



**The Hon. Myles LaRoda  
Minister of Social Services, Information  
and Broadcasting**

**Budget Contribution  
to the 2024/2025 Budget Debate**

**Tuesday, 11<sup>th</sup> June, 2024  
In the House of Assembly**

## **INTRODUCTION**

**Madam Speaker:**

**I rise on behalf of the great people of Pinewood. I thank them for their support. They have allowed me to speak on their behalf in this place, and by that fact, allow me to serve this great country on a national level. I am grateful for the confidence vested in me. I promise to represent their interest in this place, and wherever I can.**

**Madam Speaker:**

**I will attend the Awards ceremony at Cleveland Eneas Primary School on the morning of Friday, June 14. I**

**congratulate the Principal, Mrs. Avinel Smith, her executive team, staff and students, in particular the graduating class. A special congratulation goes out to Anthony Forbes, who will be attending Jordon Prince William and Dianka Rolle, who will be attending Nassau Christian Academy in the Fall. May the Eagles continue to soar.**

**Madam Speaker:**

**CLPS captured the primary school track and field meet, the 8<sup>th</sup> title in the past 9 years. I told Freetown that the eagles were coming for “Our Things”.**

**Madam Speaker:**

**The Pinewood Pre-Father's Day Grill and Chill will be held on Saturday, June 15, 2024, between 4pm and 6pm at the Isiah Taylor's Park. All fathers are invited.**

**Madam Speaker:**

**Before I start my contribution, I would like to send out condolences to the family of my childhood friend, my former neighbor and school mate, Class of 78 S. C. McPherson, and Class of 81 at A. F. Adderley, Retired Superintendent, Dencle Barr, who passed yesterday. He was a real good officer, and an even better person. The son of the late trailblazer, the late Effie Walkes.**

**Dencle was a strong supporter of the progressive cause. May his soul rest in peace.**

**Madam Speaker:**

**I want to thank the Prime Minister, the member for Cat island, Rum Cay and San Salvador for appointing me to his cabinet as the Minister of Social Services, Information and Broadcasting. His charge to me was to be sympathetic and empathetic to the most vulnerable among us.**

**Madam Speaker:**

**We are lock and step, and on the same page.**

**Madam speaker:**

**I thank my family including my mother Beverley LaRoda, my wife of 24 years Deidre, my children, my siblings and my entire family for their support. The job that I love can be time consuming, so I thank them for their understanding including my one good daughter WM Toi LaRoda who take every opportunity to remind me of me missing our daddy/daughter lunch date on Fridays.**

**Madam Speaker:**

**I want to thank my Permanent Secretary, Phedra Rahming-Turnquest, Senior Under Secretary, June Collie, Under Secretary, Donette Williamson, Acting Director of Social Services, Assistant Director of Social Services, Ms. Anne Edwards Charlamae Fernanader,**

**Deputy Permanent Secretary, Elthrice Cooper, and the entire executive team, managers and employees at the Ministry and Department of Social Services.**

**Madam Speaker:**

**I want to thank the Director of BIS Elcott Coleby, Executive Director Dianna Swann, the executive team and employees at BIS.**

**Madam Speaker:**

**I would also like to thank the executive chairman Picewell Forbes, the Board of Directors, General Manager, Clint Watson, the executive team including the team in the North, Ms. Allyson Smith, Darren**

**Meadows and Shasheena Rolle Farquharson.  
Management and employees at the BCB.**

**Madam Speaker:**

**As I shift my attention to my portfolio, I am reminded  
that Change is inevitable!**

**It is highly likely that you have heard this time tested  
saying many times before. It communicates a principle  
that is immovable.**

**The purpose of the establishment of Social Services  
has evolved and is evolving. In countries around the  
world, the Ministry of Social Services was established  
to assist individuals and families with emergency**



**matters. Today, the harshness of Hurricanes, especially over the last 25 years, recessions in the local and global economies that significantly contributes to the increase of unemployment has helped to undermine the financial stability of many of our homes.**

**I digress for a moment to commend the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the Honourable Phillip Brave Davis, for his leadership in reducing the levels of unemployment. An increase in job opportunities contributes to decreasing the demand on Social Services.**

**Madam Speaker:**

**The Ministry of Social Services was established in the Bahamas as a part of the social revolution. The philosophy of the Social Revolution as enunciated by our founding father, Sir Lynden Pindling, is to “wipe every tear from every eye.”**

**Change of the status quo, as declared by the Honourable Prime Minister, demands that we provide more services that facilitate our ability to help more people and dry more tears.**

**The Ministry of Social Services, Information and Broadcasting’s 2024/2025 Budget allocation for Head 43 is nineteen million, one hundred seventy-seven**

**thousand four hundred four dollars (19,177,404.00), representing an increase from 2023/2024 Budget allocation of fifteen million, three hundred thirty-six thousand, two hundred sixty dollars (\$15,336.260.00).**

## **DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

**Madam Speaker:**

**The Ministry of Social Services, Information and Broadcasting has many facets. The Department of Social Services is but one of them. It is an entity which has eighteen (18) Units. These are Health Social Services (Sandilands); Health Social Services (PMH); Disability Affairs; Family Island Unit; Northern Bahamas Division; National Parenting Program; Child**

**Care Facilities (Children's Homes); Senior Citizens Unit; Early Children Development Centre; Family Services Division (Domestic Court matters); Trafficking in Persons Unit; Counseling Unit; Domestic Violence Unit; Placement (Adoption) Unit; National Hotline; Child Protection Unit; Williemae Pratt Centre; Simpson Penn Centre.**

**The 2023/2024 Budget allocation for the Department was forty-six million, one hundred and eighty-nine thousand, seven hundred forty-two dollars (\$46,189,742.00) and it has been increased to forty-eight million, nine thousand, two hundred sixty-three dollars (\$48,009,263.00) in this 2024/2025 Budget, representing an increase of one million, eight hundred**

