



Contribution

by

The Hon. Marvin H. Dames, M.P.

The Minister of National Security

2021-2022 National Budget Debate Contribution

at

The House of Assembly

Wednesday, 9th June, 2021

10:00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker,

I deem it an absolute privilege to confidently rise in this Honourable House as I make my contribution to the 2021/2022 Budget Debate.

Mr. Speaker,

A strong family structure is very important, if not, the most important factor in the life of a successful politician. Having somewhere to go and call home is essential. Having someone to love as a family is priceless. And having both is a blessing. Mr. Speaker, I am blessed and grateful for a home and, most importantly, my family.

Truer words were never spoken when it was said that a man is usually a reflection of his wife and family. Stacey, my wife, is the glue that keeps us all time on task and my biggest supporter. My children, Joshua and Kai, remind me that the work I do is for their future and, by extension, the future of all Bahamian children. To my wife and children, I say thank you for being my greatest inspiration.

Mr. Speaker,

An unknown author once stated, “no one is irreplaceable, but some folks you never want to have to replace”. The people of the Mt. Moriah Constituency are amongst those folks that I would never want to replace. Specifically, I am grateful for the FNM Council of the Mount Moriah Constituency, the Consultative Committee and the Associations of the Yellow Elder, Millennium and Stapledon Gardens communities.

To my constituents in Mt. Moriah, as your representative, I know how difficult the last 15 months have been. There was great uncertainty and an immeasurable amount of turmoil in your lives - the loss of jobs; the inability to meet financial obligations such as mortgage, rent, and utility bills; and perhaps the thought of not knowing where the next meal was coming from. As your Member of Parliament, I have sat and listened to your stories and rendered assistance where I could have because we are all in this fight together.

In fact, the entire world has been tossed into this global experience that has brought immense pain and despair. But, I am here to tell you today, that while we are not perfect, you can take comfort in the fact that you have the right leader and a competent Government in place to get you through this most difficult challenge in our lifetime.

While there remains much work to be done, over the last four (4) years we have been able to accomplish a great deal of work to improve the constituency one household at a time. All of the individual time, talents and treasures were all important and have provided a better quality of life and economic development opportunities for you, the Mt. Moriah constituents.

Mr. Speaker,

I wish to extend a belated Happy Mother's Day to all of the mothers in Mt. Moriah. Despite not having our annual celebration, we did recognize our mothers and had fun doing so at our Virtual Mother's

Day Giveaway – Mt. Moriah style. To the fathers in our constituency, no worries because our Virtual Father’s Day Giveaway is scheduled for Saturday, 19th June, 2021. I encourage all fathers in the constituency to register online via the Mt. Moriah’s Facebook page.

Mr. Speaker,

Day after day we see and hear countless stories of first-world countries such as the United States, France and Canada all fighting, COVID-19, a common enemy. The World Health Organization (7th June, 2021) has confirmed **one hundred and seventy-three million, five thousand, five hundred and fifty-three (173,005,553)** positive cases of COVID-19. Meanwhile, The Bahamas has recorded **twelve thousand and twenty-four (12,024)** positive cases (Ministry of Health, 6th June, 2021). Further, for The Bahamas, this pandemic was preceded by Hurricane Dorian which devastated our northern islands in September, 2019. This is by far the worst global crisis in over a 100 years.

Mr. Speaker,

I want to impress upon Bahamians that increased healthcare demands and socio-economic challenges associated with COVID-19 are a global problem and not exclusive to The Bahamas. It is one in which no Government in the world was immune from. This Minnis Administration is doing its best given the circumstances. The decisions made by our Government prior to Dorian and during COVID allows us to maintain our economic stability and ensures that all Bahamians will persevere and exit this pandemic more resilient than before.

This is not a make believe or hocus pocus Government as we were accustomed to under the previous Administration. Pure and simple, this is accountable and transparent governance by this Minnis led Administration. In retrospect, if you believe the side opposite when they give the impression that if they had been in Government this

would have been a non-issue, or I suppose they would have found a cure and created their own vaccine, distributed it and made it magically disappear – this is totally absurd! All of a sudden, they have become expert scientists, economists and strategists of all kinds. In actuality, all they would have done is borrow us into oblivion, hire consultants in the form of friends, family and lovers with no accountability whatsoever. That is what they do best!

Mr. Speaker,

The Bahamas is a small-nation state that is heavily reliant on tourism. Statistics indicate that 70 percent of our workforce is directly and indirectly connected to the tourism industry (Tourism Today, n.d.). The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2021) predicts that the COVID-19 pandemic is anticipated to result in a possible 20 - 30 percent contraction in the tourism sector in 2020. Consequently, even after travel restrictions are lifted, the COVID-19

pandemic is still expected to have long-lasting effects on the tourism industry.

In light of the above, the socio-economic impact could have had devastating consequences if our Administration didn't consider the human implications of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our Government did not simply provide lip-service and empty promises to the thousands of Bahamians affected by these crises. We trusted and relied on our professionals, primarily in the public sector, to chart the way for a safer passage through both of these unprecedented occurrences.

Mr. Speaker,

This Minnis led Administration introduced 'The Resilient Bahamas Plan' which was anchored in engendering well-being in confidence, maintaining economic stability and planting seeds for accelerated recovery. Specifically, the plan focused on:

1. A **twenty-five point nine million dollars (\$25.9)** investment in public health and safety measures;
2. A **one hundred and eighteen million dollars (\$118)** investment in Government-funded unemployment assistance for unemployed and self-employed Bahamians;
3. A **thirty-two point eight million dollars (\$32.8)** investment in social assistance to support the food assistance programme;
4. A **forty-four point four million dollars (\$44.4)** investment in the Government's payroll support programmes; and
5. A **fifty-three point three million dollars (\$53.3)** investment in the domestic economy for business continuity to support Bahamian entrepreneurs and small businesses.

Mr. Speaker,

Purposeful debates are healthy to any democratic system of Government. However, when misleading statements are made by those who are seeking to lead our nation, they only serve to undermine investors' confidence and further add to the pain and misery already being felt by Bahamians as a result of this pandemic.

Members on the side opposite continue to engage in partisan politics which they have become so famous for. They purposely and knowingly fail to acknowledge good governance principles and best practices. But, what do you expect from a group who prior to us coming into Office made history by spare-heading, arguably, the worst Government in our nation's history.

Mr. Speaker,

This Hubert Minnis led Government is no hocus, pocus – out of focus Government. The member for Killarney deserves credit for the manner in which he has been able to maintain course despite the many storms he has had to endure during his short time in Office. As he is no stranger to saving lives - rest assured my fellow Bahamians, he will safely guide us through these challenging times. Under his leadership, we will persevere. Better him than the crew who got shipwrecked in 2017 in calm seas and still can't find their way home.

Mr. Speaker,

I would like to remind Bahamians that prior to 2017, under the last Administration, The Bahamas received three (3) credit downgrades by Standard and Poor's (S&P) and three (3) credit downgrades by Moody's during the 2012/2013 to 2016/2017 fiscal years. Before the dual crises, the country's deficit prior to the FNM being elected, was calculated at \$660 million dollars or 5.4 percent of our GDP.

Upon coming to Office, we sought to reduce the nation's national debt and we did exactly that. In the fiscal year, 2017/2018 we reduced the national debt to **four hundred and fifteen million dollars** or 3.3 percent of the GDP. This reflected an approximate **two hundred and forty-five million dollars (\$245)** difference just after one term. The following year (FY2018/19), it was further reduced to **two hundred and fifteen million dollars (\$215)** or 1.7 percent of our GDP. This reflected a **two hundred million dollars (\$200,000,000)** difference.

Just imagine if there were no Dorian and COVID-19 during our term in office.

Mr. Speaker,

Despite all that we have endured beginning in 2019, we were still able to rescue our economy from the brink of disaster. At the end of May, 2017 our foreign reserves stood at **nine hundred and fifty-four point three million dollars (\$954.3)**, according to the Central Bank Quarterly Statistical Digest for the period ending June, 2017. At the end of March, 2021 foreign reserves stood at **two billion, two hundred and fifty point seven million dollars (\$2,250.7)**, according to the Central Bank Quarterly Statistical Digest for the period ending March, 2021. This represents an increase of **one million, two hundred and ninety-six point four million dollars (\$1,296.4)** over the period. Please note that much of the increase in foreign currency reserves is attributed to:

1. This FNM Government putting Bahamians first and making a conscious decision to adjust the composition of its borrowing to favour more foreign currency borrowings due to the COVID-19 pandemic to sure up reserves; and
2. The Central Bank of The Bahamas limiting repatriation of funds since the onset of the pandemic locally to also protect The Bahamas' foreign reserve position amidst the global pandemic and reduced foreign currency earnings, traditionally associated with tourism revenue.

Mr. Speaker,

While some may not agree with everything we would have done during this crisis, I accept that. However, the fact remains that we were never here before and these are unprecedented times. The situation warranted decisive leadership and responsible decision-making. This Minnis-led Administration is all about making decisions not in the best interest of a select few, but in the interest of the Bahamian people and the future of our nation.

Mr. Speaker,

According to the World Bank (2021), while families across the globe are still experiencing devastating ramifications from COVID-19, Governmental assistance continues to provide a critical lifeline for the most vulnerable in society. Our Administration continues to do just that! Our comprehensive response provides supportive policies coupled with various social protection programmes for all communities throughout The Bahamas.

Our Government's efforts to get its population vaccinated should be commended as there is no doubt that it is tied to the successful recovery of our economy. Your children's future and that of our nation are tied to us controlling this virus. It is a known fact that those countries who are leading the world in vaccinations are witnessing tremendous declines in their positivity rate and are gradually returning to normalcy. I would like to encourage everyone within the sound of my voice to get vaccinated and disregard the misleading comments and conspiracy theories.

Mr. Speaker,

The IMF (2021) stated that vaccination will be a driving force in economic recovery. The more people that are vaccinated the better the economic outlook for nations across the globe. Hence, there has been a global response by world Governments to render vaccines to their citizens. To date, 1.78 billion doses of vaccine have been administered globally, while 62,183 doses have been administered in The Bahamas. The IMF Report further indicated a projected stronger recovery for global economies compared to the January forecast. In the latter part of the year, world economies are expected to grow 6 percent in 2021 and 4.4 percent in 2022.

Mr. Speaker,

Our Administration's 2021/2022 budget plan, "Accelerating Recovery: From Restoration to Growth" seeks to advance three (3) crucial aspects that will lead to more effective, efficient, and equitable governance in The Bahamas. The three (3) interrelated variables are:

1. Realizing a sustainable future through a new vision for the nation;
2. Initiating new decision making processes necessary to address the complex and interconnected issues facing our nation; and
3. Fostering new leadership in key sectors of the nation.

