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Announcement

**TOBAGO HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

Thursday, May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022

**The House met at 1.43 p.m.**

**PRAYERS**

[MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER *in the Chair*]

**ANNOUNCEMENT**

**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** Honourable Members, leave request to be absent from today's Sitting was submitted by Assemblyman Nathisha Charles-Pantin.

The leave is granted.

**PAPERS LAID**

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

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** *Leader of Assembly Business.*

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Papers Laid (Cont'd)

**SECRETARY OF EDUCATION, RESEARCH & TECHNOLOGY  
AND LEADER OF ASSEMBLY BUSINESS** (Hon. Zorisha Hackett):

Thank you, Madam Presiding Officer. The Chief Secretary is not in the House at this time; may his request be deferred until he is in the House.

Thank you.

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** Request for deferral has been granted

*Question deferred to next Sitting.*

**ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** *Minority Leader.*

Before we start Minority Leader, can I have your attention? This House starts at 1.30 p.m. and I will caution each Member, every Member, to please abide by the Standing Orders. This would not be tolerated again.

Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**STUDLEY PARK ENTERPRISE LTD**

8. **MINORITY LEADER** (Mr. Kelvon Morris): Thank you, Madam Presiding Officer.

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Oral Answers to Questions (Cont'd)  
MR. K. MORRIS (Cont'd)

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?”

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** *Secretary of Infrastructure, Quarries and Urban Development.*

**SECRETARY OF INFRASTRUCTURE, QUARRIES AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT** (Hon. Trevor James): Good afternoon, Madam Presiding Officer, good afternoon Members. As always, it is an honour to be able to speak in this august House.

Madam Presiding Officer, I have read this question several times in order to try to understand what the question is asking. I suppose that I have failed because it could not be that the Member was asking what seems to me, to be a rhetorical question.

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Oral Answers to Questions (Cont'd)

HON. T. JAMES (Cont'd)

He represents an organization that has tremendous experience in setting up Boards and understanding what the roles and functions of Board Members are - to come to this House today to ask this question. I had intended to give a long foreword, Madam Presiding Officer, but I have decided to answer the question as it is written:

If there is a difference in the roles?

Absolutely, there is a difference in the roles.

If there is a difference in the functions?

Absolutely, there is a difference in the functions; and

Absolutely, there is a difference in the remuneration of all Independent Directors and of the Executive Directors appointed to the Board at the Studley Park Quarry.

**SUPPLEMENTAL**

**MR. K. MORRIS:** We are not done with you.

Can the Secretary please indicate what are those differences in functions, in roles and in remuneration?

Thank you.

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Oral Answers to Questions (Cont'd)

**HON. T. JAMES:** Madam Presiding Officer, I beg your leave to state that I would need to research the answers to those questions and that I would return at the next Sitting to answer those questions.

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** *Minority Councillor.*

**DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE –**  
**DAILY RATED WORKERS**

9. **Mrs. Petal Daniel-Benoit:** Thank you, Madam Presiding Officer.

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 periods February 1<sup>st</sup> to April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022, the Division of Agriculture has engaged over 40 daily rated workers?”

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** Minority Councillor, Standing Order 26 indicates that you do not need to read the question.

*Assemblyman Nigel Taitt, Assistant Secretary of Food Security, Natural Resources, the Environment and Sustainable Development.*

Oral Answers to Questions (Cont'd)

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF FOOD SECURITY, NATURAL RESOURCES, THE ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT** (Mr. Nigel Taitt): A pleasant good afternoon, Madam Presiding Officer; Deputy Chief Secretary; all Assemblymen; Councillors; those who are seated in the House and those viewing - good afternoon again.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond, Madam Presiding Officer. The Secretary is aware that the Division will recruit persons as sees fit to execute the mandate of the Division. This is nothing unusual and the technical staff continues to express the need for recruitment of staff overtime.

As a matter of fact, given the very important mandate of food security and environmental protection, the Division will in the near future, create industries across the Tobago landscape which will open up further employment opportunities for all.

The Secretary is willing to work with everyone, including you the Minority Leader, to ensure that employment opportunities through the industry creation could be provided for the development of Tobago and all Tobagonians.

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Oral Answers to Questions (Cont'd)  
MR. N. TAITT (Cont'd)

Thank you.

**SUPPLEMENTAL**

**MINORITY COUNCILLOR:** Can the Assistant Secretary outline the process used to engage on Daily rated workers?

**MR. N. TAITT:** I prefer to defer all other questions until my Secretary is available to respond.

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** *The question has been deferred, Minority Councillor.*

*Question deferred to next Sitting.*

**MR. N. TAITT:** Thank you.

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** *Minority Leader.*

**MANDATE MONDAY**

**10. MINORITY LEADER (Mr. Kelvon Morris):** The Minority Leader asked the Secretary of Health, Wellness and Social Protection the following questions:

“As it relates to the Secretary’s statement on Mandate Monday, that  
“As of the first of April, we currently have outpatient services happening at the hospital and that includes Urology, Renal clinics,



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Oral Answers to Questions (Cont'd)  
HON. DR. F. B. YISRAEL (Cont'd)

OBGYN, Paeds and Internal medicine,” can the Secretary indicate the number of patients accessing these specified services from April 1<sup>st</sup> to present, at the Roxborough hospital and can that breakdown be provided for the period of April 1<sup>st</sup> to May 16<sup>th</sup> specifically?”

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** *Secretary of Health, Wellness and Social Protection.*

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

In the month of April, at the Roxborough Health facility we had seven (7) new patients who were seen via the Gynaecological Clinic (OBGYN). We had two (2) new General Medicine patients.

For May, we had thirty-nine (39) OBGYN and sixteen (16) medicine.

Thank you.

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** *Minority Leader.*

**SUPPLEMENTAL**

**MR. K. MORRIS:** With respect to Renal, Urology and the other services that were not mentioned, is it that you have the figures for those?

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Oral Answers to Questions (Cont'd)

**HON. DR. F. B. YISRAEL:** The figures that I have provided are the figures that are available.

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Oral Answers to Questions (Cont'd)

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** *Minority Leader.*

**MR. K. MORRIS:** Is it that persons went to access those services and were unable to access them?

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** *Secretary of Health, Wellness and Social Protection.*

**HON. DR. F. B. YISRAEL:** The process that is used to admit new patients into the out-patient clinic at the Roxborough Health Facility, is one that is based on referrals either from the Health Centres in the districts, or from individuals who live in the area who currently attend clinics in the Scarborough District.

Every person who has been referred to the Roxborough Health Facility thus far, has been seen by the professionals in their respective fields.

**MINORITY LEADER (Mr. Kelvon Morris):** Can the Secretary confirm that on the staffing organization, we currently have renal staff to provide renal services, urology and the others that were not mentioned?

**HON. DR. F. B. YISRAEL:** Madam Presiding Officer, I will answer.

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Oral Answers to Questions (Cont'd)  
HON. DR. F. B. YISRAEL (Cont'd)

It is important for us to recognize that this Administration came into office in December, 2021, when in fact this Roxborough Health Facility was commissioned and was opened over a year ago.

I am sure we all remember that the Prime Minister came up to an opening, and since then we have not been able to provide renal services at the facility.

The leadership of the Tobago Regional Health Authority is continually managing the recruitment of specialist physicians in Tobago. We have been here for close to six (6) months.

The dialysis team that has been recruited for the Roxborough Health Facility, has been undergoing training over the last couple weeks. They are now ready (given that the dialysis machines are brand new, and the technology associated with the dialysis machines were actually brand new) to start accepting patients who are referred from the Dialysis Centre at the Bacolet Health Centre to Roxborough, from next week.

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Oral Answers to Questions (Cont'd)  
HON. DR. F. B. YISRAEL (Cont'd)

We have been working to ensure that the transition of specialist patients is done in a seamless manner. As a result, there are policies that are currently being developed that speaks to the implementation, that speaks to the actual functioning of each of these specialist clinics at the Roxborough Health Facility.

Might I, Madam Presiding Officer, indicate that even though there was a huge opening for this facility years ago, this process is now happening because the process has begun. A Medical Chief of Staff was hired late last year to start managing the hospital process.

Paediatricians will be available at the Roxborough Facility from June 01<sup>st</sup> and those referrals are being set up, as we speak. Patients from the Eastern communities who have been attending specialist out-patient clinics, have currently been transferred and they will start seeing nephrology and internal medicine from next week. The required health professionals to facilitate them being seen appropriately, will be available at the facility from that time.

Oral Answers to Questions (Cont'd)

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** Minority Leader, again, your persistence precedes you. I think that the Secretary has answered all the questions. Any further questions you have, you can get them in writing from the Secretary of the Division.

Let us proceed. Next question.

*Minority Leader.*

**INTERNATIONAL PASSENGER ARRIVAL FIGURES**

**11.** The Minority Leader asked the Secretary of Tourism, Culture, Antiquities and Transportation the following question:

As it relates to the recommencement of ALL international flights to the ANR Robinson International Airport, can the Secretary of Tourism indicate the international passenger arrival figures, as well as the comparative performance for the airlines operating the route, for the period of January 1<sup>st</sup> to April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022, as compared to the same period of 2019.