**nineteen thousand, five hundred twenty-one dollars (\$1,819,521.00).**

**Madam Speaker:**

**The Department is perhaps more known for its provision of food assistance and shelter, but they are more than that. The many assistance programs are managed through the Community Support Services Division which offers the following services:**

**Food assistance; burial assistance; major appliances (fridge, stove, bed); electricity and water; temporary shelter; foster care allowance; disability allowance to those awaiting NIB approval; school uniforms; disaster**

**relief (household items only); medical assistance; grants to Non-governmental organizations, etc.**

**Madam Speaker:**

**I stand here in this Honorable House today with a strong sense of patriotic pride because of the very hard and sacrificial work of the staff of the Ministry of Social Services, Information and Broadcasting and its Departments.**

**We are redoubling on our commitment to help and equip the unemployed and those who find themselves unable to survive what we consider everyday life. Compassion always wants to help everyone. While there are always exceptions, The professionals at the**

**Department of Social Services have a heart for the hurting. However, we cannot meet every need. The economic pie is only so big and we must therefore focus on those in the most need, the poorest of the poor.**

**Madam Speaker:**

**To address a problem we must look at it in its entirety. What are the factors that contributed to it? We see persons every few months or year in search of shelter. When asked, they say I have no place to live. The truth is that sometimes there is a place to go, but family appear not to be what we knew in the past. In the past, your family was the safety net when a member of the unit was challenged in any way. Everyone galvanized**

**and ensured that if it was only a 2 room house, space was made to accommodate the family member in need.**

**Homeless numbers seem to be increasing if we accept the anecdotal evidence of those laying on benches and living in their cars. The DOSS has also seen an increase in the number of persons requiring food and temporary shelter. Homelessness in our country is determined by most persons through the anecdotal indicators I previously mentioned. It could mean, however, an individual assessed with a mental condition who requires medication to remain functional and is noncompliant and is on the streets. These individuals, Madam Speaker, should not be our clients as they require a medical intervention in an environment that my colleague for Tall Pines and the Minister of Health**



**can offer; Some are substance abusers and by the construct of our system, unless they have been rehabilitated and are simply finding themselves in need, they too should NOT be our clients.**

**OUR clients are those who are deemed, after assessment, to be truly in need of**

**temporary shelter or other services. Shelter in the past was made available by hotels and guest houses, but we have removed hotels from our listing. I've heard of cases where families lived in excess of a year because they said they had no place to go. Madam Speaker, Yes, as a nation we must assist each other and the state should assist when all else has failed, however, the cycle of repeat applicants for services is concerning.**

## **RISE (Renewing, Inspiring, Sustaining and Empowering)**

**Madam Speaker:**

**There must be an intervention. We propose that our clients are afforded an opportunity to RISE - to return to a degree of normalcy. This means that if you have been assessed and approved for some form of our community support, then you must participate in the relevant RISE sessions. Components will include financial literacy, parenting, job readiness and counselling. We intend to provide these initial components to assist our clients in moving from dependency to empowerment.**

**Madam Speaker:**

**The acronym RISE means Renewing, Inspiring, Sustaining and Empowering. Our RISE components will be provided upon acceptance of any of our services and after assessment. In this instance our conditions will be relevant to what we see emerging. Our main shelter has already been given strategic attention as we have secured the services of Ms. Dawn Darling, an individual who has extensive experience with the management of shelters and work with homelessness. Ms. Darling recently assumed her post as shelter manager and other officers from various sections of the Ministry and its Departments will assist through programs that are intended to reshape, reboot and**

**provide an alternative to those who may have lost hope.  
They will be provided the support to RISE.**

**Madam Speaker:**

**I must mention here that our digital platform, PROMIS will also undergo a review. It is the portal for which persons are able to apply for social assistance, noting that assistance is only provided to those deemed to be the poorest of the poor.**

**The assessment for need is based on a digital proxy means test that is administered through questions. This test will also be reviewed to ensure that the information captured for a decision are indicators of the evolving context of our society.**

**Madam Speaker:**

**Areas addressed by the Department of Social Services during the 2023/2024 Budget are as follows:**

**FAMILY ISLANDS**

**Social workers were placed in North Andros, Central Andros, Cat Island, Crooked Island and Long Island to fill vacancies in the local offices and provide services to those communities. Two vehicles were South Andros and Exuma Districts.**

## **HUMAN RESOURCES**

**The backlog of outstanding human resources matters was significantly resolved. These included some outstanding promotions, appointments to the permanent and pensionable establishment. Promotions included 2 Deputy Directors, 13 Assistant Directors and 28 clerical officers during the Service Wide Promotion. Requests were also made for the provision of additional Social Workers. Some 33 staff were confirmed in their posts. We continue to await MPS's processing of the remaining persons on the Unemployment Work Assistance Program.**

**Madame Speaker:**

**The Department's headquarters located in Sunshine Plaza, Baillou Hill Rd. is under extensive renovations. Once completed in 2025, the expanded premises will include a new PROMIS Call Centre to provide easy access for clients to services offered by the Department; a fully accessible facility for clients with disabilities; a fully equipped Disaster Management Unit and Emergency Operation Centre (so that the Department can efficiently perform its function in natural disaster).**

**Children and Family Services Unit was relocated to the new Prime Plaza building located on East St. South**

**where they are better able to provide services for children and families in crisis;**

**The Eight Mile Rock office was relocated to the new, state of the art premises in the Obadiah H. Wilchcombe complex.**

- Satellite offices were opened in West End and High Rock, East End Grand Bahama to provide critical services to these remote communities.**
- The Grand Bahama office of the Department of Rehabilitative Welfare Services relocated to the Workers House Building on Freeport.**
- The Department of Rehabilitative/Welfare Services relocated to expanded and significantly improved facilities at Building B, Sunshine Plaza, and New Providence.**



