as well as money laundering risks associated with charities.

This legislation seeks to, I would say arguably, reduce the amount of work that charities have had to do in the past, which is smart because the first version of it was onerous and clunky. And to that end, it's good to see that it's being stripped down to its components so it's becoming more proportional. With that being said, we do have areas of concern, especially around salary disclosure.

Recommendation 8 of the Financial Action Task Force does not require salary disclosure as a mechanism. I raised that in the briefing. The Honourable Minister and her team did make an explanation. Nonetheless, I raise it here for the purposes of the Hansard to say that although there may be other macro reasons for the purposes of salary disclosure and that information being collected by the RG, it is nonetheless not consistent with the FATF Recommendation 8, and therefore we discourage its use.

Following on from that, we were talking about the proportionality implicit in the NRA. The Honourable Minister and her team did well to argue that the risks that the AML programme [is putting] on the NPOs is proportionate to the risks that they pose. I would add that the proportionality, or the risk as posed, seems to be limited and controlled by a few controls, namely the amount of \$500,000 . . . sorry, \$50,000. Anything below \$50,000 that NPO doesn't require a compliance officer and similar controls. I would argue that those are a step in the right direction. But I don't think they go far enough, mostly because I think that the due diligence requirements imposed in this regime, as yet not defined by the Guidance Notes, invite overreach.

And so, to that end, I have the assurances of the Minister and her team that the Guidance Notes relevant to making sure that overreach does not occur will be brought into force in due course, and I look forward to that.

With that being said, I know that this is something that is required by international norms, and I 100 per cent support, again, the work of the Ministry and the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee, as does His Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Thank you, Madam [Deputy Speaker].

The Deputy Speaker: It actually is 12:30, so—

Mr. Scott Pearman: I'm in your hands.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, and I do believe—

Mr. Scott Pearman: If you would like me to hold it until 2:00 pm—

The Deputy Speaker: I do believe that we will need to break for lunch. And so I will recognise you after lunch, and you can speak.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: So, I'll ask that the . . .

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I move the Honourable House to now adjourn until 2:00 pm.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved, and we shall adjourn until 2:00 pm.

[Gavel]

Proceedings suspended at 12:30 pm

Proceedings resumed at 2:01 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Good afternoon, Members. We are now resuming on the Charities Amendment Act 2026.

BILL

SECOND READING

CHARITIES AMENDMENT ACT 2026

[Second reading debate, continuing]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the [Bill]?

I recognise the Member from constituency 22. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Those listening, and in the listening public, will recall that when the House rose for the lunch adjournment, we had heard the Honourable Minister present the Charities Amendment Act 2026. And we had heard some extensive comments by my colleague, OBA MP Jarion Richardson. I just have a few brief points to add.

However, during the lunch break, we were told that there will be a minor floor amendment. I am grateful to the Honourable Premier for drawing this to our attention, and we have no issue with it, but that will be dealt with in Committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Right.

Mr. Scott Pearman: And I just mention that for completeness, in case it hadn't made its way to your ears. Just a few very brief points.

Firstly, I would like to thank the Honourable Minister and her team. I know we had in the Chamber

earlier the Permanent Secretary, Ms [Pandora] Glassford. I see the Registrar General, Mr [Aubrey] Pennyman, and I believe a Counsel for the department, Mr. Matthew Nester. And so, we are very appreciative on this side for the fact that yesterday they took the opportunity to give us, both in relation to the Act and indeed the Regulations that will be coming in relation to this Act, and we had the opportunity to pose questions and to gain a better understanding of the logic behind it.

I should have also mentioned Ms. Lister was there as well, although she was not in the Chamber this morning, and we were extremely grateful for that. It is really very, very helpful.

I know that was done because we were doing this Bill as a first, second and third reading today, but it is generally helpful if a Bill is complicated to understand the thinking of the Government, including the civil service behind that. It just helps the Opposition in doing its job. So, my heartfelt thanks there.

My second of four points is just in relation to the Bill itself and indeed the charitable sector. I think it is probably common ground, and both sides of the House, both the Government and the Opposition, would recognise that, you know, it has been very difficult in the charitable sector. And for some reason, which I cannot quite understand . . . but let me just make clear it is my own personal opinion I am expressing here. But for reasons I cannot understand there are certain international regulatory bodies that seem to have come to the conclusion that charities are not there in fact to help everybody as they are in fact doing, but they are there to launder money and funnel arms to third-world countries for civil wars and such like.

That is certainly not been my experience as someone who has practiced law in the trust and charitable sector for coming on 30 years now. My experience has been that these charities are immensely beneficial, immensely hard-working, often populated by people who give time ceaselessly and for good cause.

And so, I am actually delighted, and I would like to commend the Government today for the fact that one of the things this Bill (when it becomes an Act) is doing is making things slightly less onerous for charities.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Because the international regulatory world imposed upon our charitable sector (then again, let me say this is my opinion) the rather unfortunate 2014 Charities Act, which was a behemoth and was not fit for purpose in a jurisdiction such as ours. But nonetheless it came in. And thankfully we are walking or rowing our way back from it as we did, I think in 2007 and 2008, and then again, this year, earlier with the earlier amendment this year, perhaps it was last year.

But anyway, the point that I think is worth making, and I make it, is this: One of the burdens that someone beyond Bermuda shores imposed upon our charitable sector was that they needed to have a compliance

officer. It is hard enough, and I have also sat on the board of the charity for over a decade . . . it is hard enough to find people to sit and give their time on these charities, these very, very important charities, as it is. Then to demand that they need a compliance officer is really a sledgehammer to crack a nut.

And I say this not to be flippant, because I do appreciate that one might be able to use the charitable sector in other jurisdictions away from ours to do certain things about which they are being criticised. But listen, if they are doing that, you have got to access their bank accounts, you can see what is happening. The idea that you require someone sitting around that board to be a compliance officer, otherwise they cannot function as a charity, is just simply overly onerous. And so, I am delighted to see that obligation is being removed, and I think that is a very good thing.

Before I take my seat Madam Deputy Speaker, and I appreciate this is going to Committee, and I will not mention a clause number, but one small point on the Bill in relation to . . . two small points on the Bill.

In relation to page two. I will not cite the clause, but there is a reference to "exempted charities." For those listening who are in the charitable sector, you know who you are if you have the right to be exempted, and if you do not know who you are, please take the effort to find out. I am sure that Mr. Pennyman and Mr. Nester and those in the civil service and the Registrar General will be very happy to assist in your questions.

So, as a public service broadcast announcement, if you are able to be an exempted charity, please register, because if you do not register there are some civil penalties that are being introduced by this amendment Act today. And we would hate for a charity to fall upon hard times, not register, and then have to pay a penalty. So, if you have not heard it before, please listen to my voice now. If you are able to be exempted, please register so you can avoid that civil penalty.

And, Madam Deputy [Speaker], before I take my seat, eagle-eye Robin Tucker, MP, spotted a typographical error in the explanatory memorandum, and we did raise this with the civil servants. The Bill is being corrected. I note that the one on the SharePoint has not yet been corrected. But the small correction for the record in Hansard is at page i of the explanatory memorandum under clause 8. The first sentence says \$50,000 or more in the middle sentence that should in fact read \$50,000 *or less*. And I understand that that has been corrected by the civil servant. But if that corrected version has not found its way to anyone else, I simply record it for the Hansard.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: And that amendment would be an amendment that could get made on the floor of the House?

Mr. Scott Pearman: My understanding, Madam Speaker, is [that] the amendment was made —

The Deputy Speaker: Is it already an amendment?

Mr. Scott Pearman: Made before the Bill got tabled—

The Deputy Speaker: Okay, yes.

Mr. Scott Pearman: But I am just pointing out for the old version, which is still on the parliament.bm website,

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, okay.

Are there any other persons who wish to speak to the Bill entitled Charities Amendment Act 2026?

I recognise the Member from constituency 18, the Finance Minister and Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I rise on this particular matter to share a couple of things. As a Minister with joint responsibility for the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee [NAMLC] along with the Minister who sits in another place, [the] Minister of Justice, I just want to rise to my feet to thank the Minister, thank the technical officers, thank the drafters, thank the Opposition, everyone else. We are navigating some very technical matters, that we are trying to make sure we get these things done in advance, to make sure that Bermuda does not have a negative mark.

We all recognise how important these particular matters are. The points that are taken from the Honourable Learned Member [who] just took his seat, are well advised and well taken. Because there is a challenge when we have all of these international bodies that are setting these things. The key point is that we need to have a risk-based approach.

And so, for some of the simplifications of which we have seen in here, this is really around a risk-based approach. We want to make sure this works well. We want to make sure that what is being set out here is actually necessary and fits inside. And so I am grateful for everyone. Because we do have a report, a review that is upcoming, Bermuda's unfortunate circumstance is, because we did so well in the last round and had the best ratings in the entire Caribbean region, we are going first in this upcoming round, which means that there is a very quick turnaround to make sure we get all the various matters related to legislation, et cetera.

We do recognise that there are certainly challenges with resources, from the drafting perspective, with recent losses that have happened there and people having to take on double work. So, I just want to take the time to express my thanks, because I know that it has been particularly trying on public officers, on the drafting section, on Ministers and others.

And so, I am grateful for not only the cooperation of the Opposition on this particular matter, that we did not have to get up today and do a vote on suspension [of] the rules, but the reality is that we have to get through these particular matters because they are

important for the jurisdiction. *They are important for the jurisdiction.* This is what I want to make sure is clear: These technical matters are to make sure that we put ourselves in the best position possible, *the best position possible*, to get a good rating in our next review.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Premier. Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the Charities Amendment Act 2026?

I see no other Members, so I call on the Minister

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I would have to admit, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the fire has been put under our feet to make sure that we are compliant with better requirements. And so, I am thankful for the support of the Opposition on this piece of legislation as well as the team of the office of Registry General, and our Parliamentary Council team who worked very hard and diligently to make sure we could be where we are today. And so, I do want to give my gratitude because it has not come without stress and hard work to be where we are today.

I just want to take the opportunity to just answer some of the questions that were brought to the floor in regard to the salary disclosure, wanting the listening public to understand that charities are responsible and accountable for public funds. And the salary disclosure will not be an actual salary amount; it will be within a certain band. And so, we recognise and we want our charities to be accountable to how they are using public funds. This also displays good governance as well.

In response to the question around . . . well it wasn't a question it was a comment in regard to private funded charities who are exempt and them getting on board and understanding that there will be a fine put in if they do not register or file the annual report. The office of the Registry General is very capable, quite capable of making sure that they alert those current private funded charities who are exempt, and with providing them the appropriate information to make sure that they file appropriately. And given enough time to file within a certain, or appropriate, period.

Overall, the Charity Amendment Act or legislation has responsibility for overall regulation and good governance for the charitable sector. And so, this Act today is providing more governance, more strengthening, for the charitable sector but also removing the over regulation as it relates to anti-money laundering because charities still remain low risk.

So, with that Madam Deputy Speaker, I move that the Bill be committed

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved that the Bill be committed.

Are there any objections to that?

There are none. So moved.

I call on the Member from constituency 31, I believe it is, Member Smith, to come and take the Chair.

House in Committee at 2:14 pm

[Ms. Linda Smith, Chairman]

COMMITTEE ON BILL

CHARITIES AMENDMENT ACT 2026

The Chairman: Honourable Members, we are now in Committee of the whole [House] for further consideration of the Bill entitled the [Charities Amendment \[Act\] 2026](#). I call on the Minister in charge to proceed.

Minister, you have the floor

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Madam Chairman.
I move that clauses 1 through 8 be considered.

The Chairman: Please proceed. Are there any objections? If not, please proceed.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Clause 1 provides for the citation for the Bill.

Clause 2 amends section 11 of the principal Act to provide for a change of the Registrar's functions from a supervisory role to an oversight role. Subsections (1)(da) and (db) are amended for the Registrar to be responsible for implementing a money laundering or terrorist financing risk-based oversight or monitoring programme for charities and to establish with NAMLC, the criteria for the risk profiles of charities in order to facilitate risk-based oversight over charities

Clause 3 amends section 25A of the principal Act to repeal the reference to the Charities (Anti-Money Laundering, Anti-Terrorist Financing and Reporting) Regulations 2014.

Clause 4 amends section 32 of the principal Act to allow a permitted disclosure of information under subsection (6) to a law enforcement agency with the responsibility for investigating or taking enforcement action against money laundering, terrorism financing or other financial crimes in a jurisdiction outside Bermuda, where the Registrar is satisfied that the law enforcement agency has requested cooperation.

Clause 5 amends section 38 of the principal Act to include the requirement that charity trustees submit in their annual report the details of salary information of paid staff in the manner prescribed by the Registrar.

Clause 6 amends section 47A of the principal Act to add two more civil penalties for failure to comply with the Regulations. A new subsection (1A) provides for a civil penalty where a charity has failed to submit annual reports and accounts within 30 days after the initial deadline for submission, allowing the Registrar to issue an additional civil penalty of \$200 above the

existing penalty. A new subsection (2AA) provides for a civil penalty where a charity has failed to register as an exempt charity under section 18(4) within 30 days of incorporation; providing the Registrar the ability to impose a civil penalty in the amount of \$200

Clause 7 amends section 47C of the principal Act to substitute the words "a copies" for "copies."

Clause 8 amends section 47F of the principal Act to repeal paragraph (a). Paragraph (a) provides an exemption for a charity that has an annual gross income of \$50,000 or more *[sic]* to be exempted from the requirement to appoint a compliance officer who has received approved AML/ATF training. This exemption is no longer required because the general requirement for a compliance officer to be appointed for any charity is removed with the repeal of the Charities (Anti-Money Laundering, Anti-Terrorist Financing and Reporting) Regulations 2014.

[An electronic device sounded.]

[Laughter]

The Chairman: It has been moved that clauses 1 through 7 *[sic]* be approved—

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Through 8.

The Chairman: [Clauses] 1 through 8 be approved.
Are there any objections? If not, so agreed.
Minister, please proceed

AMENDMENT TO CLAUSE 9

Hon. Tinee Furbert: At this time, Madam Chairman, I would like to ask for a floor amendment to the Charities Amendment Bill 2026, for clause 9.