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** *Councillor and Secretary of Tourism, Culture, Antiquities and Transportation.*

Oral Answers to Questions (Cont'd)

**HON. SECRETARY OF TOURISM, CULTURE, ANTIQUITIES AND TRANSPORTATION** (Hon. Tashia Burris): Madam Presiding Officer, thank you. Members, good afternoon.

I take note of the Minority Leader's persistence this afternoon in asking follow-up questions, so I hope that at the end of my answer, he is satisfied in his mind that I have answered him.

As it relates to the recommencement of direct international flights to the ANR Robinson International Airport, there are two (2) airlines operating for the period January to April 2022. British Airways recommenced operations on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022 and Virgin Atlantic on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2022.

For the period January - April 2022, there were a total of over two thousand, three hundred and ninety-two (2,392) passenger arrivals to Tobago, which represented an eighty point eight percent (80.8%) decline in international passenger arrivals from the total of twelve thousand, four hundred and forty-five (12,445) for the same period in 2019. So please permit me to read into the record the break-down by month.

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Oral Answers to Questions (Cont'd)  
HON. T. BURRIS (Cont'd)

- In January, 2019, we had three thousand, one hundred and twenty-nine (3,129) passengers. In 2022, we had four hundred (400);
- In February, we had three thousand, six hundred and eighty-nine (3,689) passengers. For 2022, we had eight hundred and thirty-two (832);
- In March, we had three thousand, two hundred and fifteen (3,215) passengers. For March 2022, we had six hundred and ten (610);
- In April 2019, we had two thousand, four hundred and sixteen (2,416) passengers. In 2022, we had five hundred and fifty (550);

British Airways was responsible for eighty point one percent (80.1%) percent of arrivals from January to April, 2022, with one thousand, nine hundred and sixteen (1,916) passengers. However, when compared to the same period in 2019, there was a forty-four point five percent (44.5%) decline in arrivals from three thousand, four hundred and fifty (3, 450).



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Oral Answers to Questions (Cont'd)  
HON. T. BURRIS (Cont'd)

Virgin Atlantic was responsible for nineteen point three percent (19.3%) for arrivals from January to April 2022, with four hundred and sixty-two (462) passengers arriving on the airline. However, when compared to the same period in 2019, there was a seventy-six point five percent (76.5%) decline in arrivals from a total of one thousand, nine hundred and sixty-eight (1,968).

I will now read the breakdown by airline:

- In January 2019, British airways brought in six hundred and eight (680) passengers. In 2022, they brought in three hundred and ninety (390);
- In February 2019, one thousand and fifty-three (1,053). In 2022, five hundred and ninety-eight (598);
- In March 2019, nine hundred and twenty-seven (927) passengers. In 2022 - four hundred and fifty-five (455);
- In April 2019, they brought in seven hundred and ninety (790) passengers and in 2022, four hundred and seventy-three (473);

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Oral Answers to Questions (Cont'd)  
HON. T. BURRIS (Cont'd)

It must be noted that there is a vast difference in the time periods as the former period of 2019 was pre COVID-19, while the comparative period for 2022 at the immediate recovery months after our borders were closed for nearly two (2) years. During the January to April 2019 period, Tobago was also directly serviced by Condor, Sunwing and Caribbean Airlines, while Thomas Cooke operated from January to March 2019.

It is also instructive to note, that during the period March 2020 to December 2021, when this Administration took office, marketing spends for the destination continued in spite of the fact that our borders were closed, and we were unable to receive any international flights or passengers.

The then Board of Directors of the Tourism Agency, a Board that both Members of the Minority Council served on during the period 2018 to 2021, continued to rubber stamp the payment of marketing fees to international agencies for the entire period of lock down.

In the last year alone, total marketing spend was close to eight million TT dollars (\$8mTT).

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Oral Answers to Questions (Cont'd)  
HON. T. BURRIS (Cont'd)

Numbers do not lie and it is clear to me that as the Secretary, that we are not presently seeing return on investments and these investments were done by the previous Administration.

It is actually disheartening to know that these flights that are currently operating out of the United Kingdom (UK) are leaving almost on a weekly basis filled to capacity and the majority of passengers disembark in Antigua and Barbados.

However, these marketing arrangements are currently being reviewed by the new Board, ably led by Ms. Alicia Edwards who I am certain will ensure that:

- (1) Tobago sees an increase in direct airlift from international destinations, with a result of an increase in international passenger arrivals to Tobago.
- (2) A review of our current contractual arrangements with these airlines is done to ensure that we are receiving value for money; and

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Oral Answers to Questions (Cont'd)  
HON. T. BURRIS (Cont'd)

- (3) That we review and revamp our marketing efforts across all current and new source markets to ensure that 'Brand Tobago' receives the attention that it deserves and we can begin to suddenly position ourselves in the minds of travellers as, '*the greatest little island on the Planet.*'

Madam Presiding Officer, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**SUPPLEMENTAL**

**MR. K. MORRIS:** Follow up question. I am happy that the Councillor admitted that in 2019 while I served as a Director, our arrivals were eighty percent (80%) higher than it is as of today.

I would want to find out from the Councillor, how will we get to the hundred thousand passengers that she would have indicated that she wants to have by the end of the year? How will we get to that hundred thousand?

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** *Councillor Burris.*

**HON. T. BURRIS:** Madam Presiding Officer, the Minority Leader has introduced a new question at this time and we are still building out the Division of Tourism because when I assumed office in December, we had no technical staff and we did not have a strategic plan. So, the mandate

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Oral Answers to Questions (Cont'd)  
HON. T. BURRIS (Cont'd)

that had been given to me by the Chief Secretary, was to increase our visitor arrivals.

We are doing that at this time by building out our capacity within the Division and creating a strategic plan that will also encompass all of our stakeholders who will be part of ensuring that we can get to that figure in the shortest possible time.

Thank you.

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** *Minority Councillor.*

**TOBAGO REGIONAL HEALTH AUTHORITY**  
**APPOINTMENT OF BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**12. Mrs. Petal Daniel-Benoit:** Thank you, Madam Presiding Officer.

The Minority Councillor asked the Secretary of Health, Wellness and Social Protection the following question:

“As it relates to the Tobago Regional Health Authority, Section 4 (2) of the Regional Health Authority Act provides that each Authority shall be managed by a Board of Directors. Can the Secretary indicate the timeline for the appointment of the Tobago Regional Health Authority Board of Directors in keeping with the RHA Act?”

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Oral Answers to Questions (Cont'd)

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** *Secretary of Health, Wellness and Social Protection.*

**SECRETARY OF HEALTH, WELLNESS AND SOCIAL PROTECTION** (Hon. Faith B.Yisrael): Thank you, Madam Presiding Officer. The new Tobago Regional Health Authority Board will be announced in a couple weeks.

**SUPPLEMENTAL**

**MRS. P. DANIEL-BENOIT:** As it relates to decisions that currently require the approval of the Board of Directors of the Tobago Regional Health Authority (TRHA), can the Secretary indicate what process is currently being used for those approvals?

**HON. DR. F. B. YISRAEL:** Certainly. As you recognize there is now a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Tobago Regional Health Authority (TRHA) that has a spending limit. When the spending limit is reached, the Administrator of the Division of Health, Wellness and Social Protection, is able to sign off. If that spending limit is reached, the Chief Administrator is able to sign off.

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Oral Answers to Questions (Cont'd)

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** *Minority Councillor.*

**PHYSICAL REOPENING OF SCHOOLS – COVID-19**

13. **Mrs. Petal Daniel-Benoit:** Thank you, Madam Presiding Officer.

The Minority Councillor asked the Secretary of Education, Research and Technology the following question:

“Given that the country is still experiencing a Covid-19 pandemic and face to face school has resumed, does the Division have a Covid-19 policy to manage the physical re-opening of schools?”

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** *Secretary of Education, Research and Technology.*

**SECRETARY OF EDUCATION, RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY  
AND LEADER OF ASSEMBLY BUSINESS** (Ms. Zorisha Hackett):

Thank you, Madam Presiding Officer. Good afternoon, Colleagues.

The question is: “Given that the country is still experiencing a Covid-19 pandemic and face to face school has resumed, does the Division have a Covid-19 policy to manage the physical re-opening of schools?”

Yes, we do.

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Oral Answers to Questions (Cont'd)  
HON. Z. HACKETT (Cont'd)

The Division of Education, Research and Technology has developed an Infectious Disease Management Plan - the first of its kind in the country for Covid-19. This plan outlines a systematic approach to prepare for and respond to any such infections and any related situation or activity that warrants a careful and prudent response.

This Infectious Disease Management Plan (IDMP) for Covid-19 in schools details the strategies to manage a flexible, scalable and proportionate system response, with appropriate and timely interventions and allocation of resources, to minimize the health consequences in all schools on the island of Tobago.