**Madame Speaker:**

**I wish to note here that officers of this Department will also be accommodated in the new Family Court Complex on Bernard Road. I extend sincere thanks to the Chief Justice, Ian Winder, for ensuring that we are accommodated in this modern facility which, when officially opened, will transform how the public accesses the court system.**

**Madam Speaker:**

**We recognize the challenges of Long Island and will open a new office to assist us in reaching our clients and other vulnerable groups. Major renovations to the**

**Nazareth Centre and Elizabeth Estates Children's Homes are to be undertaken.**

**Madam Speaker:**

**The services we provide represent the Heartbeat of our nation. The dedication, diligence and compassion of our staff is the “HeartBeat” of the nation. Our Heartbeat at Social Services and by extension, our clients, is getting stronger. A strong Heartbeat signals/or represents a strong nation. Our Ministry recently launched a monthly program, "The Heartbeat" on ZNS television. The purpose of this program is threefold:**

- i) To improve communication between our internal and external customers,**
- ii) Identify problems, commit to solutions and**
- iii) Celebrate the achievements of our Ministry and Community.**

**Madam Speaker:**

**WE will tell OUR story - the good and the bad.**

**One of the most exhilarating and encouraging experiences I have had in recent times is during the Heartbeat's inaugural television program, "What went wrong with the family and How do we fix it" The program was in partnership with the Ministry of National Security and Ministry of Education. One of**

**our guests was a domestic Violence victim, Petra Curry. I salute Ms. Curry for her bravery. My team is now engaged with our partners to provide counselling and other assistance to Ms. Curry.**

### **COMMUNITY AFFAIRS DIVISION**

**Madam Speaker:**

**Our Community Affairs Division is being revitalized to provide resources and increase the number of programs in community centers that are designed to be support systems for families in the areas of skills training, volunteerism, job opportunities and increased ownership opportunities for the entrepreneurs. The ultimate goal of the community centers is to be a**

**catalyst to transform all communities into safe productive areas where residents can live and share at the local, community and national levels of our society. We recognize that stronger communities create stronger families. In other words, we are in the business of helping to improve the quality of life for Bahamians.**

**Madam Speaker:**

**Computer Literacy is a must. Technology is rapidly evolving and advancing to include AI which simply means that computer programs can do tasks that one time ago could only be done by humans. Computer Literacy IS a prerequisite of progress. Therefore, we are expanding our Computer Training Program to**

**include online training for people in the inner-city communities.**

**Our Centers will introduce Daytime and Summer programmes that will foster inclusion and empowerment, resulting in stronger families and communities. The areas of attention are as follows:**

- 1. Senior's Programme**
- 2. Literacy Programme for Adults**
- 3. Job Readiness Programme for young adults**
- 4. Summer Camp for Persons with disabilities**
- 5. Etiquette Programmes designed for all ages**
- 6. Climate Action Programmes for all ages (outfitting of Centre for possible emergency shelter use, backyard farming lessons, community beautification projects)**

**7. Increased collaboration with NGOs, CSOs, Private and Public Sector partners**

**8. Identity and Rebranding of community Centre**

**9. National Pride Campaign - engage residents and businesses in communities in events that will increase their national pride (community meet and greet, blood drives, medical screening, exercise activities, clean up campaigns)**

**10. Training for staff**

**11. Solicitation of volunteers for programmes**

**12. Computer Literacy Programme for all ages**

**At the Ministry of Social Services, Information and Broadcasting, we are determined to build bridges from the cycle of dependency to self-sufficiency to economic empowerment.**

**When we release our focus from silos and accept that we are actually all headed towards the common goal of building a better Bahamas, then true partnership is fostered; A partnership where the Government recognizes that it CANNOT DO IT ALL. The church and civil society working together, in unison, can only bode well for our country. Our funds may not be great, but we provide some assistance to our partners to extend the reach of the government.**

**We encourage recipients of Grants to be good stewards of the funds entrusted to them by accounting for their funds. Madam Speaker, all entities receiving funds must produce an expense report indicating how**



**the funds were spent. They must also continue to be compliant by producing the proper documents required by the Government for receipt of its funds. This is important to note as some entities continue to seek a Grant from the Government, but are not compliant.**

**I am pleased to report that in the 2024/2025 Budget an allocation has been made in Budget Head 44, The Department of Social Services, for F.O.A.M. in the amount of \$20,000.00. This allocation is truly an acknowledgement of the dedication and commitment of this ngo, led by Ms. Khandi Gibson, a lady who has exhibited great commitment to the cause of assisting families of murder victims. She remained resilient and, in spite of limited support, she has shown the Bahamas**

**what is possible when you are determined to ensure that your vision becomes a reality, if only starting on a small scale with your own means.**

**Also of note is the substantive increase to the Bahamas Red Cross Society in the Ministry's Budget Head 43. They went from an allocation of \$66,000.00 in the 2023/2024 Budget to an allocation of \$500,000.00 in the 2024/2025 Budget. The Red Cross is a staple in our country who has provided consistent support over the years and in the most challenging times of our history. We can never forget their intervention in the aftermath of hurricane Dorian and COVID. They remain one of our trusted partners.**

**Madam Speaker:**

**Grants allocated to other organizations in the 2024/2025 Budget from Heads 43 and 44 of my Ministry include the following entities with line items in the respective budget Heads (those who received increases).**