The Chairman: There has been a motion for an amendment to clause 9.
[Are there] any objections?

Mr. Scott Pearman: No objections

The Chairman: There were no objections, so agreed.
Please proceed.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Madam Chairman.
I would now like to move all clauses 1 through 8. Sorry . . .

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Sorry, I am going to . . . Madam Chairman, I move that the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the preamble be approved.

Are there any objections?

If not, approved.
Minister.

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. Scott Pearman: Sorry, point of order

I think that the amended clause should have been approved as amended. And, I think it might not have been. Okay.

[Crosstalk]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Clause 9 should have come before the preamble.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Tinee Furbert: I did not read . . . I did not say—

Mr. Scott Pearman: I believe the Minister needs to state that it be approved as amended, in that that statement was not made. That is all I am raising, and it was told to me by someone else

[Crosstalk]

[Laughter]

The Chairman: Minister . . . perhaps, Minister could you make it . . . could you make a motion that—

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Yes, thank you.

Thank you, Madam Chairman. I would like to move that clauses 1 through 8 be approved, with the amendment of the deletion of clause 9 in the Charities Amendment [Act] 2026.

The Chairman: It has been [moved] that clauses 1 through 8 be approved. And that clause 9 with the amendment also be approved.

Are there any objections to that? If not, so [approved].

[Motion carried: Clauses 1 through 8 passed.]

[Motion carried: Clause 9 deleted.]

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I now move that the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: It has moved that the preamble be approved.

Are there any objections to that? If not, then so approved

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Madam Chairman, I move that the Bill entitled the Charities Amendment Act 2026, with amendment, be reported to the House as amended, be reported to the House as printed *[sic]*.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Yes, Madam, Chairman, I move that the Bill entitled the Charities Amendment Act 2026, as amended, be reported to the House.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Charities Amendment Act 2026, as amended, be [reported to] the House.

Are there any objections? If not, so approved.

[Motion carried: The Charities Amendment Act 2026 was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed as amended.]

House resumed at 2:22 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair]

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

CHARITIES AMENDMENT ACT 2026

The Deputy Speaker: Members, I understand that the Bill entitled the Charities Amendment Act 2026 has been reported to the House as amended.

[Are there] any objections?

There being none. So moved.

That brings us to our final item of the day, and I do understand that this is being done by the Minister of Finance and Premier, and that is the second reading of the Cost of Living Commission Amendment Act 2026.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I move that the Bill entitled the Cost of Living [Commission] Amendment Act 2026 be now read a second time.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved that the Cost of Living Commission Amendment Act 2026 be read a second time.

Are there any objections? There are none.

Continue, Minister.

BILL

SECOND READING

COST OF LIVING COMMISSION AMENDMENT ACT 2026

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the purpose of this simple Bill before the House today is for technical amendments to enable the long-promised price comparison tool that will allow Bermudians to compare the

retail prices of a selected basket of grocery store items commonly purchased by households.

This initiative is being jointly advanced between the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the digital platform is designed to enhance price transparency through a user-friendly web-based system that allows consumers in Bermuda to easily access, view, and compare the price of grocery items across all major supermarkets.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Cost of Living Commission Amendment Act 1974 currently allows the Commission to establish a database for [the] price of essential commodities as specified in the Cost of Living (Essential Commodities) Regulations 2022. The Cost of Living Act also stipulates that the Cost of Living Commission can obtain information on the price of essential commodities from businesses and inform members of the public of current prices and price changes of essential goods.

The amendments being made to the Cost of Living Commission Act 1974 are housekeeping in nature, allowing for improvements in communications and technologies that have occurred over the years.

In addition to the electronic transmission, or the electronic means of furnishing information, or the electronic means of furnishing information on the price of essential commodities, it is also critical to include the option of using digital means as well.

At present, the current Cost of Living (Essential Commodities) Regulations 2022 do not require entities to provide real-time pricing information. To address this, the sections of the Cost of Living (Essential Commodities) Regulations 2022 will be amended by the Honourable Member, the Minister of Home Affairs, to:

1. Add file uploads and transfer of files as a method by which information may be furnished to the Commission.
2. Provide flexibility with respect to the frequency with which pricing information is published.

These minor housekeeping amendments to the principal Act are to provide the *vires* for those regulations to be issued.

With those remarks, I now present the Bill entitled the Cost of Living Commission Amendment Act 2026, and welcome comments from Honourable Members.

Thank you Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the Cost of Living Commission Amendment Act 2026?

I recognise the Member from constituency 20. Member, you have the floor.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I think the Premier has made the intent of the Bill clear. We will look to see what happens further in

regulations. The key here is to make sure that it is not getting in further behind people's databases, and the Premier has made that clear as well in relation to his comments, so I have nothing further to add.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other persons who wish to speak to this amendment Act?

There are none. Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

With reference to the comment made by the Honourable Member, I did go ahead and make sure to clarify that the pricing information is just the public information of the prices which are displayed on shelves for the purpose of having a price transparency tool. It is important for that information to be reported in, so that information can be shared and compiled, so people are able to compare the price for essential goods across this. And this is something that we have been trying to get up and running.

We have procured the technical expertise. As I said, these are the matters which are largely being handled between the Ministry of Finance, of course. This Bill falls in the Ministry of Home Affairs, so we are working in tandem on this particular matter. But I can assure the Honourable Member that there is no desire under these particular provisions to collect any more information outside for the price comparison website that is there.

There are other sections of the Cost of Living Act that do allow the Minister to make enquiries, or the Cost of Living Commission, to make enquiries. But this, in this section, is just for the regulations for the app and the electronic transfer of that particular information. So, I hope that puts those particular matters to rest.

With that, Madam Deputy Speaker, I move that the Bill be committed.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved that the Bill entitled the Cost of Living Commission Amendment Act 2026 be committed.

Are there any objections?

There are none. I call on the Member from constituency 31.

Member.

House in Committee at 2:27 pm

[Ms. Linda Smith, Chairman]

COMMITTEE ON BILL

COST OF LIVING COMMISSION AMENDMENT ACT 2026

The Chairman: Honourable Members, we are now in Committee of the whole [House] for further

consideration of the Bill entitled the [Cost of Living Commission Amendment Act 2026](#).

I call on the Minister in charge.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

I move that the House take under consideration clauses 1 through 5.

The Chairman: Please proceed.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Clause 1 is self-explanatory and provides a citation for the Bill

Clause 2 amends section 10A of the principal Act. Section 10A provides for the establishment of a database consisting of the prices at which essential commodities may be purchased and the specified business undertakings providing such essential commodities for purchase. Clause 2 amends this section to enable the use of digital real-time systems and means to obtain and share such price information.

Clause 3 amends section 10B of the principal Act. Section 10B empowers the Commission to require, in accordance with regulations, a business undertaking to furnish the Commission with price information on the essential commodities that it sells. Clause 3 amends this section to provide for, in respect of such regulations, the furnishing of such information by digital means and at such intervals as may be prescribed

Clause 4 amends section 10C of the principal Act. Section 10C provides for the ways in which the prices of essential commodities in the price database may be communicated to members of the public. Clause 4 amends this section to provide for such means of communication to the public [to include] via digital means.

Clause 5 amends section 10E of the principal Act. Section 10E empowers the Minister to make regulations setting out: the list of essential commodities, the business undertakings required to furnish price information on essential commodities, and how, when and the manner in which such information is to be furnished to the Commission and shared with the public. Clause 5 amends this section to enable the prescribing of intervals for the furnishing of information and the digital means for the furnishing [and sharing] of such information

The Chairman: Thank you.

Would anyone like to speak on that? If not, it has been moved that clauses 1 . . . I am sorry—

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Madam Chairman, if there are no further speakers, I would like to move that clauses 1 through 5 be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that clauses 1 through 5 be approved.

Are there any objections?

If no, so approved. Minister?

[Motion carried: Clauses 1 through 5 passed.]

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you. I move that the preamble be approved

The Chairman: It has been moved that the preamble be approved.

Are there any objections? If no, so approved.

Hon. E. David Burt: I move that the Bill entitled the Cost of Living Commission Amendment Act 2026 be reported to the House as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Bill entitled the Cost of Living Commission Amendment Act 2026 be approved as printed.

Are there any objections?

If no, so approved.

[Gavel]

[Motion carried: The Cost of Living Commission Amendment Act 2026 was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed without amendment.]

House resumed at 2:31 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair]

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

COST OF LIVING COMMISSION AMENDMENT ACT 2026

The Deputy Speaker: Members, I understand that the Cost of Living Commission Amendment Act 2026 has been reported to the House as printed and that there were no objections.

So that takes us along . . . we have finished the [Orders] of the Day, and so I think we are now on [to] third reading[s].

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 21

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Madam Deputy Speaker, I move that Standing Order 21 be suspended to enable me to move that the Bill entitled the Charities Amendment Act 2026 be now read the third time by its title only.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any objections?

There are none.

So moved. Go ahead

[Motion carried: Standing Order 21 suspended.]

BILL**THIRD READING****CHARITIES AMENDMENT ACT 2026**

Hon. Tinee Furbert: I move that the Bill be now read a third time by its title only and passed.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved that the Bill be read a third time by its title only and passed.

Are there any objections?

There are none.

The Bill has passed.

[Motion carried: The Charities Amendment Act 2026 was read a third time and passed.]

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 21

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I move that Standing Order 21 be suspended to enable me to move that the Bill entitled the Cost of Living Commission Amendment Act 2026, be now read the third time by its title only.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Are there any objections?
There are none. Continue.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 21 suspended.]

BILL**THIRD READING****COST OF LIVING COMMISSION
AMENDMENT ACT 2026**

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I move the Bill be now read for its third time by its title only and passed.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved that the Bill be read a third time by its title only and passed.

Are there any objections?

There are none.

The Bill is now passed.

[Motion carried: The Cost of Living Commission Amendment Act 2026 was read a third time and passed.]

The Deputy Speaker: That brings us to the end of our business today.
Premier.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you. Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I move that this Honourable House do now adjourn until the date of Friday, May 1st.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved that we adjourn until Friday, May 1st.

Are there any objections?

Does anyone wish to speak to that? Sorry—

Mr. Curtis L. Dickinson: I do.

The Deputy Speaker: I recognise the Member from constituency 21.

Member, you have the floor

**LEARNING FROM HOME AND OTHER
ORGANISATIONS—HOW GOVERNMENT CAN
APPROACH SOCIAL CHALLENGES
MORE EFFECTIVELY**

Mr. Curtis L. Dickinson: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Last week we concluded debate on the 2026/27 Budget. That budget represents the capstone of an eight-to-nine-year journey to improve the fiscal profile of this country. After more than 20 years of persistent deficits, we have reached an important milestone: A balanced budget.

While there is more work to be done to secure Bermuda's long-term fiscal sustainability, we are in a much better place financially today than we have been in a really, really long time. With that accomplishment, we now have greater room to focus on different challenges: How we as a Government tackle social problems and deliver services to our people in a way that actually changes lives.

For too long our systems have been organised around departments, programmes, and processes, rather than people and outcomes. When someone needs help they often have to navigate multiple offices, repeat their story several times, and fit themselves into rules and categories that were designed for the system's convenience and not theirs. That might be administratively tidy, but it is not always effective.

If we are serious about addressing the social issues that affect Bermuda—from homelessness and mental health, to unemployment, family stress, and chronic illness—we need to rethink that approach. We must move from providing services, to solving problems; from working in silos, to working in partnership; and from designing systems around institutions, to designing them around the people we serve.

At the heart of this shift is a simple idea: People's lives are shaped by the everyday conditions in which they live—whether they have a safe place to

sleep, whether they can afford food and transport, whether they feel connected and respected, whether they can see a pathway to stability and dignity. These conditions sit at the intersection of health, fairness and opportunity. When we understand that, it becomes clear that no single ministry, no single programme, and no single policy can solve complex social problems on its own. Housing affects health. Education affects employment. Social support affects community safety. Everything is connected.

So, the question for Government becomes, How do we design our services so that they meet people where they are, address multiple needs together, and support them as active participants in their own progress?

Madam Deputy Speaker, in asking that question, we can learn from models already working here in Bermuda. One such model is the work of HOME, a charity formed to end homelessness in our country. I have had the honour of serving on the board of HOME for the last three years. While HOME is a non-governmental organisation, the way it operates offers valuable lessons for how Government can approach social challenges more effectively.

HOME begins with a clear recognition: Homelessness is not only about the absence of a roof. It is about the absence of stability, connection, and opportunity. Their approach is to address these issues together, not in isolation.

First, they focus on housing as a foundation, not a standalone solution. A safe and stable place to live is one of the most important building blocks of a healthy life. Without it managing health, holding a job, staying connected, or even getting proper rest, becomes far more difficult. By establishing stability in housing they create a starting point from which people can rebuild other parts of their lives.

Second, they emphasise connection and community. We know that loneliness and isolation can be as damaging as many traditional health-risk factors. HOME responds by building environments where people feel seen, valued, and supported. Crucially, the people they serve have a voice in shaping their own environments. Their choices matter. Their experiences guide the support they receive.

Third, they place dignity at the centre. Systems designed to help can sometimes unintentionally strip people of control, making them feel processed rather than respected. HOME reverses this dynamic. People are treated as partners in their own journey with strengths and goals, not as problems to be managed. Taken together these elements—housing as a foundation, connection as a protective factor, and dignity as a core principle—illustrate an approach that is deeply relevant to Government.

Imagine applying that thinking across our public services. When someone presents with a health issue we can not only ask about medication, but also about housing, income, stress, and support. When

someone seeks help with employment, we consider whether there are underlying challenges with mental health, literacy, or caregiving responsibilities. When a family is under pressure, we think not only in terms of compliance with rules, but in terms of what stability and support looks like for them in real life.

In that model, government is not just a provider of isolated programmes, it becomes a partner in building the conditions for stability and opportunity. That requires us to design services around the person, not around the department; to coordinate across ministries so that housing, health, education, and social support work together, involve the people affected in shaping the solutions that impact them, and measure success not just by throughput or efficiency, but by outcomes in people's lives: stability, health, employment, and dignity.