The Infectious Disease Management Plan (IDMP) was established on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2022, with its latest revision occurring on the 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 2022. All principals have been provided with a copy of the policy and are provided with updates whenever revisions are made.

The dynamism and uncertainty of the virus, coupled with the changes in the national policy mean that there would be constant changes. In response, we will monitor operations within our schools and make further



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HON. Z. HACKETT (Cont'd)

modifications to the policy based on emerging needs. The Minority Council is free to have this copy. [*Indicating*]

Thank you.

**SUPPLEMENTAL**

**MINORITY COUNCILLOR:** Can the Secretary indicate, based on the policy, what is the procedure to deal with students as well as teachers who would have contracted Covid-19 and is required to be...

**HON. Z. HACKETT:** Minority Councillor, this question was not placed on the Order Paper and as I previously indicated, this copy would be provided to you. You are free to gain the information from the version I have in front of me, I will bring it to you now.

Thank you.

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** Can I just remind Members that when you are finished speaking, turn off your microphones please, thanks.

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Motion

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER (Cont'd)

Minority Leader, please be reminded that you have forty (40) minutes of speaking time to move the Motion and thirty (30) minutes of speaking time to wrap up at the end of the debate.

To other Members presenting, you are given a speaking time of thirty (30) minutes and ten (10) additional minutes if requested by another Member, on your behalf.

*Minority Leader, you may now begin.*

**MINORITY COUNCILLOR:** Madam Presiding Officer, I am requesting to move the Motion instead of the Minority Leader.

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** Go ahead, *Minority Councillor*.

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Request for the Tobago House of Assembly to  
Develop and Implement Strategies to deal with  
Domestic Violence – Victims and Perpetrators

**PRIVATE BUSINESS**

**MOTION**

**REQUEST FOR THE TOBAGO HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY TO DEVELOP AND  
IMPLEMENT STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE –  
VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS.**

**MINORITY COUNCILLOR** (Ms. Petal Daniel-Benoit): Thank you,  
Madam Presiding Officer, for the opportunity to move this motion this  
afternoon. The motion reads:

**“WHEREAS** the Tobago House of Assembly Act No. 40 of 1996,  
via the Fifth Schedule is responsible for all matters related to Social  
Welfare;

**AND WHEREAS** the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020,  
resulted in stay-at-home measures;

**AND WHEREAS** there has been an alarming increase in incidents of  
domestic violence and child abuse directly affecting men, women and  
children;

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Request for the Tobago House of Assembly to  
Develop and Implement Strategies to deal with  
Domestic Violence – Victims and Perpetrators (Cont'd)

COUNCILLOR P. DANIEL-BENOIT (Cont'd)

**BE IT RESOLVED** that this House joins in condemnation of these heinous acts of violence and abuse meted out to citizens throughout the country.

**AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that this House mandates the Tobago House of Assembly to develop and implement strategies to treat with the meaningful engagement of both victims and perpetrators of these incidents.”

Madam Presiding Officer, in my contribution today, I will highlight global and local statistics and reports that indicate and show the alarming increase in incidents of domestic violence and child abuse.

I would also identify some recommendations to treat with the meaningful engagement of victims and perpetrators, after which I will conclude.

Madam Presiding Officer, this issue at hand is a very complex one in nature and as the Prime Minister pointed out recently, we are historically a violent society arising from our history of colonialism and slavery. But

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Request for the Tobago House of Assembly to  
Develop and Implement Strategies to deal with  
Domestic Violence – Victims and Perpetrators (Cont'd)

COUNCILLOR P. DANIEL-BENOIT (Cont'd)

before I get into the 'meat of the matter,' so to speak, I crave your indulgence as I deal with the preamble of this Motion.

As stated in the Motion in keeping with the Tobago House of Assembly Act 40 of 1996, under the Fifth Schedule, Social Welfare is listed as Item No. 26 under 'Areas of Responsibility of the Assembly.' And as such there is a department dealing with Social Welfare in the Division of Health, Wellness and Social Protection, which is geared towards meeting the needs of the elderly, disabled and disadvantaged to strengthen their economic and social well-beings. Victims of domestic violence and child abuse can be considered disadvantaged.

COVID-19 has become common place and individuals are learning to deal, to cope and to adapt to this 'new normal.' At the onset of this dreaded disease, governments worldwide implemented stay-at-home measures to combat the spread of the virus. Similarly, in Trinidad and Tobago, our government implemented the Public Health Ordinance Chapter 12 No. 4,

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Request for the Tobago House of Assembly to  
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Domestic Violence – Victims and Perpetrators (Cont'd)

COUNCILLOR P. DANIEL-BENOIT (Cont'd)

which indicates that all non-essential workers shall remain at home until such time as indicated. These restrictions resulted in closures of schools, bars, recreational facilities and of course, the suspension of non-essential services both in the private and public sectors.

These stay-at-home measures also resulted in individuals being locked down with their abusers, creating dangerous conditions for violence against women, men and children, often with tragic consequences. There may have been a school of thought that the pandemic and the stay-at-home measures would bring partners and families closer together; however, global indicators tell a different story.

The United Nation (UN) Women Report, measuring the shadow pandemic, violence against women during COVID-19, confirms the severity of the problem and has revealed gender-based violence has increased significantly as a result of COVID-19 and domestic violence has increased

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Request for the Tobago House of Assembly to  
Develop and Implement Strategies to deal with  
Domestic Violence – Victims and Perpetrators (Cont'd)

COUNCILLOR P. DANIEL-BENOIT (Cont'd)

globally in 2020 and 2021, leading to the United Nations to label this “A shadow pandemic.”

This report, Madam Presiding Officer, brings together data collected in thirteen (13) countries across all regions. It revealed the following:

Firstly, the pandemic has increased women's experiences of violence and eroded their feelings of safety. Across the thirteen (13) countries surveyed, two (2) in three (3) women report that they or a woman they know, has experienced violence at some point in their life. Nearly one in two (2) or forty-five (45) percent reported direct or indirect experiences of violence since the start of the pandemic.

The report also broke down the different types of abuse experienced. The most common form being:

- Verbal abuse, which accounted for fifty (50) percent;

followed by

- Sexual harassment - forty percent (40%);

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Request for the Tobago House of Assembly to  
Develop and Implement Strategies to deal with  
Domestic Violence – Victims and Perpetrators (Cont'd)

COUNCILLOR P. DANIEL-BENOIT (Cont'd)

- Physical abuse - thirty-six percent (36%); and
- Denial of basic needs, as well as denial of means of communication being thirty-five and thirty percent (35/30%) respectively.

Madam Presiding Officer, prior to COVID-19 these are some things that we took for granted.

The report also indicated that most women believe that COVID-19 has made things worse in relation to domestic violence. So nearly seven (7) in ten (10) women think domestic violence has increased during the pandemic and three (3) in five (5) think sexual harassment in public has also increased. In many cases, heightened demand for shelters and other forms of support has remained unmet due to operational constraints.

Madam Presiding Officer, the study found that COVID-19 has eroded women's feelings of safety, whether inside or outside of their households,



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with significant negative impacts on their mental and emotional well-being.

Socioeconomic stressors such as:

- Financial pressure;
- Employment;
- Food security; and
- Family relations

stood out as having a significant impact, not only on experiences of safety or violence, but also on women's well-being overall.

In other words, Madam Presiding Officer, violence against women, has had a significant impact on women's mental health during the pandemic and the socioeconomic factors play a major role in women's experiences of violence. One in four (4) women or twenty-three percent (23%), said that COVID-19 have made things worse in terms of how safe they feel at home and among women whose partners have no earnings, four (4) in five (5) reports that they or a woman they know, has experienced at least one form of violence.

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Finally, Madam Presiding Officer, the report also indicated that age is no barrier when it comes to violence against women. The findings revealed that age does not offer much protection. Women over sixty (60) experience violence at similar rates to younger women, with over half reporting that they or a woman they know, has experienced some form of violence and we are seeing a similar situation here at home in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Presiding Officer, this report is very instructive and it is informative also. I would encourage Members to take a read. So, I would have outlined the global statistics and now I want to share a local view on this matter.

Madam Presiding Officer, in an Article entitled "*A Perspective of Intimate Partner Violence since COVID-19*" - an intimate partner violence is sometimes referred to as 'domestic violence,' since a large number of these acts are committed by perpetrators occur in the homes or in the households.

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This article was written by Raveed Khan and Saria David from the Department of Para-clinical Services, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago. And they have stated:

“The advent of the Covid-19 pandemic saw the introduction of many unprecedented actions occurring within our communities and by extension, our country.”

Whilst many of us may have heard the term ‘pandemic’ before, few would have had the knowledge or experience of the measures that were taken to contain the corona virus in our country.

