



Ministerial Statement

by

**Senator the Hon. Kim Wilkerson, JP
Attorney-General and Minister of Justice**

“Corrections Reform Progress Update 1”

28 September, 2026

Madam President, in May I tabled in this Honourable Senate the Report of the independent Review Panel on the Department of Corrections. I said then that the Report would not be filed away and I gave a commitment to return to this Chamber quarterly to report on our progress. I rise today to keep that commitment.

Senators will recall that the Panel made 75 recommendations across four thematic areas: Treatment of Detainees, Living Conditions, Activities and Rehabilitation, and Detainee Management. Every one of them was placed in the *Post-Inspection Action Plan*, with a responsible officer, a target date and an evidential standard. That Plan is reviewed and challenged regularly

by the Ministry, the Executive Leadership of the Department and our UK partners and it is the basis for the update I give today.

Madam President, as at the most recent review of the Action Plan, **27 of the 75 recommendations have been completed**. A further 29 are actively in progress. In less than six months since the Plan became active in late March, more than one third of the Panel's recommendations have been delivered and three in every four have either been completed or are underway.

I want to be transparent about what those 27 represent. Fourteen of them are areas where the Panel asked us to keep doing what we already do well, such as, every new arrival seen by a nurse within 24 hours, the Right Living House Therapeutic Community, the work programmes at the Farm, free lawyer calls, respectful same-sex searches and meeting religious and dietary needs. Protecting that good practice matters. But the remaining 13 are new changes and they are making a real difference.

Madam President, the Panel found that the complaints process had lost the confidence of the inmate population. We have acted on that. Prisoners now have a confidential route to the Treatment of Offenders Board through sealed correspondence, with secure drop boxes being built to strengthen it further. A centralised complaints log is in place so that patterns can be identified and reported to senior management and to the Board and complaint outcomes have begun to be provided in writing. A

central log of all investigations into deaths, escapes, disappearances and serious injuries has also been established.

On dignity and living conditions, remand prisoners who are locked in their cells from 4:30 are now issued personal water bottles, so that they have drinking water through the evening and overnight. A centralised inventory system for mattresses, pillows and clothing, with minimum stock levels, is now operating. Prisoners may apply to wear their own clothing to trial and sentencing hearings. The Westgate kitchen now has clear, dedicated management oversight through a substantive Principal Officer. Inmates may also request call times that suit families overseas.

On leadership and staffing, the HMPPS Staff Profiling exercise that I told this Senate was underway in May has been completed and its recommendations were received, with an implementation plan being finalised. They will shape how we deploy our officers and structure our shifts. A dedicated Chief Officer has been assigned to lead training from 5 October 2026. And, in the middle of hurricane season, formal links with government and emergency agencies are in place, along with a two-week inventory of essential supplies.

Madam President, I turn now to the work that is underway.

The most significant of this concerns the use of force and discipline. The Use of Force Policy has been finalised for signature. A Directive on

Disciplinary Segregation, to ensure that segregation is lawful, authorised, reviewed and never used as routine punishment, has been drafted for issue. A new disciplinary process, supported by a centralised discipline log, is before management for approval and a manager is being assigned as Use of Force Coordinator. Together, these measures address some of the Panel's most serious findings.

Prisoners will also be better informed of their rights and the rules. A revised Inmate Handbook is going to print, interim reception information is being introduced at Westgate and new notice boards are being built for every unit.

In healthcare, the Senior Nursing Officer is working with the UK Overseas Territories Health Service and other jurisdictions to close the gap in access to dental care and substance misuse support between remand and sentenced prisoners and options for access to a female doctor are being explored.

On rehabilitation, discussions continue with Bermuda College and Workforce Development to expand accredited learning, case planning is being reviewed so that plans are completed promptly and include disability accommodations and a formal Incentives and Earned Privileges scheme is being prepared, drawing on the experience of other Overseas Territories. Job descriptions for full-time chaplains are being finalised for Cabinet's consideration.

On infrastructure, the hiring of a dedicated maintenance team has been approved, professional advice is being sought on ventilation, monthly meetings continue with Works and Engineering on repairs that affect security and a request has been submitted for additional secure escort vehicles.

Madam President, Senators may have seen reports of disruption to the water supply at Westgate Correctional Facility. I want to assure this Senate that the matter is under control.

In recent days, urgent plumbing repairs required the supply to be shut off at intervals. Working with Works and Engineering, the repair was completed on Sunday, 27 September and the water supply has been restored.

During the disruption, the Department put interim measures in place to maintain sanitation and security, including additional staffing. I thank the officers of the Department of Corrections, the staff of Works and Engineering and the Bermuda Police Service, which stood ready to assist.

This episode will inform the Department's business continuity planning.

Madam President, I also said in May that I would be candid, so let me be candid now. Not every date has been met. Staffing pressures continue to limit how quickly some changes can be made, including the full implementation of the national locking recommendations and changes to

the evening meal at Westgate. A planned UK visit had to be rescheduled from July and regional training scheduled for August did not proceed. These are real constraints. They are not excuses and they have not stopped the work.

Madam President, I am pleased to inform this Senate that a team from the UK Ministry of Justice and HMPPS is on the ground in Bermuda as I speak. They are working with the Department to develop a new Local Security Strategy to replace the outdated Security Manual. That work will also support a revised search policy so that strip searches are intelligence-led, a formal Classification and Assessment Policy with risk and needs assessments completed within 72 hours and intelligence and counter-corruption training for the Head of Security.

This visit is part of a broader pattern of support. The UK Ministry of Justice has stood with us throughout this process, from helping to build the Action Plan itself, to the Staff Profiling exercise, to the specialist advice and training that continue to shape our policies. We are also drawing on our peers in other Overseas Territories, learning from prisons that have already introduced an Incentives and Earned Privileges scheme, a simplified ACCT system and modern use of force frameworks. Bermuda does not have to reinvent every solution and we are not doing this alone.

Over the next quarter, work will also advance on risk-based use of restraints for remand prisoners, a policy on special accommodation, a

comprehensive staff training and development plan, a business continuity plan with drills and training and the Department's first annual staff engagement survey.

Other commitments, including phone credit support for remand and foreign national prisoners, new gym equipment and additional escort vehicles, are being pursued through the 2027/28 budget. The removal of the Treatment of Offenders Board from adjudications will require legislation, which the Ministry will bring forward once the Incentives and Earned Privileges scheme is in place.

Madam President, let me close with this.

Turning around a correctional system is not done in a single announcement. It is done in the steady, unglamorous work of reform. That is the work this Ministry, the Department of Corrections, the Prison Officers Association and our UK partners are doing, every week.

Twenty-seven recommendations completed. Twenty-nine underway. A clear plan for the rest. There is much still to do and I will return to this Senate next quarter to report on it. The hard work is being done and it will continue until Bermuda has a correctional system that is safe, humane and purposeful.

Thank you, Madam President.