**The Bilney Lane Children's Home whose estimated Budget for 2023/2024 was one hundred and thirty-one thousand, seven hundred and twenty-five dollars (\$131,725.00) has increased by sixty eight thousand dollars (\$68,000.00) in this 2024/2025 Budget estimates to one hundred and ninety nine thousand, seven hundred and twenty-five dollars (\$199,725.00).**

**The Bahamas Children's Emergency Hostel whose estimated Budget for 2023/2024 was two hundred and sixty-four thousand, dollars (\$264,000.00) has increased by ninety thousand dollars (\$90,000.00) in this 2024/2025 Budget estimating to three hundred and fifty-four thousand, and twenty-five dollars (\$354,000.00).**

**The Elizabeth's Estates Children's Home whose estimated Budget for 2023/2024 was six hundred and eleven thousand, eight hundred and seventy-five dollars (\$611,875.00) has increased by one hundred and fifty thousand dollars (\$150,000.00) in this 2024/2025 Budget estimating to seven hundred and sixty-one thousand, eight hundred and seventy-five dollars (\$761,875.00).**

**Coleby House whose estimated Budget for 2023/2024 was ninety-three thousand, five hundred dollars (\$93,500.00) has increased by ten thousand dollars (\$10,000.00) in this 2024/2025 Budget estimating to one hundred and three thousand, five hundred dollars (\$103,500.00).**

**The Old Bight Missions Home in Cat Island whose estimated Budget for 2023/2024 was two hundred and fifty thousand dollars (\$250,000.00) has increased by fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000.00) in this 2024/2025 Budget estimating to three hundred thousand dollars (\$300,000.00).**

**Madam Speaker,**

**Another new grant recipient is the United Faith Ministries who has been approved to receive seventy five thousand dollars (\$75,000.00) in this 2024/2025 budget.**

**Madam Speaker:**

**Our Disabled community has not been overlooked as REACH Organization (The Bahamas Resource and Educational source for Autism) whose estimated Budget for 2023/2024 was one hundred and ten thousand dollars (\$110,000.00) has increased by forty thousand dollars (\$40,000.00) in this 2024/2025 Budget**

**estimating to one hundred and fifty thousand dollars (\$150,000.00).**

**We look forward to seeing the results of our grants manifested in the various communities.**

**THE DEPARTMENT OF GENDER AND FAMILY AFFAIRS**

---

**Madam Speaker:**

**The Department of Gender and Family Affairs Proposes Policy and embraces practicality. This Department of Gender and Family Affairs is another one of the departments whose purpose is foundational and fundamental to restoring, increasing and developing strong families.**

**Madame Speaker I submit, when every Bahamian believes that they can achieve because there is equality and equity, when justice and security is evident across the board, Paradise will be restored. WE are on our way!**

**The strides made towards equity and equality for women through the Department of gender and family affairs was multi-tiered through new policies, local and international events and initiatives.**

**The achievements for 2023/24 of the Department of Gender & Family affairs include:**



**Protection Against Violence Act, 2023 includes the establishment of the Protection against Violence Commission and Secretariat that would assist in coordinating approaches to combat violence, providing technical assistance, and strengthening national response to violence.**

**The Department of Gender and Family Affairs has launched seven (7) Family Island Coordination Councils. The councils comprise of volunteers and community leaders to address gender-based violence. They are now organizing activities and being trained in the protocol of identifying and reporting gender-based violence. The work will continue with urgency and priority.**

**We are establishing women's shelters. Our Ministry has been approved to purchase a building for use as a shelter for female victims of domestic violence and their children. I note that the purchase of the building should be concluded by the end of this Budget period.**

**A second shelter is nearing completion and will be operated in conjunction with the Ministry of National Security, through the RBPF, Domestic Violence Unit.**

**These new shelters are part of a promise delivered as in 2012, the government agreed that the Commonwealth of the Bahamas should participate in the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) strengthening**

**State Accountability and community action for Ending Violence against women.**

**13 WAMM: (August 2023) In August last year, a successful 13th Commonwealth Women's Affairs Meeting (13 WAMM) was hosted by the Bahamas at the Atlantis Resort. Commonwealth colleagues addressed issues including Gender and Climate change, Disability Inclusion and ending Violence against Women and Girls.**

**I am honoured to now serve as Chair. I intend to follow the roadmap of Gender Equality and empowerment for women, including economic opportunities for women and better representation in decision making positions.**

## **Gender Based Violence**

**Still on the international front, in April this year, UN Women Multi-Country Office for the Caribbean and the United States Department of State, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) partnered with the Ministry of Social Services, Information and Broadcasting to launch a three part program, Vulnerable Population Response for Bahamas Law Enforcement and criminal justice agencies.**

**The programme will strengthen legislative and policy frameworks, capacities among key shareholders in human rights, gender-based violence and international norms. We expect to**

**Increase support for perpetrators through rehabilitation without incarceration.**

### **Women's Health Survey**

**Madam Speaker, today I stand in the office of Minister to encourage every woman and every responsible man to commit to doing all that we can to help influence the reduction of violence towards women in our beloved Bahamaland. The frequency of violence is unacceptably high. In collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), a Women's Health Survey was conducted in 2022, the results were announced last year. The survey results revealed that 1 in 4 women in the Bahamas have experienced violence in one form or another.**

**The results of the Women Health survey will be used to develop a Comprehensive Care Model that will improve public and private services for women who have experienced violence. It is also an empowerment tool because it addresses a number of the root causes that requires public education through our schools, civil society, churches and counselling centers.**

**On behalf of our team at social services I thank the NGO's who are making a difference. Let us all commit and for some, recommit to unite to destroy the menace call Gender Based Violence.**

