



Assembly Legislature
Tobago House of Assembly

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Announcements

TOBAGO HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

THURSDAY, APRIL 28th, 2022

The House met at 1.52 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER *in the Chair*]

ANNOUNCEMENTS

TARDY CORRESPONDENCE

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER: Pleasant good day to all Members.

This is a reminder to all Members of this House. This is the people's House and as such the business of the House shall be treated as priority, in this House on every fourth Thursday of the month, as prescribed within the Standing Orders of the Tobago House of Assembly. I have noticed and the Assembly Secretariat has noticed as well, that information coming to the House regarding the business of the people, has been tardy. This would not be accepted any longer. If correspondence is forwarded to the Assembly Secretariat and it is not in keeping with the Standing Orders of the

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Announcements (Cont'd)

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER (Cont'd)

Tobago House of Assembly, it would not be placed on the Order Paper and it would not be allowed.

I remind you all and I caution you all again, for us to be our brother's keeper in ensuring that the business of the people is conducted as efficiently and effectively as possible.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Before I take my seat, let me inform this House, that the leave request to be absent from today's Sitting were submitted by:

- (a) Assemblyman Watson Duke;
- (b) Assemblyman Nathisha Charles-Pantin;
- (c) Assemblyman Niall George;
- (d) Assemblyman Trevor James; and
- (e) Councillor Certica Williams-Orr

The leave is granted.

PAPER LAID

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER: *Leader of Assembly Business.*

Paper Laid

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SECRETARY OF EDUCATION, RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY

(Hon. Zorisha Hackett): Madam Presiding Officer, I wish to lay in the House the following paper:

PAPER LAID

- (i) Tobago House of Assembly Monthly Budget Report as at the end of January, 2022. [Secretary of Education, Research and Technology (Hon. Zorisha Hackett)]

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER: *Leader of Assembly Business.*

HON. Z. HACKETT: Madam Presiding Officer, the Executive is prepared to answer the questions, but we are requesting that the questions be deferred to the next Sitting due to the absence of both Secretaries.

STUDLEY PARK ENTERPRISE LIMITED

The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Assemblyman Trevor James.

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Oral Answers to Questions (Cont'd)
MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER (Cont'd)

8. The Minority Leader asked the Secretary of Infrastructure, Quarries and Urban Development the following question:

As it relates to the Studley Park Enterprise Limited Board of Directors, can the Secretary please indicate if there is a difference in the roles, functions and remuneration of the Independent Directors appointed to the Board as opposed to the Executive Directors appointed to the Board?

DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE – DAILY RATED WORKERS

The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Assemblyman Nathisha Charles-Pantin.

9. The Minority Councillor asked the Secretary of Food Security, Natural Resources, the Environment and Sustainable Development the following question:

With respect to employment in the Division, is the Secretary aware that between the period February 01st to April 04th, 2022, the Division of Agriculture has engaged over 40 daily rated workers.

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER: Questions Nos. 8 and 9 are deferred to the next Sitting, due to the absence of Secretaries from today's Sitting.

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Oral Answers to Questions (Cont'd)
MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER (Cont'd)

Members presenting today, please be reminded that you have forty (40) minutes speaking time, (this goes to the Secretary who is bringing the Motion) in which to move the Motion and thirty (30) minutes of speaking time to wrap up at the end of the debate. To the other Members presenting, you are given thirty (30) minutes speaking time to present and an additional ten (10) minutes if requested by another Member on your behalf.

Secretary of Health, Wellness and Social Protection you may begin.

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL BUSINESS

MOTION

REQUEST THAT THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL PUT A COMMITTEE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT STAFF IN PLACE TO CREATE A POLICY THAT GUIDES THE PROCESS IS IMPLEMENTED BY JUNE 30TH, 2022, TO DEAL WITH CLIENTS REQUESTING PSYCHO-SOCIAL SUPPORT

SECRETARY OF HEALTH, WELLNESS AND SOCIAL PROTECTION (Hon. Dr. Faith B.Yisrael): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam Presiding Officer.

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Request that the Executive Council put a
Committee of Social Support staff in place to
Create a Policy that guides the Process is
Implemented by June 30th, 2022, to deal with
Clients Requesting Psycho-social Support (Cont'd)

HON. DR. FAITH. B. YISRAEL (Cont'd)

Good afternoon to this august House, good afternoon to those who are listening and those who are viewing on the various media platforms. Good afternoon to my Colleagues.

I would like to start my presentation this afternoon, given that this is the first time that I have risen to my feet to speak to present in this term - I would like to start by congratulating you, Madam Presiding Officer, for elevating to such an auspicious level.

I would also like to say a special 'thank you' to the Electoral District of Belle Garden/Glamorgan who have gotten me to this point.

I want to also thank the Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly for his astute leadership which has allowed us again, to get to this point.

Finally, I would like to thank my Division, the Division of Health, Wellness and Social Protection. This is a Division that has been tasked with

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possibly the most difficult responsibilities over the last couple years. I would like to thank each and everyone of those who have worked over the last two (2) years; those who have worked with me thus far; the three (3) Administrators that we have since December; my Assistant Secretary, Mr. Sonny Craig; all of the Heads of Departments within that Division, including those in the Tobago Regional Health Authority.

One thing that we have learnt over the last two (2) years, is that COVID-19 has identified for all of us, every single crack that has been in our system. It identified the fact that many of us did not have medical security; it identified the fact that many of us did not have economic security; it identified the fact that many of us did not have the kind of social support that we thought we had and in many instances it caused many of our individuals, many of our families, many of our communities, to almost break. It has been a difficult two (2) years. It has been a difficult two (2)

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years and one that has identified many of the deficiencies within our social
protection system.

So, I would like to start by describing or explaining the reason why
we decided to change the name of the Division that I now lead to “The
Division of Health, Wellness and Social Protection.”

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2.02 – 2.12 p.m.

Request that the Executive Council put a
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HON. DR. F. B. YISRAEL (Cont'd)

I think the Health and Wellness parts we are used to, we understand what those mean. But I think we need to spend a little bit of time thinking about what the concept of social protection is, because that is the foundation of the Motion that I raise today, Madam Presiding Officer.

Social Protection really is a process or a series of components within a system that allows individuals; allows families; allows communities to withstand what are known as 'shocks.' Usually when we think about shocks, we think about the negative things – Covid-19; the shock – illness; the shock - loss of employment; the shock – death; the shock - being forced to be confined in a home with individuals who may be your worst enemies; being forced to be in a space where you are afraid of your family members; the shock - having our young people - children in school, out of school for that period.

Request that the Executive Council put a Committee of Social Support staff in place to Create a Policy that guides how the Process is Implemented by June 30th, 2022, to deal with clients Requesting Psycho-social Support (Cont'd)

HON. DR. F. B. YISRAEL (Cont'd)

School for many of them was a place of safety; school for many of them was their safe haven and for two (2) years we allowed them to be in a space where they may not have been safe. But shocks could also be positive things. Shocks are really any change in life. And I always give the example of a positive shock.

A young woman who just got married; a young woman who may have been raised in a Christian home, who did not 'defile' herself; a young woman who may not have ever slept in the same bed with the man that she is now married to - only to realize on the night of her wedding, that he snores. And she now realizes that she may never get another good night's rest because this man who she absolutely loves, snores.