HOME's work shows us that this approach is possible in a Bermuda context. It operates in the same housing market, the same economy, the same social realities that our citizens face every day. It adapts to individuals rather than forcing individuals to adapt to a rigid system. It connects services instead of leaving people to connect the dots on their own.

Our task is not to turn government into a charity. Our task is to bring the best of these principles into how the public sector works, to make policy with an eye on real life, to build programmes that wrap around people rather than around processes, and to create service models where those who are most affected have a real voice.

In practical terms that means asking different questions when we design and review our services. And we are making it easier . . . I am sorry, are we making it easier or harder for people to access help? Are we seeing the whole person, or just the single issue that fits our mandate? Are our incentives aligned with solving problems, or only with managing caseloads and budgets? We will not answer these questions overnight, and we will not get everything right the first time. But if we are willing to learn from partners, like HOME, and from other organisations doing important work, we can build a shared approach to social problems, solving them in a more coherent, more humane, and more effective way.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there are many charities and helping organisations across Bermuda that embody parts of this approach. HOME is just one that I know well. But it is not alone. By listening to these partners, by inviting their insight into how systems actually deal with matters on the ground, and by being prepared to adjust how we deliver its services, we can make our public service more responsible, more responsive and more impactful.

In the end, the true measure of our systems is not how complex our structures are, how many policies we can point to, or how quickly we can move paper. It is how well we support people—especially those who face the greatest obstacles to live stable, healthy, and

meaningful lives. If we keep that measure in front of us and if we organise our work around it, then the fiscal progress we have made will not be an end in itself, but a platform to social progress as well.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other persons who wish to speak to the motion?

Yes . . . well, because I was getting ready to put the gavel down, hello!

I recognise the Opposition Leader.

You did not have to stand . . . you didn't have the Premier make you stand, did you?

[Laughter]

EASTER SEASON REMINDER: OUR SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR SAFETY

Hon. Ben Smith: Madam Deputy Speaker, as we are approaching the Easter time, I thought it would be important to give a message to our community.

I think that this is a time of year where, for many of us, it's a time that we get to spend with family, friends. I know that many of the children and many of the people that still want to relive their childhood will be looking to fly kites and participate in what are traditions for Bermuda.

But for all those positives what tends to happen so many times when we break from being here in this Chamber is that so many negative things happen between this time the next time we meet. And for that reason I think it's important that we speak to our community and say the behaviour on our roads has to change. For as much as we call them "accidents," really it is preventable if you change your behaviour. Speeding up to get to your destination rather than leaving earlier so that you are going to be on time is a choice. And we have to start to make that choice as a community to think about how we behave on the roads and that we are sharing the roads with others.

The statistics that were laid out for us earlier today are concerning. But that concern has been going on for far too long. These are not new numbers. We have to challenge our community to change the way that we are behaving on the roads. We have to challenge each other because I think everybody here will know that there are times when all of us may be driving a little too fast, maybe not behaving the way that we know that we should. And what has happened is, over a period of time, that behaviour has become the norm instead of the exception. And now when we see the results of that behaviour being as negative as it is impactful to the health of our community, and the death toll in our community, we have to be mindful that it is us, as a community, changing our behaviour that will have an impact on those results.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there is also an issue in our community with continued violence. Another thing that tends to happen when we get close to holiday time because people are celebrating, people are out and about. And I think it is important at this time that we also tell our community, when you see something, you have to speak up.

When you see behaviours in your community, it is maybe having that conversation with that young person in your community or reaching out to somebody who can intervene to tell them what you are seeing before it gets to a point that it's out of hand. These are the things that, as a small, close-knit community, we can do to impact the behaviour that we are seeing that I think all of us are tired of seeing.

So, as we start to think about what we will be doing in the next week, preparing for Easter and the time that we will spend with our loved ones, it is also a time for us to reflect on what has happened up until this point and how we as a community can make the changes that are necessary for our community to be whole again. So, it has got to be our behaviour. What is it that we can do to change the behaviour on our roads, to change the behaviour in our communities so that our streets are safer, our neighbourhoods are safer, and then we can go into these holidays hopeful that on the other side of it we do not have any of these incidents in in our paper, in our press.

It really should be about the celebrations, the happy times that we had that we are reporting, not more negative things in our community. Each of us has that responsibility and I think that it's important that we continue to give that message to each and every person that we can speak to. And we will start with the people in this Chamber making sure that they are adjusting their behaviour, and thinking maybe I go a little bit slower, maybe I go and talk to this young person and say there is a better choice that they can make.

If it starts with our leadership in this Chamber maybe we can set the example as role models that can spread throughout our community. That, I believe, is something that everybody here can get behind.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, with that, I would like to wish you a happy Easter for next week and for everybody in the Chamber and looking forward to us coming back on May 1st. And let us hope that between now and then we have things that we can talk about that we can celebrate, and not any of the things that I think none of us in our community want to continue to see.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the motion?

I recognise . . . there being none, no others.

Premier, you have the floor.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker

Madam Deputy Speaker, as we do wrap up this session and prepare to come back for the summer session, of course it is customary for the Leaders of the House to get up and give greetings. And so, following that particular contribution from the Leader of the Opposition I am pleased to do the same today.

**PREMIER, MINISTERS AND OPPOSITION LEADER
PERSONAL STAFFS ACT 2019
OUTSTANDING REPORTS**

Hon. E. David Burt: But there is one particular matter, Madam Deputy Speaker that I did wish to deal with before I get to those matters. This is a matter that is regarding outstanding reports under the Premier, Ministers and Opposition Leader Personal Staffs Act 2019 which require personal staff matters to be reported to the House.

I do know that many of these things are in the public domain from previous sessions. However, the Government has been undertaking to try to get these things done in an accurate fashion. And it would surprise you to note, Madam Deputy Speaker that it is not as easy as said [and] as is advertised.

We were looking to make sure, at least for a report for 2024 and 2025, that it could have been tabled in the House earlier today. However, I do have that report for 2024 and 2025. I will lay it on the Table, therefore, persons can go ahead and view that particular report and those particular matters we communicated in the official fashion.

But I just wanted to make sure that it was clear that this is not a matter of the Government attempting to duck responsibility. But it is clearly not the Premier who puts these particular reports together, there are public officers, et cetera. There have been a number of changes. And when you have moves and different things inside the permanent secretaries we need to make sure we get our situations right, or our processes right, so it's not as much of a heavy lift to make sure these things get done.

Matters in prior years may already be in the public domain as there are parliamentary questions that are asked. But we have prepared the reports for fiscal year 2024 and 2025 . . . sorry, 2023/24 and 2024/25. And we will endeavour to have the report for fiscal year 2025/26 when we return in line with a timeline that is laid out by the Act in and of itself.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

**PAPERS AND OTHER
COMMUNICATIONS TO HOUSE**

**PREMIER, MINISTERS AND OPPOSITION LEADER
PERSONAL STAFFS ACT 2019
ANNUAL REPORTS 2023/24 AND 2024/25**

Hon. E. David Burt: So, moving on from that, as I said, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am happy to lay this particular [report on the Table](#).

Should I do that now?

The Deputy Speaker: Sure, yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

May I continue?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, of course.

BUDGET SESSION CLOSING STATEMENT

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Today does mark the end of what has been a particularly productive session for the House. Of course, Madam Deputy Speaker, when we come back at this time the most important thing to do is to pass a budget. And the House, this House certainly did pass that particular budget which is a culmination of efforts over many years.

It is important, Madam Deputy Speaker, to recognise that as the fiscal year draws to a close, and April 1st comes next week, people who are having monthly or weekly . . . get paid on a weekly basis will see their pay cheques bigger. Because they will note that there are less taxes that are being taken from their pay cheques, as this Government has reduced the taxes for persons in line with the commitments of which we have set out

They will also see, next week, when they go to re-license their car that there will be a reduction in the price of their cars being relicensed as this Government has reduced—

[Inaudible interjection]

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: —the amount. Yes, for everyone as the . . . as this Honourable House has made sure that we have reduced the price of vehicle licensing as well.

But, Madam Deputy Speaker, as we heard earlier today public officers (including those of us here inside this House who subscribe to GEHI) will also have enhanced benefits under the Government Employee Health Insurance scheme, which is important because preventative care is important.

And as you would know, and I am sure, Madam Deputy Speaker, you know the meeting to whom I refer to and the person who raised the issue in St. George's

was actually very surprised when this advocate had come to me and had said that substance abuse treatment is not covered under GEHI and I said that cannot be the case.

I went ahead and looked into it, and it was in fact accurate. And I determined at that point in time that we were going to make sure we made that right. We need to make sure that we provide the support for our public officers, retirees, and their families if they may be grappling with the grips of substance abuse, and those things are particularly important.

There are a number of other matters that we accomplished in this particular session, Madam Deputy Speaker. In addition to the matters that we laid out—the expansion, the significant investments in matters related to health care which were also included inside the budget, Madam Deputy Speaker. The significant expansion on matters related to capital investments that were laid out inside the budget. So, the budget in and of itself is the most important thing that we achieved during this session. But there are a number of other laws and Acts that have passed.

Now what I will say is, Madam Deputy Speaker, the work of governing continues.

There are still particular matters that the Government needs to attend to. I take the comments from the Honourable Member, the Leader of the Opposition in stride, because the reality is that there are particular challenges that continue to exist on our roads. And every time when it comes up to a holiday we will stand here will advocate for better road use.

But the one way to do that, Madam Deputy Speaker, is making sure that we act through technology. I expect, then, when the House comes back we will have legislation to consider from the Minister of National Security in regard to the speed camera system that is to be deployed, because it needs to be a legislative underpinning. And I expect there will [be] support on both sides of the House for that in making sure that we can use technological means as well to allow the police to focus on serious crimes and other particular matters to hopefully clamp down on these particular matters that are related to speeding.

And I note that the Honourable Member for constituency number 21 had made comments. And the reality is that today, as he speaks on the matter related to homelessness, that the Honourable Minister of Youth, Social Development and Seniors, did table the report Plan to End Homelessness. We have given significant support to the charity HOME, and we continue to work to ensure that government becomes more efficient and can solve problems of which people do face.

So, with that, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am grateful for the cooperation of all Members and you as well, Madam Deputy Speaker, for being here so we could advance the critical matters to make sure that the Government is prepared for a National Anti-Money Laundering Committee review . . . or, sorry, the FATF review that will take place.

EASTER GREETINGS

Hon. E. David Burt: And I wish to join on the Leader of the Opposition, and you, Madam Deputy Speaker, in wishing all persons a very happy Easter holiday, wishing safe Good Friday celebrations throughout the country, knowing that the Minister of Public Works and the Minister of Youth . . . sorry, and the Minister of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport are currently making sure that all requisite fields will be able to be mowed, and done and happen as the significant amounts of rain that has contributed to those particular challenges. But we are well aware of those particular matters. And, having just seen an email from the Minister of Public Works and Environment and working with the Minister of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport [will] make sure those things are done.

And for those persons who are celebrating Easter—

An Hon. Member: Is he cutting grass now?

Hon. E. David Burt: Easter, oh yes, we do—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes, everyone cuts grass.

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: As we are . . . the Honourable Opposition Leader made a comment, but I think it's important that I share.

There are certain parks which are managed by Parks, and there are other parks which are managed by Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport—those ones that fall under Sports and Recreation. And that is the reason why it is a shared responsibility. But Government must work together and that is the reason why those two Ministers and Ministries are ensuring . . . because after that significant amount of rainfall we want to make sure that we deal with those particular matters.

We have made significant investments in capital budgets to bring on more trailers, to bring on more equipment, to make sure this gets done. And we have to make sure that we are showing the impact of those particular items.

So, with that, Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish all those persons who celebrate Easter. It is a particularly, it is the most important holiday on the Christian calendar. I wish all persons who are celebrating Good Friday and Easter a very happy and blessed Easter holiday.

For other religions that may be celebrating over this time I wish them the best as well, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I look forward to seeing everyone when the House does return.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker

EASTER GREETINGS

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

And before we leave, I will join the chorus and say happy Easter to all as well. This is spring. Spring signals new beginnings. So hopefully we will go out into our communities with new hope, new faith, and a continued purpose of serving our people for the betterment of Bermuda, and for them themselves.

And so, on that note, happy Good Friday, happy Easter. And I will see you all in May.

The House is adjourned.

