



Government of Bermuda

Ministry of Social Development and Seniors

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
To the Senate**

by

**Senator Lindsay Simmons, JP
Junior Minister of Social Development and Seniors**

Teen Dating Abuse Awareness and Prevention Month

Wednesday, 23rd February 2022

Madam President, I rise today to inform Members of the Senate and the general public that February is Teen Dating Abuse Awareness and Prevention Month. I would also like to take this opportunity to share what the Ministry of Social Development and Seniors has done in support of this initiative. While the month is targeted towards teens, it is important that all adults in our community who have healthy interactions with teens not limited to parents and guardians, lead the charge of having conversations with them on dating abuse. These conversations should include but not be limited to various aspects of teen dating such as what respect in a relationship looks/feels like; red flags leading to an abusive relationship or while in an abusive relationship; and helping agencies in our community.

Madam President, Bermuda is witnessing an increase in abusive relationships not only amongst adults, but with our teens. There has been a surge in reports from middle and high schools; and youth housing facilities.

Madam President, by working together there is an opportunity for the country to make a difference now through what is required to mitigate domestic violence among teens. It is intended that resources such as education and awareness

campaigns; school and community forums implemented specifically for teens will potentially have a direct impact on reducing the number of adults in abusive relationships in the future.

Madam President, as Members of the Senate it is incumbent upon us as leaders of this country and all adults involved with children's activities to set a precedence for our youth. Through training and awareness on red flags, we can teach them how to respond appropriately to abusive behaviours to reduce these harmful relationships.

Madam President, common red flags of abuse include, but are not limited to:

- demands made by a partner for personal/private information such as password to access devices and/or social media accounts etc.;
- name calling or intimidating behavior;
- apologetic behavior or actions after a physical or verbal altercation;
- being afraid to speak their mind or go against their partner because it will cause an argument; and
- a person threatens to leave if their partner doesn't follow their orders.

Madam President, too often teens mistake these warning signs also referred to as red flags as a form of love. Adults can assist them with understanding that these red flags are key warnings to behaviours that should not be tolerated such as jealousy, control, manipulation, and isolation. This Government encourages healthy conversations with our young people on the topics of teen dating abuse and awareness, which provides them with an opportunity to ask questions, feel less vulnerable, supported and safe.

Madam President, also discussions on responding appropriately to these red flag warnings is critical to creating boundaries to stop these unwanted behaviours, and a way to support teens to build up the courage to leave an abusive relationship.

Madam President, in support of Teen Dating Abuse Awareness and Prevention Month the Ministry for Social Development and Seniors hosted and facilitated a virtual forum entitled "Domestic Violence Awareness". The panel consisted of

Cindy Clarke, the Director of Public Prosecutions; Laurie Shiell, Executive Director of Centre Against Abuse; Tina Laws, Executive Director of Women's Resource Centre; and Susan Adhemar, a Chartered Counselling Psychologist and myself.

Madam President, the in-depth interactive conversation that lasted approximately ninety (90) minutes was aired on CITV and watched by thousands of viewers on Facebook. During the conversation, I shared my personal experience of domestic abuse, and how I overlooked the warning signs of abuse. Honourable Tinee Furbert, JP, MP, Minister of Social Development and Seniors received numerous positive feedback as a result of this forum. I would to take this opportunity to thank the panelist for their time; and valuable insight and expertise on domestic abuse.

Madam President, I am imploring members of our community to start or continue the discussions on the importance of incorporating respect in relationships either it be incorporated in the curriculum for schools, youth activities and sports, and youth groups.

Madam President, additionally to the services provided by the Department of Child and Family Services in supporting healthy teen relationships there are organizations in Bermuda that advocate and ensure teens have access to information and services that support healthy relationships. These support systems are:

- School Counsellors;
- The Family Centre;
- Teen Services;
- Coalition for the Protection of Children; and
- Centre Against Abuse.

Madam President, I want to take this opportunity to highlight and thank Tammy L. Richardson-Augustus JP, a law partner who took the initiative to collaborate with the US non-profit One Love Foundation. One Love Foundation is a national non-profit organization that was created in 2010 in memory of Yeardeley Love, a 22-year old University of Virginia senior who was murdered by her ex-boyfriend just weeks before her graduation that same year.

Madam President, One Love Foundation aims to end relationship abuse by providing the tools, educational resources and workshops to empower young people with the knowledge to identify and avoid abusive relationships. The organization has educated nearly 1.7 million young people through workshops, both in-person and virtually.

Madam President, in July 2021, Ms. Richardson-Augustus organized an inaugural event in partnership with One Love Foundation. The 3-day Student Leadership Summit had thirty student participants aged 14 to 22 from public and private school; and universities. Participants learned about the ten signs of healthy and unhealthy relationships, how to identify and avoid abuse and gained leadership skills to become youth ambassadors.

Madam President, the Government is committed in observing February as Teen Dating Abuse Awareness and Prevention Month on an annual basis and encourages all sectors of our community to do the same. Although, one month a year has been designated to teen dating abuse awareness and prevention the Government supports ongoing initiatives that aims to continue such conversations with teens throughout the year.

Madam President, Members of the Senate and Bermuda's adults as a collective we must remember that teens observe our actions daily regardless if they are positive or negative. We must be committed in doing our part daily to lay and preserve the foundations of a healthy community by having, maintaining and encouraging healthy relationships. Our youth turn to us for guidance that supports healthy interactions, which ultimately fosters healthy adult relationships in our community.

Thank you, **Madam President!**