Social Protection is giving us all the technical capacity; giving us all the skills; giving us all the resources to ensure that we can withstand those shocks - the shocks that maybe negative and the shocks that may be positive,

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allowing us to say, “Hey, this is what happened - the breadwinner is no longer the breadwinner, but we could figure out what we need to do as a family because we were prepared.” We now know that we have to go and learn a skill and start a new business - we are now prepared. That is what social protection is. And coming into this, understanding what social protection is, we at the Division decided that we needed to do everything that we could do to make that happen.

Now, if you look back at the campaign - the campaign included the Chief Secretary at the end of practically every statement or every speech that he gave, spoke about Tobago being ‘the greatest little island on this planet.’ And because we have to make Tobago ‘the greatest little island on this planet,’ we have been doing a critical assessment of what it really takes to ensure that we do the kind of social protection that is necessary for our Tobago people. That assessment included listening to different groups of people. They come to me all the time - the workers within the Division; the individuals who are

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clients within the Division; individuals who are clients in other Divisions. My
Colleagues - Secretaries and Assistant Secretaries - almost every day one of
them messages me and says, “This individual who is in my constituent, needs
help.” So we have been doing; we have been listening - listening to the
frustrations of those who provide the service on one end and listening to the
frustrations of those who receive the service.

Can I just say that one of the things that my Chief Secretary said to us
the other day (well, we do tell each other secrets) was “You see that form you
all use, that form is too difficult; that form – you all have to change that form
because it is causing people to be frustrated.” And it is the little things like
this that we have to sit down and critically look at, to determine what is best
for how we provide services.

The Social workers - they have been saying to me, “Faith, we are tired;
we are tired. We are tired trying to do our work and then it does not work.”

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HON. DR. F. B. YISRAEL (Cont'd)

We are tired of trying to do the best that we can for our clients, but because we do not have an official process that allows us to get together and allows us to speak to each other and allows us to really interact in a way that is meaningful for our clients, we feel that we are not providing the best service.” We have been listening.

The clients say to me, “Dr. Faith, I came to Social Services; I filled out the form there and because they recognized that I need help with housing, they sent me down to Crown Point. I came to town with the last \$10.00 that I had and now they are sending me down to Crown Point.” Or, “They are telling me that they do not have food cards at Social Protection, so they are sending me back in town to Finance because that is where the short-term social service cards are housed.”

“Dr. Faith, we came to that office because we needed help and it feels like we have to beg for the help; it feels like we have to keep telling our sad

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stories; it feels like we have to keep talking and we have to keep going and
sitting down for the whole day because (well, thank God that the dress code
rules are now out the door) we do not feel that we are getting the kind of help
that we need.” *[Interruption]*

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER: Member, I do not know if it slipped me,
but did you read the Motion?

HON. DR. F. B. YISRAEL: I did not.

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER: Can you please do so?

HON. DR. F. B. YISRAEL: Sure.

The Motion reads:

“**WHEREAS** Covid-19 has caused significant socio-economic
challenges for individuals, families and communities in Tobago due
to its designation as a pandemic and the Public Health Regulations
put in place to safeguard citizens;

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HON. DR. F. B. YISRAEL (Cont'd)

AND WHEREAS the Tobago House of Assembly, via the 5th Schedule of the THA Act, is responsible for “Social Welfare;”

AND WHEREAS the mandate of this new THA Executive is to make Tobago “the greatest little island on the planet” via sound policies and the execution of people-centred programmes;

BE IT RESOLVED that the THA utilize a whole of government approach to its distribution of social support to those in need in Tobago, using a case-conferencing model to treat with all clients requesting psycho-social support at the various Divisions.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a committee of social support staff from each division be convened to create the policy that guides how this process is implemented by June 30th, 2022.”

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER: Thank you, you may proceed.

HON. DR. F. B. YISRAEL: Thank you, Madam Presiding Officer.

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HON. DR. F. B. YISRAEL (Cont'd)

So, I have laid out the many concerns - I have laid the many questions
and I have laid out the frustrations that many of our clients and our service
providers have outlined to us.

We are now in a position as the Executive Council of the T.H.A
(Tobago House of Assembly), to do something about it.

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HON. DR. F. B. YISRAEL (Cont'd)

We are now in a position to make a policy decision, which is why we come to this House at least once a month to debate the policies that are important to the people of Tobago. We are now in a position to do something about it.

While having conversations, Madam Presiding Officer, with some of the individuals who provide social support within the Divisions, one of things that they have suggested and is the 'crock' as they say, of this Motion, is the idea of having all the social support staff within the Tobago House of Assembly, work as if the Tobago House of Assembly is a single entity and not silos doing their own thing. We have individuals within each of the Divisions who provide some level of social support.

It is obvious at the Division of Health, Wellness and Social Protection, we provide:

- The Rental assistance;
- Food Vouchers, if those are available;

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- Counselling; and
- Housing, if that is necessary

We provide those kinds of support.

But if you are someone who needs help with building your house or constructing your house, you would then have to go the Division with responsibility for Settlements.

If you have a student who needs help getting uniform or books, you then have to go to the Division of Education.

If you are entering the Tobago Regional Health Authority and for some reason, you need a service that we cannot provide at the Tobago Regional Health Authority, you then need to be re-routed back to the Division of Health, Wellness and Social Protection to get that financial support to allow you to get that medical treatment.

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We are now at the point where we have all recognized that it is critical for us to treat the Tobago House of Assembly as a single entity known as the Tobago House of Assembly and therefore, provide an opportunity for those who do the social support, to come together and work together for the client. And we have to remember that that is why we are doing this – it is for the client.

One of the things I think that we have been doing before, is what is known as “case co-ordination,” and I think that is because the social support staff - the social workers and social work assistants and the various entities understand that it is important to communicate with each other, that it is important to share information with each other, to do some collaboration and to do that kind of thing, but that is not quite what we are talking about. We need to go a little further than just case co-ordination.

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That is why this Motion specifically asked us to use a 'case-conferencing model' to work together. Let me define what case-conferencing is. It is a more formal, planned and structured event which is separate from regular contact with the clients.

Let me repeat that:

It is a more formal, planned and structured event that is separate from the regular contact we have with the clients.

The goal of case-conferencing is to provide holistic, coordinated and integrated services across providers and to reduce duplication - **and to reduce duplication**. Now this is another thing that has come up quite a bit.

We have clients, because they are trying their best to get as many services as they can, because they need it, they go 'social support shopping' for want of better term. They go to one Division and then go to another Division; and they go to another Division and they go to another Division,

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because they are really trying to get as much as they can out of the system. Now, what the case-conferencing would allow us to do, is for all of the entities within all of these Divisions who are providing their various kinds of support, to sit in a single room (now, COVID-19 has taught us that this room can be a virtual one) and to actually have careful consideration for the needs of the client. So what would that do?

