



**Dr. Emily Gail Dill, JP**

Junior Minister of National Security and Transport

**Building a Secure and Safe Community Together**

July 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024

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Good morning **Madam President**,

The recent tragic events of a number of violent deaths have rocked the island to its core. Questions arise as to what, if anything, is being done to prevent violence and the senseless loss of life? There are those who say nothing is being done. Thankfully, there are those who know the facts of the matter and stand ready to outline the programs, policies and legislation designed to ensure the security and safety of the community.

**Madam President**, the Ministry of National Security's Gang Violence Reduction Team (GVRT) was established in 2017 with Pastor Leroy Bean as the Coordinator. The GVRT, comprising of four dedicated members, focuses on reducing gang violence and anti-social behavior in Bermuda. They have implemented a Coordinated Crisis Response Team that provides immediate and post-incident support to families, relatives, and witnesses of violent incidents. This vital work mitigates the impact of violence in our community, ensuring those affected receive timely assistance and access to necessary resources. The behind-the-scenes efforts, often unseen by the wider community, help families navigate the aftermath of violent incidents and, in some cases, have prevented escalation or retaliation.

**Madam President,** significant progress is being made. The GVRT's Redemption Programme and Youth Work Placement and Mentoring Initiative have been operational for five years. Over 150 young men between fifteen and thirty years old have completed the programme, which provides paid employment opportunities, educational support, and skills development to benefit participants in their future careers. The GVRT also delivers programmes in schools that focus on outreach, incident management, and personalized support to students.

**Madam President,** lives have been saved since the introduction of Roadside Sobriety Checkpoints in 2018. Due to these checkpoints, several drivers have been arrested while under the influence of alcohol; countless others made the decision to seek alternative transportation rather than risk being caught at a checkpoint. This year the Government has supported an upgrade to the BPS' CCTV network. The upgrade project will be completed by this Fall. The CCTV network will provide the BPS with enhanced coverage of the island's roads and public spaces and will be an instrumental component of the BPS' investigative resources. This level of CCTV coverage enhances community safety, by deterring criminal activities through constant surveillance making potential offenders think twice before committing crimes. Additionally, when crimes are committed, it aids in the swift identification and apprehension of suspects.

**Madam President,** in January 2022, the Department of Corrections welcomed its first female Commissioner, Mrs. Keeva Joell-Benjamin, who continues to lead Corrections in its mission to "empower inmates to be responsible and productive citizens." This Government has allocated funding for the improvement of computer labs at the Corrections facilities which have provided inmates with opportunities to gain access to online educational and technological programmes. Inmates who are

seeking employment as part of their discharge planning can now be given a monitored personal email address, allowing them to communicate with potential employers.

**Madam President**, this Government has approved the transition of the substance abuse recovery programme, the Right Living House, from overseas management to the Department of Corrections. The transition was completed in July 2024 and will provide stability for the residents and more permanent employment opportunities for Bermudians. Overall, the inmates that participate in this programme continue to benefit tremendously both whilst incarcerated, and post-release by way of the Aftercare Component of the programme.

**Madam President**, the Customs Department monitors and controls the cross-border movement of people and goods. Through partnerships with the BPS, the Customs Department works to interdict contraband items and illicit substances into and out of Bermuda. Since 2018, the Customs Department has actioned approximately 2000 seizures of goods. In the same time period, Customs has intercepted 8 shipments that contained firearm components, ammunition, spent ammunition or pepper spray. Their diligent work is boosting community safety and security.

**Madam President**, to support the Customs Department, the Government allocated funds for the relocation and refurbishment of several of the Customs facilities, including the Cargo Terminal and the Yachting Facility. A recent upgrade of the Department's X-Ray equipment has enhanced the Department's ability to scan containers and shipments to ensure that dangerous weapons do not enter Bermuda. The public will note that the Customs Automated Processing System (CAPS), and upgrades to the Department's IT infrastructure have made declaring and processing shipments through Customs less onerous and time consuming.

**Madam President**, this Government was innovative in keeping the airport open when the requirements for airport rescue firefighting

services were amended as a result of an audit of Skyport in 2022. The urgent need for airport rescue-certified firefighters was initially met through a contract with a Canadian company to provide overseas firefighters. The BFRS recruited and trained 34 firefighters to replace the overseas contingent.