**[At 2:58 pm, the House stood adjourned until 10:00 am Friday, 1 May 2026.]*

**[The House resumed on 15 May 2026.]*

**BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
2025/2026 SESSION**

**OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT INDEX
FEBRUARY – MARCH 2026
(in two volumes)**

Volume 1 includes: 20 February – 6 March 2026

Volume 2 includes: 9 – 27 March 2026

*This Index is arranged alphabetically with “Order of Business” headings and MPs’ names in **bold**. “Bills” are arranged both alphabetically and procedurally (i.e., First Reading, Second Reading, Committee, Report, Third Reading).*

A

Adams, Hon. Jache

Budget, Debate on Budget Statement and Reply 2026/27, 1961–1964

Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 2121, 2555–2556, 2831

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27

Ministry of Public Works

Head 36-Ministry Headquarters, 2442–2447, 2479, 2482

Head 68-Department of Parks, 2447–2452, 2479

Head 79-Department of Environment and Natural Resources, 2452–2458, 2480–2481, 2482–2483

Head 81-Department of Public Lands and Buildings, 2458–2463, 2481, 2483–2484

Head 82-Works and Engineering, 2463–2472, 2481–2482

Government Fees Amendment Regulations 2026, 2780–2781

Marine Resources Enforcement Strategy, 1873, 1881–1882

Road Paving and Planned Works for Swing Bridge update, 2117–2118

Single-use Plastics Act 2026, introduction of, 2816–2817

Adjournment, motions thereon

Bermuda, Protect Bermuda, Get Involved

Smith, Ms. Linda, 2806–2807

Black History Month

Swan, Mr. Hubert (Kim) E., 2113–2115

Budget Session closing statement

Burt, Hon. E. David, 2848–2849

CARICOM, Strength in regional unity, Bermuda's place in the Caribbean

Lightbourne, Hon. Alexa, 2804–2805

Easter Season

Burt, Hon. E. David, 2849

Foggo, Ms. Lovitta F., 2849

Smith, Hon. Ben, 2847

English proficiency test in Bermuda

Hayward, Hon. Jason, 2654

Simmons, Mr. Scott, 2654–2656

Fatal shooting in Southampton

Robinson, Mr. Dwayne, 2748–2749

Golf courses, government owned need to be self-sustaining

Swan, Mr. Hubert (Kim) E., 2800–2803

HOME, Learning from HOME and other organisations: How Government can approach social challenges more effectively

Dickinson, Mr. Curtis L., 2845–2847

Adjournment, motions thereon (continued)

Legacy, honouring legacy, confronting misconceptions

Famous, Mr. Christopher, 2807–2808

Neurodiverse children, call for national minimum training standard for those interacting with

Tucker, Ms. Robin, 2803–2804

Parliamentary unscheduled sitting, concern over

Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 2800

Premier, Ministers and Opposition Leader Personal Staffs Act 2019, outstanding reports

Burt, Hon. E. David, 2848

Announcements by the Speaker or Member presiding

Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 1900–1901, 2018, 2122, 2208, 2558–2559, 2773–2774

Question Period, Written Questions, procedural question, 1886

Anthea Insurance Limited Act 2026 (See Petitions)

Anti-trust legislation

Fair Competition Ensuring and Preventing Market Concentration in Bermuda, Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers

Appropriation Act 2026 (See Bills)

Asphalt Plant

and Quarry (See Premier's Question Period)

new plant status update (See Question Period)

Auxiliary Bicycles (Project Ride) Amendment Act 2026 (See Bills)

B

Bermuda

FinTech Strategy 2026-2028 (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

Housing Trust Audited Financial Statements 2024/25 and Outlook for 2026/27 (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

Protect Bermuda, Get Involved (See Adjournment, motions thereon)

Big Up Yaself National Mini-Youth Conference 2026 (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

Bills

Appropriation Act 2026

First and Second Reading

Burt, Hon. E. David, 2745

Third Reading, 2746

Auxiliary Bicycles (Project Ride) Amendment Act 2026

First Reading, 1872

Second Reading

Darrell, Hon. Owen, 2101–2102, 2108–2109

Furbert, Hon. Tinee, 2106–2107

Lister, Mr. Dennis III, 2103–2104

Rabain, Hon. Diallo V. S., 2108

Robinson, Mr. Dwayne, 2102–2103

Swan, Mr. Hubert (Kim) E., 2104–2106

Tyrrell, Mr. Neville S., 2107–2108

Wilson, Hon. Kim N., 2106

Committee, 2109–2112

Report, 2112

Third Reading, 2112

Bills (continued)

Charities Amendment Act 2026

First Reading, 2832

Second Reading

Burt, Hon. E. David, 2840

Furbert, Hon. Tinee, 2836–2837, 2840

Pearman, Mr. Scott, 2838–2840

Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 2837–2838

Committee, 2841–2842

Clause 9 amended, 2841

Report, 2842

Third Reading, 2845

Corporate Income Tax Agency Amendment Act 2026

First Reading, 2747

Second Reading

Burt, Hon. E. David, 2790–2791, 2792

DeCouto, Dr. Douglas, 2791–2792

Committee, 2792–2794

Clause 3 amended, 2793

Report, 2794

Third Reading, 2799

Cost of Living Commission Amendment Act 2026

First Reading, 2774

Second Reading

Burt, Hon. E. David, 2842–2843

Fahy, Hon. Michael, 2843

Committee, 2843–2844

Report, 2844

Third Reading, 2845

Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2026

First Reading, 2432

Second Reading

Burt, Hon. E. David, 2776–2777

DeCouto, Dr. Douglas, 2776

Furbert, Hon. Wayne L., 2774–2776, 2778

Hayward, Hon. Jason, 2777–2778

Lightbourne, Hon. Alexa, 2777

Committee, 2778–2779

Report, 2779

Third Reading, 2798

Economic Substance Amendment Act 2026

First Reading, 2747

Second Reading

Burt, Hon. E. David, 2795, 2796

Dickinson, Mr. Curtis L., 2796

Pearman, Mr. Scott, 2795–2796

Committee, 2796–2798

Report, 2798

Third Reading, 2800

Bills (continued)

Employment Amendment Act 2026

First Reading, 1902

Second Reading

Campbell, Mr. Vance, 2425–2426

Hayward, Hon. Jason, 2425, 2427

Lister, Mr. Dennis III, 2426–2497

Pearman, Mr. Scott, 2426

Committee, 2428–2431

Division (motion to rise and report progress), 2430

Report, 2431

Third Reading, 2431

Health Insurance (Mutual Re-Insurance Fund) (Prescribed Sum) Validation Act 2026

First Reading, 2660

Second Reading

Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 2783–2784

Wilson, Hon. Kim N., 2783, 2784

Committee, 2784–2785

Report, 2785

Third Reading, 2799

Motor Car (Licence Duties Reduction) Amendment Act 2026

First Reading, 2208

Second Reading

Burt, Hon. E. David, 2522–2526

Darrell, Hon. Owen, 2513, 2528

DeCouto, Dr. Douglas, 2515

DeSilva, Hon. Zane J. S., 2527–2528

Furbert, Hon. Wayne L., 2513–2515

King, Mr. Robert, 2517–2518

Lister, Mr. Dennis III, 2515–2516

Rabain, Hon. Diallo V. S., 2516–2517

Robinson, Mr. Dwayne, 2513

Simmons, Mr. Jamahl S., 2518–2519

Smith, Hon. Ben, 2526

Swan, Mr. Hubert (Kim) E., 2519–2522

Committee, 2528

Report, 2529

Third Reading, 2540

Motor Car (Ridesharing) Amendment Act 2026

First Reading, 1901

Second Reading

Burt, Hon. E. David, 2322–2326

Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 2320–2322

Darrell, Hon. Owen, 2292–2293, 2326–2329

DeSilva, Hon. Zane J. S., 2311–2314

Fahy, Hon. Michael, 2299–2303

Furbert, Hon. Tinee, 2303–2305

Lightbourne, Hon. Alexa, 2310–2311

Rabain, Hon. Diallo V. S., 2296–2299

Robinson, Mr. Dwayne, 2293–2296

Scott, Mr. W. Lawrence, 2305–2308

Bills (continued)

Motor Car (Ridesharing) Amendment Act 2026 (continued)

Second Reading (continued)

Simmons, Mr. Jamahl S., 2308–2310

Simmons, Mr. Scott, 2317–2318

Smith, Hon. Ben, 2314–2316

Swan, Mr. Hubert (Kim) E., 2319–2320

Tyrrell, Mr. Neville S., 2318–2319

Wilson, Hon. Kim N., 2308

Committee, 2329–2336

Report, 2336

Third Reading, 2336

Municipalities Reform Act 2026

First Reading, 1901

Second Reading

Burt, Hon. E. David, 2645–2647

DeSilva, Hon. Zane J. S., 2633–2634, 2649–2650

Fahy, Hon. Michael, 2634–2637

Foggo, Ms. Lovitta F., 2639–2640

King, Mr. Robert, 2642–2643

Ming, Mrs. Renee, 2637–2639

Pearman, Mr. Scott, 2647–2649

Rabain, Hon. Diallo V. S., 2644–2645

Richardson, Mr. Jarion, 2640–2642

Swan, Mr. Hubert (Kim) E., 2643–2644

Committee, 2650–2652

Report, 2652

Third Reading

Division, 2653

Payroll Tax Amendment and Validation Act 2026

First Reading, 2336

Second Reading

Burt, Hon. E. David, 2534–2536

DeCouto, Dr. Douglas, 2530–2531

Furbert, Hon. Wayne L., 2529–2530, 2536

Lister, Mr. Dennis III, 2534

Swan, Mr. Hubert (Kim) E., 2532–2534

Committee, 2536–2539

Report, 2539

Third Reading, 2539

Single-Use Plastics Act 2026, First Reading, 2832

Supplementary Estimate (No. 2) 2025/26

First Reading, 2433

Second Reading

Furbert, Hon. Wayne L., 2785–2786

Wilson, Hon. Kim N., 2786

Committee of Supply

Ministry of Finance, 2786–2787

Ministry of Health, 2787–2788

Report, 2790

Black History Month (See Adjournment, motions thereon)

Budget

Debate on Budget Statement and Reply 2026/27

Adams, Hon. Jache, 1961–1964

Burt, Hon. E. David, 1993–1997

Campbell, Mr. Vance, 1931–1935

Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 1947–1952

Darrell, Hon. Owen, 1976–1978

DeSilva, Hon. Zane J. S., 1988–1993

Dickinson, Mr. Curtis L., 1969–1971

Fahy, Hon. Michael, 1938–1943

Furbert, Hon. Tinee, 1971–1974

Furbert, Hon. Wayne L., 1997–1999

Hayward, Hon. Jason, 1917–1924

King, Mr. Robert, 1981–1984

Lister, Mr. Dennis III, 1974–1976

Pearman, Mr. Scott, 1965–1969

Rabain, Hon. Diallo V. S., 1952–1957

Richardson, Mr. Jarion, 1925–1929

Simmons, Mr. Jamahl S., 1929–1931

Smith, Hon. Ben, 1957–1961

Swan, Mr. Hubert (Kim) E., 1943–1947

Tucker, Ms. Robin, 1984–1986

Tyrrell, Mr. Neville S., 1986–1988

Weeks, Hon. Michael A., 1978–1981

Wilson, Hon. Kim N., 1935–1938

Opposition's Reply to the Budget Statement 2026/27

DeCouto, Dr. Douglas, 1902–1916

Statement in Support of Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27

Burt, Hon. E. David, 1849–1872

Budget Session closing statement (See Adjournment, motions thereon)

Building Permit and Safebuilt update (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

Burt, Hon. E. David

Adjournment, motions thereon

Budget Session closing statement, 2848–2849

Easter Season, 2849

Premier, Ministers and Opposition Leader Personal Staffs Act 2019, outstanding reports, 2848

Appropriation Act 2026, 2745

Budget

Debate on Budget Statement and Reply 2026/27, 1993–1997

session closing statement, 2848–2849

Statement in Support of Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27, 1849–1872

Charities Amendment Act 2026, 2840

Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 2122, 2206–2207

Corporate Income Tax Agency Amendment Act 2026, 2790–2791, 2792

Cost of Living Commission Amendment Act 2026, 2842–2843

Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2026, 2776–2777

Economic Substance Amendment Act 2026, 2795, 2796

Burt, Hon. E. David (continued)

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27

Ministry of Cabinet Office and Digital Innovation

Head 09-Cabinet Office, 2096–2098

Ministry of Finance

Head 10-Ministry Headquarters, 2246–2258, 2287, 2289

Head 11-Accountant General, 2258–2261, 2287–2289

Head 28-Department of Social Insurance, 2288

Head 39-Registrar of Companies, 2267–2273, 2290–2291

Head 58-Interest on Debt and Guarantee Management, 2273–2274

Non-Ministry Heads

Head 05-Office of the Auditor General, 2666–2670

Errata, 2680–2683

Head 92-Department of Internal Audit, 2683–2684

Government

Authorities (Fees) Amendment Order 2026, 2433

(Fees) Amendment Order 2026, 2747

Employee Health Insurance Scheme Enhanced Benefits, 2810–2811

Motor Car

(Licence Duties Reduction) Amendment Act 2026, 2522–2526

(Ridesharing) Amendment Act 2026, 2322–2326

Municipalities Reform Act 2026, 2645–2647

Payroll Tax Amendment and Validation Act 2026, 2534–2536

Premier, Ministers and Opposition Leader Personal Staffs Act 2019

Annual Reports 2023/24 and 2024/25, 2848

Question Period

Standard Premium Rate for upcoming fiscal year, 2205

Supplementary Estimate (No. 2) 2025/26, 2433

C**Campbell, Mr. Vance**

Budget, Debate on Budget Statement and Reply 2026/27, 1931–1935

Employment Amendment Act 2026, 2425–2426

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27

Ministry of Economy and Labour

Head 14-Department of Statistics, 2413–2414

Head 29-Registry General, 2414–2415

Head 44-Ministry Headquarters, 2412–2413

Head 60-Workforce Development, 2415–2416

Head 94-Economic Development Department, 2416–2417

Head 99-Department of Labour, 2417–2418

Question Period

Bermuda FinTech Strategy 2026–2028, 2202

Economic Development Strategy 2023-2027

Strategic Priority 1: Local and International Business Retention and Expansion,
2349

Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig

Adjournment, motions thereon

Parliamentary unscheduled sitting, concern over, 2800

Budget, Debate on Budget Statement and Reply 2026/27, 1947–1952

Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig (continued)

Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 2017, 2121

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27

Ministry of Health

Head 21-Ministry Headquarters, 2158–2159

Ministry of Public Works

Head 81-Department of Public Lands and Buildings, 2477–2479

Health Insurance

(Mutual Re-Insurance Fund) (Prescribed Sum) Validation Act 2026, 2783–2784

(Standard Health Benefits) Amendment Regulations 2026, 2783

Motor Car (Ridesharing) Amendment Act 2026, 2320–2322

Question Period

Education Grants, 2760 (answered in writing)

Fair Competition Ensuring and Preventing Market Concentration in Bermuda, 1889, 1890

School upgrades and renovation costs, 2761 (answered in writing)

Senators and MP remuneration in addition to parliamentary/ministerial salaries, 2008

Standard Premium Rate for upcoming fiscal year, 2203, 2204

Written Questions, procedural question, 1886

Capital Investment Disbursement 2026/27 (See Premier's Question Period)

Caribbean

Community, the Story of us: Green Paper on Bermuda's application for membership (See Papers and Other Communications to House)

Tourism Organization (CTO) Event in Bermuda, update (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

CARICOM

Bermuda's next steps (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

Caribbean Community, the Story of us: Green Paper on Bermuda's application for membership (See Papers and Other Communications to House)

Membership (See Question Period)

Strength in regional unity, Bermuda's place in the Caribbean (See Adjournment, motions thereon)

CARIFTA 2026, Bermuda's Delegation (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

Casino Gaming (See Premier's Question Period)

Charities

Amendment Act 2026 (See Bills)