Mr. Speaker,

Countries that place safety and security at the forefront of the economy

are often stable and welcoming to investors. Successive Governments have always placed a high priority on safety and security. And, in spite of the situation, the commitment and concrete actions undertaken by our law enforcement agencies in the maintenance of law and order; protecting our vast maritime domain, facilitating election preparedness; assisting in enforcement of the Emergency Orders; and providing health and security services for the incarcerated, are all commendable.

Mr. Speaker,

Permit me, if you will, with the remainder of my time to address my stewardship as Minister of National Security, and outline the contributions of the men and women at our Ministry and the agencies that fall under my remit.

Mr. Speaker,

Overall, the agencies within our Ministry's portfolio experienced increases in their recurring budgets and decreases in overall capital expenditures. The cumulative budgetary allocation for *the Ministry of National Security* and its agencies for the fiscal period 2021/2022 is **two hundred and fifty-five million, one hundred and thirty-seven thousand, nine hundred and eighty-five dollars (\$255,137,985)**. This reflects a three (3) percent increase over last year's budget of **two hundred and forty-seven million, forty-three thousand, eight hundred and twenty-three dollars (\$247,043,823)**.

Mr. Speaker,

Out of that figure, *The Ministry of National Security* has been allocated **twenty-five million, six hundred and fifty-seven thousand, one hundred and eighty dollars (\$25,657,180)**. This reflects a 6 percent decrease over the previous period.

Mr. Speaker,

The Royal Bahamas Police Force was allocated **one hundred and twenty-four million, eight hundred and sixty-nine thousand, two hundred and seventy-four dollars (\$124,869,274)**, which reflects a two percent increase or **two million, six hundred thousand, four hundred and sixty-seven dollars (\$2,600,467)**, compared to the last fiscal period. This increase was realized in the following areas:

- Recruitment;
- Salary adjustments for promotions; and
- Operational costs due to COVID-19

The Royal Bahamas Defence Force has been allocated **sixty-eight million, eight hundred and thirty-three thousand, five hundred**

and twelve dollars (\$68,833,512). This reflects a one percent increase or **nine hundred and forty-one thousand, eight hundred and fifty-eight dollars (\$941,858)** compared to last year when **sixty-seven million, nine hundred and forty-six thousand, six hundred and fifty-four dollars (\$67,946,654)** was allocated. The increases in the recurrent were realized in:

- Salary adjustments for promotions;
- Recruitment;
- Food; and
- Operational requirements

One million, two hundred and twenty-four thousand dollars (\$1,224,000) will service recruitment, and an additional **three hundred thousand dollars (\$300,000)** will be allocated to salary adjustments attributed to promotions. The remaining sum of **one million, one hundred and fifty-nine thousand dollars (\$1,159,000)** will go to operational costs relative to rent, food and other supplies in this COVID-19 environment. It should be noted, however, that the RBDF 2021/2022 recurrent estimates increased by **four point three million dollars (\$4.3).**

The Bahamas Department of Corrections has been allocated **thirty-one million, seventy-seven thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine dollars (\$31,077,999)** for recurrent expenditure. This reflects an 11 percent increase or **three million, one hundred and seventy-eight thousand, seven hundred and fifty-eight dollars (\$3,178,758)** over last year. This increase was realized in:

- Salary adjustments for promotions;
- Recruitment and uniform allowances for 86 new officers;
- Increments for current officers;
- Food; and
- Operational requirements

One million and twenty thousand dollars (\$1,020,000) will service recruitment and an additional **two hundred thousand dollars (\$200,000)** will be allocated to uniform allowance. **Eight hundred thousand dollars (\$800,000)** was allocated towards food and other supplies in this COVID-19 environment, while **one hundred and**

seventy-two thousand dollars (\$172,000) will be allocated to operational costs. Meanwhile, **one million, seven hundred and eighty-five thousand, seven hundred and fifty-one dollars (\$1,785,751)** has been allocated for salaries, increments and adjustments to salary.

The Parliamentary Registration Department has been allocated a *recurrent expenditure of four million, seven hundred thousand, and twenty dollars (\$4,700,020)*. This reflects a 210 percent increase or **three million, one hundred and eighty-seven thousand, seven hundred and eighty-six dollars (\$3,187,786)** compared to the last fiscal year. The increase in expenditure of **four million, eighty-five thousand, four hundred and sixty-nine dollars (\$4,085,469)** is to assist in the preparation for the upcoming General Election, school board elections, and associated expenses.

Mr. Speaker,

Since coming to Office, our Government's primary focus, as it relates to national security, was to restore confidence in our law enforcement agencies; foster a spirit of professionalism; equip our agencies with the tools necessary to effectively prevent and combat crime and other social-ills; and to build genuine partnerships with communities. Despite the challenges faced by our Administration over the last four (4) years, we are pleased to report that we remained committed to our promise to the Bahamian people.

Mr. Speaker,

Permit me to share with you how our Government was able to deliver on its mandate to the Bahamian people by focusing on eight (8) key areas. They include:

1. Ministry of National Security's Agencies' Achievements
2. Progressive Legislative Transformation
3. Technological Advancements
4. Capital Asset Acquisition - Infrastructural Development
5. Human Capital Investments - Recruitment and Training
6. Electoral Reforms - Modernization of the electoral process

7. Taking care of our own - Promotions
8. Multi-Agency Partnerships

1. The Ministry of National Security's Agencies' Achievements

Allow me to go on record to say without any fear of contradiction, that our men and women in uniform performed at an exceptional level over the last four (4) years. And, as their Minister, I am eternally grateful and exceedingly proud of their commitment and dedication to service, especially during what can arguably be referred to as the most challenging period in our nation's history. Allow me to share some of the highlights of the various agencies:

Mr. Speaker,

I begin with the Royal Bahamas Police Force (RBPF). The Police Force's records indicate that between 2017 to 2020 there were 18,332 incidents of **major crimes** reported to the Police. For the previous four (4) years period, (2012 to 2016), there were 40,108 incidents of major crimes reported. This reflects a 54 percent decrease over the previous four (4) years period. In other words, under this Hubert

Minnis-led Government, major crimes were reduced by **MORE** than half.

For the offence of **murder**, between 2017 to 2020, there were 430 incidents reported during the period. For the previous four (4) years period, (2012 to 2016), there were 609 incidents of murder reported. A decrease of 179 incidents or 29 percent. In other words, under this Hubert Minnis-led Government, murder incidents decreased by one-third.

For the offence of **armed robbery**, for the period 2017 to 2020 there have been 1,893 incidents reported by the Police. For the previous four (4) years period, (2012 to 2016), there were 4,798 incidents. We have successfully reduced armed robbery by 61 percent.

For the offence of **rape**, for the period 2017 to 2020 there have been 194 incidents reported by the Police. For the previous four (4) years

period, (2012 to 2016), there were 438 incidents. We have successfully reduced rape by 56 percent or by half over the previous period. However, it is not lost on us that between 2019 (37) and 2020 (50), rape increased by 35 percent. Hence, the reason why this Government has made the offense of rape a key focus in the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit (PMDU).

For the offence of **house breakings**, for the period 2017 to 2020 there have been 4,021 incidents reported to the Police. For the previous four (4) years period, (2012 to 2016), there were 9,226 incidents. We have successfully reduced housebreaking by 56 percent or half. Mr. Speaker, the reason for the extremely significant decrease are many, but it would be remiss of me if I failed to acknowledge the role that the National Neighbourhood Watch Council (NNWC) is playing in communities throughout The Bahamas, in partnership with the Police, to reduce community related crimes, such as housebreakings.

For the offence of **firearm seizures**, between 2017 to 2020 there were 1,250 seizures. For the previous four (4) years period, (2012 to 2016), there were 2,019 firearm seizures. In other words, firearm seizures decreased by 38 percent or one-third. The RBPF work in this area is commendable and let me explain.

Between 2019 (March-December) and 2020 (January to December), the Police reported a more than 40 percent decrease in detected gun shots across New Providence. The reduction in gun shots is associated with less firearms on our streets and, for the Police Force, gun seizures are a top priority. For January to May, 2021, the period under review, there have been 129 firearms and 1,806 rounds of ammunition seized. Included in the seizures were 105 pistols, 9 revolvers, 4 shotguns and 11 high-powered rifles.

With the aid of local and international partnerships, technology like ShotSpotter, and intelligence-driven policing, the Police continue to

reduce the amount of firearms on our streets. While there is still a long way to go in ridding firearms of our streets, I commend the Police for their efforts, to date.

Mr. Speaker,

Let me be the first to say that the numbers, as presented, are very encouraging and, lends to the fact that we are truly heading in the right direction as it relates to crime. However, this year, while overall crime is showing an 8 percent reduction, we are seeing increases in two key areas: murder and armed robbery. At present, murders are up 52 percent and armed robberies are up 42 percent over last year at the same time. This up-ticking appears to be a global trend. But, it is also a reminder that there remains much work ahead of us.

Mr. Speaker,

Guns, drugs and violence are interrelated and the Police being aware of

the same are actively involved in monitoring the importation/exportation and possession of the same. From the 1st January to 30th May, 2021, the two major types of drugs seized were cocaine and marijuana. The former resulted in a total of 408 lbs. of cocaine taken off our streets. The latter reflected marijuana seizures in various forms inclusive of 408 lbs. of marijuana, 540 marijuana plants, and 2,156 packages of marijuana gummies. These seizures resulted in 540 persons being arrested, of which, 437 persons were charged with drug related offences.

Mr. Speaker,

Between 2017 to 2020, there were 2,461 lbs of cocaine seized. For the previous four (4) years period, (2012 to 2016), there were 7,711 lbs of cocaine seized. In other words, cocaine seizures decreased by 68 percent or two-thirds. Between 2017 to 2020 there were 38,110 lbs of marijuana seized. For the previous 4 years period, (2012 to 2016),

there were 63,676 lbs of marijuana seized. In other words, marijuana seizures decreased by 40 percent.

Again, these decreases are proving that current strategies being employed by our law enforcement agencies are working and paying dividends. The acquisition of new technologies, greater synergies in partnerships and improved intelligence gathering capabilities are proving worthwhile.

Mr. Speaker,

As it relates to road traffic fatalities, between 2017 to 2020 there were 223 matters. For the previous four (4) years period (2012 to 2016), there were 228 matters. In other words, road traffic fatalities decreased by 2 percent. Again, this means that new technologies, public service announcements and community partnerships are proving worthwhile.