Someone walks into the Division of Health, Wellness and Social Protection; their information is collected at the Division of Health, Wellness and Social Protection and an initial assessment is done at the Division of Health, Wellness and Social Protection. Because I have confidence in the social workers and my social worker assistants there, I know that when they do an assessment, it is a real thorough assessment. Now that they have done that assessment, they realize that even though the person who walked in, came in saying they want food, because they have done a real

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assessment, they have recognized that yes, they do need food, but just handing them a food card, or just handing them a food voucher, is not going to solve their problem. What we need to do, is to look at the entire individual and figure out what is best for them. What is best for them may actually be working with Settlements, because the only reason they are in need of food, is because the house that they used to live in is in disrepair so they are now forced to rent, and the rental amount is out of their reach. They may then realize that this person actually has a skill - a real skill that is marketable, a real skill that they can use to make money with, so they can direct them within the Division to the Realization of Economic Achievement (REACH) Programme where we give small Grants for individuals who want to start up businesses. But if they have a bigger business idea, we can then direct them to the Business Development Unit (BDU) where they can get a larger grant to continue doing their business.

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They may realize that even though they came in and spoke about food, that they actually have children who are home who have not gone to school yet, because they do not have the uniform; they do not have the school books; they do not have the school shoes, and instead of just sending them over to Education, the case-conferencing would allow them to speak to the various social workers, social support staff, to get what is needed for this particular client.

Now, what that does, is ensure that when we are done with the client, the client has gained the capacity to no longer be a client. And I want you all to think about that a little bit. The aim of social support, the aim of social protection is to ensure that we get the client to a point where they no longer need to be a client. And if what we are doing does not get them to the point where they no longer need to be clients, what we are doing is to

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just tag them along - not building their capacity; not giving them the tools to give them the technical competence to no longer need our service. And that is why it is so important for us to use that case-conferencing mechanism - to ensure that when that client walks through any door (and that is critical) in any Division, the assessment that they would get at that Division would allow them to access the kind of services that would get them to the point of no longer needing social support – maybe a couple months later; a year later - would get them to that point because they have walked in one door. And the health professional - the social support professionals are the ones sitting around the table saying, “You know what? Miss ‘So and So’ this is her situation. I think that she needs this, that and the other, what do you think? “Can we get her this, that and the other?” “Can we get him this that and the other,” to ensure that when that client is served, they are served to the best of our ability.

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HON. DR. F. B. YISRAEL (Cont'd)

The second **WHEREAS** or the second resolution of the Motion, is one that allows I think, the professionals, to be the drivers of this process. They are the ones who have been on the ground doing it; they are the ones who understand what needs to be done; they are the ones who have gone to school and have the experience to do it. So what we are doing, is asking them to sit together, to work through the actual process; to work through the policy that they will then use to implement this case-conferencing model in the future. And yes, because I am the kind of person - and because we know that we need deadlines and because we know that the Social Workers are competent, that they can provide that policy by June 30th, because they already have it, I am sure. Yes, already have it worked out. So, Madam Presiding Officer, the aim of this is simple in my mind. We have to figure out how to do what is best for our clients.

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HON. DR. F. B. YISRAEL (Cont'd)

The Tobago House of Assembly - the policy of this Executive of the Tobago House of Assembly, is one where we have spoken quite a bit about digitization. And we do know from chatting with those who provide the support, that that is a critical part to being able to do this, because one of the things we hear very frequently, is that if the client comes in and the client puts in their name; address; date of birth; the number of children they have; the names of the children and so forth, those things do not change when they move from one Division to the next. So if we have a central system where that kind of information could be put in, so that when they are seeking support from the other Divisions, the social support staff already have all of the background - they already have the basic information that would help the process so much faster.

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HON. DR. F. B. YISRAEL (Cont'd)

So, Madam Presiding Officer, in my mind, and in the mind of the Executive Council, the Motion today is a simple one. It is one that puts the clients; it is one that puts the people of Tobago at the center of service provision. It is one that allows individuals to not have to go, as we say, 'begging cap in hand.' It is one that would allow us to provide the kind of social support that we so critically need in a way that allows the client their dignity; in a way that allows the client to feel like we actually do love and care for them and in a way that allows them to get the best support that they can get using our resources in the most effective and most efficient manner.

And it is because of that, Madam Presiding Officer, that I am asking all of my Colleagues, all of the Members of this House, to support this very simple Motion.

I round up by reading the Motion again. It said:

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HON. DR. F. B. YISRAEL (Cont'd)

“WHEREAS Covid-19 has caused significant socio-economic challenges for individuals, families and communities in Tobago, due to its designation as a pandemic, and the Public Health Regulations put in place to safeguard citizens;

AND WHEREAS the Tobago House of Assembly, via the 5th Schedule of the THA Act, is responsible for “Social Welfare;”

AND WHEREAS the mandate of this new THA Executive is to make Tobago “the greatest little island on the planet” via sound policies and the execution of people-centred programmes;

BE IT RESOLVED that the THA utilize a whole of government approach to its distribution of social support to those in need in Tobago, using a case-conferencing model, to treat with all clients requesting psycho-social support at the various Divisions.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a Committee of social support staff from each Division be convened to create a policy that guides how this process is implemented by June 30th, 2022.”

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Request that the Executive Council put a Committee of Social Support staff in place to Create a Policy that guides how the Process is Implemented by June 30th, 2022, to deal with clients Requesting Psycho-social Support (Cont'd)

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER: *Question proposed.*

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER: *Member for Darrel Spring/Whim, you may now join the debate.*

MR. K. MORRIS: No response.

MINORITY COUNCILLOR (Mrs. P. Daniel-Benoit): I am asking for permission to join the debate at this time.

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER: I am sorry. I did not hear you, Minority Councillor.

MRS. P. DANIEL-BENOIT: I am asking for permission to join the debate at this time.

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER: *Permission granted.*

MRS. P. DANIEL-BENOIT: Madam Presiding Officer, thank you for the opportunity to join the debate at this time.

Today in my discourse, I will seek to obtain responses that will help single mothers who desperately require assistance for their families from the Tobago House of Assembly, to understand how this Motion will affect them

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MRS. P. DANIEL-BENOIT (Cont'd)

as they apply for assistance from the State. And from the point of view of citizens deserving of every kind of assistance that the (Tobago House of Assembly (THA) has to offer, the Minority will also seek to ensure that this Motion does not cause increased bureaucracy, lengthen the application process and therefore cause added stress and undue burden to the vulnerable and the less fortunate in our society, seeking assistance.

Madam Presiding Officer, providing that these issues are addressed and mitigated against, the Minority is prepared to support this Motion. Some of the issues or questions that were prepared today by the Minority, the Secretary of Health would have provided the answers for some of those questions.

I am happy that she brought some clarity because one of the things that we were seeking to determine, is what the Motion was intended to achieve and she would have highlighted that it will deal with both the efficiency in the process as well as the duplication of the process.

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However, Madam Presiding Officer, there are a number of other questions that we will like to pose to the Secretary of Health, Wellness and Social Protection.

In the fourth paragraph, it is indicated that a whole of government approach will be undertaken. And what I am asking, Madam Presiding Officer, (I am not sure if the Secretary would have addressed it) is if a client would have gone to one Division, is it that the service that this client requires - do they have to go to other Divisions to access the service? So say for example, someone's house would have burnt down, is it that the client seeking support from Social Services - they may also need some food card assistance - is this client required to go to one place and they will access the services in one place, or would the client be redirected to other agencies?

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Additionally, Madam Presiding Officer, the term that is considered in terms of psycho-social support, and if we look at the text book definition, it says

“Psycho-social support...

and I paraphrase

...is defined as support given to help meet the mental, emotional and social as well as spiritual needs of individuals.”