**Madame Speaker:**

**During the National Women's Week November 2023, the Department of Gender and Family Affairs hosted an annual Empower forum at the Super club Breezes with powerful and influential headliners. The keynote speaker was the Managing Director of First Caribbean Bank, Ms Jacqui Bend. Enthusiasm was high Dr Bend and the panel of dynamic experts interacted with attendees who included students of the Willie Mae Pratt Centre for Girls.**

**The DGFA also observed International Women's Day and partnered with The Bahamas Development Bank on March 8<sup>th</sup> to host a forum for women entrepreneurs.**

**The Ministry is pleased that the bank announced its intent to launch a new lending product designed specifically for women entrepreneurs with the goal of removing the financial barriers, and helping women to achieve their entrepreneurial success.**

**Madame Speaker:**

**We have officially entered the Hurricane season, the Department of Gender and Family Affairs partnered with the Bahamas Psychological Association to provide stakeholders with tips and tools to be better prepared physically and mentally in the event of a disaster. Many Bahamians who experienced the wrath of hurricanes are still emotionally traumatized. Not to mention the fight to manage stress from damages or**



**loss of home and property. According to participants, the Disaster Preparedness and your Mental Health Workshop was helpful.**

**The Men's Desk at the Department of Gender and Family Affairs advocates for the full engagement of men and boys as agents of change and violence prevention. Men and boys as agents of change and violence prevention and are strategic partners and allies in the achievement of gender equality.**

***Reclaiming our boys, a mentorship programme aims at exposing and educating boys to a new reality of masculinity, and seeks to build communication***

***Skills, self-esteem and respect.***

## **United Nations Commission on the Status of Women**

**Madam Speaker:**

**I will briefly speak about the United Nations CSW Meeting last year. I am pleased to have led a delegation to the United Nations for the Sixty Eighth session of the commission on the status of women (CSW68) in March of this year.**

**One of the highlights was a Side Event hosted by The Bahamas and the Commonwealth Secretariat. I wish to extend my thanks to the staff of the Ministry of Social Services, Information and Broadcasting, and Ambassador Stan Smith and staff of the Bahamas Permanent Mission to the United Nations, as well as**

**Consul General Leroy Major for the tremendous assistance they provided to the delegation.**

**The conclusions of CSW emphasized the need for inclusive policies, meaningful participation of women in decision-making processes and meaningful participation that underscore a roadmap for furthering gender equality.**

**The Sixty-Ninth Session of CSW is scheduled for March 2025, and will focus on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women.**

## **NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (NCPD)**

**Madam Speaker:**

**Our strategy to strengthen Families includes empowering Persons with Disabilities by Protecting disability rights, ensuring access, promoting disability inclusion and advancing equal opportunities. The Central Bank of the Bahamas stepped forward to include the blind community. They conducted consultations with the community of blind persons before the release of their new notes. As a result of the consultations, the Bank included an embedded raised symbol that could be used by blind persons to determine the denomination of the note.**

**The National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD) was established by The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) Act, 2014. The Commission and its Secretariat continue the mandate to oversee the implementation of the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) Act, 2014. The NCPD is taking a multi-pronged approach to advancing the vision and mission through on-going registration of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) is now at 1500. Equal Opportunities are being advanced through Disability Empowerment Workshops which provide sensitivity training to the general public. In the budget year 2023/24, Town Hall Meetings were held in New Providence, North and South Long Island and North and Central Andros. Our next family island visit will be to the islands of Acklins, Crooked Island and Long Cay.**

**A Disability Day of Love was held in Freeport, Grand Bahama.**

**Inclusion in action was demonstrated in culture and sports as the persons with disabilities participated in Junkanoo under the group the Chosen Ones; they lead the 2023 Boxing Day Parade. Special Olympians also won medals at the world Special Olympics in Germany. Our persons with disabilities were not only included in the ultimate cultural parade and the Special Olympics, they excelled! We congratulate them!**

**The NCPD is empowering and equipping the Persons of disabilities. The NCPD has a complimentary Wheelchair program, Forty (40) brand new wheelchairs were distributed to persons with mobility issues**

**throughout the Bahamas. Walkers, canes and crutches were also distributed free of charge to those requiring them.**

**There is more progress. We have engaged the services of sign language interpreters to ensure that those who are Hard hearing (HOH) or Deaf Have full access to the budget debate. We are grateful for their service in the national interest and applaud their skills. The NCPD has also provided an interpreter at the Bahamas Technical & Vocational Institute (BTVI) to ensure that persons with disabilities have full access to participate in higher learning.**

**The budget allocation for 2023/2024 was well invested and we will continue our trend in the 2024/2025 Budget.**

**Madam Speaker:**

**We recently launched a strong Public Relations Campaign. It promotes Public Awareness, inclusion and equal rights for the entire Community of persons with Disabilities. The PSA features one of our local celebrities, Sawyer Boy. The focus is accessible parking. During the new fiscal year, the PSA will promote inclusion and equal rights for the entire Community of persons with disabilities.**

**The Ministry of Social Services and the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities are deeply committed to improving the lives of every person with**



**a disability throughout the Bahamas, from Grand Bahama in the North to Inagua in the South.**

## **WILLIEMAE PRATT CENTRE FOR GIRLS**

**Madam Speaker,**

**The Government is very supportive of the growth and development of the Williemae Pratt Centre and we recognize that staff along with a supporting community play an important role in transforming the residents into positive productive young girls/ladies.**

**The Centre is currently in transition which will result in a modern Centre with more vocational, educational,**

**sporting and cultural programmes to prepare the residents for successful reintegration into society.**

**Madam Speaker:**

**Training is essential and the staff will continue to be provided with an opportunity to receive training to ensure that they remain up to date with 21st Century Best Practices. Such training will include: corrections, leadership skills through understanding and adapting to human behaviors, communication skills, team building, conflict management, human resource management, legal responsibilities, stress management, workplace diversity, performance skills, security and situational decision-making skills;**