The introduction of lock down measures, such as the closure of public spaces like bars; restaurants; malls; places of worships and the list went on, as well as the stay-at-home orders - like working from home for non-essential persons and the closure of all schools, were just a few of the measures that were put in place to curb the spread of Covid-19. The article goes on:

“The ramifications of these measures were planned out overtime with some becoming apparent earlier than others and with grave

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consequences, particularly an increase in acts of intimate partner violence or what we also call domestic violence.

And the article quotes:

“Locally in Trinidad and Tobago prevalence rates as high as forty-one percent (41%) have been reported with alcohol and drug abuse being cited as the leading cause.

According to the August 2020 Report from the Trinidad and Tobago Central Registry of Domestic Violence, in 2019 there were two hundred and thirty-two (232) reports of domestic violence.

Compared to 2020, there were five hundred and fifty-six (556) cases of domestic violence that were reported and we are seeing a significant increase - more than double the amount.

During the period of January to March 2021, there were eight hundred and twenty-six (826) reported cases of domestic violence.”

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Madam Presiding Officer, based on these findings, it would appear that Covid-19 created a conducive environment for domestic violence surge with the background of an existing high prevalence rate compounded by confinement and possible increased consumption of alcohol and drugs at home. And of course, the article went on to indicate some societal factors that may have accounted for the increase in violence.

Madam Presiding Officer, while preparing for this presentation, it was quite interesting to see the number of commentators, researchers and professionals globally as well as locally, agreeing that the stay-at-home measures which fight against the Covid-19 pandemic, have resulted in alarming increase in domestic violence.

And as we see this demonstrated, there is another article that was captioned:

“Stay-at-home orders accompanied by a rise in domestic violence in Trinidad and Tobago.”

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And the comments of this article is attributed to former Commissioner of Police Gary Griffith, who was speaking at the launch of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Services Gender-based Violence Unit on January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020.

And the article reads:

“In a press conference on April 9<sup>th</sup> 2020, the country’s Commissioner of Police, Captain Gary Griffith shared the data confirming that such crimes have been on the rise.”

And he was speaking to domestic violence crimes.

“In February 2019, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service has received thirty-nine (39) reports of assaults by beating. In February 2020 the figure had climbed to seventy-three (73).

Similarly, in March 2019 reports on domestic violence numbered forty-two (42), while in March 2020, there were ninety-six (96) reports.”

And Mr. Griffith in the report stated that there was a rise in domestic violence cases from two hundred and thirty-two (232) in 2019, to five hundred

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and fifty-eight (558) in 2020. And from the reports we obviously see an alarming trend of the increase in domestic violence.

Madam Presiding Officer, although we were not able to obtain data specific to Tobago in relation to domestic violence crimes, the Minority held several meetings and discussions with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and individuals who assist domestic violence victims. They also noted the overwhelming increase in persons seeking support and seeking help from their organizations as a result of domestic violence.

Not only have we observed an increase in domestic violence - there has also been reports of a stark surge in crimes against children and adolescence. And various theories explain the social isolation measures taken by governments worldwide; the impact on jobs; the economic instability; high levels of tensions and fear of the virus as well as other factors which have accounted for the increased levels of stress in families and therefore, greater risk of violence.

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The Report from the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago reported four thousand, one hundred and forty-two (4,142) cases of child abuse across Trinidad and Tobago in the year 2021, and for the first quarter of 2022 - January to March - the Children's Authority has already seen one thousand and thirty (1,030) cases of child abuse across the country.

As it relates to Tobago, between 2021 and 2022, reported cases of child abuse in Tobago have accounted for close to four percent (4%) of the total reported cases across Trinidad and Tobago. And based on the overall statistics, this means that there were more than one hundred and fifty (150) cases of child abuse reported in the year 2021 in Tobago, and approximately forty (40) cases have already been reported for the first three (3) months in 2022 - and this is January to March - in Tobago.

Madam Presiding Officer, during the 'Child Abuse Prevention Month' in April 2022, the Children's Authority highlighted that across Trinidad and Tobago, child sexual abuse remains a major concern and it is the second



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highest category of abuse reported to the Authority, accounting for just over twenty-three percent (23%) of the reported cases.

It is important to note that these statistics are based only on the cases reported to the Authority. Many cases of child abuse and also domestic violence would have gone undetected if persons failed to make a report. So we are encouraging as well, persons - that if they know, if they see, to make a report.

Madam Presiding Officer, one incident of domestic violence or child abuse, or any crime for that matter, is one too many. And we call on the Executive Council and the Members opposite to join with the Minority in condemning these heinous acts against our citizens.

It is anticipated that Members on the majority would pontificate that the People's National Movement (PNM) was in office for over twenty (20) years, why did they not address this issues and so forth and so forth. Yes, the former

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Administration would have implemented policies and measures to address these issues.

It was under the People's National Movement Administration that various social welfare grants and assistance were implemented that mirrors most of those social support offered by the Central Government, for example, the Rental Assistance - and there are many more assistance and grants provided.

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A Committee was also set up geared towards streamlining children's care and foster care facilities and establishing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to manage and supervise the operations of these homes compliant with the Children's Authority Regulations.

It is our information that this Committee would have created a policy document and guide for foster care and children's homes on the island.

Madam Presiding Officer, there are also a number of other initiatives to strengthen the support to these institutions on the island, among other initiatives.

Notwithstanding, Madam Presiding Officer, the COVID-19 pandemic has exaggerated and intensified incidents of domestic violence and child abuse. The research speaks for itself and shows that this is not only a Trinidad and Tobago issue; it is not only a Tobago issue, but a global challenge which we must face head-on. Dynamic, forward-thinking, innovative, sustainable solutions are required now.

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**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** *Minority Councillor.*

Minority Leader, this Motion was brought in your name, can you please explain why you did not do your presentation first to move your Motion?

**MINORITY LEADER (Mr. Kelvon Morris):** This was an administrative error in terms of it was to be in the name of the Minority Councillor. However, it was written under the hand of the office of the Minority Leader.

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** Madam Clerk.

**MINORITY COUNCILLOR:** Thank you, Madam Presiding Officer.

*[Interruption]*

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** Minority Councillor, please hold. Madam Clerk. [Conversation between Madam Clerk of the House and Madam Presiding Officer, takes place.]

Minority Councillor and Minority Leader, I cautioned you all to get your correspondences correct when coming to the business of the House. The Motion is in the Minority Councillor's name. Yes?

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**COUNCILLOR:** Yes, Madam Presiding Officer.

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** You may proceed.

**MINORITY COUNCILLOR:** Thank you, Madam Presiding Officer.

I was indicating, Madam Presiding Officer, that dynamic; forward thinking; innovative and sustainable solutions are required immediately, right now, to address these issues.

This minority as we highlight and identify the issues, we also put forward recommendations to address them.

I am pleased to indicate that most of the recommendations today, came from our consultations with organizations and individuals who will support these victims.

The first recommendation I wish to place on the table for consideration, is the review of existing policies to ensure that they are applicable and address the issues currently facing our island in relation to domestic violence and child abuse.

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COVID-19 presented new realities and highlighted existing ones and therefore, existing policies may require adjustments.

Additionally, it may also require implementing new and innovative policies for the medium term, as well as the long term.

Another recommendation that we wish to put forward, is greater collaboration, strengthened partnerships and increased resources for Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) supporting victims of domestic violence and child abuse, to facilitate added access to shelters and to provide increased social support to victims.

In our meetings with the stakeholders, it was highlighted that a number of victims returned to the perpetrators, because they simply have nowhere else to go and therefore, seemingly, have no other option than to stay in the situation of abuse. This was quite alarming.

Our third recommendation, is improved or greater public awareness campaign in an effort to reduce and end domestic violence and child abuse.

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And finally, we also want to recommend support for the perpetrators. If we wish to reduce or end domestic violence and child abuse, support should not only be provided to victims, but also to the perpetrators. It is said that domestic violence is learnt behaviour and because it is learnt behaviour, it can also be unlearned.

There are numerous stories where current perpetrators were past victims or were a part of families where domestic violence or child abuse occurred. Then we also have some of our traditional beliefs of '*spear the rod and spoil the child*' or '*if the man does not beat the woman, he does not love her,*' as illustrated by a calypso from one of our famous Calypsonians. These are just a few examples of learnt behaviours.

Therefore, the minority advocates for intervention and support for the perpetrators which provide appropriate measures to hold them accountable for their abusive behaviours and choices that addresses the root causes and belief systems which contribute to the violent behaviours, as well as

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challenges them to recognize and adjust their abusive behaviours and attitudes with the goal of preventing violence in their current and future relationships.

Madam Presiding Officer, the Minority believes that a multi-pronged approach should be used where the Tobago House of Assembly facilitates the partnership of all sectors - government or the public sector, business sector, as well as civil society such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and include support for both victims and perpetrators that is of a preventative, as well as protective in nature.

In conclusion, Madam Presiding Officer, this Minority is willing to work with the Executive Council to address these and other issues and seek the support of those opposite, for this Motion.