Another author describes it as a broad term, describing a range of services offered to those in pressing need. And this is designed ‘to help individuals cope with a serious illness or to alleviate distress following a disaster,’ such as services which may range from mental health counselling and group and spiritual therapy and other assistance.

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And based on this definition, Madam Presiding Officer, a client may presume that all the services that are offered by the Tobago House of Assembly may be considered psycho-social support. In this regard, is it that every person or every client seeking social support from the Tobago House of Assembly, is required to go through or required to case-conference? So, the Motion proposes case-conferencing to treat with all clients seeking psycho-social support. As a single parent seeking assistance from the State, does it mean that my application requires case-conferencing?

Madam Presiding Officer, because we are such a small close-knit society, some clients would have an issue with confidentiality and sharing their information across several Divisions and persons. So, one of the things that the Minority is also seeking to find out, is how confidentiality would be managed while the case is conferenced?

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Sometimes, Madam Presiding Officer, some persons, because of varying reasons, may feel discouraged to seek assistance because they feel that everyone is in their business and everyone knows what is happening to them because of pride or varying reasons. So again, Madam Presiding Officer, we will seek to find out how will the case-conferencing deal with confidentiality and ethical concerns of the client - how will that be managed?

Madam Presiding Officer, another concern of the Minority, is that we are seeking to get information on whether or not the client is required to give consent to have their application case-conferenced. If the client does not consent for the application to be case-conferenced, would that client be denied the support that they seek?

Additionally, Madam Presiding Officer, in the final paragraph of the Motion, it states *inter alia*:

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“...that a committee of social support staff from each division will be
convened to create a policy ...”

We are seeking from the Secretary, to define who are considered social
support staff?’ Are they:

- Social Workers;
- Psychologists;
- Business Operation Assistants?

Who are the persons that will be involved in the formation of the policy?

Before I conclude, I wish to reiterate that this Minority supports
whatever policies and programmes are proposed and are implemented by the
Administration that will improve the lives and advance the development of
the island.

Therefore, the Minority is prepared to support this Motion once the
pertinent questions are answered and receive the appropriate responses.

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And as a Minority, we will continue to advocate on behalf of all of Tobago, and in the interest of everyone seeking assistance, so that they can fully understand how this policy will affect them, as well as ensure that the applicants are not disadvantaged.

Another concern of the Minority, Madam Presiding Officer, is how practical it is to implement this Motion. How regular would meetings occur to case-conference an application? What steps would be put in place for persons who need urgent assistance? And how will an emergency be managed or addressed under this proposed policy? Is it that persons in an emergency have to wait until the convening of a Committee to case-conference their application? We are seeking to determine how will an emergency be managed or addressed under this proposed policy?

Further, Madam Presiding Officer, the Minority will also propose to put forward some recommendations for the consideration and

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implementation of this policy. One such recommendation, is the review of the current grant offerings, keeping in mind the time value of money and also considering the inflation rate of goods and services. And we are all aware that the value of one hundred dollars (\$100.00) two (2) years ago, is significantly less to a one hundred dollars (\$100.00) spent today. And therefore, reviewing the current grant structure may be necessary at this time.

We are also seeking consideration to possibly have a range of grant qualifications. The range can be from five hundred dollars (\$500.00) to five thousand dollars (\$5,000.00), based on criteria that will be set up by the Executive Council and the policymakers.

Another recommendations of the Minority, is to have an integrated system that can provide information on the various social support accessed by the client across Divisions. So that at any one point in time, persons in

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authority can see what social services support has been access by a particular
client?

Madam Presiding Officer, finally, in the execution of our duties, this
Minority will hold the Executive Council to account and would ensure
transparency and good governance.

We want to ensure that what is good for Tobago is implemented, and
we will support whatever policy that will bring relief to more persons that is
faster and transparent and that will provide more effective and efficient relief
to all deserving citizens.

Madam Presiding Officer, I thank you for the opportunity to
contribute. [*Desk thumping*]

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MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER: *Member for Bethel/Mt. Irvine, you may
now join the debate.*

**SECRETARY OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, YOUTH
DEVELOPMENT AND SPORT** (Hon. Terance Baynes): Thank you,
Madam Presiding Officer, for the humbling privilege to lend my voice to this
useful and decent Motion.

I would want to commend the Secretary of Health, Wellness and Social
Protection for bringing this Motion. I think it demonstrates a kind of
situational sensitivity as we attempt to grapple with the challenges of
optimizing our social support for our people in these difficult days.

May I also commend the Chief Secretary, who leads from the front and
has mandated us in this team, to fix this Tobago space with the deliberate
intent of actually making Tobago ‘the best little island on the planet.’

All across the Divisions, fixing work has been taking place, though we
must admit that our enthusiasm, our expertise and even the mandates

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that we all had, could not have effectively prepared us for the magnitude of
the work that we have been engaged in and must continue to engage in. But
we are up to the challenge though.

I think the people of Tobago have installed us into this political
kingdom for such a time like this, hence we must do everything in our power
to make life better for them.

And none of us here could have adequately prepare for Covid-19 and
its attendant fall-out and we have to be thankful for minds like the mover of
the Motion, Dr. Faith and several others who have, as they say, '*take night
and make day*' in alerting us and educating us and guiding us during one of
the most difficult seasons in the history of our existence here in this place we
call Tobago. But you know, despite all the good work that has been done in
Community Development, Youth and Sports and I suspect in all the other
Divisions, it is our reasoned view that the provisions of social services can

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improve and a centralized model which we now call 'case-conferencing' is in fact, ideal. Essentially, it is what I call, 'a social service clearing house' - a central place that will aid us in optimal social service delivery.

I must admit though, that I was a little bit kind of caught off guard in all honesty, because in more recent times, there have been some dull minds in the space, men that were intellectually and mentally delayed in my view, [*Desk thumping*] who suggest that we have been doing nothing - we have done nothing in the four (4) months to improve the lives of our people. Some have been so negative that if you put them in a dark room, they would develop into a photo. [*Desk thumping*] However though, we shall illuminate the space with innovative and dynamic ideas to improve the standard of living in this place that we call Tobago.

I have to confess, Madam Presiding Officer. I came here today all prepared to bowl a full spell, because this is my maiden contribution in this

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august House, but I was caught a little bit off guard with the expeditious management of time by the mover of the Motion and even by the Minority side, so I think it may not be beautiful or even fashionable for me to be inordinately long though the temptation is there. But suffice it to say, Madam Presiding Officer, that a lot has been done in most of the Divisions and data is there to prove it.

I do not want to go into too much over there in Community Development, especially as there is so much that is being done in the vocational skills training to assist our people. We have done a lot with virtual platform training; we have done a lot with Y-zones and virtual programmes; Y-camp and virtual programmes, retooling and revitalization as it relates to our Community Councils and so on.

In the Department of Youth, I have to commend the Assistant Secretary, Mr. Wane Clarke for the work that he has been doing in the Department of Youth and Sport. [*Desk thumping*] He has gone in there and taken the bull

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by its horns - he is a worker and has been doing a considerable amount of
work in trying to optimize that section of the Division and get stuff done.

Some forty percent (40%) of the population we are told, are young
people who have been affected adversely by Covid-19. When we look at
some of the negative thing - the attendance and participation of youth groups
and other development activities that have been affected, because greater
focus is now placed on survival rather than engaging in healthy activity, and
the numbers and types of programmes which could be implemented due to the
new digital mode that has to be used now, and has been one of the issues, is
the level of volunteerism as a result of the reduced wages and unemployment
have been affected in a significant way and we have done a lot of retraining
of young people and so on.