**Madam Speaker:**

**Efforts have been made to improve the working conditions for staff, and by extension the living conditions for residents at The Willie Mae Pratt Centre for Girls.**

**Presently, personnel and residents from The Bahamas Department of Corrections (BDCS) are assisting with the renovations at the Centre's (Cottages One & Two), and we say a special thank you to them, as we are grateful for their kind assistance. In addition, the residents from BDCS renovated the cosmetology room. I am pleased to announce that as a result, there is a state of the art room for training and operation.**

**Madam Speaker,**

**There has been an improvement to the Centre's compound lighting in 2024, and lighting improvements are ongoing to assist with security measures. I note that because of the number of residents (thirty-seven) presently being housed at WMPCG, members from BDCS assist with patrolling the perimeter daily; and the Centre recently purchased eight (08) high definition cameras that has enhanced security significantly.**

### **Education 2024/2025**

**Residents are allowed to continue with their education at Penn/Pratt Co-Educational Unit:**

**Twenty-six (26) resident took between one and five BJs; and seven (7) residents took between one and six BGCSEs**

**Very shortly, once it is determined that residents are academically challenged, residents will be allowed to enroll in vocational certification courses at The Bahamas Technical & Vocational Institute (BTVI), so that they will be trained in a skill, and become productive citizens. If residents are released from our care while they are students at BTVI they will be allowed to continue with their studies.**

**We are grateful for the support and collaborative efforts of the Administrators, Teachers and Staff at the Penn /Pratt Co-Educational Unit and thank them for their**

**efforts in educating and reforming our residents. Also, we wish to thank the Zonta Club of New Providence for providing The Willie Mae Centre for Girls with after school teachers. Those teachers were extremely instrumental in preparing our young girls for both the BJC and BGCSE exams.**

### **Reform and Rehabilitative Measures**

**In addition to In-House Programmes, the Centre has partnered with other community groups/stakeholders for positive results.**

**New Dimension Church and Southland Cathedral Global Ministries provides the residents at The Willie Mae Pratt Centre for Girls with their spiritual aspect**

during detention and for this we are grateful to Bishop Victor Johnson, Pastor Jackie Johnson, Rev, Dr. Ivan Butler, Pastor Devard Francis and their members for their kind service and to all other churches and civil groups for their gifts, support and words of encouragements.

### **Mentorship**

The Urban Renewal Division of the Royal Bahamas Police Force (Fox Hill) along with the Prison Fellowship Ministries are a part of the volunteers for the centers, and assist with mentoring the residents.

**Madam Speaker:**

**We are pleased to note that most of the normal activities have resumed, inclusive of weekly visitations.**

**Our aim and objective is to ensure that residents are able to maintain and /or foster a closer relationship with family while at The Willie Mae Pratt Centre for Girls.**

**The residents of the Centre are required to participate in a number of in House Mandatory Programmes designed to promote behavioral changes and develop life skills, among others.**



**We have reunited twelve (12) of our girls with their family for the year 2024. Based on our reports they are doing well. For the year 2024, to date there were twenty-three (23) admissions at The Willie Mae Pratt Centre for Girls.**

**While this is a challenging period for all of us, who are involved in our juvenile facility it is also an exciting time in that we are able to meet our challenges. I am certain that the centre will transition our residents into positive productive young ladies.**

**SIMPSON PENN**

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN THE 2023/2024 BUDGET**

**Madam Speaker:**

**The Simpson Penn Centre for Boys introduced several mentoring programs and thus far programs listed have shown great success.**

### **Mentoring Programs**

- **Police Intervention - Program Royal Bahamas**

#### **Police Force (RBPF)**

- **Youth Sports & Culture Mentorship Art Program**
- **Chiles' Motivational Program**
- **Body Temple Health and Wellness Program**
- **National Training Agency Reentry/Job readiness**

#### **Program**

- **National Drug Council Program**

- **Bahamas Technical Vocational Institute (BTVI) Soft Skills Training Program**

- **Recreational Therapy Program (Mental Health)**

- **Sports Program – (Basketball Camp)**

- **Rotary Club Mentorship Program**

- **Kiwanis Club Mentorship Program**

- **Online Peace Actualization Community Transformation (PACT) Life Coaching Program**

- **Spiritual Enrichment - Various local church organizations**

- **Creative Christian Arts Ministries International**

- **Living Waters Kingdom Ministries**

- **Life Changers Ministries International**

- **Transformers Ministry of the High-bury Park**

- **Evangelistic Temple Church**

- **Church of Christ**

## **Facility Repairs**

**Throughout the year (2023), maintenance, repairs, and renovations were performed at the Centre to ensure its proper upkeep. The Centre underwent the following repairs.**

- **Restored, upgraded, and replaced telephones and telephone lines. (Batelco - BTC)**
- **Extermination of Cottage #1 – (Ministry of Works)**
- **Installation of additional cameras & equipment upgrade (CCTV Bahamas)**
- **Install Hurricane Proof Windows - Cottages 1 & 2 (Chipman’s Building Company CBC)**
- **Roof Repairs to Cottages 1 & 2**

- **Interior painting of Cottages 1 & 2**

### **Security Training (In-house)**

**Security and Custodial Officers were trained by Simpson Penn Centre for Boys Head Security to improve their knowledge and abilities while also receiving information and instruction on how to do specific tasks more effectively.**

- Radio Communication**
- Proper Upkeep of Diary**
- Report Writing**

**Madam Speaker:**

**The success stories (2023) for the boys of the school are as follows:**

□ Ten (10) boys have graduated and earned their certifications in Carpentry, Plumbing and Electrical work from the Bahamas Technical Vocational Institute (BTVI)

□ The online Peace Actualization Community Transformation (PACT) Urban Peace Program in Toronto Canada was successfully completed by two (2) boys.