I will re-read the Motion:



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**“WHEREAS** the Tobago House of Assembly Act 40 of 1996 via the fifth schedule is responsible for all matters related to social welfare;

**AND WHEREAS** the onset of COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 resulted in stay-at-home measures;

**AND WHEREAS** there has been an alarming increase in incidents of domestic violence and child abuse directly affecting men, women and children;

**BE IT RESOLVED** that this House joins in condemnation of these heinous acts of violence and abuse meted out to citizens throughout the country;

**AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that this House mandates the Tobago House of Assembly to develop and implement strategies to treat with the meaningful engagement of both victims and the perpetrators of these incidents.”

Madam Presiding Officer, I beg to move.

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**MINORITY LEADER:** Madam Presiding Officer, I beg to second this  
Motion.

*Question proposed.*

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**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** *Assemblyman Sonny Graig, you may  
now join the debate.*

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY IN THE DIVISION OF HEALTH,  
WELLNESS AND SOCIAL PROTECTION** (Mr. Sonny Graig) [Desk  
thumping]. A pleasant good afternoon, Madam Presiding Officer. To all of  
the majority and minority in the House, a pleasant good afternoon.

The Minority has brought to us this evening, a Motion which I will read  
that states:

“**WHEREAS** the Tobago House of Assembly Act 40 of 1996, via the  
5<sup>th</sup> Schedule is responsible for all matters related to Social Welfare;

**AND WHEREAS** the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020,  
resulted in stay-at-home measures;

**AND WHEREAS** there has been an alarming increase in incidents of  
domestic violence and child abuse, directly affecting men, women and  
children;

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**BE IT RESOLVED** that this House joins in condemnation of these heinous acts of violence and abuse meted out to citizens throughout the country;

**AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that this House mandates the Tobago House of Assembly to develop and implement strategies to treat with the meaningful engagement of both victims and perpetrators of these incidents.”

Let me tell this House this afternoon that this Motion is late. It is very late because as I sit as Assistant Secretary of Health, Wellness and Social Protection, I could say beyond the shadow of a doubt, that we have been working assiduously to deal with this situation in our beloved island of Tobago.

The goodly Councillor stated statistics from far and wide and I do not think it would be of any consequence for me to seek to state also that there is no challenge to the fact that domestic violence constitutes something very heinous and very, very harmful to our society.

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We at the Division have been meeting and interacting with persons in our community continuously for the five (5) months that we have been in office. And during those five (5) months, of course (they came just at the tail end of the pandemic) we have been able to see where some negligence on the part of those who were before us, could be part of the reason for some of these challenges that we have in our society.

The research on domestic violence would show that most of the perpetrators in domestic violence happen to be men. And when your island suffers a certain kind of leadership, it could filter down right into the society and create a certain measure of frustration.

Nonetheless, we at the Division are well equipped and seeking to continually improve the quality of service we offer to those who are so affected - both victims and perpetrators.

It is part of the structure of governance in Trinidad and Tobago to have proceedings and court hearings from time to time to deal with matters of this

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kind. So for domestic violence, we have a Family District and Children's Court to deal with matters as they arise. The Judicial Officers are present and there are Probation Officers to prepare a Probation Officer's report in order to guide the decision-making process. Parties in proceedings can be adults and children. Risk Assessments Reports have been requested as far back as 2021 as well, so that we can do a better job as we go forward.

We requested counselling - we have therapy mediation and probation services. All these are done in Trinidad, but in Tobago the modules is a bit different because we have internal referrals where our social workers and social support staff could meet those affected and deal with their different challenges. A supervision order can be made in which an officer is required to monitor a child in need of care and protection, so the children are specially taken care of.

We have Judicial Officers, Judges; Masters and or Magistrates. They can request investigative reports at any time that involves the abuse of a child

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and this can be done at any point in the proceedings. Both clients and victims can benefit from interventions and support through counselling; monitoring; rehabilitation through probation supervision orders; referrals to other stakeholders to assist in their overall well-being - for example, in treatment and substance abuse.

So the Motion as presented to us today, borders on pretense that nothing is in place because if I read it again, it says, “the House mandates the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) to develop and implement strategies ...” There is something developed already and there are already strategies in place.

The strategies also involve assistance to the perpetrators. We know that once the perpetrators are not dealt with, there is the risk of repeat offence from time to time.

Upon request of the Court, supervision orders are carried out; clients are monitored and are referred to counselling. Anger management and drug treatment are also offered. Perpetrators are also exposed to workshops –

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training programmes for behavioural changes such as thinking for a change;  
remedial therapy and case-care management. All this is guided by an Act –  
the Domestic Violence Act No.27 of 1999.

So, this afternoon we could safely say, that the Motion presented is  
flawed and that as an institution, (the Tobago House of Assembly) we stand  
ready to just improve on what we already have in place to work for the  
betterment of our citizens.

During the pandemic which lasted two (2) years, persons who were so  
prone and so inclined, were involved in many of these heinous behaviours,  
but it is not something brand new to our environment and to our society.  
Domestic violence has been around for a very long time and so we intend to  
do our best to seek to work with our citizenry; to work with our professionals  
to ensure that this scourge is brought under subjection.

Despite officers being trained in general counselling, there is a need for  
specialized training in the area of domestic violence. Recommendation for an



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assessment tool to deal with the varying types of applicants - that is, spouses, siblings, parents, parent/child, etcetera, this would assist in the implementation of more precise programmes and recommendations to deal with recidivism.

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This was made particularly since the Tobago District Court began requesting Risk Assessment Reports in 2021. Multi-agency forums; agencies working together to assist victims and perpetrators of domestic violence, sharing information and plans on how they intend to deal with families taking into account the ongoing risk associated with COVID-19.

We have social workers who are hesitant to enter homes and do in-depth investigations and these areas present our greatest challenges. A standard database to capture necessary, pertinent information for easy storage, retrieval of information and for use by the Central Statistical Office (CSO) and of course, attention to be given to particular training in assessment and counselling - clients with domestic violence issues and matters before the Court.

What I am saying in a nutshell, is that regardless of what the situation presented is by this Motion, the Tobago House of Assembly and the

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Division of Health, Wellness and Social Protection, is well equipped and seeking to arm itself continually to be able to deal with this ongoing threat.

Under the leadership of our Chief Secretary and our Divisional Secretary and Assistant Secretaries, we intend to continue to pilot the way towards dealing with this scourge in this society.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. [*Desk thumping*]

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** *Minority Leader, you may now join the debate.*

**MINORITY LEADER** (Mr. K. Morris): Thank you, Madam Presiding Officer.

It is indeed a pleasure once more to join this debate in what I would describe as a 'most relevant and necessary discussion' in Tobago at this time.

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MR. K. MORRIS (Cont'd)

Let me also congratulate the Minority Councillor, Mrs. Petal Daniel-Benoit, for tabling this Motion today, because given what we have been seeing playing out in the public space over the last month or so, where we are seeing a number of reports dealing with child abuse and child care and of course, we continue to see the challenges that we as a nation are facing when it comes to domestic violence, this tells me that this is a Minority Council that is well in touch and well in line with what really matters to the people, not just of Tobago, but of Trinidad and Tobago. I wish to congratulate my Colleague.

Madam Presiding Officer, my Colleague from Buccoo/Mt. Pleasant would have indicated that this Motion - he described it as late and he seemed to suggest that it is irrelevant. It tells me how out of touch this current Administration is, with what is really going on with our people here in Tobago. It tells me that this gentleman is willing to call things or call the weather, 'sunny' when it is indeed, raining. Because this issue of domestic

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violence, this issue of child abuse is alive and well in our homes - in many homes - real in Tobago at this time. Therefore, we found it very critical that we bring this Motion to the attention of the Tobago House of Assembly, so that we can have rational discussions, we can have meaningful discussions as to how we address this issue, this scourge that is plaguing our island.

I do not know who the Assistant Secretary would have consulted, but when you talk to the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), when you talk to the stakeholders, the people who are providing care to victims and the persons who are providing care in the Children's Authority and those other stakeholders, you would recognize how grave a situation we have on our hands at this time. So to dismiss this issue as irrelevant and as late and we have it under control - we do not have it under control, Sir.

This issue is one that requires simply more than policies; this issue is one that requires simply more than us playing lip service - us marching up

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and down the road; it requires us to get together as a people; get all the persons who are willing to make a difference. We need to get back into the schools; we need to get into the churches; we need to get into the communities and it means that we need to refashion and rebrand; and we need to treat with our young men and our young ladies; and we need to treat with our families; and we need to treat with our homes and we need to treat with our Tobago people to ensure that violence is something we eradicate on this island.

Madam Presiding Officer, it is in this context that we brought this Motion. In fact, there was a report from *Loop TT* dated November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021. One of the persons, a Ms. Kobe who is attached to the Gender-based Violence Unit - she is telling us that domestic violence in the country has reached a point where its incidents have been established as a national concern.

