



Ministry of Finance

Public Consultation on The Draft Statistics Bill, 2020

September 1, 2020

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Ministry of Finance is inviting public feedback on the draft Statistics Bill, 2020 (the Bill) which seeks to establish the Bahamas National Statistical Institute and a National Statistical System and would facilitate the establishment of standards for collecting, compiling, analyzing and publishing official statistics. *For instructions on how to provide feedback, see section IV (Feedback Guidelines).*
2. In 2016, the government obtained a loan from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) to improve the management of the public finances and procurement, and to enhance its capacity to monitor progress and implementation of key government priorities. Component II of the Public Financial Management and Performance Reform Project aims to bolster the ability of the government to collect data and produce quality statistics and guide the modernization of the Department of Statistics (“the DOS”).

II. BACKGROUND

3. The Statistics Act, 1973 (the Act) established the DOS and provided for the taking of census and the collection, compilation, analysis, and publication of statistical information. The Bill, which was modelled after the CARICOM Model Statistics Bill, seeks to address the shortcoming identified in the Act.
 - It did not provide for a lead agency or a well-defined strategy to coordinate information production.
 - Production of statistics is fragmented with no coordination mechanism, no common strategy and programme, and no institutional leadership.
 - Statistics are disseminated by other agencies, including the Ministry of Health, the Department of Tourism, the Ministry of Education and the Central Bank of The Bahamas without an overarching strategy or plan.

- The Bahamas national statistical system did not consider important requirements, such as independence, transparency, and accountability of the statistical system.

III. PROPOSED LEGISLATION

4. In keeping with best practice for promoting professional independence, accountability and transparency in statistical agencies, the key features of the Bill are as follows:
 - The establishment of the National Statistical Institute (the “Institute”) as an autonomous body corporate to replace the existing Department of Statistics. The Institute would have a government-appointed board which will appoint the Managing Director, in consultation with the Minister.
 - The introduction of mandatory annual reporting by the Institute to the Parliament—as an accountability measure.
 - The appointment, by the board, of an advisory body, the National Statistical Committee (NSC)—to be comprised of heads of other agencies in the national statistical ecosystem, as well as representatives of the private sector. The intent is to ensure a participatory, consultative, all-inclusive, and transparent approach to the development and dissemination of national statistics.
 - The development of the National Statistical Strategy by the NSC, which is to be published on the official website of the Institute and reviewed every three years.
 - The inclusion of criminal offense provisions that seek to reinforce compliance with the Bill; and the power of the Managing Director to compound offences and fine persons for failure to comply with the Institute’s request for information.
 - The Institute will have access to all records, documents, returns, and certificates in the control of public bodies from which information is sought for the purpose of the Act.
 - Public officers presently employed with the DOS or contract officers with at least three years of continuous service will be given employment options—to either retire from the public service, seek a transfer to the Institute or remain in the public service under specific conditions.
5. The statement of objects and reasons at the end of the Bill provides a brief explanation of the various legislative clauses.

IV. FEEDBACK GUIDELINES

6. The Ministry of Finance appreciates your participation in this important initiative. To ensure that the consultation is productive and focused, we ask that you kindly observe the following guidelines:
 - Utilize the template provided to organize and submit your feedback.

- Identify yourself and, where applicable, the organization you represent to enable us to contact you, should clarification be needed.
 - Be clear and concise in your comments—referencing the specific clause.
 - Focus your comments on how the legislative amendments can be better written to make them clearer. If possible, provide alternative formulations on the clause(s) in question.
7. Completed templates should be forwarded to:
- Email: pfmpmr@bahamas.gov.bs
or
- Mail: Ministry of Finance
Cecil Wallace-Whitfield Centre
West Bay Street
P.O. Box N-3017
Nassau, The Bahamas
Attention: Financial Secretary
8. All comments received during the consultation will be reviewed and, if accepted, will be incorporated into the final bill for consideration of the Cabinet.

V. CONSULTATION PERIOD

9. The public consultation is from September 1 to September 30, 2020. Comments received after September 30, 2020 will not be considered.

VI. SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

10. The Ministry of Finance will publish a summary of the main comments received on the Government's official website www.bahamas.gov.bs, together with its responses, by October 14, 2020. The identity of respondents will not be disclosed in the summary.

VII. DOCUMENTS TO DOWNLOAD

11. For reference, interested persons may visit the Ministry of Finance website at www.bahamas.gov.bs/finance to download a copy of the relevant documents for this public consultation.