**Madam Speaker,**

**It should also be noted that the majority of the residents were enrolled in an alternative educational program at Penn Pratt Co-Educational School. The academic**

**achievements of the students in the year 2023 were exceptional, with 60% successfully passing the National examination, Bahamas Junior Certificate (BJC), with a 'C' average or above in different subjects. Moreover, the residents' grade point averages for the Christmas term school reports were impressive, with two residents achieving a GPA of 3.00 or higher and others reaching a 2.00.**

### **Success Stories - 2024**

**□ In June 2024, the National Training Agency (NTA) is anticipating the graduation of five (5) boys**

**□ A candidate from Simpson Penn has been selected to receive a four-year college s – 2024 scholarship in**

**the United States for further education, the process has already commenced with September as the start tentative date as an in-kind donation from various churches.**

### **UPCOMING PLANS**

**Ongoing facility repairs will continue during the new fiscal budget.**

#### **Security Training**

- **Training on security procedures provided by the National Security department.**

**Madam Speaker the following programs will continue and further development will continue.**



- **Police Intervention Program – Royal Bahamas Police Force (RBPF)**

- **Youth Sports & Culture Mentorship Art Program**

- **Chiles' Motivational Program - Canada**

- **Body Temple Health and Wellness Program**

- **National Training Agency Reentry/Job readiness Program**

- **National Drug Council Program**

- **Bahamas Technical Vocational Institute (BTVI) Soft Skills Training Program**

- **Recreational Therapy Program (Mental Health) - Sandilands Rehabilitation Centre**

- **Sports Program – (Basketball)**

- **Rotary Club Mentorship Program**

- **Kiwanis Club Mentorship Program**

- **Online Peace Actualization Community**

## **Transformation (PACT) Life Coaching Program**

- **Spiritual Enrichment - Various local church organizations**

- **Creative Christian Arts Ministries International**

- **Living Waters Kingdom Ministries**

- **Life Changers Ministries International**

- **Transformers Ministry of the High-bury Park**

- **Evangelistic Temple Church**

- **Church of Christ**

- **(NEW) Christ Community Church**

- **(NEW) Agape Church**

- **(NEW) Sports Program (Flag Football)**

- **(NEW) Royal Bahamas Defence Force Drilling & Mentorship Program**
- **(NEW) Farming Program - Bahamas Agriculture Industrial Corporation (BAIC)**

## **THERAPUTIC BOARDING SCHOOL FOR BOYS**

**Madam Speaker:**

**A Committee for At-Risk Youth was appointed, comprising of myself and the members for Engleston, Free Town and Yamacraw. We convened our first meeting on 28th February, 2024 and met consistently to come up with a plan to address our young school aged boys who may be at risk. Consequently, it was agreed that a program should be designed to capture**

**those students who were chronically problematic in schools, but were not yet adjudicated by the Court system. Also, this population would initially include male students who were not in a wholesome family structure and would benefit from a twenty-four hour (full time) structured environment, differentiated from the Programme S.U.R.E. which operates during the regular school hours.**

**After consultation, approval was granted for the introduction of the Bahamas' first therapeutic boarding school program which will include a psycho-educational, academic and vocational criteria and a multi-disciplinary boarding school approach for at-risk boys ages fourteen (14) years and older.**

**The primary elements of the program are inclusive of: Academic Development, Therapy (emotional development), Career & Skills Development and Physical Development. These features will be encompassed with Housing, Trauma Informed Staff and Family Involvement components that aim to provide positive family style structure for the students, staff training and various forms of family engagement. This program will also be scalable and therefore adaptable to other “day time” school populations.**

## **COMMUNICATION UNIT**

**Madam Speaker,**

**The recent adjustment to the portfolio of The Ministry of Social Services to include The Bahamas Information Services and the Broadcasting Corporation of The Bahamas is an asset to the people of our Bahamaland as mindsets are transformed through communication.**

**Having an appreciation for the role of communication in personal, corporate and national development, we have expanded our communications strategy to include the monthly publication of the Social Uplifting Newsletter. We tell 'our' story in the SUN. The SUN also addresses our social challenges head on. Here is the first edition Madam Speaker, There are reports featuring our staff and clients that inspire and ignite hope! It is solution based in approach and designed to help fuel our individual and collective commitment and**

**determination to RISE! I invite members of this honourable House to share the SUN digitally by scanning the code provided at the back.**

**Our publication, the Social Uplifting Network Newsletter, the television program, “the Heartbeat”, combined with the Bahamas Information Services and The Broadcasting Corporation uniquely positions us to play a meaningful role in accelerating the restoration, growth and development of the Bahamas. Stay tuned for our soon to be introduced podcast.**

## **BAHAMAS INFORMATION SERVICES**

**Madam Speaker:**

**I turn my attention to the Bahamas Information Services Department.**

- The approved budget estimate for BIS, Head 16, is \$2,620,652. This represents an increase of just \$23,000 over the previous fiscal year.**
  
- In the current fiscal year we worked closely with Department of Information and Communications Technology, DICT, to facilitate the upgrade the department's website, making it fully compliant with government's IT security and formatting protocols, making it more interactive, more customer friendly and with a more defined news, information and services theme.**



- **We expanded content storage capacity with the installation of a new server. This new unit provides 62 terabytes of active storage and 18 terabytes of compressed backup storage.**

- **We are upgrading and expanding the bandwidth of our incoming data lines to support livestream services, particularly our internet radio and podcast, the LINK. Our podcasts are currently pre-recorded.**

- **We also continue to digitalize all of our current print editorial content as we migrate to a total paperless communications environment.**

- **Just to update the House on the status of the new corporate offices for BIS, the Grand Bahama office has**

been relocated from Millennium House to Siboney. I extend my thanks to my cabinet colleague, Minister Ginger Moxey, the Minister for Grand Bahama and her Permanent Secretary.