Amendment Regulations 2026 (See Regulations)

Competition

Ensuring Fair Competition and Preventing Market Concentration in Bermuda, Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers

Confirmation of Minutes

20 February 2026, 1873

27 February 2026, 2117

2 March 2026, 2199

4 March 2026, 2199

6 March 2026, 2541

9 March 2026, 2541

11 March 2026, 2751

13 March 2026, 2809

16 March 2026, 2809

20 March 2026, 2809

Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches

Adams, Hon. Jache, 2121, 2555–2556, 2831
Burt, Hon. E. David, 2122, 2206–2207
Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 2017, 2121
Darrell, Hon. Owen, 2014–2015, 2556, 2830
DeCouto, Dr. Douglas, 1897, 2352–2353, 2773, 2828
DeSilva, Hon. Zane J. S., 1900, 2353, 2832
Dill, Rev. Dr. Emilygail A., 1897, 2017, 2122, 2207–2208, 2558, 2831
Famous, Mr. Christopher, 2772–2773, 2831
Foggo, Ms. Lovitta F., 1898–1899, 2205, 2832
Furbert, Hon. Tinee, 1895–1896, 2352, 2830–2831
Furbert, Hon. Wayne L., 2120, 2771–2772
King, Mr. Robert, 2016, 2555, 2772, 2830
Lister, Mr. Dennis III, 1894–1895, 2016, 2351, 2557, 2828
Ming, Mrs. Renee, 2015
Rabain, Hon. Diallo V. S., 1895, 2205–2206, 2557–2558
Robinson, Mr. Dwayne, 2773
Simmons, Mr. Jamahl S., 1898, 2558
Smith, Hon. Ben, 1896–1897, 2017–2018, 2352
Swan, Mr. Hubert (Kim) E., 1896, 2015–2016, 2206, 2351–2352, 2556–2557, 2773, 2829
The Speaker, 1900–1901, 2018, 2122, 2208, 2558–2559, 2773–2774
Tucker, Ms. Robin, 2017, 2772
Tyrrell, Mr. Neville S., 1900, 2558–2559, 2829–2830
Weeks, Hon. Michael A., 1899–1900, 2015, 2120–2121, 2207, 2829
Wilson, Hon. Kim N., 2208

Corporate Income Tax

Agency Amendment Act 2026 (See Bills)

(Tax Refund Reserve Fund) Amendment Regulations 2026 (See Regulations)

Cost of Living Commission Amendment Act 2026 (See Bills)

Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2026 (See Bills)

Cybersecurity, Bermuda's national risk assessment, launch of (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

Cybertips Programme, revival of (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

D

Darrell, Hon. Owen

Auxiliary Bicycles (Project Ride) Amendment Act 2026, 2101–2102, 2108–2109
Budget, Debate on Budget Statement and Reply 2026/27, 1976–1978
Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) Event in Bermuda, update, 1884–1885
CARIFTA 2026, Bermuda's Delegation, 2753–2754
Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 2014–2015, 2556, 2830
Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27
Ministry of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport
 Head 20-Ministry Headquarters, 2485–2490, 2499–2512
 Head 34-Transport Control Department, 2164–2167, 2187–2196
 Head 35-Department of Public Transportation, 2167–2170, 2187–2196
 Head 52-Department of Culture, 2170–2175, 2187–2196
 Head 71-Ministry Headquarters, 2159–2164, 2187–2196
Government camping facilities, update and improvements to, 2752–2753
Merchant Shipping (Fees) Amendment Regulations 2026, 2751, 2833–2834

Darrell, Hon. Owen (continued)

Motor Car

(Licence Duties Reduction) Amendment Act 2026, 2513, 2528

(Ridesharing) Amendment Act 2026, 2292–2293, 2326–2329

(Ridesharing) Regulations 2026, 2809

Act 1951 Modernisation, 1883–1884

Motor Taxi (Taxi Despatching Service) Amendment Regulations 2026, 2809

Proceeds of Crime (Anti-Money Laundering and Anti-Terrorist Financing) Amendment Regulations 2026, 2752

Ridesharing, Regulation of Service, 2813–2814

Sports Awards 44th Annual, Elevating Sports Together, 2658–2859

DeCouto, Dr. Douglas

Budget

Opposition's Reply to the Budget Statement 2026/27, 1902–1916

Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 1897, 2352–2353, 2773, 2828

Corporate Income Tax Agency Amendment Act 2026, 2791–2792

Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2026, 2776

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27

Ministry of Finance

Head 10-Ministry Headquarters, 2274–2276, 2278

Head 11-Accountant General, 2278

Head 12-Customs, 2279

Head 28-Department of Social Insurance, 2279, 2286

Head 38-Office of the Tax Commissioner, 2279–2282

Head 39-Registrar of Companies, 2284–2285

Head 58-Interest on Debt and Guarantee Management, 2285

Government Fees Amendment Regulations 2026, 2781

Motor Car (Licence Duties Reduction) Amendment Act 2026, 2515

Payroll Tax Amendment and Validation Act 2026, 2530–2531

Premier's Question Period

Middle East Advisor contract terms, 2554

Question Period

Digital Transformation Team Strategic Partner update, 2010

Economic Development Strategy 2023-2027

Strategic Priority 3: Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development 2023-2027, update, 2660

Electoral Reform update, 2011

Rental Support Services (Emergency Subsidy) Pilot Programme - Hardship Fund, update and impact, 2767, 2768

Senators and MP remuneration in addition to parliamentary/ministerial salaries, 2006, 2008

Dementia Navigation and Support Program Funding (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

Department of Financial Assistance 2024/25 Annual Report (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

DeSilva, Hon. Zane J. S.

Bermuda Housing Trust Audited Financial Statements 2024/25 and Outlook for 2026/27, 1874–1875

Budget, Debate on Budget Statement and Reply 2026/27, 1988–1993

Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 1900, 2353, 2832

Corporate Income Tax (Tax Refund Reserve Fund) Amendment Regulations 2026, 2751

DeSilva, Hon. Zane J. S. (continued)

Economic Substance Amendment Regulations 2026, 2751

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27

Ministry of Housing and Municipalities

Head 53-Bermuda Housing Corporation, 2611–2616, 2625–2628, 2630–2631, 2632

Head 90-Ministry Headquarters, 2605–2611, 2625–2628

Morgan's Point Development Company update, end of FY 2025/26 and outlook 2026/27, 2434–2435

Motor Car

(Licence Duties Reduction) Amendment Act 2026, 2527–2528

(Ridesharing) Amendment Act 2026, 2311–2314

Municipalities Reform Act 2026, 2633–2634, 2649–2650

Question Period

Ridesharing, Regulation of Service, 2823

Dickinson, Mr. Curtis L.

Adjournment, motions thereon

HOME, Learning from HOME and other organisations: How Government can approach social challenges more effectively, 2845–2847

Budget, Debate on Budget Statement and Reply 2026/27, 1969–1971

Economic Substance Amendment Act 2026, 2796

Digital Transformation Team Strategic Partner update (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

Dill, Rev. Dr. Emilygail A

Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches 1897, 2017, 2122, 2207–2208, 2558, 2831

Divisions

Employment Amendment Act 2026 (motion for Committee to rise and report progress), 2430

Municipalities Reform Act 2026 (Third Reading), 2653

Dollars and Sense Teen Financial Literacy Experience (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

E

Easter Season (See Adjournment, motions thereon)

Economic Development Strategy 2023-2027

Strategic Priority 1: Local and International Business Retention and Expansion (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

Strategic Priority 2: Business Retention Investment Promotion 2023-2027 update (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

Strategic Priority 3: Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development 2023-2027, update (See Papers and Other Communications to House)

Strategic Priority 5: Investing in People, update (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

Economic Substance

Amendment Act 2026 (See Bills)

Amendment Regulations 2026 (See Regulations)

Education

Grants (See Question Period)

Ministry of Education 2026 Scholarships and Awards Programme (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

Overseas therapeutic schools, oversight for approving (See Question Period)

Public Education Reform (See Premier's Question Period)

Education (continued)

Scholarships, Government Public Service Scholarships, launch of (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

School upgrades and renovation costs (See Question Period)

Electoral Reform update (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

Employment Amendment Act 2026 (See Bills)

tabling of (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

English proficiency test in Bermuda (See Adjournment, motions thereon)

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27 (Committee of Supply)

Furbert, Hon. Wayne L., 1999

Ministry of Cabinet Office and Digital Innovation

Head 09-Cabinet Office

Burt, Hon. E. David, 2096–2098

Rabain, Hon. Diallo V. S., 2058–2065, 2095–2096

Richardson, Mr. Jarion, 2083–2088

Head 13-Bermuda Post Office

Rabain, Hon. Diallo V. S., 2065–2066, 2100

Richardson, Mr. Jarion, 2098–2099

Head 18-Department of Libraries and Archives

Rabain, Hon. Diallo V. S., 2066–2067, 2094–2095

Richardson, Mr. Jarion, 2081–2083

Head 32-Department of Planning

Rabain, Hon. Diallo V. S., 2067–2070, 2092–2094

Richardson, Mr. Jarion, 2078–2081

Head 43-Department of Information and Digital Technologies

Rabain, Hon. Diallo V. S., 2070–2071, 2091–2092

Richardson, Mr. Jarion, 2076–2078

Head 80-Office of Project Management and Procurement

Rabain, Hon. Diallo V. S., 2071–2072, 2088–2091

Richardson, Mr. Jarion, 2073–2076

Ministry of Economy and Labour

Head 14-Department of Statistics

Campbell, Mr. Vance, 2413–2414

Hayward, Hon. Jason, 2394–2397, 2419–2421

Head 27-Immigration

Hayward, Hon. Jason, 2397–2399, 2419–2420, 2421

King, Mr. Robert, 2418

Head 29-Registry General

Campbell, Mr. Vance, 2414–2415

Hayward, Hon. Jason, 2399–2402, 2419

Head 44-Ministry Headquarters

Campbell, Mr. Vance, 2412–2413

Hayward, Hon. Jason, 2392–2394, 2419, 2421–2423

King, Mr. Robert, 2418

Head 60-Workforce Development

Campbell, Mr. Vance, 2415–2416

Hayward, Hon. Jason, 2402–2405, 2419

King, Mr. Robert, 2418

Robinson, Mr. Dwayne, 2418–2419

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27 (Committee of Supply) (continued)

Ministry of Economy and Labour (continued)

Head 94-Economic Development Department

Campbell, Mr. Vance, 2416–2417

Hayward, Hon. Jason, 2405–2410, 2423

Head 99-Department of Labour

Campbell, Mr. Vance, 2417–2418

Hayward, Hon. Jason, 2410–2412, 2424

Ministry of Education

Head 16-Ministry Headquarters

King, Mr. Robert, 2238–2239

Lister, Mr. Dennis III, 2209–2214, 2240–2242, 2244

Smith, Hon. Ben, 2230–2231, 2239, 2244, 2245

Head 17-Department of Education

Lister, Mr. Dennis III, 2214–2228, 2240–2242, 2243, 2245–2246

Smith, Hon. Ben, 2231–2238, 2240–2242, 2243

Head 41-Bermuda College

King, Mr. Robert, 2239

Lister, Mr. Dennis III, 2228–2230, 2242

Ministry of Finance

Head 10-Ministry Headquarters

Burt, Hon. E. David, 2246–2258, 2287, 2289

DeCouto, Dr. Douglas, 2274–2276, 2278

Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 2277–2278

Head 11-Accountant General

Burt, Hon. E. David, 2258–2261, 2287–2289

DeCouto, Dr. Douglas, 2278

Head 12-Customs

DeCouto, Dr. Douglas, 2279

Furbert, Hon. Wayne L., 2261–2262, 2285–2286

Head 28-Department of Social Insurance

Burt, Hon. E. David, 2288

DeCouto, Dr. Douglas, 2279, 2286

Furbert, Hon. Wayne L., 2262–2265, 2285–2286

Head 38-Office of the Tax Commissioner

DeCouto, Dr. Douglas, 2279–2282

Furbert, Hon. Wayne L., 2265–2267, 2285–2286

Head 39-Registrar of Companies

Burt, Hon. E. David, 2267–2273, 2290–2291

DeCouto, Dr. Douglas, 2284–2285

Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 2282–2284

Head 58-Interest on Debt and Guarantee Management

Burt, Hon. E. David, 2273–2274

DeCouto, Dr. Douglas, 2285

Ministry of Health

Head 21-Ministry Headquarters

Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 2158–2159

Wilson, Hon. Kim N., 2123–2132

Head 22-Department of Health

Wilson, Hon. Kim N., 2132–2153

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27 (Committee of Supply) (continued)

Ministry of Health (continued)

Head 24-Hospitals

Wilson, Hon. Kim N., 2153–2158

Ministry of Home Affairs

Head 89-Department of Energy

Fahy, Hon. Michael, 2735–2737, 2741

Lightbourne, Hon. Alexa, 2716–2726, 2742–2744

Head 93-Ministry Headquarters

Fahy, Hon. Michael, 2730–2735

Lightbourne, Hon. Alexa, 2706–2716, 2739–2741

Head 97-Land Title and Registration Department

Fahy, Hon. Michael, 2737–2739

Lightbourne, Hon. Alexa, 2726–2730

Ministry of Housing and Municipalities

Head 53-Bermuda Housing Corporation

DeSilva, Hon. Zane J. S., 2611–2616, 2625–2628, 2630–2631, 2632

Fahy, Hon. Michael, 2617–2622, 2628–2630, 2631–2632

Swan, Mr. Hubert (Kim) E., 2622–2623

Head 90-Ministry Headquarters

DeSilva, Hon. Zane J. S., 2605–2611, 2625–2628

Fahy, Hon. Michael, 2623–2625

Ministry of Justice

Head 03-Judicial Department

Lister, Mr. Dennis III, 2027–2032, 2056

Pearman, Mr. Scott, 2048–2051

Head 25-Department of Corrections

Lister, Mr. Dennis III, 2032–2041, 2055, 2057

Pearman, Mr. Scott, 2051–2054

Head 74-Department of Court Services

Lister, Mr. Dennis III, 2041–2045, 2057

Pearman, Mr. Scott, 2054–2055

Head 87-Ministry Headquarters

Lister, Mr. Dennis III, 2019–2027, 2055

Pearman, Mr. Scott, 2045–2048

Ministry of National Security

Head 06-Department of Defence

Weeks, Hon. Michael A., 2565–2571

Head 07-Bermuda Police Service

King, Mr. Robert, 2599–2600

Weeks, Hon. Michael A., 2571–2578, 2602–2604

Head 12-Customs Department

King, Mr. Robert, 2597–2598, 2601, 2602

Weeks, Hon. Michael A., 2578–2582, 2600–2601, 2602, 2604

Head 45-Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service

Weeks, Hon. Michael A., 2583–2588

Head 83-Ministry Headquarters

King, Mr. Robert, 2596–2597

Weeks, Hon. Michael A., 2560–2565

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27 (Committee of Supply) (continued)