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Throughout the last two (2) years and with the advent of COVID-19, there has been a steady increase in the number of persons provided with support by the Domestic Violence Unit. She went as far as to break it down for us and she said:

“In 2020, over eight hundred and ninety-nine (899) people (these being six hundred and forty-nine (649) females) and two hundred and five (205) males, were provided with support via the Victim and Gender-based Unit, while for this year (which was 2021), eight hundred and fifty-eight (858) people were assisted - six hundred and fifty-nine (659) females and one hundred and eighty-eight (188) males.”

What this this tells us, is that the issue of domestic violence, the issue of intimate violence is not only restricted to women - it is a national issue that affects both men as much as it affects women. It tells us that as a society, we need to get into the homes where the issues are alive and well.

I was speaking to one Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) provider. In the conversation, I was told that basically there are situations

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that would happen in the home, so when you have broken homes where domestic violence would have been a situation that the children would have experienced, that affects the child and when that affects the child, the child goes into school. When that child is faced with incidents of - whether it be someone perhaps might bully them; might trouble them, just they just do not know how to deal with conflict and we are seeing that issue transcending from the home into the schools.



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We are seeing fights all over social media and that tells us that something is wrong and we need to get the kind of intervention - we need to sit down and understand what is that thing that is wrong and treat with it.

I heard my Colleague explained and discussed the kind of systems you already have. And you are speaking to the converted because of course, for the past Administration of course (and Councillor Daniel-Benoit mentioned it) would have put some systems, would have put some things in place, but we recognize that there are gaps and it is for this reason while we condemn these acts of violence, while we condemn the acts of the perpetrators, we are saying that we must not give up on them. We are saying, let us look at where the gaps lie and let us see how we can have these issues resolved to the benefit of both the victim as well as the perpetrator.

There are situations where when you look at this whole issue of gender-based violence and when you look at how we treat with the victims, I know for a fact, that there are persons who stay in abusive relationships because they

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just do not know where to turn; they just do not know where to go. They may apply for a grant; they might apply for the rental assistance, but they may just not qualify and we do not yet have the type of support - the domestic violence shelters and those kinds of things. And even if we have them, they are not enough; they are not sufficient to really take in victims of domestic violence. This is one of the things that we would want to posit as something we should do posthaste - to work with the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) - persons like Ms. Mars and they who deal with gender-based violence and have available or construct if we can, a shelter specific to persons facing domestic violence.

We are saying that we have issues with child abuse. There are persons in our system who for one reason or the other, will perpetrate acts against children that are of the most heinous nature and we condemn those persons, but we should not leave them in the dark because it means that most times

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these persons have some kind of mental challenge that has been suppressed over a period of time, it is very difficult. I could share with you, because I know of persons who have mental challenges and who need to see a therapist. It is very difficult to get that kind of support on a timely basis, even now.

So yes, the Division may have some therapeutic counsellors, but how many are they? And when you look at how long it takes to access the service, sometimes even depending on the case - if you are a child, then you have to go through another - I think it is through the Division of Education and if you are an adult, then you go through the Division of Health, Wellness and Social Protection. And perhaps maybe we look at where we streamline this service under one unit and have resource in that unit - adequate therapeutic counsellors - so that we can give persons the requisite support.

I remember one time in the Tobago House of Assembly (THA), we did have support for workers and you could have accessed very discreetly and confidentially, the service of going to a counsellor and you talk about whatever situation - it could be domestic, it could be on work and so forth, but

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at some point it became very costly to the Tobago House of Assembly and that service would have had to be removed, I believe.

But I am saying here, coming out of this Covid-19 experience, this type of service is needed more than ever because we have persons under pressure.

Imagine, this Administration is one that is sending home persons without any kind of support; no separation package and you are sending home in some cases, families - you are sending home the husband and you are sending home the wife. How do you expect these persons to survive? These kind of issues can lead to domestic violence because when people are frustrated, when they are unable to provide, this leads to conflict. So we/you are contributing to domestic violence at this time. [*Interruption*]

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** Minority Leader, you are out of order. Please get back to the topic at hand.

**MR. K. MORRIS:** We are talking about domestic violence.

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** Minority Leader, this is my House in case you forgot. Please get back to the topic at hand. [*Desk thumping*]

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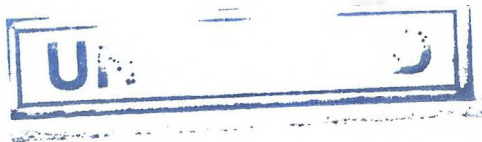
**MR. K. MORRIS:** Madam Presiding Officer, I stand guided. Thank you.

Domestic violence - I recognize that we have to be very guided in how we speak about domestic violence and those reasons and those situations that can foster domestic violence.

I would have consulted with an expert in this matter and we had the discussion very openly and we were looking at some of the other strategies that can be adopted.

Some of the things we discussed - because we looked at what are some of the strategies that we can use in terms of assisting both victims and perpetrators of domestic violence, as well as child abuse. It is suggested that the strategies adopted must be one of continuous and a continuum of care, and it must focus on the preventative, (so your prevention) and it is important that we begin to develop and teach this in our primary schools all the way up.

So we are saying that domestic violence and child abuse and those issues - the strategies should involve education and educating persons from as



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early as the primary schools all the way up to adulthood, so that we can create that environment that would allow persons to:

- Appreciate each other.
- Appreciate how you treat with conflict.
- Appreciate how you care for one another; and
- How you relate with one another.

We are positing that this should really have the involvement of our Education sector and the schools.

We should also look around developing this in the homes, in the families, and we are not just simply saying let us implement this strategy as a 'one-size-fits-all.' But we are saying that it is for us to understand our communities, for us to understand our families and let us really do things that impact the homes.

Let us get into the homes because there are a lot of broken homes, a lot of broken men and women walking around. And when these broken men and women walk around, it is through these interactions that we end up with issues

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of violence, where we are losing our women at the hands of violent men and where we are seeing our young girls especially, being abused by some men that I would not want to really describe in this House. We have some immediate actions that should be necessary when these things occur.

We need the swift and immediate actions to be put in place. We need an immediate referral for mental health assessment and the treatment should come forward whether it be by the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) or a contracted firm. There should be no wait for all involved – both victim and perpetrators. We also need not make the issue so much criminal while we are not taking away from the fact that it is a crime, but we really should adopt a humanistic approach to this issue. We need to seek and understand the question why? Why is this happening?

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We need to have places (as I mentioned before) of safety for both persons (victims and perpetrators) should this happen. So, we are not just proposing places of safety for the victim, but we also need to look at how we house and how we rehabilitate the perpetrators.

As mentioned before we also need to have that robust divisional referral without the hassle. In the future, we need to have these programmes sustained throughout the island at all levels. So yes, the Division of Health, Wellness and Social Protection should be that initiating frontline department, that frontline division, but at the same time, we really need an 'all of government approach' to this situation that is domestic violence and child abuse.

We also asked the question, what are some of those prevailing conditions that foster these incidents of domestic violence and child abuse in our society? We must admit and we have to understand that there are horrible people living amongst us. With that being said, we have to



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understand emotions; we have to understand that there's a lack of willingness to understand that people are not property and therefore, they should not be owned. The way we raise our boys in understanding life and women and relationship are also important. The way we see child protection, we need to really educate persons as to what 'child protection' really means and we also need to create the relevant child protection system.

So as I close, Madam Presiding Officer, I want to reiterate to this Honourable House that this Minority - we will continue to look at the issues relevant to the people. Because one of the things about this minority, is that we believe that whatever we come to this House with, should really represent what the people are saying on the ground. And in our walks - you would see us from time to time all across Tobago, walking and meeting the people and this issue of domestic violence and child abuse is one that we recognize is very real.

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In fact, the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are crying out for support and we will posit to you that we provide the strategies; we provide the systems that can bring support to both the perpetrators and the victims of these incidents, as to ensure that we have a safe Tobago; we have a Tobago where our children are protected; we have a Tobago where our women are protected and that we have a Tobago where our men feel empowered.

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** *Secretary of Health, Wellness and Social Protection.*

**HON. DR. F. B. YISRAEL:** Thank you, Madam Presiding Officer. [*Desk thumping*]

I must admit that when I saw this Motion, I thought that it was a decent attempt by the Minority to right some of the wrongs that have been

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plaguing our system and by 'system,' I mean, the official system since we are talking about the Tobago House of Assembly over the last couple decades.

I smiled because the first resolution is very much one that I think that we can all agree to. Violence is not something that we should allow to happen and yes, we should all condemn violence in all forms. So I thought that that was good.

When I read the second resolution, Madam Presiding Officer, I became a little concerned for several reasons and some of those reasons do include the fact as the Minority Councillor stated in the opening remarks, that many of the deficiencies that we are seeing in the system now, are actually there because the processes and because the policies and because all of those things that are necessary to make it work, are not in place and the reality is that the group of individuals who have the responsibility to put them in place, is the same organization that the Minority Council belongs to.