Mr. Speaker,

No one could have predicted the national implications of COVID-19 on

The Bahamas. Since the first Emergency Orders were implemented in March 2020, the Police Force along with the Defence Force has been at the forefront for a safe and healthy Bahamas. The COVID-19 Enforcement Unit (CEU) located at the Cable Beach Police Station forms the basis of the COVID Command Centre. It was established on the 3rd August, 2020 and consists of civilian monitors, dispatchers and ambassadors who work along with Police Officers. The Programme is also operational on Grand Bahama, Abaco, Eleuthera, Exuma and Bimini.

The Unit is responsible for coordinating national activities, in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation, to ensure that both Bahamians and visitors adhere to the health and safety protocols of the Emergency Orders. I would like

to thank the Officers, the monitors, dispatchers and ambassadors for the wonderful job they are doing in regulating businesses and the general public. Your work and dedication helps to keep us all safe.

Mr. Speaker,

I would like to note that while most of our citizens have and continue to follow health and safety protocols, there are select members who fail to adhere to the stipulations. Since the COVID-19 Centre was established there were approximately 1,940 Emergency Orders violations committed resulting in **one million, twenty thousand, five hundred and fifty dollars (\$1,020,550)** in fines.

As it relates to statistics from this area, there were a total of 62 persons (27 adult males, 33 adult females, 1 juvenile female, and 1 juvenile male) arrested with reference to fraudulent COVID-19 test results. Fifty-two (52) of these persons were convicted and fined totaling **one hundred and seventeen thousand, five hundred dollars (\$117,500)**.

The airport ambassadors remained focused and vigilant in enforcing the Emergency Orders, as it relates to interisland travels. To date, five hundred and twenty-three (523) persons attempted to travel without proper documents and were denied by COVID Ambassadors at their various checkpoints. COVID Ambassadors were also posted at beaches during holidays and special operations to ensure that beach goers were following COVID beach protocols. Periodic checks were made at all parks and a total of one thousand, three hundred and forty-six (1,346) beach visits were conducted during the period in review.

Officers and ambassadors conducted thirty-nine thousand, three hundred and sixty-three (39,363) business establishment visits, of which, three hundred and thirty-one (331) businesses were found in breach of the Emergency Orders for operating a prohibited business. For the most part, the majority of businesses are adhering to the

COVID protocols and CEU continues to encourage business owners and managers, alike, to keep their customers and employees safe.

Royal Bahamas Defence Force

Mr. Speaker,

Our Administration has made significant investments in the Royal Bahamas Defence Force (RBDF) with the view of improving their maritime domain awareness across our Commonwealth. For **migrant interdictions** between 2017 to 2020 there were 1,229 migrant apprehensions. For the previous four (4) years period, (2012 to 2016), there were 4,746 migrants apprehended. In other words, the number of migrants interdicted decreased by 74 percent. This significant decrease can be attributed to improved operational strategies and partnerships, decentralization, radar installation and improved intelligence gathering.

The downward trend continued for 2021, for the period the 1st January

to 31st May, 2021, when there were 9 migrant interdictions that resulted in the apprehension of 85 migrants. This was inclusive of 62 Cubans and 23 Haitians. For the same period in 2020, there were 7 migrant interdictions which reflected a 29 percent decrease. In other words, the number of migrants interdicted decreased by 75 percent.

For poaching and illegal fishing incidents, between 2017 to 2020 there were a total of 21 vessels apprehended resulting in a seizure of 138,750 lbs of assorted fisheries. For the previous four (4) years period, (2012 to 2016), there were a total of 18 poaching vessels interdicted, resulting in 76,600 lbs of assorted fisheries product confiscated. This represented a 10 percent increase in vessels seized and 55 percent increase of fishery products seized.

The Bahamas Department of Correction Services

Mr. Speaker,

The rehabilitative programmes at the Department have been proving

effective as we continue year over year, to see the downward trend in the **recidivism rate**. The year 2020 was no exception, as the recidivism rate fell to 12 percent compared to 14 percent in 2019. This in itself is a testimony that the Department of Corrections is effecting correctional reform.

Mr. Speaker,

I have just outlined some of the key accomplishments of those agencies under my remit. Let me conclude this area by saying this: much of what these agencies are called upon to do are often not reflected in the statistics sheets. We are indebted to our men and women in uniform. This is one of the reasons why our heroes in uniform are so special.

2. Progressive Legislative Transformation

Mr. Speaker,

During our tenure, we thought it prudent to alter the fabric of Bahamian society through legislation. In 2018 we introduced a compendium of legislation in the form of the **Financial Transactions Reporting Act (2018)** and the **Proceeds of Crime Amendment Act (2018)**. The objective of the former was to repeal and replace the Act.

The ultimate goal sought to reform and standardize the way financial institutions report their transactions so as to ensure integrity, credibility, confidence and respectability in our financial sector. The latter imposes legislation that would strengthen measures to expose all persons, organizations and companies involved in criminal activity, cover-ups and conspiring with others to conceal their ill-gotten gains, by whatever means necessary.

Our Administration did not stop there! We continued with the establishment of an **Anti-Terrorism Amendment Act (2018)**. The objective was to provide a more comprehensive, contemporary, and

legislative framework to counter terrorist activity including the targeting of all assets, financial and otherwise, that are related to terrorist activity. More importantly, it criminalizes terrorism; the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; and the financing of terrorism. It also provides for the detection, prevention, prosecution, conviction and punishment of such activities; and the confiscation, forfeiture and seizure of assets of those involved in such activities.

Mr. Speaker,

The jury system is a crucial component in the cycle of our criminal justice sector, and it was in desperate need of reform. **The Juries Amendment Act** (2020) allows for a verdict in the conviction of murder in capital cases by a 12-person jury that attracts the death penalty. Further, an amendment has been made which allows for a 9-person jury in all matters other than murder or treason. In every other case, other than cases where the penalty of death is affixed, the

verdict may be found, given and returned by 6 empaneled jurors.

Mr. Speaker,

In 2019, we brought the **Road Traffic Amendment Act**, which changed the name of the offense from “reckless and dangerous driving” to vehicular manslaughter, thereby sending a stronger message to those who continue to drive recklessly on our streets and disregard human life. Offenders are liable and may be subject to a term of imprisonment, not exceeding 15 years. Prior to this change, persons were either given a slap on the wrist or a fine.

Mr. Speaker,

In 2019 we introduced the **National Crime Intelligence Agency Act**, with the objective of enhancing the security of The Bahamas. NCIA is the premonitory agency responsible for gathering, analyzing, coordinating, disseminating and reflecting the complex overlapping of

both domestic and international security issues. NCIA also seeks to establish channels of communication with overseas intelligence agencies for the promotion and exchange of information to advance the safety of our nation.

Mr. Speaker,

In 2020 we brought the **Bail Amendment Act (2019)** and the objective behind this is to be tougher on crime and remove the presumptions for bail. The enactment improves upon the existing system by increasing the jurisdiction of a Magisterial Court to grant bail in certain cases and to provide for the establishment of rules for regulating the procedures for applying for bail. This new piece of legislation serves to further modernize and improve the overall efficiency of the judicial sector. Ultimately, this will significantly reduce the backlog of cases in the Supreme Court as the Magisterial Court now has greater autonomy.

Mr. Speaker,

In 2020 the **Parliamentary Elections Amendment Act (2020)**, allowed for the introduction of a Permanent Register. This allows for the modernization of the voters' registration process by making provisions for electronic biometric data cards to replace the paper voters' cards. This also reduces costs associated with registering the same list of voters over and over again.

Mr. Speaker,

In 2020 there was a Compendium of Amendments to **the Department of Corrections Amendment Act, Defence Force Amendment Act, Defence Force Reserves Amendment Act and Defence Force Regulations**. The Department of Corrections Amendment Act now extends the retirement age of subordinate Correctional Officers from age 50 years to age 55 years. The increase brings the much needed parity among law enforcement agencies. It also brought equitable

pensions, while ensuring suitability and sustainability over the long-term.

The Defence Force Amendment Act and Reserves Amendment Act now increases the enlistment age of Marines from age 25 years to age 30 years, thereby to attract a pool of more qualified individuals. In addition, related matters addressed the re-engagement and continuation of service. The retirement age of Warrant Officers and Marines of the regular Force is now extended from age 55 years to 60 years or 40 years of service. The ultimate goal is to ensure that the agency does not lose institutional knowledge.

In 2019, the **Sexual Offenders Regulations (SOR)** was tabled in this Honourable House, which allows for the establishment of a Sexual Offenders Registry. The objective behind the Registry is to ensure the reporting requirements and tracking of sexual offenders following their release from prison. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report that the

Cabinet, just last month, approved the appointment of Dr. Rochelle Lightbourne, a trained psychologist, to serve as the SOR Registrar during this upcoming fiscal period.

Rehabilitation of Offenders

Despite the fact that this legislation was enacted in 2007, amended and put in the dust file in 2015, it took a caring Government to remove the file from permanent storage, and the result speaks for itself! To date, we have expunged **28** Bahamians with **85** applications pending. Meanwhile, **24** of these cases were referred to the Prerogative of Mercy Committee (POM) for consideration.

Prerogative of Mercy (POM)

Mr. Speaker,

Ours is a caring Government and, please, let me explain what I mean by that. Mr. Speaker, since coming into Office, under the POM Committee, 209 inmates serving time at the Department of Corrections were granted clemency. This is the largest number of

clemency ever given under any Government. Additionally, the POM Committee is preparing to meet in a month's time to consider another 200 applications for requests for clemency.

Mr. Speaker,

Our Government's approach is simple as it relates to legislative implementation. We are of the view that while laws are made to punish those in violation of society's norms, for the most part, it should also take into consideration that with proper intervention and oversight, persons capable of redeeming themselves, do deserve a second chance. Mr. Speaker, this Minnis-led Government, believes in second-chances.

3. Technological Advancements

Mr. Speaker,

It is no secret that before coming into Office, this Minnis-led Government in its manifesto touted the role of technology in its efforts to bring down the high level of crime in our country. To date, our

Government would have invested in excess of **forty-four million dollars (\$44,000,000)** in technologies for our law enforcement agencies, with another **six million (\$6,000,000)** in contracts scheduled for the upcoming fiscal period. I wish to highlight a few:

Royal Bahamas Police Force

Mr. Speaker,

There was an estimated **twenty-three million dollars (\$23,000,000)** invested in technologies for the Royal Bahamas Police Force that aided in intelligence gathering, crime prevention, crime detection and prosecution. This number is expected to grow during this fiscal period.