The point I am trying to make, Madam Presiding Officer, is that we
have spared no time in trying to do the best that we can under the

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circumstances, to serve our communities. We have coming on stream what we call the “Youth Information Management Systems” (YIMS). As you know, we are fascinated by these acronyms and it provides a digital platform for the registration of Youth Organizations and individual young persons in our youth registry database. The systems will allow the Divisions to obtain information directly from our youth through surveys and assessments, to inform programme planning implementation, among other things.

This data base actually is now populated with some eight hundred and forty-five (845) young persons and we have an ambitious goal to try and register all twenty-four thousand (24,000) plus young people in Tobago.

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I think because of our drive and the various minds that we have in this new Administration, this is something that is doable. As well, we have been trying to provide assistance for several, several, several youth organizations in Tobago. Just because of the time issue, I do not want to go into all that information, but the point that I am trying to make with this, is to refute the claims of some who say that we have not been doing anything since we took office - since we came into these Divisions last December.

So what I am speaking of here, while I am focusing on Community Development, I am sure that the self-same information can be found in all the Divisions across this Tobago House of Assembly (THA).

In the Department of Sport, I think I really want to say this - we have endeavoured to improve health conditions for individuals through the introduction of physical activities in communities; to develop functioning facilities to assist with the development of high-performance athletes. The

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key focus is sport for development and the development of sport. And of course, we have some programmes that we put in place to have a healthy and physically active Tobago, with the understanding of the benefits of being physically active.

This is important because just a few days ago, I was going into my office and the elevator malfunctioned, so I said let me try and be scientific and try to speedily ascend the three (3) floors. By the time I got to the first flight, I was huffing and puffing and I realized how unfit I am. So the optimizing of sporting facilities and so on and for us to be encouraged to engage in these activities, is a matter of paramount importance to our population. Notwithstanding that COVID-19 has caused many of us to be in our homes consuming an enormous amount of food. Many of us, our clothes retail cost has gone up exponentially; many of the ladies are in frustration when they look at their wardrobes now, because some of those fancy dresses

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and skirts and so on that normally would have fitted so nicely, they need to go and visit the stores because of the consumption over the time they were in those enclosed spaces. So the issue of exercise and the provision of those things, the provision of facilities for that to happen, is a matter that is very, very important.

So, I said all of this to say, Madam Presiding Officer, that in spite of all the things that we have been doing in the Division, whether in Community Development itself; in the OSH Department; in the Youth Department; in the Sport Department and the several things that we have done - our reasoned conclusion is that we can and we must do more.

So, Madam Presiding Officer, I would just like to share some of the benefits of us implementing this system. They are as follows:-

(1) When we implement this interesting and innovative system which we now call the conferencing - the convenience for clients seeking services, and

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Dr. Faith alluded to that a while ago - that one of the challenges that we are facing, is that people are having to go in all these different places and so on, even if they are doing 'social service shopping.' This centralized clearing house is going to help us with convenience. I think that that is a positive thing.

(2) The second thing is precision as it relates to the provision of the services. Because you will have all the minds in one space and all of those cases will be treated and addressed by the experts in the space, and that to me will help to treat with some of the ills of not being able to address the issues and the concerns of people sometimes even in a timely manner.

The other thing is the minimizing of 'double dipping.' We have to confess, that no matter how difficult or how sad a situation, there are always going to be some individuals who try to take advantage of the situation, and we are finding that there are some tricksters in the system. I do not know

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what it is, but there is a kind of mind boggling; kind of offensive kind of greed that is in the society that bothers me; that there are people who are well off, there are people who can do better, but because a system is there, they find some way to trick themselves into the system - to take advantage of services because it is the government's.

We have seen that - we talked about the food card. There are people who have no business having food cards and the people who really need the service does not seem to have it. So these are some of our concerns that we will be able to minimize this business of 'double dipping.'

Another benefit is that there would be significant time reduction in case assessment and the provision of services. This one I like - implementing this system, this 'case-conferencing model' will be a useful object lesson for the possible introduction of a community secretariat in every district across Tobago. Let me explain that a little bit.

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One of the conversations that we have been having at the Division is to try optimizing the usage of community centres and so on - is to make these places like a secretariat in the particular district where individuals can go and get certain services. In other words, people in Charlotteville and L'Anse Fourmi who are coming to Scarborough to get an Affidavit done; to get some kind of legal document done - to know about the different services that the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) offers, instead of having to go in Bacolet and then Shaw Park and then Crown Point and all of that - these community centres can be like a central place - a secretariat; a central clearing house where people can get that kind of information. I think that this model can be a good reference point for that.

The next thing, Madam Presiding Officer, is the introduction of SOPs and I learnt this today - 'Standard Operating Procedures' relating to the delivery of the service. This must be a critical thing because - and this

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provides an opportunity to eliminate deficiencies in the monitoring and the evaluation of the regimes that we have related to the delivery of the services. I think in most cases there is a lack of the requisite tools to carry out the function and that contributes to deficiency, so hence there is a need for SOPs that are user-friendly for the times that we now live in, with all the ITs support and all the other scientific tools that are needed for such an initiative.

Of course, Madam Presiding Officer, the collective wisdom and intellect that can be found in a central space. All of us have been called and there are some cases when you are called, you have no clue - you have no point of reference - you do not know how to even begin to address those things and I think that having these lettered minds in the same place will assist greatly in treating with some of these complex situations.

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The final benefit, Madam Presiding Officer, that this particular system is consistent with international best practice as it relates to the provision of social services. And of course, it is married to our mandate in making Tobago 'the greatest little island on the planet.'

In summary, this case-conferencing model is indicative of how this Administration intends to deliver services to this place we call 'Tobago.' This model speaks to:

- Convenience;
- Precision;
- Minimizing of system abuse;
- Time reduction to service delivery;
- Relevant standard operating procedures or (SOPs); and
- Collective wisdom.

I would like to say, Madam Presiding Officer, that I therefore, support this Motion wholeheartedly and we in the Division of Community

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Development, Youth and Sport stand ready to play our role in the realization of this initiative.

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER: *Member for Darrel Spring/Whim you may now join the debate.*

MR. K. MORRIS: No response.

HON. Z. HACKETT: Madam Presiding Officer, may I now join the debate?

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER: *Member for Bethesda/Les Coteaux, you may now join the debate.*

SECRETARY OF EDUCATION, RESEARCH & TECHNOLOGY

(Hon. Zorisha Hackett): Thank you, Madam Presiding Officer, for the opportunity to contribute to such a felicitous, critical and indispensable Motion brought by the Member for Belle Garden/Glamorgan and Secretary of Health, Wellness and Social Protection.

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Since its inception, the Tobago House of Assembly has provided special grants and services through its various Divisions to the most vulnerable citizens of this island, to enable them to traverse through difficult periods. However, the management of how these resources are distributed has always been a point of contention as it relates to the perception of equality and fairness.

Owing to the fact that there have been numerous concerns expressed by the public about the possible misuse, abuse and corruption, this Administration has chosen to develop and implement a policy that reflects a holistic inter-divisional support system, be it social, psycho-social or socio-economic support.