- We are in the advanced stages of securing a new location for the Nassau offices.

**Madam Speaker:**

**BIS remains committed to expense control.**

**BROADCASTING CORPORATION OF THE BAHAMAS**

**Madam Speaker:**

**I turn now to The Broadcasting Corporation of The Bahamas, our national state broadcaster. For the first time in a very long time, we know what indeed it takes to operate the national network every year. During the mid-year budget, the corporation provided a full analysis and accounting of its expenses, obligation, and operating expenses. We know that it takes some 19 million dollars annually to operate ZNS. So when you take the 8 to 9 million that the corporation has received over the years in subvention from the government added to the 5 million in revenue produced by the BCB it paints an even clearer picture of the financial challenges. However, thankfully we believe we are moving in the right direction now that we know what the numbers are. In this fiscal budget the BCB was able to get a small increase of about 1 million in their**

**subvention moving it from 9 million to 10.3 million dollars.**

**We are grateful for the increase in subvention as the BCB is fully engulfed in badly needed and overdue infrastructural upgrade to its properties and headquarters as well as critical technical upgrades needed to bring the corporation in line with industry standards, decrease its expenditure and increase revenue opportunities that will make the entity more viable. Additionally, since last year this time, the BCB has relaunched, rebranded and restructured. Introducing in phases new locally produced shows by the corporation, and a revamped flagship news product set to debut in a matter of weeks along with new daily tv current affairs and entertainment shows. The**

**corporation was also able to replace its fleet of vehicles that were less than standard and were plagued with mechanical issues for years. Both Grand Bahama and New Providence now have new news and radio vehicles.**

**Madam Speaker,**

**If you've been watching, you will have seen the transformation of the BCB right before your eyes. As you can appreciate in the broadcasting industry, equipment life span is becoming shorter, therefore scheduled upgrades must now become a part of the planning yearly at the BCB as failure to do so will create systemic issues that, in the long run, causes the corporation more money.**

**The technical upgrades going on at the BCB is pegged at just over 1 million dollars but will not satisfy all the immediate needs. The upgrading of the master controls and programming systems are long overdue and must take place soon to ensure the corporation stays on air. ZNS' main tv studio has undergone its first comprehensive renovation since it was opened by the late Queen Elizabeth II more than 30 years ago when television was introduced. Today we have a modern, state of the art studio with technical and lighting systems that will rival any competitor in the region. The newsroom studio which hosts the national broadcast every evening, is presently being upgraded to mirror that of the Studio A. It will also be expanded to now contain two tv sets.**

**The corporation is also investing money in its protection against lightning strikes by installing proper groundings and resisters that protect the tower and equipment at the Rusty Bethel drive headquarters. Having suffered several strikes last year that impacted equipment, it is critical for this installation to take place. During the mid-year budget, we made the case that critical funding was needed to complete these technical upgrades and replacement. We remain resolute in our quest to see this phase completed as the corporation plays a critical role during the hurricane season in ensuring The Bahamas navigates through any pending storm or threats to our archipelago. And in case anyone is wondering, these upgrades and refurbishment are not luxury items but a national necessity in linking the islands of the**

**Bahamas and ensuring we can effectively communicate to Bahamians on every island and anytime. ZNS must never be in a vulnerable position where it cannot deliver on this national mandate. Whatever is broken that hinders this, we must fix it and fix it fast!**

**Madam Speaker,**

**While systems, and infrastructure are being updated, we are also strengthening the most important resource, the people. We are happy that outstanding personal monuments and remuneration due to the previous industrial agreement were for the most part settled. This included making outstanding pension and gratuity payments for retirees and reinstating the medical**



**insurance which is fully funded by the corporation. This is an area that must be looked at. We recognize the importance of providing health insurance for our team however we must find a way to do this in a financially sustainable manner, so that every three months the policy is not jeopardized. The corporation is also engaged in a skills upgrade program to provide opportunities for employees to sharpen their tools or engage in workshops and seminars that enhance their performance.**

**This past year, the BCB has successfully delivered on its mandate to broadcast national events. We are the authority on international events. Our programming is now more engaging and entertaining, and our news and current affairs mandate continues to lead**

**nationally. We are inspiring daily and are ensuring that the archipelago stays united. This new fiscal year is expanded to be a banner year for ZNS as only the sun covers the Bahamas better! With new revenue streams set to come to fruition and new products set to break revenue ceilings, The Broadcasting Corporation of the Bahamas is bracing for great success as it continues to fulfil its mandate to the Bahamian people.**

## **CONCLUSION**

**Madam Speaker,**

**I conclude with this; my portfolio represents the “heartbeat” of the nation. We cover persons from birth to their farewell. It is a job that my team and I take very**

**seriously. It requires a new perspective and constant reviewing to ensure that what is provided is still relevant, considering the times in which we find ourselves.**

**This 2024/2025 Budget provides us with the means to expand our reach, to undertake new initiatives, to rebrand and deliver assistance across various platforms to those who are in the most need.**

**No Government can meet every need of its citizens, so it is my pledge to continue to foster an environment conducive to forming strategic partnerships that would permit us to expand our reach beyond our limit.**

**Madam Speaker:**

**In all things and at all times I give thanks, and on this occasion , Madam Speaker, I extend my sincere thanks to my management team and all staff throughout the various Departments and sections of the Ministry of Social Services, Information and Broadcasting for their commitment to our goals. I am indeed grateful for their support. I say to them let us continue to work unto God.**

**Madam Speaker:**

**Pinewood is pleased and honoured to support this 2024/2025 Budget.**

**I thank you.**