These technologies include:

- Real Time Crime Centre
- CCTV
- ShotSpotter
- Marco's Alert
- Body Worn and Dash Cameras
- Motorola Contract
- Electronic Monitoring System
- COVID-19

The Real Time Crime Centre

The Real-time Crime Centre (RTCC) was officially opened in February, 2021. The Centre is responsible for centralizing police technologies to facilitate a more efficient and effective administration and operational system. Specifically, the Centre streamlines all technologies into a centralized monitoring base. Footage is live and recorded for ease of access to assist with police investigations. During the upcoming fiscal period, my Ministry will invest **one hundred and five thousand, four hundred and ninety-three dollars (\$105,493)** in a Motorola integration system for the Centre.

CCTV

Mr. Speaker,

My Ministry has invested over **five million dollars (\$5,000,000)** to expand the RBPF's CCTV by some 400 cameras to provide additional eyes of the ground. The overall goal is to expand the system to 750 cameras in hot-spot areas. During the current fiscal period, **nine hundred and eighty-five thousand, two hundred and eighty-three**

dollars (\$985,283) was invested to advance the programme. The recordings are playing a critical role in providing police with evidentiary footage to aid in investigations and increase the solvency rate.

ShotSpotter

Mr. Speaker,

Since coming to Office, this Administration has embarked on a project to outfit The Bahamas with state-of-the-art technology to assist the RBPF with detecting and preventing crime. Curbing gun violence is one of the most prevalent crimes and of significant concern. That is why our Government invested **one point nine million dollars (\$1.9)** to purchase ShotSpotter technology to assist the Police Force.

To date, **one million, three hundred and thirty-seven thousand, four hundred and thirty-two dollars (\$1,337,432)** has been expended during this fiscal period. The final payment of **six hundred**

and two thousand, three hundred and sixteen dollars (\$602,316)

will be made

in the new fiscal period. From its launch date on March 28th, 2019 to May 31st, 2021 the system is serving its intended purpose which is to detect gunshots and allow for faster response times from the Police.

To date, there have been 2,562 gun-shot incidents including 1,523 multiple, 690 single and 349 probable shots. Robinson Road and East Street had the first and second highest repeated locations, while Friday – Sundays was the most active days and 7:00 p.m.- 4:00 a.m. were the most active times. Due to the success of ShotSpotter and at the request of RBPF, it is the intention of our Government to extend the coverage area for ShotSpotter in additional areas throughout New Providence.

Marco's Alert

Mr. Speaker,

The Marco's Alert system was important to our Government as it involved the protection of children. Our Government invested over **three million dollars (\$3,000,000)** to forge a collective partnership and alliance between corporate Bahamas, the Police Force, and civil society. The technology is primarily designed to assist in the safe return of abducted and/or missing children.

In May 2021, our Government invested another **one point nine million dollars (\$1.9)** with Multimedia for software to aid in a Public Alert Warning System using the billboards strategically placed in major thoroughfares. This resulted when our Government was made aware that the two mobile providers in the country did not possess the technology, namely a Cell Broadcast Entity and Cell Broadcast Centre, we made the decision to make this necessary investment. The Public Warning Alert System (Marco's Alert) will enable the Police to send out a broadcast (Marco's Alert) through commercial radio stations, television broadcasts, teletext communications, electronic network systems, and billboards.

Further, in the event there is a threat to the public or weather alert, the systems' administrators (NEMA, RBPF, MNS, etc.) can create a geofence in a particular area, community, island, or the entire Bahamas and immediately send a notification to the public through the mobile network. Once the subscriber's cell phone is registered to a tower, whether it is on silent or vibrate, it will receive the message. The only way to disarm the alert will be to open the message. This means that more people will be made aware of the intended messages using this platform.

Body and Dash Cameras

Mr. Speaker,

The wave of criticism regarding police-citizen interaction in the United

States continues to raise concerns for police interaction with members of the public in other jurisdictions. Of course, The Bahamas is not

immune to the same concerns regarding police-citizen interactions. Globally, more and more police agencies are equipping front-line Officers with body-worn cameras which allows for a street-level view of an on-duty Police Officer at work.

To support this technology, in February, 2021 our Government made an incremental payment of **six hundred and eighty-eight thousand, five hundred and sixty-one dollars (\$688,561)** for 200 body-worn and 200 dash-cameras. At present, a total of 120 body-worn cameras are being used by frontline officers. In addition, a total of 20 police vehicles have been outfitted with dash cameras. In the upcoming fiscal year, our Government will invest **three hundred and ninety-four thousand, three hundred and fifty-seven dollars (\$394,357)** for upgrades and maintenance.

Electronic Monitoring

Mr. Speaker,

The current contract for the Electric Monitoring System (EMS) expired during December, 2020. A decision was made to retain the current vendor on a month-to-month basis until a new contract is signed. I can report that after an exhaustive process, the Cabinet of The Bahamas has agreed to award a new contract in the amount of **two point five million dollars (\$2.5)** to a vendor to be named sometime this month.

Royal Bahamas Defence Force (RBDF)

Mr. Speaker,

There was an estimated **twenty million dollars (\$20,000,000)** invested in technologies for the Royal Bahamas Defence Force that aided in intelligence gathering, maritime domain awareness, and search and rescue operations. These technologies include:

- Drones
- Bridge Simulator
- AV Integration System
- *Drones*

Mr. Speaker,

The Defence will acquire several drones including a quadcopter capable of vertical take-off and landing. Due to its size, the drone can be transported in law enforcement vehicles and deployed in less than 5 minutes. It has the capability to be launched from RBDF's ships and used for vessel boarding search and seizure (VBSS) operations and for search and rescue (SARS) operations on land and sea.

Meanwhile, the deep trekker is an underwater drone with an 8 hours endurance time. It will be used as a remote operated vehicle (ROV) to inspect all cruise and cargo ships for contraband when entering the port of Nassau and other entry points in the country. It will also be used to search for lost items at depths of up to 645 feet. Long range drones will also be used for special patrols and surveillance of unrestricted airspace the areas of New Providence. The Police Force will also use long range drones in their daily operations.

Bridge Simulator

Mr. Speaker,

The Bridge Simulator was acquired at a cost of **one point six million dollars (\$1.6)** and was commissioned during the early part of 2020. It is a tool that provides professional development training for the command in operation of the DAMEN class vessels and two Bahamas class vessels. This very valuable piece of equipment has trained an estimated 35 Officers, to date, and safely increases the operational skills of Officers and Marines in these vessels. We expect this number to grow and translate into better operations and management of the RBDF fleet of vessels.

RBDF's Audio Visual Integration System

Mr. Speaker,

On the 27th May, 2021, a **ninety-three thousand dollars (\$939,000)** contract was signed between the RBDF and Multimedia Technologies for the acquisition of the Audio Visual Integration System. This

system will further enhance the situational and maritime domain awareness of the RBDF by providing live audio and video feed from remote locations to RBDF Command Centres. Additionally, the system will allow for interconnectivity between our law enforcement agencies. The systems will be installed at HMBS Coral Harbour, Gun Point, Ragged Island and Matthew Town, Inagua.

Bahamas Department of Corrections (BDOCS)

Mr. Speaker,

It has often been said, that the Bahamas Department of Corrections is often overlooked. As Minister, with responsibility for BDOCS, I can say without fear of contradiction that our Government has made and continues to make a significant investment in the Department of Corrections. Only recently, Cabinet has approved a CCTV contract in the amount of **four hundred and ten thousand, four hundred and one dollars (\$410,401)** for the acquisition of 100 cameras to be

installed in key areas throughout the facility. These high quality cameras will be outfitted with license plate and facial recognition software. Additionally, the contract will also provide for the design and built out of the network infrastructure.

4. Capital Asset Acquisition – Infrastructural Development

Royal Bahamas Police Force

Mr. Speaker,

Since coming to Office in 2017, our Government immediately undertook a comprehensive assessment of the RBPF's fleet and discovered that the agency was in desperate need of transport. As a result, the Government undertook to bolster the police's fleet by investing **five point nine million dollars (\$5.9)** for a new fleet of police vehicles. In continuing with its commitment to the RBPF, the

Government has allocated **eight hundred and one thousand dollars (\$801,000)** for additional vehicles to complement the existing fleet.

This will include 30 Kias, 2 passenger 15-seater vans, and one (1) Ford truck. We are also in the process of investing **five hundred and eighty-eight thousand dollars (\$588,000)** to purchase 10 Dodge Charger Police Interceptors and another **eight hundred and ninety thousand dollars (\$890,000)** to purchase two (2) new fire trucks for New Providence. These new additions to the fleet will result in the reopening of fire stations in strategic sections of the island including Cable Beach, Carmichael Road, East Street South and Elizabeth Estates. Hence, no matter where a fire incident occurs, there will be a quicker response.

Mr. Speaker,

Our Government will invest an additional **eighty thousand dollars (\$80,000)** for the purchase of eight (8) pre-trained drug and firearm

detection dogs to complement the K-9 Unit. The dogs are expected to arrive in the country within two weeks and will include four (4) pre-trained drug and firearm detection dogs and three (3) dual purpose drug detection dogs. Of the total, two (2) will be assigned to Grand Bahama to assist in policing duties.

Police Stations

Mr. Speaker,

The island of Andros is being developed at a rapid pace. In fact, the airport in Fresh Creek is now receiving more and more international flights daily. A number of new bridges have been opened in Stafford and Staniard Creeks, and developments including new villas in Kamalame Cay which all necessitate the need for a higher number of Police Officers in Andros to complement the development. Hence, renovations have been completed to the police station in South Andros.

We are also exploring the possibility of establishing a marine base in South Andros in the Mars Bay area. The Force is also in the process of acquiring a fire engine that is being donated in partnership with local residents and the administration for North Andros. Thus, North Andros will soon have 2 fire engines at its disposal. The Force will also assist with the training of fire volunteers.

Mr. Speaker,

Renovations also occurred in Bimini as the police station has been outfitted with the installation of computers, air conditioning, and wash rooms. These upgrades and amenities have made Officers more comfortable and better able to execute their duties in a more appropriate environment. In San Salvador renovations to the police station are completed. A 30 kilo-watt generator that was purchased in the previous budget was installed and is now capable of supplying power to the entire compound and community centre. We are also exploring the possibility of building a new police station on the island.

Additional police stations were renovated on the islands of Inagua, Mayaguana, Acklins and Long Island. We are also exploring the possibility of acquiring 5 pre-owned fire engines. These are smaller engines which we plan to deploy on Cat Island, Acklins, Crooked Island, Mayaguana, and Long Island. A new police station on Ragged Island has also been built.