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It is a fact, that the last two (2) years of COVID-19 have caused all of us to be a little battered and bruised, some of us really a lot more than others. Those of us who were blessed enough to continue being employed, we felt probably a little less harsh response to what was going on, but the last two (2) years really have been difficult for a lot, a lot, a lot of Tobagonians.

It is important to recognize though, that (and I will say it again because maybe we need to remind people) “Rome was not built in a day.” We need to remind Tobagonians that we really have just been here for under six (6) months; we need to remind Tobagonians that the system that we have met has been the system in place for the last twenty-one (21) years, so we need to be realistic.

I would like to ask the Minority Councillor, to probably indicate to the Minority Leader, that the words of my Colleague, Assemblyman Sonny Craig, were very clear. He indicated that the Motion was a little late. I do

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not think and I could be wrong, that he indicated that it was irrelevant. So it is inaccurate to try to state that my Colleague is saying something that is so heinous, is irrelevant. He did indicate that it was late for very good reasons, that it was late. It is late.

Now, let us go back to one of the things that I continually speak about, is the fact that when we are to fix a problem, it is absolutely critical for us to understand the cause of the problem before we can suggest solutions.

I indicated in a programme a couple of weeks ago, that we in Trinidad and Tobago need to stop being reactive to things happening and that we need to take very clear and decisive decisions about how we as individuals respond, and how we as individuals breed this kind of culture that has caused us to be so violent.

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How exactly do we treat with our young boys and our young girls? Let us just think about it. We very frequently say to a little three (3) year old girl who has fallen and bruised her knee and is crying - we run to her; we hug her; we kiss the 'boo-boo.' We show kindness and compassion and those things to our young girls, but a three (3) year old boy who has fallen and who has hurt himself and is crying, many of us say to him; "Stop crying, you are behaving like a girl. What are you crying for?" And at that moment, you are actually telling this three (3) year old child who is hurt, who is feeling pain, that the pain and the hurt that he is now feeling does not matter and that he is not allowed to express that hurt and that pain. And then we become surprised when that three (3) year old boy is now twenty/twenty-five/thirty (20/25/30) years old and does not know how to express hurt and pain in a way that is not violent. You have to ask yourself, "What are we doing to culture our boys and our girls."

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Another quick example - the fact that when that little boy cries you say to him, “you are behaving like a girl;” the fact that every single time a male does something and you are trying to insult him, you compare him to a woman, in and of itself, is saying that you think that women are less than. You think that women are not equal because if an insult is to call a little boy a little girl, (“you are behaving like a girl,”) that is an insult, you in yourself have accepted the fact that boys and girls are not equal. And I ask you to think about the reverse.

Will you ever say to a little girl in your hope of trying to punish, that they are behaving like a boy? We do not do that. It is only in the reverse where we say, “You are behaving like a girl.”

A couple weeks ago, I did a programme, Madam Presiding Officer, in the East. I am continually called to do programmes as they relate to safer sex and safer sexuality with our young people. I did this programme with several different groups and I asked them several questions.

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I asked - if a thirty (30) year old man has sex with a thirteen (13) year old girl, is that wrong? And in two (2) or three (3) of the groups, they all said yes, that it is obviously wrong. A 'big hard-back' man having sex with a thirteen (13) year old girl, that that is obviously wrong.

And I asked the same question - if a thirty (30) year old woman has sex with a thirteen (13) year old boy, is that wrong? And in every single group they said, "That is okay; she is bringing him out; she is giving him experience." These are young people who have already begun to accept that there is this imbalance among the genders.

This is the last example I will give to show that we need to be very conscious when we are standing here and saying these things. We need to be very conscious of what we actually do. I asked that same group, talking about sexual harassment, (which I am so happy you brought up, Minority Councillor) what happens when a bunch of fellas on the corner passing and a young girl passes? You know the typical - they all are able to say, "pisk; pisk;



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dark thing; sweetness; shorty; you looking good.” They all recognized that that was how we responded.

Madam Presiding Officer, I asked the girls in the group, “Do you like it when young fellas do that?” They all very quickly shouted, “No!” Madam Presiding Officer, what happened after that, is what I am really coming to. What happened after that was that the young men in those groups started saying, “But you all like it; you all are accustomed to it; ent you all does be wearing the short clothes and want we to call you all and thing, thing, thing, thing?” They automatically started pushing back. And then I asked the young girls again, the same question. I asked them - I said, “Girls, do you all like it when the young men do that?” And the first time they answered, they all screamed, “No, we do not like it.”

The second time I asked the question after the young men started pushing back, they all then said, “Not really.” Some were very silent. Because, Madam Presiding Officer, they had recognized at that point, that



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their 'no' did not mean anything and that their 'no' was pushed back on and that their 'no' did not have value.

Now, I say all of this, Madam Presiding Officer, to indicate that as much as we want to just get up and give a fancy speeches and that kind of stuff, there is some very deep, deep, deep seated work that we as Trinbagonians, we as Tobagonians need to do within our own families, within our own circles to help treat with this issue of domestic violence.

Let me seg away a little bit into what is happening at the Division of Health, Wellness and Social Protection. When we saw this Motion, I quickly ran to some of my social workers again, who by the way - one of the reasons that they are unable to respond as quickly as they should, is because the Unit is heavily understaffed which was one of the reasons, one of the things we did recently, was to send out notices for more social workers and therapeutic counsellors and so forth, to be hired. Because as much as we are asking them

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to do the work, we need to also support them by ensuring that their workload is not too much for them to bear. They are still only human beings.

So I asked them, “Given that this is the Motion that I am expected to debate on, can you tell me what is in place now? What is in place; what have you been doing; what is being going on; where has this been going? Talk to me.” And one of the first things they said to me was, “Dr. Faith, we had a whole programme that we were planning to do. We had a whole proposal that included going into our communities and chatting with the youths and chatting with the older people and chatting with the boys versus chatting with the girls and what not, what not. We had all of those.” Then they pulled out the proposals that were dated years ago, and then I asked them what happened?

And the response was, “Those above did not think that it was a priority. All they wanted us to do, was to give out the food cards; give out the equipment and to give that kind of stuff. They did not put priority in these

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things because they would not have been able to show. We had the four hundred (400) and something food cards in our back pockets.”

So, it is kind of very annoying to have the Minority Council come here today and talk about the fact that the social workers and the therapeutic counsellors and so forth - that they are not doing enough when they have been trying and it is your colleagues who did not give them the support to do what they needed to do.

I join my Colleague, Assemblyman Sonny Graig, in saying, that the Motion is late.

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Let me also indicate, that we have the audacity to come here and stand up and talk about the fact that we do not have a shelter for women who are in domestic violence situations.

When I was at the Division of Health - and it was 'Health and Social Services' back then, (that is to tell you how long it was) one of the things that was implemented then was the Women's Empowerment Technology Centre (WETEC). It was a shelter that women and their children were supposed to go to, when they are in need. I showed up at the Division of now Health, Wellness and Social Protection and asked where is that shelter? The answer is that they are ducking their head and saying, "Well, those who were in charge did not see it as a priority, so it fizzled away." Then I had to ask them - I understand because when I was in the Minority Council there was talk about a building that was purchased for some millions of dollars that we were supposed to use to house children, to house possibly women, all of that. We spent millions of dollars on that property.

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A couple weeks ago, I went with my staff to view the property and I left almost in tears, because the whole thing has cracks all over it. When they looked at it; when my PIU looked at it, they said “Dr. Faith, we cannot use that building, that building is not safe. The amount of work we would have to put in to make that building safe, it does not make sense trying to rehabilitate that building.” That building was purchased within the last couple years, during the period where the organization that they represent right now, were the ones who took taxpayers’ money; took taxpayers’ money and purchased that building that we now cannot use, because I do not even know what was the rationale for spending the money. But we are here now and we are in a position where we cannot use it.

My social support staff, what they are currently doing, because we just looked at the Auditor General’s Report again, and as soon as I saw the Auditor General’s report, I actually said to my Administrator, “Let us sit

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down right now, to figure out what we need to put in place, because anytime the Auditors come to look at this tenure, I do not want my good name associated with any of those adverse reports.” [*Desk thumping*] So, we sat down and we realized that several things need to happen. We need to have very good policies in place; we need to figure out how we can actually provide swift support in a way that actually makes sense, in a way that actually fulfills the Auditor General and fulfills the Financial Regulations and those things, without having to boast that we have four hundred (400) and something food cards in our back pockets.

My social workers, my social support staff - they have been tasked with coming up with that policy, so that we know when we say, ‘Left,’ ‘Right,’ ‘Up’ and ‘Down,’ it is because that is the policy and we are going to follow it. Some of the programmes that were not agreed to include dealing with:

- Anger management;

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- Parental classes;
- Substance abuse prevention;
- Life skill training;
- Giving out more money for the REACH grant and so forth,  
which is a Business Development Grant.

