



## Ministerial Statement

By

**The Hon. Michael Weeks, JP, MP**  
Minister of National Security

**Community Violence Workshop**

**November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

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**Mr. Speaker,** I rise today to give the House an update on the Community Violence Workshop that was held at the end of September.

**Mr. Speaker,** you will recall that in May of this year I made a statement to this Honourable House on addressing violence in Bermuda. Not more than 48 hours after my appointment in April, I found myself performing the grim task of offering condolences to two families who were dealing with the grief of losing their young sons to gun violence.

**Mr. Speaker,** I have in the Ministry Headquarter Offices a poster with the names and ages of the 81 persons who have been murdered in Bermuda since 2003. I see that every day and it reminds me of my purpose as they are not merely statistics. In less than 20 years we have had 81 murders. Just let that sink in, 81 murders in less than 20 years. The youngest victim was only 14 years old when her life was taken. Most were in their 20s. Nothing is more precious than life itself and we must do all we can to stop this. How did we as a community get here?

**Mr. Speaker,** violence and anti-social behaviour is a serious threat to our community and it continues to be my top priority. I have stated on a

number of occasions that we will not Police our way out of this. That is the reality. Community violence and anti-social behaviour is a community problem that requires a community response.

**Mr. Speaker,** in June I held a Town Hall meeting on the issue at Bailey's Bay Cricket Club and then another at St. Paul's Church in the City of Hamilton in July. I was very encouraged by the number of persons that attended and the open and honest feedback that I received.

**Mr. Speaker,** following the Town Hall meetings, the Community Violence Workshop was convened on September 29th and 30th of this year to get feedback from the key stakeholders.

**Mr. Speaker,** the Community Violence Workshop was to build on the Town Hall meetings to find real solutions, Bermuda based solutions to our problem. I invited representatives from several government departments across multiple Ministries including Health, Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, and of course National Security. Also invited were helping agencies including charities that work with young people who are touched by community violence and anti-social behaviour. I invited clergy, sports clubs and community activists. I even invited representatives from the opposition because this issue is bigger than party politics and only together can we tackle this issue. I would like to thank all those who attended and for giving of their time and expertise.

**Mr. Speaker,** the overall purpose of the workshop was to have a real honest look at our response to community violence and anti-social behaviour. We must have a coordinated and actionable plan for prevention, intervention and reintegration of offenders.

**Mr. Speaker,** this was not a workshop where we asked people to sit and listen to an overseas expert tell us how we should fix this. This was an opportunity for key local stakeholders to roll up their sleeves and work

on real solutions by having open and frank discussion on not only what we are doing but what is not working and what we should be doing.

**Mr. Speaker**, I asked participants to be honest and not hold back. We need to know where there are gaps in services, duplication of services and a need for resources and further services. We need to know what works, what doesn't, what we are doing well and where we must make improvements. This was not a finger pointing session. This was an opportunity to review where we are and what needs to be done for a safer community.

**Mr. Speaker**, I know participants were heartened by the remarks of the Premier at the opening of the workshop. He spoke of this Government's commitment to tackling this issue. Commitment not just in words but with resources as well.

**Mr. Speaker**, the conversations that were held over those two days were rich and thought provoking. Topics discussed included issues around mental health, economic security, family, education, Bermuda's history and culture. Participants did not just discuss the work of others but looked within. Service delivery was discussed enabling people to openly review not only how their organisations worked but also how they could work more effectively with other entities or with additional resources. These kinds of conversations will allow us to work better in the future and for that I am grateful.

**Mr. Speaker**, it is with this information that a strategy and action plan on addressing Community Violence and anti-social behaviour will be created. A plan where all of Bermuda is involved and knows and plays a role. Bermuda requires a plan that reflects the needs, thoughts, and desires of the community in combatting this national issue and that is what we intend to provide.

**Mr. Speaker**, there is another segment of the community that must be consulted with. They are integral to the success of the strategy. That is young people themselves. Too often young people are talked about or talked at. We must include them, understand their view and experiences and take their advice. Over the next several weeks I will be talking to groups of young people to get their views on their Bermuda. It is for them we work and it is with them that we will succeed.

**Mr. Speaker**, there is much work to be done over the next few months and this Government is serious about creating a way forward that has real impact on our communities. I want to invest in our communities so we can restore the feelings of safety and community we once had and stop the violence and anti-social behaviour.

**Mr. Speaker**, there are many entities including the public and third sector whose work mitigates violence and anti-social behaviour in Bermuda. It has a positive impact. They save lives and help vulnerable youth to make and take positive life choices. We need to build on this work.

**Mr. Speaker**, following the youth engagement, I will be inviting a number of the key stakeholders to assist in the completion of the strategy and action plan. I look forward to updating this Honourable House when that work is completed and providing the details at that time.

**Mr. Speaker**, in closing, you will note that I have not said this is a gang issue. Saying it is a gang issue is a convenient label that gives some comfort as it is “those people in those neighbourhoods”. It belies the fact that the violence and antisocial behaviour is a community wide problem and not a gang issue and will only be solved by the community as a whole.

Thank you **Mr. Speaker**.