Mr. Speaker,

In the upcoming fiscal period, the Paradise Island Police Station will be undergoing extensive renovations in line with a new project on the island. The Tourism Welcome Centre building in downtown Nassau was acquired by the Force, and renovations will be initiated to erect a new police station for the new cruise port. Renovations at Police Headquarters on New Providence will be ongoing, including upgrades to the Fire House.

In the upcoming budget period, we are exploring the possibility of establishing new police stations in Cat Island, San Salvador, at the Long Island Airport and at the Great Harbour Cay Airport. There will also be a new 6,500 square foot police station in Marsh Harbour in the Don McKay building. The police station in Sandy Point will also be re-built. We have put to tender the Police Station for West End in order to have the station repaired in the upcoming fiscal year, so the Officers will have excellent facilities to work in. At this time, I wish to commend the skilled and hardworking Officers of the Police Maintenance Department who are doing a tremendous job in carrying out most of this work.

Royal Bahamas Defence Force

Mr. Speaker,

Since 2017, our Government has invested in excess of **twenty-five**

million dollars (\$25) in capital development and acquisition of capital assets. These allocations have resulted in substantial upgrades to RBDF facilities and modernization of their equipment, as well as a number of capital assets.

Electrification of HMBS Coral Harbour

Mr. Speaker,

Significant progress was made with the electrification of the Defence Force Base at HMBS Coral Harbour. The project was approved by Cabinet at a cost of **three million, five hundred and fifteen thousand, four hundred and ninety-seven dollars (\$3,515,497)**. From the overall cost, Bahamas Power and Light has been awarded **six hundred and ninety-two thousand, and ninety seven dollars (\$692,097)** to complete upgrades to the underground infrastructure to the Sandy Bottom Project Coral Harbour Base, north side.

The contractor is expected to complete the work during the first quarter of the 2021/2022 budget cycle. The completion of this work will end the need for vessels, while berthed alongside Coral Harbour Base to operate their generators for power, thereby resulting in substantial savings in fuel cost and wear and tear on machinery.

Renovations to HMBS Coral Harbour

Mr. Speaker,

A contract has also been awarded for renovations to the ground floor of the north gate building at a cost of **two hundred and eighty thousand dollars (\$280,000)**. The project has commenced and is 20 percent completed. The renovated spaces will provide for additional office spaces that are urgently needed. Additionally, a contract valuing **two hundred and fourteen thousand and seventy-six dollars (\$214,076)** has been awarded to complete the long awaited renovations to the Training Centre which is 70 percent completed. The

completion will ensure that the proper physical facilities are in place as the Defence Force seeks to have training programmes accredited.

Renovations to Matthew Town

The decentralization of the Defence Force's operations continued with the completion of the renovations to the galley and gym at HMBS Matthew Town, Inagua and the installation of the electrical supply at the Maritime Centre in Matthew Town. The installation of the electrical supply at the Maritime Centre will provide the necessary shore power supply for the RBDF vessels when berthed alongside the docks and will reduce the cost of fuel, as well as, the wear and tear on its machinery.

To support the same, **seventy-four thousand, seven hundred and ninety dollars (\$74,790)** has been invested to upgrade the electrical supply at the base in Matthew Town, Inagua inclusive of the perimeter lighting. The contract was awarded to Blue Waters, a local company

out of New Providence. The initial down-payment was made on the 5th May, 2021 and the project is expected to be completed by the first quarter of the 2021-2022 budget cycle.

Construction of Fuel Facilities in Matthew Town, Inagua

Mr. Speaker,

Further, Sun Oil Limited has been awarded the contract for the installation of fuel facilities at HMBS Matthew Town, Inagua and Gunn Point, Ragged Island. The installation cost for the fuel facilities at Matthew Town, Inagua and Gunn Point, Ragged Island is budgeted at **six hundred and seven thousand, and seventy-seven dollars (\$607,077).**

I am pleased to report that the construction of the fuel storage tanks has been secured and is now in the process of being shipped. To complement and complete the projects on both islands will require the

finishing of civil works. For HMBS Mathew Town, Inagua tender for the civil works is being prepared and will be submitted to the Tender's Board, shortly.

Construction of fuel facilities Gunn Point, Ragged Island

For Gunn Point, Ragged Island, a contract valuing **fifty-five thousand dollars (\$55,000)** has been awarded to TPS Construction, a local company from New Providence. It should be noted that both projects are essential to the Defence Force's decentralization initiatives as it will provide the fuel storage facility and capacity that allows the agency's vessels to refuel and remain on station for longer periods.

The ability of the Defence Force to remain in the southern Bahamas is essential to our safety and security. By being present, the agency is able to fully execute its lines of efforts inclusive of maritime domain awareness and control. These bases will be able to ensure effective and efficient execution of the agency's mandate and missions using

the logic of purpose undergirded with cause and effect. By establishing operational strategic conditions with reference to better situational awareness and control, the agency will be able to protect our territorial borders from poaches, illegal migrants, and smuggling operations involving drugs, weapons and humans.

Mr. Speaker,

The dry-docking and refit of HMBS Lawrence Major's auxiliary machinery commenced in Suriname during the month of May, 2021 at a cost of just over **one million dollars (\$1,000,000)**. Above waterline repairs are 50 percent completed with the remaining scope of works or below waterline expected to be undertaken in Curacao. The work is expected to be completed before the end of this current budget cycle. With necessary repairs completed to the vessel it will be able to join its sister vessels. Having seaworthy vessels in good operational conditions is essential to ensuring Officers and Marines are equipped

to prevail in the sustainability of the defense of our nation, when called upon.

RBDF's Drone Academy

Mr. Speaker,

As the lead agency for the multinational Drone Programme the Defence

Force is putting in place the necessary facilities to facilitate the same at HMBS Coral Harbour. The construction of the landing strip at a cost of **one hundred and thirty-nine thousand, five hundred and nineteen dollars (\$139,519)** commenced on the 14th March, 2021 and it is 60 percent completed with a forecasted completion date of June 4th, 2021. To complement, our Government will invest **six million, eight hundred and nineteen thousand, eight hundred and seventy-seven dollars (\$6,819,877)** to advance the multi-agency programme.

Additionally, a contract valued at **one hundred and sixty-six thousand dollars (\$166,000)** has been awarded to a local company out of Grand Bahama for the construction of modular units that will be erected on the north shore at HMBS Coral Harbour. This project is 25 percent completed and, once finished, the units will accommodate a workshop, classrooms, sleeping quarters, bathrooms, a dining area and administration office. The units will be fully furnished and are expected to be installed during the first quarter of 2021/2022.

BDOCS

Mr. Speaker,

Since taking office, our Government has tackled some of the most pressing issues at BDOCS consisting of upgrades to deteriorating infrastructure and the replacement of archaic security systems which are essential to the upkeep of the facility's security and environment and in compliance with international standards. Colleen Patrick-Gourdreau (n.d.) once stated, "don't do nothing because you

can't; do everything – do something". Because we are a Government of doers, we tackled and continue to tackle some of the most menacing problems at BDOCS.

Mr. Speaker,

During this fiscal period, BDOCS was successful in securing **four point six million dollars (\$4.6)** for various capital expenditure. To date, upgrades to modernize the southern wing in the Maximum Security Facility have been completed; and works have now commenced in the western wing as two blocks are currently under renovations with the remaining two blocks awaiting upgrades during this fiscal period. At the completion of these works in the western group, the same will be duplicated in the eastern group in the Maximum Security Housing Facility. These renovations will improve the living and working conditions for both staff and inmates. All of the work should be completed in the next fiscal period.

Further, renovations are continuing at the Annex Housing Facility that houses inmates on the extra-mural scheme. This building has been in a state of disrepair for some time and is now receiving the attention needed. The multi-purpose centre at the Medium Security Facility is near completion, and the restoration of the water system at the Remand Centre Facility will be completed once the COVID-19 related priorities have become more stabilized.

Mr. Speaker,

Approval was also granted by the Tender's Board for the procurement of a 2020 freightliner valued at **three hundred and fifty-six thousand, one hundred and six dollars (\$356,106)** and negotiations are ongoing to finalize the cost with the vendor. The purpose of this roll-on roll-off truck will be to transport waste in a safe and secure method, as oppose to in open trucks.

In a correctional environment, security systems are integral to preventing potentially dangerous situations. It also provides a sense of security for both staff and inmates. Accordingly, a surveillance system has been approved by Cabinet in the sum of **four hundred and ten thousand, four hundred and one dollars (\$410,401)** for the surveillance of the Housing Units. Additionally, the United States Embassy has made a substantial donation of security equipment to BDOCS to assist with operations.

Included are a Leidos Advanced Imaging System valued at **two hundred and twenty-two thousand, six hundred and thirty-two dollars (\$222,632)**; an Astrophysics XIS-6040 X-ray Inspection System valued at **twenty-six thousand, four hundred and sixty-nine dollars (\$26,469)**, and radios and other associated equipment valued at **thirty-nine thousand, six hundred and sixteen dollars (\$39,616)** for a grand total of **two hundred and eighty-eight thousand, seven**

hundred and nineteen dollars (\$288,719) to which we are extremely grateful.

Mr. Speaker,

To complement, our Government will also invest **two hundred and forty-six thousand, two hundred and forty-one dollars (\$246,241)** to improve the surveillance and security system at BDOCS. Collectively, these security apparatus will help to strengthen the agency's security strategy, and they come at a time when the Department is conducting an overhaul of its antiquated security system and replacing it with contemporary security equipment that is capable of sustaining the institution's security requirements.

5. Human capital development – Recruitment and Training

Mr. Speaker,

In the 21st century professional development has become critical for all categories of work. This is particularly true for security forces

which have to make decisions in a split second. Interesting to note is that security forces' training have evolved from just on the job training to now include academia and scientific methodologies which have been infused into the sector to address the multidisciplinary complexities.

Training is constantly evolving to meet the new challenges and variants of safety and security. In addition, the advancement in technologies has meant that Officers, marines and civilians must engage in training. According to Stone (1934), "there are a great many things that can be learned only by experience, but there are a host of things a man can learn through instruction which will make his experience much more valuable and successful".

Mr. Speaker,

During the four (4) years period, (2012-2016), a total of 1,077 serving Police Officers completed in-service training. During the four (4)

years period, (2017-2021), a total of 1,725 serving Police Officers have completed in-service training on various topics. This represents a 60 percent increase and doubles the numbers for the previous Administration for the same four years period. Topics included courses such as domestic violence, professional development and lectures for the proficiency examinations.