Those were the programmes that were written in that proposal that I looked at and those were the programmes that they said to me, were not a priority. So do not come, I am sorry. Do not come today and try to pretend that you are doing something. Well yes, I will say it. You had the opportunity; your organization had the opportunity to do it, and did not do it. [*Desk thumping*] over the last umpteen years.

Talking about perpetrators - we actually were supposed to have a graduation within the prison system this week, because again, my social support staff went out of their way and actually implemented a full prison programme, where the prisoners were learning about dealing with their anger and dealing with your emotions and how we could resolve these



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issues, so that when they go back into the system, they go back better.

When representatives from the prison system actually met with me, they actually said, “Dr. Faith, we were so excited about this, because we are actually seeing the results; we are actually seeing that some of our charges are now in a better position than where they were before.” So the programmes are there. What we need, is the kind of leadership that actually prioritizes those kinds of programmes so that the support staff, the social support staff that are doing the best that they can throughout the various Divisions, (not just mine) can do their work.

Now I am very, very, very happy (and I am wrapping up) that the Minority Leader also spoke about the fact that one of the problems we have, is that if you have a client who is a child, that the child needs to be seen by people in Education while the adults need to be seen by people in the Division of Health, Wellness and Social Protection. Because what he is in fact speaking about, is the reason we brought the Motion that we brought

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last month to the House, to have a case-conferencing model in place so that all of these social support people can actually work together on their cases. That policy will be done by the end of June. And as a matter of fact, my social support people are telling me that even though the policy is not yet done, they have already started doing it, where depending on the case they are already sitting in a single room (not necessarily physically) with the social workers from different arms of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA), ensuring that the kind of service we provide to our clients, is absolutely the best.

Up until today, this morning as a matter of fact, I was in a meeting with the United Nation (UN) women, because UN women are looking at various models of ensuring that our cities, of ensuring that our communities...

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** Member, you have five (5) more minutes.

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**HON. DR. F. B. YISRAEL:** Thank you, Madam Presiding Officer. This meeting with the UN women this morning, was part of us partnering to ensure that we use tried and true and tested models to develop the kinds of systems that we are talking about. We are continuing to provide the kind of leadership; to provide the kind of support to our social support staff that is necessary.

Before I wrap up, I would like to actually give two (2) numbers that have been in place at the Division of Health, Wellness and Social Protection. These numbers - one is for therapeutic counsellors, because we actually have a decent cadre of counsellors on board - they are an amazing bunch of people who know what they are talking about and know what to do. [*Desk thumping*] If you are in a situation where you need therapeutic counselling, you can call or *WhatsApp* 683-8341. If you need an assessment - social support intervention, you can call or *WhatsApp* 683-8347. Yes, those are both numbers that I met while here, but we are ensuring that the individuals who answer those calls, are totally supported in their job.

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And because of that, Madam Presiding Officer, we are recommending that we do in fact, indeed support an amended version of this Motion. We will go with:

**“WHEREAS** the Tobago House of Assembly Act 40 of 1996 via the 5<sup>th</sup> schedule is responsible for all matters related to Social Welfare;

**AND WHEREAS** the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, resulted in stay-at-home measures;

**AND WHEREAS** there has been an alarming increase in incidents of domestic violence and child abuse, directly affecting men, women and children;

We will even go with:

**BE IT RESOLVED** that this House joins in condemnation of these heinous acts of violence and abuse meted out to citizens throughout the country;

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But we will amend the Motion to change the last resolution to, instead of  
reading:

“That this House mandates the Tobago House of Assembly to develop  
and implement strategies to treat with the meaningful engagement of  
both victims and perpetrators.”

We then have it read:

“**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that this THA Executive Council  
continue to support the work of our social support staff within the  
Tobago House of Assembly and the larger Tobago community  
including NGOs and CBOs in managing these issues.”

With that, Madam Presiding Officer, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** Honourable Members, the question is  
that the Motion be amended by deleting the last resolution that reads:

“**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that this House mandates the THA  
to develop and implement strategies to treat with meaningful  
engagement of both victims and perpetrators of these incidents.”

And inserting the words:

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**“BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that this THA Executive Council continue to support the work of our social support staff within the Tobago House of Assembly and the larger Tobago community including NGOs and CBOs in managing these issues.”

Members taking part in the debate hereafter may speak on the original Motion and the proposed amendment.

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** *Minority Councillor, you may wrap up the debate.*

**MRS. P. DANIEL-BENOIT:** Madam Presiding Officer, thank you again for the opportunity to wind up this debate.

First, I want to say that I am happy that those opposed to the Minority would have agreed to some aspects of the Motion. However, I do not see the relevance of amending and the diversion that is currently placed for the amendment.

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

We are also happy that you agreed that the former Administration would have implemented and put in place, policies to address this issue and Secretary of Health, Wellness and Social Protection, in her wind up, would have indicated the good work of the persons who are providing services for mental health issues and counselling and so forth, and the hotline that is now available to persons seeking immediate intervention in relation to domestic violence and abuse.

We agree that there is a need to culture our children differently and that is one of the reasons why under the former Administration, the current Division of Health, Wellness and Social Protection was named, “Health, Wellness and Family Development,” because we saw the need to empower and engender and boost the whole issue of family life. Because we understand that everyone has a role and a responsibility to play in the upbringing and we all have a part to play in contributing to the reduction. But we are also saying that the Tobago House of Assembly and this Executive Council has a major

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role in facilitating and bringing all sectors together to the table, to forward and implement these strategies.

What I think the majority did not understand in the Motion, is that we agree and the statistics both presented by myself and everyone who would have presented statistics here, shows that domestic violence and child abuse is prevalent in our society, but we see the Motion currently as timely and relevant because there has been a significant rise and based on the statistics, it is more than two-fold in some instances, in domestic violence and child abuse. So we understand that current policies are in place, but what we do not feel, is that the current policies address the need sufficiently. We do not feel that the current policies address the significant rise, the exaggerated rise in domestic violence and child abuse and we feel that this Administration needs to pay closer attention and deal with those issues that present themselves as a result of Covid-19.



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

Pre-COVID-19, yes, we had domestic violence, but we are seeing now an exaggerated rise and of course, we are seeing in Trinidad and Tobago where (was it last week) almost every day of the week, there was a murder – death - a woman; child and children, and we feel that this is something urgent that the Administration needs to pay attention to and that it cannot be ‘business as usual.’

Madam Presiding Officer, we also want to correct the record, and it was indicated that the Minority agreed that policies were not in place. The Minority did not agree, or did not indicate, or did not suggest by our utterances, that nothing was in place to deal with domestic violence and child abuse from the last Administration.

Madam Presiding Officer, I would not go much longer, but in the research and the regents we would have seen and based on the discussions with Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), individuals - I am happy that we would have engaged in those discussions so that we have a greater

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appreciation and a full understanding of what is happening in relation to these  
issues.

One of the things that were identified, is that the potential for economic  
abuse which leads and increases domestic abuse and child abuse, one of the  
resulting factors was due to job losses, furlongs, reduced working hours and  
a general decline in economic activity.

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COUNCILLOR P. DANIEL-BENOIT (Cont'd)

We would have seen that in Trinidad and Tobago because of the lockdown and the stay-at-home measures, persons were forced to go home. Again, it was indicated that job losses was one of the reasons and one of the factors that accounted for increased stress levels and an increase in domestic violence and abuse.

Madam Presiding Officer, I want to caution this current Administration, that as they dismantle departments and they dismantle and send home persons, that the manner in which they are doing the restructuring and disengaging and disenfranchising persons, they are not contributing to the increase in domestic violence and child abuse.

Madam Presiding Officer, I just want to thank you for the opportunity to contribute in this debate.

I thank you.

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**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** Honourable Members, amendments were proposed to the Motion before the question is put to the House. We need to vote on each amendment.

The amendment proposed was, that we delete the last resolution:

“**AND BE IT FURTHER** resolved that this House mandates the Tobago House of Assembly to develop and implement strategies to treat with the meaningful engagement of both victims and perpetrators of these incidents;”

and to insert:

“**AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that this Tobago House of Assembly Executive Council continued to support the work of our social support staff within the THA and the larger Tobago community including NGOs and CBOs in managing these issues.”

*The amendments are carried.*

Now Members, I would now put the question to the House given all amendments were carried.

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MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER (Cont'd)

The new amended Motion reads as follows:

**“WHEREAS** the Tobago House of Assembly Act 40 of 1996 via the Fifth Schedule is responsible for all matters relating to social welfare

**AND WHEREAS** the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 resulted in stay-at-home measures;

**AND WHEREAS** there has been an alarming increase in incidents of domestic violence and child abuse directly affecting men, women and children;

**BE IT RESOLVED** that this House joins in condemnation of these heinous acts of violence and abuse meted out to citizens throughout the country;

**AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that this THA Executive Council continue to support the work of our social support staff within the THA and the larger Tobago community including NGOs and CBOs in managing these issues.”

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MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER (Cont'd)

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Leader of Assembly Business.*

**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 3.57 p.m.*