Ministry of National Security (continued)

Head 88-Bermuda National Drug Control

King, Mr. Robert, 2599

Smith, Ms. Linda, 2598

Weeks, Hon. Michael A., 2588–2596, 2600

Ministry of Public Works

Head 36-Ministry Headquarters

Adams, Hon. Jache, 2442–2447, 2479, 2482

King, Mr. Robert, 2476

Smith, Ms. Linda, 2472–2473

Head 68-Department of Parks

Adams, Hon. Jache, 2447–2452, 2479

Head 79-Department of Environment and Natural Resources

Adams, Hon. Jache, 2452–2458, 2480–2481, 2482–2483

King, Mr. Robert, 2476

Smith, Ms. Linda, 2473–2474

Head 81-Department of Public Lands and Buildings

Adams, Hon. Jache, 2458–2463, 2481, 2483–2484

Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 2477–2479

King, Mr. Robert, 2477

Smith, Ms. Linda, 2474–2475

Head 82-Works and Engineering

Adams, Hon. Jache, 2463–2472, 2481–2482

King, Mr. Robert, 2477

Smith, Ms. Linda, 2475–2476, 2479

Ministry of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport

Head 20-Ministry Headquarters

Darrell, Hon. Owen, 2485–2490, 2499–2512

Smith, Hon. Ben, 2490–2499

Head 34-Transport Control Department

Darrell, Hon. Owen, 2164–2167, 2187–2196

Fahy, Hon. Michael, 2181–2182, 2183

Robinson, Mr. Dwayne, 2177–2178

Head 35-Department of Public Transportation

Darrell, Hon. Owen, 2167–2170, 2187–2196

Fahy, Hon. Michael, 2182–2184

King, Mr. Robert, 2185–2186

Robinson, Mr. Dwayne, 2178–2179

Swan, Mr. Hubert (Kim) E., 2185

Head 52-Department of Culture

Darrell, Hon. Owen, 2170–2175, 2187–2196

Robinson, Mr. Dwayne, 2179–2180, 2181

Head 71-Ministry Headquarters

Darrell, Hon. Owen, 2159–2164, 2187–2196

Fahy, Hon. Michael, 2184–2185, 2186–2187

Robinson, Mr. Dwayne, 2176–2177, 2181

Swan, Mr. Hubert (Kim) E., 2185

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27 (Committee of Supply) (continued)

Ministry of Youth, Social Development, and Seniors

Head 23-Department of Child and Family Services

Furbert, Hon. Tinee, 2370–2388

Head 55-Department of Financial Assistance

Furbert, Hon. Tinee, 2388–2390

Head 86-Ministry Headquarters

Furbert, Hon. Tinee, 2354–2370, 2391–2392

Tucker, Ms. Robin, 2390–2391, 2392

Non-Ministry Heads

Head 02-Legislature

Rabain, Hon. Diallo V. S., 2661–2666

Head 05-Office of the Auditor General

Burt, Hon. E. David, 2666–2670

Errata

Burt, Hon. E. David, 2680–2683

Head 101-Privacy Commissioner

Rabain, Hon. Diallo V. S., 2689–2693, 2701–2703

Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 2693–2698

Head 56-Human Rights Commission

Furbert, Hon. Tinee, 2670–2674

Head 63-Parliamentary Registrar

Rabain, Hon. Diallo V. S., 2674–2680, 2705

Errata

Rabain, Hon. Diallo V. S., 2684–2685

Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 2704–2705

Head 92-Department of Internal Audit

Burt, Hon. E. David, 2683–2684

Head 98-Information Commissioner's Office

Rabain, Hon. Diallo V. S., 2685–2689

Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 2698–2701, 2703–2704

Report, 2100, 2197, 2292, 2425, 2512, 2632

F

Fahy, Hon. Michael

Budget, Debate on Budget Statement and Reply 2026/27, 1938–1943

Cost of Living Commission Amendment Act 2026, 2843

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27

Ministry of Home Affairs

Head 89-Department of Energy, 2735–2737, 2741

Head 93-Ministry Headquarters, 2730–2735

Head 97-Land Title and Registration Department, 2737–2739

Ministry of Housing and Municipalities

Head 53-Bermuda Housing Corporation, 2617–2622, 2628–2630, 2631–2632

Head 90-Ministry Headquarters, 2623–2625

Ministry of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport

Head 34-Transport Control Department, 2181–2182, 2183

Head 35-Department of Public Transportation, 2182–2184

Head 71-Ministry Headquarters, 2184–2185, 2186–2187

Motor Car (Ridesharing) Amendment Act 2026, 2299–2303

Municipalities Reform Act 2026, 2634–2637

Fahy, Hon. Michael (continued)

Question Period

CARICOM, Bermuda's next steps, 2349, 2350

Membership, 2118 (answered in writing)

Imports, addressing industry's call to diversify imports, 2554, 2555

Morgan's Point Development Company update, end of FY 2025/26 and outlook
2026/27, 2437, 2438

Motor Car Act 1951 Modernisation, 1891, 1892, 1893, 1894

Ridesharing, Regulation of Service, 2821, 2822, 2823, 2824

Solar floating photovoltaic plant, 2119 (answered in writing)

Fair Competition Ensuring and Preventing Market Concentration in Bermuda, Statements by
Ministers and Junior Ministers

Famous, Mr. Christopher

Adjournment, motions thereon, Legacy, honouring, confronting misconceptions, 2807–
2808

Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 2772–2773, 2831

Fatal shooting in Southampton (See Adjournment, motions thereon)

FinTech, Bermuda FinTech Strategy 2026-2028 (See Statements by Ministers and Junior
Ministers)

Foggo, Ms. Lovitta F.

Adjournment, motions thereon

Easter Season, 2849

Anthea Insurance Limited Act 2026, 1885–1886

Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 1898–1899, 2205, 2832

HODLIFE Insurance Company Act 2026, 1886

Municipalities Reform Act 2026, 2639–2640

Furbert, Hon. Tinee

Auxiliary Bicycles (Project Ride) Amendment Act 2026, 2106–2107

Big Up Yaself National Mini-Youth Conference 2026, 2436–2437

Budget, Debate on Budget Statement and Reply 2026/27, 1971–1974

Charities

Amendment Act 2026, 2836–2837, 2840

Amendment Regulations 2026, 2810

Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 1895–1896, 2352, 2830–2831

Dementia Navigation and Support Program Funding, 2435–2436

Department of Financial Assistance 2024/25 Annual Report, 1876–1877

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27

Ministry of Youth, Social Development, and Seniors

Head 23-Department of Child and Family Services, 2370–2388

Head 55-Department of Financial Assistance, 2388–2390

Head 86-Ministry Headquarters, 2354–2370, 2391–2392

Non-Ministry Heads

Head 56-Human Rights Commission, 2670–2674

Homelessness, Plan to End Together, tabling of, 2814–2815

Ministry of Education 2026 Scholarships and Awards Programme, 1875–1876

Motor Car (Ridesharing) Amendment Act 2026, 2303–2305

Plan to End Homelessness Together Annexes I, II and III, 2809

Rental Support Services (Emergency Subsidy) Pilot Programme - Hardship Fund, update
and impact, 2756–2757

Furbert, Hon. Wayne L.

Budget, Debate on Budget Statement and Reply 2026/27, 1997–1999
Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 2120, 2771–2772
Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2026, 2774–2776, 2778
Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27
Ministry of Finance
Head 12-Customs, 2261–2262, 2285–2286
Head 28-Department of Social Insurance, 2262–2265, 2285–2286
Head 38-Office of the Tax Commissioner, 2265–2267, 2285–2286
Government (Fees) Amendment Order 2026, 2647, 2746
Motor Car (Licence Duties Reduction) Amendment Act 2026, 2513–2515
Payroll Tax Amendment and Validation Act 2026, 2529–2530, 2536
Supplementary Estimate (No. 2) 2025/26, 2785–2786

G

Golf courses, government owned need to be self-sustaining (See Adjournment, motions thereon)

Government

Authorities (Fees) Amendment Order 2026 (See Papers and Other Communications to House)
camping facilities, update and improvements to (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Employee Health Insurance Scheme Enhanced Benefits (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
(Fees) Amendment Order 2026 (See Orders)
Fees Amendment Regulations 2026 (See Regulations)

H**Hayward, Hon. Jason**

Adjournment, motions thereon
English proficiency test in Bermuda, 2654
Bermuda FinTech Strategy 2026-2028, 2199–2200
Budget, Debate on Budget Statement and Reply, 1917–1924
Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2026, 2777–2778
Economic Development Strategy 2023-2027
Strategic Priority 1: Local and International Business Retention and Expansion, 2337, 2339–2341
Strategic Priority 2: Business Retention Investment Promotion 2023-2027 update, 2541, 2545
Strategic Priority 3: Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development 2023-2027, update, 2657, 2659
Strategic Priority 5: Investing in People, update, 2757–2758
Employment Amendment Act 2026, 2425, 2427
tabling of, 1881
Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27
Ministry of Economy and Labour
Head 14-Department of Statistics, 2394–2397, 2419–2421
Head 27-Immigration, 2397–2399, 2419–2420, 2421
Head 29-Registry General, 2399–2402, 2419
Head 44-Ministry Headquarters, 2392–2394, 2419, 2421–2423
Head 60-Workforce Development, 2402–2405, 2419

Hayward, Hon. Jason (continued)

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27 (continued)

Ministry of Economy and Labour (continued)

Head 94-Economic Development Department, 2405–2410, 2423

Head 99-Department of Labour, 2410–2412, 2424

Youth Employment Strategy update, 1879–1880

Health

Dementia Navigation and Support Program Funding, 2435–2436 (See also Question Period)

Insurance

Government Employee Health Insurance Scheme Enhanced Benefits (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

(Mutual Re-Insurance Fund) (Prescribed Sum) Validation Act 2026 (See Bills)

(Standard Health Benefits) Amendment Regulations 2026 (See Regulations)

Standard Premium Rate for upcoming fiscal year (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

HODLIFE Insurance Company Act 2026 (See Petitions)

HOME, Learning from HOME and other organisations: How Government can approach social challenges more effectively (See Adjournment, motions thereon)

Homelessness, Plan to End Together, tabling of (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

Housing

Bermuda Housing Trust Audited Financial Statements 2024/25 and Outlook for 2026/27 (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

Homelessness, Plan to End Housing Crisis Together

Annexes I, II and III (See Papers and Other Communications to House)
tabling of (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

I

Immigration, English proficiency test in Bermuda (See Adjournment, motions thereon)

Imports, addressing industry's call to diversify imports (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

J

Jury Reform, conclusion of Public Consultation (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

K

King, Mr. Robert

Budget, Debate on Budget Statement and Reply 2026/27, 1981–1984

Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 2016, 2555, 2772, 2830

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27

Ministry of Economy and Labour

Head 44-Ministry Headquarters, 2418

Head 60-Workforce Development, 2418

Ministry of Education

Head 16-Ministry Headquarters, 2238–2239

Head 41-Bermuda College, 2239

Ministry of National Security

Head 07-Bermuda Police Service, 2599–2600

Head 12-Customs Department, 2597–2598, 2601, 2602

King, Mr. Robert (continued)

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27 (continued)

Ministry of National Security (continued)

Head 83-Ministry Headquarters, 2596–2597

Head 88-Bermuda National Drug Control, 2599

Ministry of Public Works

Head 36-Ministry Headquarters, 2476

Head 79-Department of Environment and Natural Resources, 2476

Head 81-Department of Public Lands and Buildings, 2477

Head 82-Works and Engineering, 2477

Ministry of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport

Head 35-Department of Public Transportation, 2185–2186

Motor Car (Licence Duties Reduction) Amendment Act 2026, 2517–2518

Municipalities Reform Act 2026, 2642–2643

Question Period

Bermuda FinTech Strategy 2026-2028, 2203

Bermuda Housing Trust Audited Financial Statements 2024/25 and Outlook for 2026/27, 1887, 1888

Casino Gaming Commission economic return, 2008, 2009

Cybersecurity, Bermuda's national risk assessment, launch of, 2825, 2826, 2827

Economic Development Strategy 2023-2027

Strategic Priority 1: Local and International Business Retention and Expansion, 2348, 2349

Electoral Reform update, 2012, 2013

Government camping facilities, update and improvements to, 2766, 2767

Ministry of National Security recruitment across uniformed services and departments, update, 2347, 2348

Morgan's Point Development Company update, end of FY 2025/26 and outlook 2026/27, 2438, 2439

Overseas therapeutic schools, oversight for approving, 2764

Rental Support Services (Emergency Subsidy) Pilot Programme - Hardship Fund, update and impact, 2770, 2771

Road paving and planned works for Swing Bridge update, 2119

L

Legacy, honouring, confronting misconceptions (See Adjournment, motions thereon)

Lightbourne, Hon. Alexa

Adjournment, motions thereon

CARICOM, Strength in regional unity, Bermuda's place in the Caribbean, 2804–2805

Caribbean Community, the Story of us: Green Paper on Bermuda's application for membership, 2433