Madam Presiding Officer, at the Division of Education, Research and Technology which I now fondly call “DIRTEC” there is a strong legacy of

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social support and that occurs through food grants, school supply grants and support for households that care for differently-abled students.

Financial Assistance to students is a service made available by DIRTEC (Division of Education, Research and Technology) through the grant to necessitous students attending public schools. This vote has been provided for since 2016. It goes back to 2006 with an increase, but as indicated clearly in its name, the Division seeks to assist needy students by supplying school-related items which would equip students and give them an opportunity to perform at their best without disadvantage. This service is offered throughout the year and once students are identified and their needs and assessment completed, these grants are provided for.

In addition to this, DIRTEC (Division of Education, Research and Technology) provides counselling services to reduce dependency on the State. The aim of the school social worker is therefore, to empower his/her client

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with knowledge that facilitates restoration through a transparent system of assessment, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Though we can boast of the many successes of this system, DIRTEC has an overall policy that guides procedures across the Tobago House of Assembly, but we need to now reduce duplication, increase efficiency, transparency and of course, accountability.

At the Division of Education, Research and Technology, a significant amount of money has been spent on Financial Assistance over the years, especially so with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, and this goes at an average of five hundred and fifty (550) families, eight hundred and twenty (820) students and half a million dollars (\$.5m) per year.

In order to design an effective policy, there must therefore be empirical evidence as well as documented procedure and at my Division, the process of obtaining the clientele includes the following steps:

- Firstly, names are obtained based on recommendations by schools;

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- Secondly, walk-ins are allowed to access gently used books for example, stored within the Student Support Services Unit.

I go further to say that these books have been sourced through parents who donate gently used books with the aim of assisting other families who may have missed the opportunity to be interviewed.

Moving on, the Student Support Services Unit Officers then conduct home visit to verify that the information provided is accurate. Applicants and referrals requesting the services are asked to provide the Division with documents necessary to complete the needs assessment.

The needs assessment is imperative in this process as they seek to:

1. Identify needs.
2. Recognize the resources available to the student;
3. Understand how the student managed previously; and

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4. Identify and recommend how the resources available in the
Division could improve the standard of living and performance
of the identified students.

Apart from the needs assessment though, the interview lends itself for
the Division through the School Social Worker and this is important so that
he/she can better understand what issues might be hampering the student's
performance, whether academic or otherwise, thus providing additional
support to the student and/or family by the Division, of course, if resources
are available.

In cases where the resources are not available internally, that is where
external assistance is sought and the necessary referrals made to other
Divisions. This of course, is in keeping with the professionalism of Social
Workers who seeks to address the needs of its clientele holistically.

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Madam Presiding Officer, in 2020 at the onset of the pandemic, the
Division of Education, Research and Technology received nine hundred and
twenty-one (921) food card requests and were able to assist families and
children registered in schools across the island in that regard. These were
received from the Division of Finance, Trade and the Economy.

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One of the major challenges was trying to avoid duplication of the services from the almost two thousand (2000) names that were received in the system at large.

Our Student Support Services Unit liaised with other agencies in an effort to avoid duplication, including the Social Welfare Office; the former Division of Finance and the Economy and through Area Representatives. However, it must be noted that this process resulted in significant delays, in the disbursement of the assistance to those in need.

Owing to these shortcomings, this Administration is now focused on delivery without duplication or delay. As we aim for the holistic social development, involvement of various Divisions is therefore critical and one of the areas to consider will of course be the type of support that is provided by each agency in order to eliminate duplication of services and to better invest public funds.

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Further to the aforementioned, Madam Presiding Officer, policy must include processes and procedures that improve the chances of the most vulnerable having access to services in real time, while at the same time reducing the opportunity for exploitation.

There are several grants for instance, that aid families with home and business development. Business development grants often span a wide range of fields such as agriculture, tourism and construction, but many entrepreneurs have failed in their efforts due to lack of adequate training; mentorship; personal discipline and of course, family support.

We also cannot ignore the perception of grant funding being used in the past as a political tool to enable loyalists to drain the public purse and we cannot afford to continue making those same mistakes. Our intentions are reflected by this groundbreaking policy and we must now manage this

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process in such a manner as to bring true relief when needed and to support
all Tobagonians in their quest to improve the quality of their lives.

As Secretary of DERTEC, this Motion's resolution to use a whole of
government approach in its distribution of social support to those in need in
Tobago, promotes the establishment of a multi-disciplinary case
management team. This team will be built from the various agencies that
currently provide support and will be charged with:

- (1) Reviewing what currently exists. For example, the agencies
programmes; procedures; database and technology currently
used;
- (2) Identifying what does and does not work - intake, procedure,
assessment, documentation, for instance;
- (3) Discussing accessibility to data; ease of access and set time-
frame to receive or disperse information as it relates to this
point;

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- (4) Qualifying those who will be needing assistance - whether we give a means test or no means test, for instance.
- (5) Identifying decision-makers as to who receives assistance and then make sure that it engenders fairness and minimizes bias; and
- (6) Setting guidelines for information sharing, whether we need to protect privacy and maintain confidentiality in certain instances, and whether we need to share in one space so that the actual client does not have to move from building to building and get all the help they need in one particular space, whether physical or virtual.

Madam Presiding Officer, as we aim to create this policy that guides how this process is to be implemented with a June 30th, deadline in mind, allow me to now submit a case-conferencing model that can be adopted. The strength-based clinical case management model recognizes that the

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ultimate goal of a case manager goes beyond just accessing information.

In this model, the case manager focuses on empowering clients and their families and focusing on creating client opportunities for growth, education and skill development.

Further, the strength-based case management model recognizes the value of community service, family and cross-agency partnerships. It encourages the client to build and nurture informal support networks, alongside identifying and accessing formal community services and institutional resources. However, the strength-based case management model steps away from the clientician's perspective on the client's needs. Instead, it encourages the client to take the lead in identifying his or her own needs; takes control over the search for resources and services to address those needs and view the community as a resource instead of a barrier to success.

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Strength-based clinical case management model involve outreach, clinical services, advocacy and robust coordination between case managers and clients. Implementing a programme based on this model requires that organizations such as the Tobago House of Assembly and agencies such as our Divisions, support case managers with a robust case management system that can track highly individualized services and capture complex data and metrics.

Madam Presiding Officer, as I close, allow me to declare that the Division of Education, Research and Technology supports this timely Motion and I thank you again, Dr. Faith B. Yisrael and the Members of this august Chamber, for allowing me another opportunity to contribute to this Motion.

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

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MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER: *Member for Darrel Spring/Whim, you may now join the debate.*

MINORITY LEADER (Mr. Kelvon Morris): Madam Presiding Officer, let me firstly thank you for this opportunity to contribute to this debate, which for the layman looking in, really, is a situation where we are coming to the House to approve a policy that is not yet determined. You know in local parlance, we call that ‘putting the cart before the horse.’ Because we have a situation here where we are discussing perhaps what might be, what might not, without really understanding what would be the final outcome.

Because when you look at the first “**BE IT RESOLVED...**” we have already concluded that the only approach that would work in this system, is a case-conferencing system, without allowing the committee that we are proposing, to do its work. Because really and truly, yes there is merit in a case conference system and model, but a case conferencing system will not address all the issues that currently faces our social support delivery.