**Madam President,** this was no easy feat. The recruitment required the Government to reallocate funds to cover the salaries of the new firefighters. The new firefighters were then put through intense and expedited training to ensure their readiness for service before the contract with the Canadian company expired. The Government is pleased that the Airport Operations Division of the BFRS is now manned by a full complement of Bermudian certified airport rescue firefighters.

**Madam President,** under this Government, the Royal Bermuda Regiment has undergone transformative changes that align with our commitment to modernize and enhance its effectiveness. As outlined in our 2017 party platform and reiterated in the subsequent Throne Speech, we pledged to end conscription—a promise that was fulfilled with the enactment of the Defence Amendment Act 2018 in July.

**Madam Speaker,** this pivotal legislation marked a significant shift, transitioning the Regiment to a fully voluntary enlistment model. There were concerns expressed regarding the ability to meet recruitment targets and I am pleased to report that the Regiment not only met but exceeded expectations. Although the overall number of soldiers has decreased compared to the era of conscription, the quality of the recruits has markedly improved. The voluntary enlistment has contributed to a more dedicated and skilled personnel base. Soldiers are trained to be multi-skilled, enhancing the Regiment's operational effectiveness. Importantly, the voluntary model has also resulted in a higher retention

rate, as soldiers who choose to serve demonstrate a stronger commitment and longer tenure compared to those conscripted.

**Madam Speaker,** this evolution reflects our Government's strategic vision for a modernized and capable defense force, and the positive outcomes achieved thus far validate the success of this significant policy shift.

**Madam President,** in February 2020, the Regiment's Coast Guard Unit was established. The Coast Guard initially worked with the Marine Police to bolster inshore patrol capabilities during the busy summer boating season. The Coast Guard has since evolved into the sole agency with responsibility for maritime security in Bermuda. The Coast Guard provides twenty-four hour on-duty capability during the summer boating season and is available year-round to assist with marine distress incidents. The ongoing evolution of The Coast Guard will create expanded opportunities for young Bermudians and promote skills development in the area of marine security.

**Madam President,** the Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation Team is the team within the Ministry of National Security Headquarters that is responsible for national disaster mitigation and response planning. To the uninformed, the team may be thought of as the team that helps after hurricanes, however, under the administration of this Government, the team has evolved into much more.

**Madam President,** the Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation Team fosters relationships with other government agencies and external stakeholders to ensure that Bermuda is prepared to respond to a large-scale disaster. The team has facilitated stakeholders' engagement in several areas including multi-agency preparedness, cruise ship and port disaster planning exercises, food security planning, evacuation planning,

search and rescue operations, and the safe transport and storage of chemicals.

**Madam President**, since 2019, Cybersecurity is within the portfolio of the Ministry of National Security. The Ministry of National Security has developed a comprehensive set of Information Systems Security Policies and a Risk Management Programme in alignment with industry standards. These policies and programmes are being implemented across the Public Service to further protect from potential theft, fraud, and unauthorized access thereby strengthening the overall security of the government's Information Systems.

**Madam President**, in August 2022, the Cabinet approved a Cybersecurity Unit, inclusive of a National Cybersecurity Incident Response team. The Cybersecurity Unit underwent a National Cyber Risk Assessment by the UK Home Office in November 2022, which highlighted Bermuda's strengths and weaknesses in the Cybersecurity space.

Most recently, **Madam President**, the Ministry established the Cybersecurity Act 2024 to provide for the protection of Bermuda's Critical National Information Infrastructures. Additionally, the Computer Misuse Act 2024 was repealed and replaced the 1996 Act in order to align Bermuda with the requirements of the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime. Amendments to additional legislation is forthcoming in furtherance of this aim. The Cybersecurity Unit is evidence of the Government's commitment to promoting cybersecurity in Bermuda, particularly of the Government and other Critical National Information Infrastructure. The Unit is now a legislated body that will continue its work to prevent, prepare for and respond to cyber incidents in Bermuda.

**Madam President**, the initiatives, policies and programmes of the Ministry of National Security, and its Departments are representative of

the Ministry's aim of keeping Bermuda safe. The public can rest assured that this Government will continue to direct resources towards programmes and policies that improve the lives of Bermudians.

Thank you, Madam President.