CARICOM-Bermuda's next steps, 2341–2344

Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2026, 2777

Dollars and Sense Teen Financial Literacy Experience, 2759–2760

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27

Ministry of Home Affairs

Head 89-Department of Energy, 2716–2726, 2742–2744

Head 93-Ministry Headquarters, 2706–2716, 2739–2741

Head 97-Land Title and Registration Department, 2726–2730

Imports, addressing industry's call to diversify imports, 2543–2544

Motor Car (Ridesharing) Amendment Act 2026, 2310–2311

Lister, Mr. Dennis III

Auxiliary Bicycles (Project Ride) Amendment Act 2026, 2103–2104
Budget, Debate on Budget Statement and Reply 2026/27, 1974–1976
Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 1894–1895, 2016, 2351, 2557, 2828
Employment Amendment Act 2026, 2426–2497
Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27
Ministry of Education
Head 16-Ministry Headquarters, 2209–2214, 2240–2242, 2244
Head 17-Department of Education, 2214–2228, 2240–2242, 2243, 2245–2246
Head 41-Bermuda College, 2228–2230, 2242
Ministry of Justice
Head 03-Judicial Department, 2027–2032, 2056
Head 25-Department of Corrections, 2032–2041, 2055, 2057
Head 74-Department of Court Services, 2041–2045, 2057
Head 87-Ministry Headquarters, 2019–2027, 2055
Jury Reform, Conclusion of Public Consultation, 2005–2006
Motor Car (Licence Duties Reduction) Amendment Act 2026, 2515–2516
Payroll Tax Amendment and Validation Act 2026, 2534
Proceeds of Crime (Anti-Money Laundering and Anti-Terrorist Financing) Amendment Regulations 2026, 2834, 2835

M

Marine Resources Enforcement Strategy (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Merchant Shipping (Fees) Amendment Regulations 2026 (See Regulations)

Message to Senate

Appropriation Act 2025, 2746
Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27, 2746
Middle East Advisor contract terms (See Premier's Question Period)

Ming, Mrs. Renee

Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 2015
Municipalities Reform Act 2026, 2637–2639
Ministry of
Education 2026 Scholarships and Awards Programme (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
National Security recruitment across uniformed services and departments, update (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Morgan's Point Development Company update, end of FY 2025/26 and outlook 2026/27 (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

Motion

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27 be approved
Furbert, Hon. Wayne L., 1902
Motor Car
Act 1951 Modernisation (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
(Licence Duties Reduction) Amendment Act 2026 (See Bills)
(Ridesharing) Amendment Act 2026 (See Bills)
(Ridesharing) Regulations 2026 (See Regulations)
Motor Taxi (Taxi Despatching Service) Amendment Regulations 2026 (See Regulations)
Municipalities Reform Act 2026 (See Bills)

N

Neurodiverse children, call for national minimum training standard for those who interact with
(See Adjournment, motions thereon)

O

Office of Public Guardian, payment to Members of Parliament (See Question Period)

Order

Government Authorities (Fees) Amendment Order 2026

Burt, Hon. E. David, 2433, 2747

Furbert, Hon. Wayne L., 2647, 2746

Pearman, Mr. Scott, 2747

Overseas therapeutic schools, oversight for approving (See Question Period)

P

Papers and Other Communications to House

Bermuda FinTech Strategy 2026-2028, 2199

Caribbean Community, the Story of us: Green Paper on Bermuda's application for
membership, 2433

Charities Amendment Regulations 2026, 2810

Corporate Income Tax (Tax Refund Reserve Fund) Amendment Regulations 2026, 2751

Economic Development Strategy 2023-2027

Strategic Priority 1: Local and International Business Retention and Expansion, 2337

Strategic Priority 2: Business Retention Investment Promotion 2023-2027 update,
2541

Strategic Priority 3: Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development 2023-2027,
update, 2657

Strategic Priority 5: Investing in People, update, 2752

Economic Substance Amendment Regulations 2026, 2751

Government

Authorities (Fees) Amendment Order 2026, 2433

Fees Amendment Regulations 2026, 2541

Health Insurance (Standard Health Benefit) Amendment Regulations 2026, 2657

Homelessness, Plan to End Together, Annexes I, II and III, 2809

Marine Resources Enforcement Strategy, 1873

Merchant Shipping (Fees) Amendment Regulations 2026, 2751

Motor Car (Ridesharing) Regulations 2026, 2809

Motor Taxi (Taxi Despatching Service) Amendment Regulations 2026, 2809

Premier, Ministers and Opposition Leader Personal Staffs Act 2029, Annual Reports
2023/24 and 2024/25, 2848

Proceeds of Crime (Anti-Money Laundering and Anti-Terrorist Financing) Amendment
Regulations 2026, 2752

Supplementary Estimate (No. 2) 2025/26, 2433

Parliamentary

Questions (See Question Period)

unscheduled sitting, concern over (See Adjournment, motions thereon)

Payroll Tax Amendment and Validation Act 2026 (See Bills)

Pearman, Mr. Scott

Budget, Debate on Budget Statement and Reply 2026/27, 1965–1969

Charities Amendment Act 2026, 2838–2840

Economic Substance Amendment Act 2026, 2795–2796

Employment Amendment Act 2026, 2426

Pearman, Mr. Scott (continued)

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27

Ministry of Justice

Head 03-Judicial Department, 2048–2051

Head 25-Department of Corrections, 2051–2054

Head 74-Department of Court Services, 2054–2055

Head 87-Ministry Headquarters, 2045–2048

Government (Fees) Amendment Order 2026, 2747

Municipalities Reform Act 2026, 2647–2649

Proceeds of Crime (Anti-Money Laundering and Anti-Terrorist Financing) Amendment
Regulations 2026, 2835

Question Period

Dementia Navigation and Support Program Funding, 2439, 2440

Jury Reform, Conclusion of Public Consultation, 2013, 2014

Petitions

Anthea Insurance Limited Act 2026, 1885–1886

HODLIFE Insurance Company Act 2026, 1886

Plan to End Homelessness Together, Annexes I, II and III (See Papers and Other
Communications to House)

Premier, Ministers and Opposition Leader Personal Staffs Act 2019

Annual Reports 2023/24 and 2024/25 (See Papers and Other Communications to House)
outstanding reports (See Adjournment, motions thereon)

Premier's Question Period

Asphalt Plant and Quarry

Smith, Ms. Linda, 2553

Capital Investment Disbursement 2026/27

Swan, Mr. Hubert (Kim) E., 2551, 2552

Casino Gaming

Smith, Hon. Ben, 2546, 2547

Middle East Advisor contract terms

DeCouto, Dr. Douglas, 2554

Public Education Reform

Smith, Hon. Ben, 2547

Tourism numbers below pre-pandemic levels

Smith, Hon. Ben, 2549, 2550

Proceeds of Crime (Anti-Money Laundering and Anti-Terrorist Financing) Amendment
Regulations 2026 (See Regulations)

Public

Education Reform (See Premier's Question Period)

Safety Awareness Seminars (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

Q

Quarry

Asphalt Plant and (See Premier's Question Period)

Question Period

Asphalt Plant, status update of new plant

Smith, Ms. Linda, 1886, 1887

Bermuda FinTech Strategy 2026-2028

Campbell, Mr. Vance, 2202

King, Mr. Robert, 2203

Question Period (continued)

Bermuda Housing Trust Audited Financial Statements 2024/25 and Outlook for 2026/27
King, Mr. Robert, 1887, 1888

Big Up Yaself National Mini-Youth Conference 2026
Smith, Hon. Ben, 2440, 2441

CARICOM
Bermuda's next steps
Fahy, Hon. Michael, 2349, 2350

Membership
Fahy, Hon. Michael, 2118 (answered in writing)

Casino Gaming Commission economic return
King, Mr. Robert, 2008, 2009

Cybersecurity, Bermuda's national risk assessment, launch of
King, Mr. Robert, 2825, 2826, 2827

Cybertips Programme, revival of
Tucker, Ms. Robin, 2767

Dementia Navigation and Support Program Funding
Pearman, Mr. Scott, 2439, 2440

Digital Transformation Team Strategic Partner update
DeCouto, Dr. Douglas, 2010
Smith, Ms. Linda, 2009

Economic Development Strategy 2023-2027
Strategic Priority 1: Local and International Business Retention and Expansion
Campbell, Mr. Vance, 2349
King, Mr. Robert, 2348, 2349
Strategic Priority 3: Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development 2023-2027,
update
DeCouto, Dr. Douglas, 2660

Education Grants
Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 2760 (answered in writing)

Electoral Reform update
DeCouto, Dr. Douglas, 2011
King, Mr. Robert, 2012, 2013
Smith, Ms. Linda, 2010

Fair Competition Ensuring and Preventing Market Concentration in Bermuda
Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 1889, 1890

Government camping facilities, update and improvements to
King, Mr. Robert, 2766, 2767
Robinson, Mr. Dwayne, 2765, 2766

Imports, addressing industry's call to diversify imports
Fahy, Hon. Michael, 2554, 2555

Jury Reform, Conclusion of Public Consultation
Pearman, Mr. Scott, 2013, 2014

Ministry of National Security recruitment across uniformed services and departments,
update
King, Mr. Robert, 2347, 2348
Tucker, Ms. Robin, 2344, 2345, 2346

Morgan's Point Development Company update, end of FY 2025/26 and outlook 2026/27
Fahy, Hon. Michael, 2437, 2438
King, Mr. Robert, 2438, 2439

Question Period (continued)

Motor Car Act 1951 Modernisation

Fahy, Hon. Michael, 1891, 1892, 1893, 1894

Office of Public Guardian, payment to Members of Parliament

Tucker, Ms. Robin, 2761

Overseas therapeutic schools, oversight for approving

King, Mr. Robert, 2764

Smith, Hon. Ben, 2763

Tucker, Ms. Robin, 2762, 2763, 2764, 2765

Rental Support Services (Emergency Subsidy) Pilot Programme - Hardship Fund, update and impact

DeCouto, Dr. Douglas, 2767, 2768

King, Mr. Robert, 2770, 2771

Tucker, Ms. Robin, 2769

Ridesharing, Regulation of Service

DeSilva, Hon. Zane J. S., 2823

Fahy, Hon. Michael, 2821, 2822, 2823, 2824

Robinson, Mr. Dwayne, 2818, 2819, 2820, 2821

Smith, Hon. Ben, 2821, 2823

Road

Paving and planned works for Swing Bridge update

King, Mr. Robert, 2119

Smith, Ms. Linda, 2119

Traffic collisions, public health impact

Robinson, Mr. Dwayne, 2827

School upgrades and renovation costs

Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 2761 (answered in writing)

Senators and MP remuneration in addition to parliamentary/ministerial salaries,

Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 2008

DeCouto, Dr. Douglas, 2006, 2008

Solar floating photovoltaic plant

Fahy, Hon. Michael, 2119 (answered in writing)

Standard Premium Rate for upcoming fiscal year

Burt, Hon. E. David, 2205

Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 2203, 2204

Tucker, Ms. Robin, 2204

Written Questions, procedural question

Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 1886

The Speaker, 1886

Youth

Employment Strategy update

King, Mr. Robert, 1890, 1891

Mental Health Needs, Building Capacity in our Community to Support

Smith, Hon. Ben, 2011, 2012

R

Rabain, Hon. Diallo V. S.

Auxiliary Bicycles (Project Ride) Amendment Act 2026, 2108

Budget, Debate on Budget Statement and Reply 2026/27, 1952–1957

Building Permit and Safebuilt update, 2545–2546

Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 1895, 2205–2206, 2557–2558

Rabain, Hon. Diallo V. S. (continued)

Cybertips Programme, revival of, 2754–2755

Digital Transformation Team Strategic Partner update, 2001–2002

Electoral Reform update, 2003–2004

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27

Ministry of Cabinet Office and Digital Innovation

Head 09-Cabinet Office, 2058–2065, 2095–2096

Head 13-Bermuda Post Office, 2065–2066, 2100

Head 18-Department of Libraries and Archives, 2066–2067, 2094–2095

Head 32-Department of Planning, 2067–2070, 2092–2094

Head 43-Department of Information and Digital Technologies, 2070–2071, 2091–2092

Head 80-Office of Project Management and Procurement, 2071–2072, 2088–2091

Non-Ministry Heads

Head 02-Legislature, 2661–2666

Head 101-Privacy Commissioner, 2689–2693, 2701–2703

Head 63-Parliamentary Registrar, 2674–2680, 2705

Errata, 2684–2685

Head 98-Information Commissioner's Office, 2685–2689

Government Fees Amendment Regulations 2026, 2541

Motor Car (Licence Duties Reduction) Amendment Act 2026, 2516–2517

(Ridesharing) Amendment Act 2026, 2296–2299

Municipalities Reform Act 2026, 2644–2645

Scholarships, Government Public Service Scholarships, launch of, 2812–2813

Regulations

Charities Amendment Regulations 2026, 2810

Corporate Income Tax (Tax Refund Reserve Fund) Amendment Regulations 2026

DeSilva, Hon. Zane J. S., 2751

Economic Substance Amendment Regulations 2026

DeSilva, Hon. Zane J. S., 2751

Government Fees Amendment Regulations 2026, 2541

Adams, Mr. Jache, 2780–2781

DeCouto, Dr. Douglas, 2781

Health Insurance (Standard Health Benefits) Amendment Regulations 2026

Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 2783

Wilson, Hon. Kim N., 2782–2783

Merchant Shipping (Fees) Amendment Regulations 2026

Darrell, Hon. Owen, 2751, 2833–2834

Robinson, Mr. Dwayne, 2834

Motor Car (Ridesharing) Regulations 2026, 2809

Motor Taxi (Taxi Despatching Service) Amendment Regulations 2026, 2809

Proceeds of Crime (Anti-Money Laundering and Anti-Terrorist Financing) Amendment Regulations 2026

Darrell, Hon. Owen, 2752

Lister, Mr. Dennis III, 2834, 2835

Pearman, Mr. Scott, 2835

Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 2834–2835

Remuneration

Office of Public Guardian, payment to Members of Parliament (See Question Period)

Senators and MP remuneration in addition to parliamentary/ministerial salaries, (See Question Period)

Rental Support Services (Emergency Subsidy) Pilot Programme - Hardship Fund, update and impact (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