Mr. Speaker,

In March of 2019 our Government signed an ‘Intent to Collaborate Agreement’ with the University of The Bahamas to augment leadership training for senior law enforcement officers. In May of 2019 the first cohort of 16 persons completed the first segment and received their certificates at a formal ceremony at the University of The Bahamas. Later that month, 11 of the initial cohort including five (5) Police Officers and six (6) Correctional Officers successfully completed the second component in a formal ceremony in Atlanta, Georgia.

As we continue to work towards professionalizing the Police Force and all of our agencies, we know that succession planning is key. This Programme and other professional development opportunities are key aspects of a broader succession plan for all law enforcement agencies. As a result, each law enforcement agency will have a cadre of competent Officers who will have the skill-set of a progressive ‘CEO’ from which the new generation of leaders will be selected

Mr. Speaker,

Our Government is committed to providing the necessary support to assist the RBPF with its ongoing training and development of its Officers, including Reserves and civilian staff. For the four (4) years period, (2012-2016), 413 persons were recruited. For the four (4) years period, (2017-2020), 406 persons were recruited and are now performing police duties. In the next fiscal period, we expect to recruit an additional 100 police recruits. That will bring the overall number of

new police recruits during our term in Office to 506. This reflects a 23 percent increase in recruitment under this FNM Government.

RBDF

Mr. Speaker,

For the Defence Force, to date, 132 persons participated in training and development opportunities. Due to COVID-19 many of the professional development sessions were administered via virtual learning platforms and included training at the HMBS Coral Harbour, training facilities abroad, and tertiary and vocational institutions. Of particular importance to note was the Bridge Simulator Training course. The training is designed to provide for better bridge managerial skills for the Officers that command the Defence Force vessels, as well as, Disaster and Crisis Management training in advance of the hurricane season.

Mr. Speaker,

In the upcoming budget cycle the Defence Force will continue to transform with major capital development projects. A three (3) years contract with DAMEN Shipyard valuing **five million, six hundred and ten thousand, two hundred and fifty dollars (\$5,610,250)** was signed on the 27th May, 2021. The scope of work has several components inclusive of a spares package and, most importantly, a training programme that will provide extensive training for the Defence Force technical teams that will build capacity within the organization.

This will ensure that its personnel will be equipped with the necessary skills for the maintenance and service of its vessels. The main objectives of this contractual relationship is to propel the organization from an unfavorable state of breakdown maintenance to that of planned maintenance to extend the useful life of its fleet of vessels.

The aforementioned is extremely vital to institutional and capacity building.

Mr. Speaker,

According to Covey (2004), “any saw used repeatedly and not sharpened will before long lose its ability to efficiently cut wood”. This serves as an apt metaphor on the need for continued professional development. The Defence Force will continue to pursue accreditation for its Centre of Excellence/Maritime Defence Training Institute.

The agency’s Training Department offers a variety of professional developmental courses during basic training, as well as, advanced training programmes. The training facilities has been renovated and upgraded as the first step towards accreditation. The accreditation of the courses is being pursued through NAECOB and is projected to cost **two hundred and fifty thousand dollars (\$250,000).**

For the four (4) years period, (2012-2016), 200 persons were recruited. For the four (4) years period, (2017-2020), 269 persons were recruited under this Government. In the next fiscal period, we expect to recruit an additional 65 marine recruits. That will bring the overall number of new marine recruits during our term in Office to 334. This reflects a 67 percent increase in recruitment under this FNM Government.

BDOCS

Mr. Speaker,

Officer training at BDOCS is also crucial for institutional success. Professional development training improves their competencies in officer-inmate interactions with consideration for respect and human relationships; anger management; and conflict mediation (The Centre for Justice, n.d.; Crawford, 2016). As it relates to professional development for staff, for this fiscal period, 435 staff members have been exposed to virtual training facilitated by local and international

entities which is remarkable. It is expected that more training will be pursued in the next fiscal period.

Mr. Speaker,

Despite the pandemic, professional development still remains critical to the overall operational effectiveness and efficiency at BDOCS for inmates. It is an effective rehabilitative tool for the successful re-entry of offenders into society. Scholars (Batchelder & Pippert 2002; Kling & Krueger 2001) contend that incidences of crime and recidivism are related to the educational attainment and employment of an individual. According to scholars (Giles, et al. 2004), to reduce recidivism and improve the employment opportunities for inmates, education and training programmes should be vocationally centred.

Mr. Speaker,

On the 17th May, 2021, Mr. Speaker, a total of 30 inmates started the

BTVI Programme via virtual learning at the Correctional Training Institute. To date, commendably, BDOCS is getting closer to achieving its professional development target of training 600 inmates as 466 or 77 percent have already completed the programme. To expand upon the professional development opportunities, the Department is in the process of affording these training opportunities to inmates housed in Maximum Security Facility with the creation of a virtual learning centre.

6. Electoral Reforms - Modernization of the electoral process

Mr. Speaker:

I now turn my attention to the Parliamentary Registration Department which is the agency responsible for ensuring that all eligible Bahamians have the opportunity to register and vote in free and fair elections.

The last General Election in The Bahamas was held on the 10th May 2017. Presently, it has been four (4) years since that election, and the

Constitution of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas mandates that the next General Election shall be held no later than five (5) years after the first sitting of Parliament. The first sitting of this Parliament took place on May 24th, 2017.

Mr. Speaker:

You would recall that, previously, to prepare for a General Election the Parliamentary Commissioner had to prepare a new “Voters’ Register” every five (5) years. However, with the passage of the Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Act, 2020, the legal requirement for the five-year register was repealed and the new Permanent Register came into force.

Since the 2017 Voters’ Register is the core of the Permanent Register this eliminates the need for the mass registration of voters, as in years past. This has allowed the Parliamentary Registration Department (PRD) to adhere to social distancing requirements, while still

conducting voter registration exercises for the limited number of Bahamians seeking registration or transfers.

Mr. Speaker,

Despite the current health crisis, the Parliamentary Department continues to work relentlessly to deliver on its obligation to prepare a credible Voters' Register and plan for the administration of a free and fair election. In this regard, voters' registration continues throughout the islands of The Bahamas. The current Voters' Register as of the 25th May, 2021 has **one hundred and ninety thousand, one hundred and fifty-seven (190,157)** voters with a breakdown as follows:

Family Islands	28,002
Grand Bahama	30,412
<u>New Providence</u>	131,743
Total	190,157

Mr. Speaker,

Let me make it clear to all within the sound of my voice, simply put:

1. If you registered in 2017 and have not moved – you do not need to register again.
2. If you registered in 2017 and have changed constituency or polling division but it has not been 90 days or more, you don't need to register again.

Only qualified Bahamians who are not on the 2017 Voters' Register or who have moved to an address different from the one on their current or purple voter's card need to visit a Parliamentary Registration Centre, to register, or transfer their registration to a new polling division and constituency where they now reside.

Mr. Speaker,

To reiterate, the targeted groups are inclusive of:

a) New Registrations

- i. This refers to eligible persons who are 18 years of age and above and not on the current Permanent Register;

b) Transfers

i. This refers to persons already registered on the voters' list, but who have moved from one place of occupancy to another for a period of 90 days or more; and

b) Legal name changes

Mr. Speaker,

I wish to use this opportunity to highlight details relative to the expanded Voters' Registration Exercise which has been ongoing.

PHASE 1

Registration since 2017 has been ongoing, when permitted, with strict adherence to health and safety protocols. The registration centres include:

- a) The Parliamentary Registration Department's Head Office, Farrington Road, New Providence;
- b) The Parliamentary Registration Department's Sub-Office, Freeport, Grand Bahama; and

- c) Family Island Administrators' Offices Registration at the aforementioned occur during regular business hours from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

PHASE 2

Beginning on Monday, 15th February, 2021, Phase Two commenced with strict health and safety protocols. Ongoing registration, to complement the main voters' registration, consists of:

New Providence with seven (7) centres that are opened and continue to be operational to date, as follows:

1. Town Centre Mall Post Office
2. Grant's Town Community Centre, Quakoo Street
3. South Beach Post Office
4. Elizabeth Estates Post Office
5. Carmichael Road Post Office
6. Cable Beach Post Office
7. Parliamentary Registration Department

On Grand Bahama, the following registration centres remain operational including:

1. St. Nicholas' Anglican Church Hall
2. St. Mary Magdalene's Anglican Church Hall
3. St. Stephen's Anglican Church Hall
4. Masonic Lodge Hall (Lucayan Lodge Temple Association)
5. New Canaan Zion Baptist Church Hall
6. Church of God of Prophecy, Hawksbill
7. Church of Christ Apostolic Church
8. The Government Complex – McClean's Town
9. PRD Sub-office Mall Drive

Family Island Administrators' Offices continue registration, as usual, from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

PHASE 3

Beginning in March 2021, Phase Three commenced with health and safety protocols being strictly adhered to. The following pop-up centres were activated to complement the main and sub-voter's registration exercise sites:

a) On New Providence the following locations served as pop-up sites:

1. Gambier Primary School
2. Adelaide Primary School
3. Sandilands Primary School
4. Kemp Road Union Baptist Church
5. Church of Christ, Yellow Elder
6. Various workplaces of both private and public entities (taking into consideration safety protocols)

b) On Grand Bahama the following locations served as pop-up sites:

1. West End (St. Mary Magdalene's Anglican Church)
2. High Rock, East Grand Bahama, (St. Nicholas' Anglican Church)
3. Government Complex McClean's Town – East End, Grand Bahama

Mr. Speaker,

To ensure the accuracy of the Permanent Register, the Parliamentary

Registration Department work continues, as follows:

- 1) Engage in continuous editing of the Permanent Voters' Registration List;
- 2) The Permanent Register will be continuously purged of deceased voters;
- 3) New registrants will be added daily;
- 4) Transfers will be processed daily; and
- 5) Incarcerated persons voting rights will be suspended

Mr. Speaker,

I wish to inform Members that on the weekend of the 29th May, 2021, the Parliamentary Department commenced enumeration or scrutineering exercises in parts of the St. Anne's constituency and Freetown constituency on the island of New Providence and the East Grand Bahama constituency, Grand Bahama. Over the coming weeks the Department will expand its scrutineering exercises in other constituencies with particular emphasis on constituency boundary

lines where discrepancies have been noted during in-house editing of the register.

The public will be informed, in advance, via public service announcements of the constituencies where scrutineers will be conducting their surveys and they will all be uniformed and with a highly visible I.D. badge. The public is advised that under no circumstances will the scrutineer need to enter the house of any resident, however, the voter will be requested to sign an interview form and be given a copy of the same. I invite the public to cooperate with the scrutineers in the performance of their duty.