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Because think about it - what this case-conferencing system and model is about - and I just want to perhaps share with my good friend from Bethel/New Grange, that it is not simply a centralized system. Because you have persons working in their various units, but what you would have is the synergy, and the conferencing is where you bring all the minds together. So it is not really - because you said a central clearing house, but a central clearing house means there is one place where everybody reside and the issues are dealt together. So take for example, someone has an emergency, do you now case-conference this emergency? This person needs help right now, right where they are, and they go the Division of Social Protection to get the rent they need - the rental assistance grant, because they do not live anywhere, they do not have a house so they do not need anything from the Division of Settlements.

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Would we still call the Division of Settlements; call Agriculture; call
Community Development and call all these people to case-conference, to get
this support to this client?

While we are on this situation of case-conferencing and emergencies,
there are other issues that I can see arising out of this. There is the ethical
concern, because when you are dealing - and I am sure that the Secretary of
Health, Wellness and Social Protection who would have been my colleague
in the past, in the Division of Health would recall that there are certain
information-sharing protection when it comes to medical information.

So someone who has a mental health case, that person's information
cannot just be arbitrarily shared across platforms. So are we going to
conference that client? And how are we going to conference that client? Are
we going to breach the medical ethical responsibilities that we all should
observe?

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Madam Presiding Officer, we in the Minority understand the impact of Covid-19 and whereas, we recognize the first preamble of the Motion speaks to the damaging effects of Covid-19 on the population of Tobago, we also understand that this Motion does not necessarily treat with the fundamental issues facing the average Tobagonian at this time. And what are those issues - unemployment.

Madam Presiding Officer, *ad nauseam*, I am inundated with persons coming to my electoral district office, seeking employment. How does such a system help or improve the lives of the unemployed? How does this system really treat with the development needs of the Tobago economy so that we can employ more people?

As we speak right now, I can give you a case of someone in my electoral district – a grandmother - a child with special needs; renting; unemployed - went to access services at the Division. And do you know what she was told? She was told that she cannot get help and that she cannot access the rental

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assistance grant, because she is unemployed. What kind of crazy policy is that? That the policy to give someone with a special needs child, unemployed, requiring a grant, that they have to be, or were employed first, or they have to be underemployed to get the rental assistant grant.

For me, these are the issues that we need to treat with first and foremost and this is why I would recommend that rather than we look at the theoretical approaches, let us look at real approaches and perhaps we should be discussing here, even within this Motion, creating a bipartisan committee to look at how we remodel and retool the social support grants within the Tobago House of Assembly to meet the current needs of the average Tobagonian, post-Covid-19.

Because these are the way that you really improve lives; this is the way you would change lives - it is not about having persons sit down in separate spaces and conferencing, because think about it - who is going to manage the

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process? Who is going to ensure that every Officer is readily available at the
same time to treat with the specific needs of the client coming for support?

I know for a fact that in the Division of Settlements - Assemblyman
Pollard, how many Social Officers you have? I think you have two - one in
the East and one in the West. If we are inundated with over a hundred
requests - let us say it is a natural disaster, and everybody requires support,
how do we manage that all at the same time with only two Officers in your
department – two Social Support Officers? Are we planning to hire more
people? It sounds good in theory; we understand what you are trying to
achieve, but is it practical?

As a Minority, we would ask the questions so as you go into your
meeting, you go into your committee of Social Support personnel, you can
have the considerations so that you can properly diagnose the issue.

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And while we talk about diagnosing issues, we have to be careful that we do not misdiagnose issues in the Tobago space, especially when it comes to social support, because I will tell you this. One of the experiences I have working within the Division of Health over the years, is that the issue or the issues are not so much that we do not have sufficient grants, and that kind of thing, but one is funding and the other is delivery. Increasing efficiency - moving away the bureaucracy so that persons who really need the support can get the support quickly and on time.

And I am not too sure that this kind of approach where we are now moving where you have to really pull people together, or even if one person takes the information, but there has to be some kind of evaluation if we are not adding more time to the process. Because often time when somebody leaves Charlotteville to come to town, it is because they have an urgent need and when they go into that office, their expectation is, when I walk out of that place that I am going to, my needs should be fulfilled. Will this system

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answer that kind of problem? I know we want to do things differently - I know the passion of the Secretary, but I would caution as we go forward, that perhaps we do some more consultation so that we have a full understanding and a holistic appreciation for the issues that we are trying to diagnose so that when we diagnose the issues and when we apply the solutions, they are solutions that could in fact, improve the lives of the persons and of the clients, the end users of the product and the service.

Madam Presiding Officer, I came here with a message because you know when you read the context of the second **WHEREAS**, and where it alludes to sound policies, the people of Darrel Spring/Whim have asked me to convey their concerns as to whether the sound policies of the Progressive Democratic Patriots (PDP) applies to the people of Darrel Spring/Whim? It is in that context that we have a road in Spring Trace in Darrel Spring - that project commenced sometime in October/November. The project was halted

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after the successful outcome of the Progressive Democratic Patriots (PDP)
and to date, that project has not recommenced.

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However, at the same time, the people of Darrel Spring/Whim are seeing roads being paved in Buccoo and have no issues with “Sunny Days” having his roads paved, but at the same time, it must not be one where we are neglecting one area while we are at the same time, ensuring that we treat with the other areas. So pave Buccoo, but all I am asking and all the people of Darrel Spring/Whim are asking, is that you also pave and finish the job that was started in Spring Trace, Darrel Spring/Whim.

And jobs - the young fellas - they are hearing; they are seeing - and they are hearing Agriculture is taking on people; they are hearing that Health is taking on people, Works is taking on people - and they want to know if the people of Darrel Spring/Whim are not people too. Because it does not seem like they can get any job at all. Is this the three (3) votes that you all are punishing the people for? [*Desk thumping*][*Laughter*] I do not know,

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but I am asking as we develop the policies, the sound policies, let us develop them and apply them to all of Tobago fairly and equitably.

Madam Presiding Officer, as I close - because I do not think that I will have another opportunity to wish first and foremost, my mother, a God-fearing woman and my beautiful wife, 'Happy Mother's Day.'

I want to extend 'Happy Mother's Day' to all the mothers of Trinidad and Tobago and the world, including my good friend from Bethesa/Les Coteaux - her mother - I also want to wish her a 'Happy Mother's Day.'

[*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*]

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER: *Assemblyman Dr. Faith B. Yisrael, you may now wrap up the debate.*

HON. DR. F. B. YISRAEL: Thank you, Madam Presiding Officer.

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I am walking to the lectern and wondering whether I should waste any of my time to respond to some of what was just said.

Madam Presiding Officer, it is important for us to recognize that the Progressive Democratic Patriots (PDP) has been in office since December, 2001. It is now April and many of the issues that were just raised by the Minority Leader, are not new ones. As a matter of fact, I am very, very happy that the goodly gentleman highlighted that policy about rental assistance - because that is a policy that we met in December and that is a policy that was in place by the Administration that he represents. So I am really happy he was the one who highlighted how that policy is.

Maybe it is also important to identify the fact that the audit that is currently being done as it relates to some of these contracts that were given out just before election, Madam Presiding Officer, will highlight that many of those contractors were actually already paid. So if there is an issue with a

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road that is not finished, maybe a question needs to be directed somewhere else, but we will not speak about that, Madam Presiding Officer.