Richardson, Mr. Jarion

Budget, Debate on Budget Statement and Reply 2026/27, 1925–1929

Charities Amendment Act 2026, 2837–2838

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27

Ministry of Cabinet Office and Digital Innovation

Head 09-Cabinet Office, 2083–2088

Head 13-Bermuda Post Office, 2098–2099

Head 18-Department of Libraries and Archives, 2081–2083

Head 32-Department of Planning, 2078–2081

Head 43-Department of Information and Digital Technologies, 2076–2078

Head 80-Office of Project Management and Procurement, 2073–2076

Ministry of Finance

Head 10-Ministry Headquarters, 2277–2278

Head 39-Registrar of Companies, 2282–2284

Non-Ministry Heads

Head 101-Privacy Commissioner, 2693–2698

Head 63-Parliamentary Registrar, 2704–2705

Head 98-Information Commissioner's Office, 2698–2701, 2703–2704

Municipalities Reform Act 2026, 2640–2642

Proceeds of Crime (Anti-Money Laundering and Anti-Terrorist Financing) Amendment Regulations 2026, 2834–2835

Ridesharing

Motor Car (Ridesharing) Amendment Act 2026 (See Bills)

Motor Car (Ridesharing) Regulations 2026 (See Regulations)

Regulation of Service (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

Road

Paving and planned works for Swing Bridge update (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

Traffic collisions, public health impact (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

Robinson, Mr. Dwayne

Adjournment, motions thereon

Violence - Fatal shooting in Southampton, 2748–2749

Auxiliary Bicycles (Project Ride) Amendment Act 2026, 2102–2103

Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 2773

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27

Ministry of Economy and Labour

Head 60-Workforce Development, 2418–2419

Ministry of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport

Head 34-Transport Control Department, 2177–2178

Head 35-Department of Public Transportation, 2178–2179

Head 52-Department of Culture, 2179–2180, 2181

Head 71-Ministry Headquarters, 2176–2177, 2181

Merchant Shipping (Fees) Amendment Regulations 2026, 2834

Motor Car

(Licence Duties Reduction) Amendment Act 2026, 2513

(Ridesharing) Amendment Act 2026, 2293–2296

Robinson, Mr. Dwayne (continued)

Question Period

Government camping facilities, update and improvements to, 2765, 2766

Ridesharing, Regulation of Service, 2818, 2819, 2820, 2821

Road Traffic Collisions, Public Health Impact, 2827

Royal Bermuda Regiment Deployment to Jamaica-Hurricane Melissa Recovery Support (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

S

Scholarships, Government Public Service Scholarships, launch of (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

School upgrades and renovation costs (See Question Period)

Scott, Mr. W. Lawrence

Motor Car (Ridesharing) Amendment Act 2026, 2305–2308

Senators and MP remuneration in addition to parliamentary/ministerial salaries, (See Question Period)

Simmons, Mr. Jamahl S.

Budget, Debate on Budget Statement and Reply 2026/27, 1929–1931

Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 1898, 2558

Motor Car

(Licence Duties Reduction) Amendment Act 2026, 2518–2519

(Ridesharing) Amendment Act 2026, 2308–2310

Simmons, Mr. Scott

Adjournment, motions thereon

English proficiency test in Bermuda, 2654–2656

Motor Car (Ridesharing) Amendment Act 2026, 2317–2318

Single-Use Plastics Act 2026 (See Bills)

introduction of (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

Smith, Hon. Ben

Adjournment, motions thereon

Easter Season, 2847

Budget, Debate on Budget Statement and Reply 2026/27, 1957–1961

Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 1896–1897, 2017–2018, 2352

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27

Ministry of Education

Head 16-Ministry Headquarters, 2230–2231, 2239, 2244, 2245

Head 17-Department of Education, 2231–2238, 2240–2242, 2243

Ministry of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport

Head 20-Ministry Headquarters, 2490–2499

Motor Car (Licence Duties Reduction) Amendment Act 2026, 2526

(Ridesharing) Amendment Act 2026, 2314–2316

Premier's Question Period

Casino Gaming, 2546, 2547

Public Education Reform, 2547

Tourism numbers below pre-pandemic levels, 2549, 2550

Question Period

Big Up Yaself National Mini-Youth Conference 2026, 2440, 2441

Overseas therapeutic schools, oversight for approving, 2763

Ridesharing, Regulation of Service, 2821, 2823

Youth Mental Health Needs, Building Capacity in our Community to Support, 2011, 2012

Smith, Ms. Linda

Adjournment, motions thereon

Bermuda, Protect Bermuda, Get Involved, 2806–2807

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27

Ministry of National Security

Head 88-Bermuda National Drug Control, 2598

Ministry of Public Works

Head 36-Ministry Headquarters, 2472–2473

Head 79-Department of Environment and Natural Resources, 2473–2474

Head 81-Department of Public Lands and Buildings, 2474–2475

Head 82-Works and Engineering, 2475–2476, 2479

Premier's Question Period

Asphalt Plant and Quarry, 2553

Question Period

Asphalt Plant, new plant status update, 1886, 1887

Digital Transformation Team Strategic Partner update, 2009

Electoral Reform update, 2010

Road Paving and Planned Works for Swing Bridge update, 2119

Solar floating photovoltaic plant (See Question Period)

Southampton, Fatal shooting in (See Adjournment, motions thereon)

Speaker (See Announcements by Speaker or Member presiding)

Sports Awards 44th Annual, Elevating Sports Together (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

Standard Premium Rate for upcoming FY (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers

Bermuda FinTech Strategy 2026-2028, 2199–2200 (See also Question Period)

Bermuda Housing Trust Audited Financial Statements 2024/25 and Outlook for 2026/27, 1874–1875 (See also Question Period)

Big Up Yaself National Mini-Youth Conference 2026, 2436–2437 (See also Question Period)

Building Permit and Safebuilt update, 2545–2546

Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) Event in Bermuda, update, 1884–1885

CARICOM-Bermuda's next steps, 2341–2344 (See also Question Period)

CARIFTA 2026, Bermuda's Delegation, 2753–2754

Cybersecurity, Bermuda's national risk assessment, launch of, 2811–2812 (See also Question Period)

Cybertips Programme, revival of, 2754–2755 (See also Question Period)

Dementia Navigation and Support Program Funding, 2435–2436 (See also Question Period)

Department of Financial Assistance 2024/25 Annual Report, 1876–1877

Digital Transformation Team Strategic Partner update, 2001–2002 (See also Question Period)

Dollars and Sense Teen Financial Literacy Experience, 2759–2760

Economic Development Strategy 2023-2027

Strategic Priority 1: Local and International Business Retention and Expansion, 2339–2341 (See also Question Period)

Strategic Priority 2: Business Retention Investment Promotion 2023-2027 update, 2545

Strategic Priority 3: Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development 2023-2027, update, 2659 (See also Question Period)

Strategic Priority 5: Investing in People, update, 2757–2758

Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers (continued)

Electoral Reform update, 2003–2004 (*See also* Question Period)

Employment Amendment Act 2026, tabling of, 1881

Fair Competition Ensuring and Preventing Market Concentration in Bermuda, 1878–1879
(*See also* Question Period)

Government

camping facilities, update and improvements to, 2752–2753 (*See also* Question Period)

Employee Health Insurance Scheme Enhanced Benefits, 2810–2811

Homelessness, Plan to End Together, tabling of, 2814–2815

Imports, addressing industry's call to diversify imports, 2543–2544 (*See also* Question Period)

Jury Reform, Conclusion of Public Consultation, 2005–2006 (*See also* Question Period)

Marine Resources Enforcement Strategy, 1881–1882

Ministry of

Education 2026 Scholarships and Awards Programme, 1875–1876

National Security Recruitment across Uniformed Services and Departments, update, 2337–2339 (*See also* Question Period)

Morgan's Point Development Company update, end of FY 2025/26 and outlook 2026/27, 2434–2435 (*See also* Question Period)

Motor Car Act 1951 Modernisation, 1883–1884 (*See also* Question Period)

Public Safety Awareness Seminars, 2758–2759

Rental Support Services (Emergency Subsidy) Pilot Programme - Hardship Fund, update and impact, 2756–2757 (*See also* Question Period)

Ridesharing, Regulation of Service, 2813–2814 (*See also* Question Period)

Road

Paving and Planned Works for Swing Bridge update, 2117–2118 (*See also* Question Period)

Traffic Collisions, Public Health Impact, 2817–2818 (*See also* Question Period)

Royal Bermuda Regiment Deployment to Jamaica-Hurricane Melissa Recovery Support, 2542–2543

Scholarships, Government Public Service Scholarships, launch of, 2812–2813

Single-use Plastics Act 2026, introduction of, 2816–2817

Sports Awards 44th Annual, Elevating Sports Together, 2658–2859

Standard Premium Rate for upcoming fiscal year, 2200–2201 (*See also* Question Period)

Youth

Employment Strategy update, 1879–1880 (*See also* Question Period)

Mental Health Needs, Building Capacity in our Community to Support, 2004–2005
(*See also* Question Period)

Supplementary Estimate (No. 2) 2025/26 (*See* Bills)

Swan, Mr. Hubert (Kim) E.

Adjournment, motions thereon

Black History Month, 2113–2115

Golf courses, government owned need to be self-sustaining, 2800–2803

Auxiliary Bicycles (Project Ride) Amendment Act 2026, 2104–2106

Budget, Debate on Budget Statement and Reply 2026/27, 1943–1947

Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 1896, 2015–2016, 2206, 2351–2352, 2556–2557, 2773, 2829

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27

Ministry of Housing and Municipalities

Head 53-Bermuda Housing Corporation, 2622–2623

Swan, Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. (continued)

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27 (continued)

Ministry of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport

Head 35-Department of Public Transportation, 2185

Head 71-Ministry Headquarters, 2185

Motor Car (Licence Duties Reduction) Amendment Act 2026, 2519–2522

(Ridesharing) Amendment Act 2026, 2319–2320

Municipalities Reform Act 2026, 2643–2644

Payroll Tax Amendment and Validation Act 2026, 2532–2534

Premier's Question Period

Capital Investment Disbursement 2026/27, 2551, 2552

Swing Bridge, road paving and planned works for update (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

T

Tourism numbers below pre-pandemic levels (See Premier's Question Period)

Tucker, Ms. Robin

Adjournment, motions thereon

Neurodiverse children, call for national minimum training standard for those who interact with, 2803–2804

Budget, Debate on Budget Statement and Reply 2026/27, 1984–1986

Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 2017, 2772

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27

Ministry of Youth, Social Development, and Seniors

Head 86-Ministry Headquarters, 2390–2391, 2392

Question Period

Cybertips Programme, revival of, 2767

Ministry of National Security Recruitment across Uniformed Services and Departments, update, 2344, 2345, 2346

Office of Public Guardian, payment to Members of Parliament, 2761

Overseas therapeutic schools, oversight for approving, 2762, 2763, 2764, 2765

Rental Support Services (Emergency Subsidy) Pilot Programme - Hardship Fund, update and impact, 2769

Standard Premium Rate for upcoming fiscal year, 2204

Tyrrell, Mr. Neville S.

Auxiliary Bicycles (Project Ride) Amendment Act 2026, 2107–2108

Budget, Debate on Budget Statement and Reply 2026/27, 1986–1988

Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 1900, 2558–2559, 2829–2830

Motor Car (Ridesharing) Amendment Act 2026, 2318–2319

V

Violence

Bermuda, Protect Bermuda, Get Involved (See Adjournment, motions thereon)

Fatal shooting in Southampton (See Adjournment, motions thereon)

W**Weeks, Hon. Michael A.**

Budget, Debate on Budget Statement and Reply 2026/27, 1978–1981

Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 1899–1900, 2015, 2120–2121, 2207, 2829

Cybersecurity, Bermuda's national risk assessment, launch of, 2811–2812

Weeks, Hon. Michael A. (continued)

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27

Ministry of National Security

Head 06-Department of Defence, 2565–2571

Head 07-Bermuda Police Service, 2571–2578, 2602–2604

Head 12-Customs Department, 2578–2582, 2600–2601, 2602, 2604

Head 45-Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service, 2583–2588

Head 83-Ministry Headquarters, 2560–2565

Head 88-Bermuda National Drug Control, 2588–2596, 2600

Ministry of National Security Recruitment across Uniformed Services and Departments, update, 2337–2339

Public Safety Awareness Seminars, 2758–2759

Royal Bermuda Regiment Deployment to Jamaica-Hurricane Melissa Recovery Support, 2542–2543

Wilson, Hon. Kim N.

Auxiliary Bicycles (Project Ride) Amendment Act 2026, 2106

Budget, Debate on Budget Statement and Reply 2026/27, 1935–1938

Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 2208

Ensuring Fair Competition and Preventing Market Concentration in Bermuda, 1878–1879

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2026/27

Ministry of Health

Head 21-Ministry Headquarters, 2123–2132

Head 22-Department of Health, 2132–2153

Head 24-Hospitals, 2153–2158

Health Insurance

(Mutual Re-Insurance Fund) (Prescribed Sum) Validation Act 2026, 2783, 2784

(Standard Health Benefit) Amendment Regulations 2026, 2657, 2782–2783

Motor Car (Ridesharing) Amendment Act 2026, 2308

Road Traffic Collisions, Public Health Impact, 2817–2818

Standard Premium Rate for upcoming fiscal year, 2200–2201

Supplementary Estimate (No. 2) 2025/26, 2786

Youth Mental Health Needs, Building Capacity in our Community to Support, 2004–2005

Written Questions, procedural question (See Question Period)

Y

Youth (See Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

Big Up Yaself National Mini-Youth Conference 2026 (See Statements by . . .)

Dollars and Sense Teen Financial Literacy Experience (See Statements by . . .)

Employment Strategy update (See Statements by . . .)

Mental Health Needs, Building Capacity in our Community to Support (See Statements by . . .)

Ministry of Education 2026 Scholarships and Awards Programme (See Statements by . . .)

VOLUME 1:		VOLUME 2:	
Sittings 24 – 28	pages in Hansard	Sittings 29 – 34	pages in Hansard
20 February 2026	1849–1872	09 March 2026	2337–2432
27 February 2026	1873–2000	11 March 2026	2433–2540
02 March 2026	2001–2116	13 March 2026	2541–2656
04 March 2026	2117–2198	16 March 2026	2657–2750
06 March 2026	2199–2336	20 March 2026	2751–2808
		27 March 2026	2809–2850