Mr. Speaker,

Now that we have a Permanent Register, enumeration exercises will be a critical tool that the Parliamentary Department will utilize as part of its work to maintain a credible register. While the majority of citizens do not relocate once they have purchased a home there is still

a significant number that live in apartments and relocate from time to time.

Furthermore, as aspiring Bahamians move out of their homesteads and start their own family or just to live on their own, they too may need to transfer their registration. The scrutineering exercise will allow the Department to come across these individuals and invite such persons to visit a voter registration centre to transfer their registration to their new addresses.

Mr. Speaker,

Transparency and accountability are key to any electoral process. In keeping with the same, the Department wishes to establish an open dialogue with the public. In an effort to provide every opportunity for the public to access registration sites and have their questions or concerns addressed, the Parliamentary Registration Department will provide information via several media platforms including:

1. The respective leading newspapers in the nation
2. Radio and television public service announcements
3. Press conferences
4. Billboards
5. Their website at www.elections.gov.bs

They can also be accessed through their social media account inclusive of: Facebook – The Parliamentary Registration Department

Mr. Speaker,

The current staff complement of the Department is woefully inadequate

to properly perform the duties of a modern Parliamentary Registration Department. The Parliamentary Commissioner has, therefore, prepared a revised organizational structure with established posts from top to bottom. This will enable the agency to provide the quality of service befitting in a modern Bahamas. For too long the Department

has been allowed to limp along with a modicum of staff between elections and to ramp up the staff complement with secondments and redeployment of public officers in preparation for general elections.

Consequently, soon after the election, they all return to their substantive agency denuding the Department of officers with institutional knowledge of its workings. Now that we have a Permanent Register this practice is unsustainable and the Department needs a full complement of staff to maintain the register on a daily basis. It is my intent to request that the Ministry of Public Service and National Insurance review the proposed structure and, thereafter, the matter will be put forward for Cabinet consideration.

Mr. Speaker,

In preparation for the 2022 General Election, the Parliamentary Registration Department has been allocated **four million, seven**

hundred thousand and twenty dollars (\$4,700,020) in the 2021/22 fiscal year. This reflects an increase of **three million, one hundred eighty-seven thousand, seven hundred and eighty-six dollars \$3,187,786** compared to the 2020/21 budget.

Mr. Speaker,

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought immense challenges for the Parliamentary Registration Department, however, they remain committed to achieving its objectives. In light of the aforementioned, from the bottom of my heart, I would like to thank the Acting Parliamentary Commissioner, Mr. Duncanson, his Advisory Team, and all Parliamentary Officers for your service to our great nation.

The Bahamas will continue to maintain the safe and peaceful transfer of power in Government. This is mainly due to the credibility of the electoral process and the will of the people. Both undergird our democracy which is the third oldest in the western hemisphere. I,

therefore, encourage all Bahamians to continue to participate in this valued process by registering to vote and voting your choice in 2022.

7. Taking Care of Our Own - Promotions

Mr. Speaker,

My Ministry fully understands that our law enforcement personnel endure stressful work environments. Consequently, personnel matters, if left unresolved, can impede productivity. The goal of this Administration is to tackle our law enforcement concerns head-on and not deny or defer. For me, this is personal because I, too, was a law enforcement officer. In addition, their exemplary performances over the last 15 months during the worst crisis in our nation means we owe a debt of gratitude. In the next fiscal period, we intend to continue to reform law enforcement career paths, facilitate promotions with increments and bring parity among our agencies.

Mr. Speaker,

Allow me to say this, to the men and women of law enforcement who fall under my remit principally, RBPF RBDF, and BDOCs - our Government continues to recognize your worth, especially during times of crisis. Because of this, your caring Government has taken steps to ensure you are rewarded for your contributions to the safety and security of our nation.

Mr. Speaker,

Funding has been made available during this upcoming fiscal period in all of your budgets to cover promotion. To the men and women in the BDOCs, this Minis-led Administration has not forgotten you. Your promotions are secured. As a matter of fact, steps are being undertaken by the Department of Public Service to adjust your career paths, thus enabling more of you to be eligible for upward mobility.

To the men and women in BDOCS, I have been assured that your promotion will be made retroactive. To the Police Reserves, I know it

has been a while, but allocations for your promotion have been included in this upcoming fiscal period. You have worked hard and are well deserving of it.

8. Multi-Agency Partnerships

Mr. Speaker,

Law enforcement is complex due to its multidisciplinary approach.

Since assuming Office in 2017 we have introduced a multifaceted approach to address an array of challenges associated with maintaining a safer and secure Bahamas. This multidisciplinary approach has led to the establishment of several collaborative arrangements, through which certain forms of safety and security are tackled. The multidisciplinary and collaborative networking operate on the basis of joint objectives. Within this framework they share information and jointly determine which combination of interventions are applied.

Mr. Speaker,

The National Neighborhood Watch Council (NNWC) is a part of this multi-agency partnership which offers a collaborative component to maintaining a safer Bahamas. The programme was launched in 2018 and the objective was for a “safer and more helpful nation characterized by community partners, local businesses and national security officials all teaming together to prevent crime by holding the community’s hand through public interaction and education”. The NNWC’s objective is to galvanize community support, work collaboratively with the Royal Bahamas Police Force and other agencies to reduce crime.

Mr. Speaker,

There are 168 neighbourhood watch groups throughout The Bahamas and they include:

105	New Providence
22	Eleuthera
19	Grand Bahama
12	Abaco

10 Exuma
168 Total

Mr. Speaker,

The NNWC assist in safety and security by tackling various socio-economic challenges facing our communities throughout The Bahamas. We are all keenly aware that gun violence inflicts an enormous burden upon our country, particularly within the inner city. The health and well-being of nearly everyone living within these neighborhoods are adversely impacted. This Administration has committed itself to ensuring that effective policies and programmes address community gun violence because they are essential to tackling the public health epidemic of gun violence.

In March of this year, the NNWC visited with the recent victims of crime. Of particular note was the demise of the 10 year old boy in March, 2021 due to gun violence. The same was also extended to the victims of the community fire on the 4th May, 2021. While the goal was to provide comfort to the families, they were also furnished with

monetary donations, personal items, food stamps and care packages. In addition, in partnership with The Bahamas Christian Council, prayer visuals were held throughout the various communities.

Mr. Speaker,

The NNWC inclusive of the Police Force partnered with the Department of Environmental Health and sponsored a cleanup campaign. The activities involved canvassing a number of areas which resulted in over 700 vehicles being tagged and recorded as derelict for removal. Members of the select communities were informed about the unkept properties which often led to rodent infestations. Various feasible solutions to reduce such infestations were provided to address the issue.

Mr. Speaker,

Before the end of this fiscal period, on June 21st – 25th, 2021, the NNWC will introduce Community Safety Week. The ultimate goal is to assemble professionals within the industry to address a wide range

of topics relative to community awareness. Topics on the agenda will include Fire Prevention, Insurance, Community Disaster Management, Red Cross Volunteerism, and Healthy Neighbours and Communities. With these initiatives, the NNWC is seeking to build stronger and safer mindsets within our communities.

Mr. Speaker,

The NNWC is a powerful resource for community association among leaders and other civic volunteers. Neighbourhoods are the backbone of every island in The Bahamas, in fact, every nation. The NNWC's Programme, simply works! Throughout the country we have witnessed decreases in property crimes and related offenses. The Programme helps keep communities safe, while building pride and serving as a springboard for efforts to address other community concerns. Hence, for the 2021/2022 fiscal year, our government will allocate **one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000)** to the NNWC to expand and advance the mandate of the Programme.

CITIZEN SECURITY AND JUSTICE PROGRAMME (CSJP)

Mr. Speaker,

The Citizen Security and Justice Programme (CSJP) is funded through a **twenty million dollars (\$20,000,000)** loan from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). The Programme seeks to use multi-faceted approaches to crime and violence-prevention and reduction in The Bahamas. The objective of this Programme is to offer four different components to address the vulnerability of inner city youth; increase the employability of vulnerable youth; offer vocational training for incarcerated juvenile and adults; and improve the judicial sector.

Mr. Speaker,

I am pleased to report that, notwithstanding the undeniable challenges in 2020, the project is continuing to realize notable levels of progress in 2021. Component I focuses on community development to improve

behaviours for non-violent conflict resolution. It is estimated that **three million and ninety-one thousand dollars (\$3,091,000)** will be spent on this component during the life cycle of the project. For the period, July 2020 – March 2021, **two hundred and seventy thousand, one hundred and fifteen dollars (\$270,115)** has been spent.

The deliverable milestone for this component was three community centres which are now fully operationalization in New Providence. They include the Fox Hill, Bain and Grant's Town (Quakoo Street) and Baillou Hill Road (Edmund Moxey). Despite the pandemic, the Centre Managers have made tremendous strides ensuring maximum community impact and engagement. These Centres serve as hubs for learning and extracurricular activities within the communities. They are considered safe spaces, where community members gather for purposeful events and reprieve.

Mr. Speaker,

Since its official launch in March 2020, the Fox Hill Centre has amassed a reliable network of private sponsors and community advocates who's assistance has contributed considerably to the success of this and many other community initiatives hosted by this Centre. During this fiscal period, the Centre facilitated widespread community food and clothing drives which resulted in over 100 beneficiaries. The hired chef prepared meals that were distributed to members of the community along with clothing and shoes, as needed.

Meanwhile, the Quakoo Street Community Centre hosted a robust Home-School Programme in partnership with The Eight Bahamas Scouts organization. This Programme provided virtual access to learning resources for students in a safe and sanitized environment. The Programme was designed to cater to students who would have fallen behind in their classroom studies during the lockdowns. The ultimate goal was to provide educational enrichment to facilitate

students meeting the necessary requirements of grade assignment so as to matriculate onto the next level of compulsory education.

Mr. Speaker,

The Edmund Moxey Centre has become a hub for civic, cultural, educational, musical and empowerment gatherings. Within the parameters of the established COVID-19 protocols, the Centre is home to multi-generational initiatives inclusive of:

- The Mount Moriah Transformers Youth Band who performed skillfully at the first CSJP - REVIVE Academy Graduation.
- FEM-STEM Bahamas, which is a non-profit organization, that educates, empowers and exposes girls to opportunities in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM).
- The Coconut Grove Neighbourhood Watch which plays a vital role in safeguarding the surrounding communities from criminal activities.

With over 3,000 youth and community members having accessed these Community Centres since their launch, I am confident that these Centres have embedded themselves into the fabric of their respective

communities and that many more persons, especially our youth, will continue to be impacted by their existence.