The Minority Councillor asked several key questions and I am glad that she indicated that the Minority Council was willing to support the Motion if these questions were answered. I am now a little bit concerned that the Minority Leader may not have known what the Minority Councillor was going to say, but I will answer the questions because they are important, pertinent questions. Thank you for those questions, Minority Councillor.

The question about whether the client will go to one Division and access all of the services is a 'one-stop-shop' kind of model that we hope to get to. But the reality is, that we need to be realistic with where we are now and the steps that we need to take, are steps that will be incremental as we go along. So, the aim is to have the client walk into one Division and given the case-conferencing mechanism that will be in place - so let us just say that the

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client walks into Social Protection and the client then needs housing-related support, because that case-conferencing is being done with the client, they may not need to go down to Settlements to start the process, but may actually have their home assessed by the social worker without the client even going down to Settlements to start the process because it has already started. Now, the reality is that we live in Trinidad and Tobago where you still need paper to do a lot of stuff, so there may be a situation where coming close to the end of the assessment, you may have to come and sign the final document or something at this specific Division, but at least the process is way on the way and the client is being served.

The question about psycho-social support - I am not even sure what the question is. Psycho - relating to the mind and the brain and so forth; social - relating to economics and so forth - putting them together - psycho-

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social support, I am sure that most people understand what that means. It means that if you are coming and you need food; rent; burial; counselling - all of those things - that is what we are talking about. The list of social support workers that we are talking about, is one that we specifically use that term because we realize that within the various Divisions, they use different words; they use different terms. So there are social workers in some Division; there are Probation Officers in some Divisions; there are Therapeutic Counsellors in some Divisions, there are Guidance Officers in some Divisions. There are several different categories of people who provide psycho-social support, so we are using that term because we want to be all encompassing. How regular will they meet? This is something that I think the Committee should be able to determine - once a week; once a month, whatever it is - that is something that the Committee can determine

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and that goes to the next question. What do we mean by what happens when
there is an emergency?

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Currently, the Social Support staff understand that when the client comes in, you do an assessment of the client and that assessment of the client will then determine how quickly you need to provide the service. So obviously, if the people's house burnt down, we know that you will have to find somewhere for them to stay that night. But if the house did not burn down you know you may have a little bit of time to determine what is best and do what is best for the client.

I have absolute confidence that the social workers and the Social Support staff that we have in Tobago know the difference and know how to do the assessment and know what kinds of services are needed in an emergency versus a service that is needed urgently; versus a service that is needed routinely. They have the technical capacity to do that assessment. That is why we are asking them to do it.

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One of the questions that came up - and it is an important one - and it is one that is near and dear to my heart, is the issue of confidentiality. Confidentiality has been a sour point in Tobago and it is important to understand that for us to be professionals, we have to take confidentiality seriously.

There is a difference between **anonymity** and **confidentiality**, Madam Presiding Officer. **Anonymity** means that we do not know who the person is. It is a number that has been assigned - we do not know who that person is that we are treating with. That is somebody - a case that is anonymous. **Confidentiality** means that we understand that the information that this person has given us, is near and dear to them and to us, and we must keep it in a particular way. We must not share it with individuals who do not have the right to know that information. **Confidentiality** is something that we are

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supposed to be dealing with continually, not just in case-conferencing, but in every aspect.

And to treat with **confidentiality** we would have something known as 'informed consent.' That term has two words in it. Informed meaning I have the information; consent meaning that I have told you that I am allowing you to share that information. Again, these are standard operating procedures in social work and they will apply in this situation.

We come to this House and maybe the Minority Leader - because we just spent twenty (20) years of his party doing what they want, he is not familiar with the fact that the reason why we come to this House at least once per month, is to debate and agree on policies.

The Tobago House of Assembly, this Tobago House of Assembly is bringing to the people of Tobago an idea that was not birthed by me - an idea that came out of consultations with social Support Staff; with clients who

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have all said that this would really, really help us to get the services that our clients need, to them, quicker. That is how this came about.

So we are here saying to the people of Tobago, that this is what this THA is planning to do. Let us talk about the good of it; the bad of it; what we need to do; what we need to make better; what we need to improve, (and I appreciate the questions) so that we can then go back to the Executive Council and then implement the policy that we agreed on here in the Assembly Legislature.

Another question that may not have been asked - I cannot remember if it was asked or not - going back to the confidentiality issue, relates to whether a person's information can just be shared, and we spoke about informed consent. The thing about informed consent, is that it can be given and it can be taken away. Because a person has not given informed consent, does not mean that they will not be served. They will just understand that

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HON. DR. F. B. YISRAEL (Cont'd)

the seamless process that we have put in place will not apply to them, because they are choosing to not use that seamless process that has been put in place. It does not mean that that person cannot jump in their car or jump on a bus and go down to Settlements or go over to Education or go over wherever they want to go - we are not saying that they cannot do that. What we are saying, is that we want to make it easier for you so if you allow us to do the case-conferencing, we will bring all of these people together and bringing them together does not have to be in a physical space - it could be in a virtual space - to discuss what is best for this person and have them get the best service possible.

So, Madam Presiding Officer, I am happy that we were able to sit and do the kind of assessment that is necessary thus far. I am happy that having spoken to many of these Social Support workers, that we have been able to come to this point. And I am happy that most if not all of the Members sitting here have agreed that our clients deserve nothing but the best. And because

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3.42 – 3.53 p.m.

Request that the Executive Council put a
Committee of Social Support staff in place to
Create a Policy that guides how the Process is
Implemented by June 30th, 2022, to deal with
Clients Requesting Psycho-social Support (Cont'd)

HON. DR. F. B. YISRAEL (Cont'd)

we agreed that our clients deserve nothing but the best, we are asking each and everyone of you to support this Motion, this Motion that speaks to us treating with the individual at the centre of our service provision, treating with the individual because they deserve to be treated with respect; with efficiency; with effectiveness and I am asking, Madam Presiding Officer, that all of us sitting around this horse shoe agree with the Motion that reads:

“WHEREAS Covid-19 has caused significant socio-economic challenges for individuals, families and communities in Tobago, due to its designation as a pandemic, and the Public Health Regulations put in place to safeguard citizens;

AND WHEREAS the Tobago House of Assembly, via the 5th Schedule of the THA Act, is responsible for “Social Welfare;”

AND WHEREAS the mandate of this new THA Executive is to make Tobago ‘the greatest little island on the planet’ via sound policies and the execution of people-centred programmes;

Request that the Executive Council put a
Committee of Social Support staff in place to
Create a Policy that guides how the Process is
Implemented by June 30th, 2022, to deal with
Clients Requesting Psycho-social Support (Cont'd)

HON. DR. F. B. YISRAEL (Cont'd)

BE IT RESOLVED that the THA utilize a whole of government approach to its distribution of social support to those in need in Tobago, using a case-conferencing model, to treat with all clients requesting psycho-social support at the various Divisions.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a Committee of Social Support staff from each Division be convened to create a policy that guides how this process is implemented by June 30th, 2022.”

Madam Presiding Officer, I so move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICEER: The Motion is carried.

Leader of Assembly Business.

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3.42 – 3.53 p.m.

Adjournment

ADJOURNMENT

Motion made: That this House do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.

(Hon. Z. Hackett)

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 3.53 p.m.