Mr. Speaker

Under Component I, the CSJP has mobilized several training initiatives that contributed to the reduction of crime and violence within the community through preventative measures. In 2021 these community leaders mobilized and provided training in Parenting and Conflict Resolution and Sexual Assault Prevention. I am happy to report that we are well on our way to achieving our targets for these outputs within the third quarter of this year.

To date, approximately 500 persons have been trained through our CSJP Crime Prevention Training Curriculum. We have also achieved our target of training and certifying 20 community leaders. These persons affect change in their respective communities through private

and small group training sessions, community projects and sustained networking throughout the community.

Mr. Speaker,

The CSJP acknowledges that sustainability must be at the centre of all its outputs. To this end, the project is now in the process of procuring a Firm to convert all crime prevention training curricula into e-learning modules which will be made widely available to the public for continued use through the Ministry of Education. It is anticipated this contract will be signed by September of this year.

Mr. Speaker,

Component II of the CSJP focuses on increasing employability and employment of at-risk youth in New Providence. For the period July 2020 – March 2021, approximately **one hundred and fifty-eight thousand and thirty-two dollars (\$158,032)** has been spent on this component. To achieve this goal, the youth training aspect of this

Component has been reimagined into what is now called REVIVE ACADEMY. Revive Academy is a free job readiness programme offered to youth between the ages of 15-29 years. Its motto is, *‘Tomorrow is For The Taking’*, and it strives to provide competency-based training that will accelerate one’s journey to job readiness.

With a budget allocation of approximately **seven hundred thousand dollars (\$700,000)**, the CSJP contracted two (2) of the leading learning institutions in The Bahamas in November 2020 to deliver employability training. The Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institute is responsible for delivering soft skills training, while the University of The Bahamas is responsible for delivering numeracy and literacy training. With an overall target of 700 beneficiaries at each institution, I am happy to report that approximately 500 young people have been trained, to date. It is anticipated that this number will increase by contract conclusion in October, 2021.

Mr. Speaker,

Although numeracy, literacy and soft skills are fundamental skills for employment, the CSJP seeks to equip the youth of The Bahamas with an even sharper competitive edge. According to a Wages and Productivity Survey, conducted by the IDB in 2013, Bahamian employers are mostly in need of qualified tradesmen in production and sales related fields. To this end, the CSJP has projected to spend **nine hundred thousand dollars (\$900,000)** on additional training in production and trades with special emphasis on entrepreneurial acumen and sales strategy.

It is anticipated that approximately 1,350 young people, including 400 incarcerated juveniles will benefit from this free training opportunity. Procurement for a firm to deliver this training under the CSJP - REVIVE Academy brand is currently in progress with the contract expected to be signed in September, 2021.

I would like to add that as a requirement for graduating from REVIVE Academy, all trainees must register on the Department of Labour's 'Job Seekers Portal'. This will ensure that these graduates have the support they need to find employment after they have been upskilled. Further, in an effort to make Public Employment Services more accessible and user-friendly to both REVIVE Academy graduates and the public at large, the CSJP has contributed to the refurbishment and upgrading of two (2) of the Department of Labour's offices inclusive of Carmichael and Robinson Roads. The ultimate goal, Mr. Speaker, is to reduce the crime rate among persons between ages 15-29 years and increase employment and productivity, island-wide.

Mr. Speaker,

Component III of the CSJP aims to “strengthen institutional capabilities

for more efficient justice services”. For the period July, 2020 – March, 2021, approximately **six hundred and ninety-six thousand, one hundred and fourteen dollars (\$696,114)** has been spent on this component. This Component aligns with the judiciary’s vision for a higher functioning court system – and its goal is to address a number of technological challenges that exist within the courts; comprehensively redefining the way justice is delivered in The Bahamas.

The CSJP has allocated approximately **two million dollars (\$2,000,000)** to implement an Integrated Case Management System (ICMS) within the courts. This system essentially combines the use of software, hardware, and cloud technologies to bring the judiciary to the highest level of performance and lead it on the path to a fully paperless court with e-services. Further, the ICMS will automate the entire production of court performance reporting and analytics, making it possible for courts, judges, administrators and registrars to

quickly and easily develop new lines of sight into the efficiency of their operations and the execution of their duties.

The contract for the development and implementation of the ICMS was signed in December, 2020 and is being implemented in 2021. I am happy to report that the consultancy is 50 percent completed with an end target of December, 2021. Hands-on software testing and training within the various court divisions is set to begin in July, 2021.

Mr. Speaker,

The CSJP has further prioritized the modernization of the courts by investing **four hundred and eighty thousand dollars (\$480,000)** to convert over four (4) million registry documents into digital format, essentially rendering our court system paperless. This digitization element complements the ICSM and ensures efficiency across all departments within the judiciary. I am happy to report that since awarding this contract in December 2020, nearly all of the four (4)

million paper documents have been successfully digitized and the CSJP is expecting to allocate additional funding to digitize even more paper documents within the judiciary in 2021.

Further, it is intended that a Digitization Unit be established within the judiciary sector to support the scanning and digitization of documents as a standard practice moving forward. To accommodate such a technology-driven environment, the CSJP is allocating additional funding to train judiciary staff in computer literacy. It is expected that 300 judiciary staff will benefit from this computer literacy upskilling during the year 2021.

Mr. Speaker,

Component IV of the CSJP focuses on reducing the recidivism rate among persons within the correctional and juvenile detention systems. For the period, July, 2020 – March, 2021, approximately **forty-five thousand dollars (\$45,000)** has been spent. I am happy to report that

we are reaping the benefits because for the past four (4) years, the recidivism rate has continued to drop from 17 percent in 2017 to 12 percent for the year ending 2020.

Unlike previous Governments, this Administration continues to invest in programmes that increase released offenders' chances for reintegrating into the society once they have completed their period of incarceration. We are a Government of doers and all Bahamians, irrespective of status, deserve an equal opportunity to be productive members of society.

Mr. Speaker,

In 2020, the Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institute (BTVI) was contracted to deliver skills training in various vocational trades to 600 inmates. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our target was not met. However, BTVI's contract was recently renewed in order for this necessary training to be delivered to the inmates.

Additionally, **one point five million dollars (\$1,500,000)** has been allocated to upgrade and refurbish the industry trades training centre at BDOCS and the juvenile centre. Bids for this construction project are expected to go to tender within the next four (4) months.

It is anticipated that once released from prison, these rehabilitated offenders will utilize the skills and trades that were received during their incarceration, to find gainful employment or pursue an entrepreneurial venture. This will lessen the chances of repeated criminal activity and will ensure that these persons do not become reoffenders.

To support the same, **one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000)** will be allocated to contract four (4) consultants to contribute their expertise to implementing several other outputs under this component. While these outputs are in their implementation phase, it is expected

that they will be operationalized within the next 4 months. The anticipated programme development will include:

1. The Substance Abuse Prevention Programme;
2. Pre-release corrections programming;
3. Assessing the structural integrity of the workshops targeted for renovation; and
4. An ICT specialist to develop infrastructural design documents that will upgrade the current offender assessment and management systems at BDOCS and the electronic case management system for juvenile detention centres.

Mr. Speaker,

At the conclusion of 2020, an external evaluator was hired to objectively assess the performance of the Citizen Security and Justice Programme (CSJP). After four (4) months of rigorous review in 2021, the findings indicate that the CSJP is making tangible progress towards its goals and performance is satisfactory, a rating one rung below the top mark which should ultimately be achieved by the project's end.

As the Minister with responsibility for National Security, I remain proud of the work done by the Citizen Security and Justice Programme and believe they are poised to contribute to lasting change in this great country of ours.

TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS (TIPS)

Mr. Speaker,

The trafficking of human beings continues to be one of the most heinous crimes carried out by one individual against another. It is an inhumane practice that has an enormous impact on its victims, causing them psychological and physical harm and trauma. Trafficking in Persons (TIPS) Unit is the responsible for generating awareness to prevent trafficking; protecting victims; and prosecuting offenders.

Due to the nature of the crime a multidisciplinary TIPS Task Force and TIPS Committee work collaboratively to eliminate trafficking. For

the 2021/2022 fiscal year, our Government will allocate **ninety-five thousand dollars (\$95,000)** to the Unit to advance its work.

Mr. Speaker,

For the period, January 1st to May 31st, 2021, the TIPS Committee engaged in victim-centered training for 260 persons from various sectors of society inclusive of:

- **164** RBDF Officers
- **62** Public Hospital Authority employees
- **13** Social Services' employees
- **21** Ministry of Tourism – Bahama Host Trainers

Of particular importance, the TIPS Committee was able to partner with the Ministry of Tourism and succeeded in training a number of Bahama Host Trainers across the archipelago. This is significant because now there will be a TIPS module included in the Bahama Host certification course. All persons desirous of achieving Bahama Host certification, will be sensitized on TIPS and will be able to

identify possible cases. This will greatly assist in reducing the number of traffic related matters in our borders.

Mr. Speaker,

In addition to the aforesaid, 25 members from the TIPS Task Force participated in a virtual Caribbean Regional Training exercise hosted by the United States Department of Justice, Human Prosecution Unit. Attendees took part in discussions such as *Coercion Based Human Trafficking Prosecutions* and *Best Practices and Challenges*.

It should be noted that despite the COVID-19 pandemic, through extensive investigations and screening, it was discovered that traffickers continue to target vulnerable, impoverished females by enticing them with the promises of well-paying jobs (child caretaker and other domestic work) and a better way of life.

The methods of recruitment frequently used by traffickers to attract such persons are Facebook, WhatsApp and other social and print media. The TIPS Unit will continue to work with its partners to identify TIPs cases; provide victim care services; investigate and, where warranted, prosecute alleged traffickers.

Mr. Speaker,

I would like to highlight that The Bahamas hosted the first Annual Regional Trafficking In Persons Committee (TIPCOM) Forum on May 6th, 2021 under the theme, “*A Regional Discussion on Successes and Challenges In Anti-Trafficking Activities*”. This forum was important because we recognized that throughout our region the issue of Trafficking In Persons cannot be easily fought by individual countries.

It is, therefore, important that we engage further with officials involved in anti-trafficking activities in other countries throughout the

region to exchange best practices with a view of achieving the best results to eliminate this global issue. This is the first of what is hoped to be an annual meeting of our regional TIPS partners.

Mr. Speaker,

The Government of The Bahamas for the sixth consecutive year, ending June 2020, remains on Tier 1 Status. This recognition is a testament to our continued efforts to remain contemporary in strategies to eradicate this modern day slavery. The country will await its Tier Status in the upcoming reporting period ending June 2021, as issued by the U.S. State Department.

Mr. Speaker,

Events like COVID-19 means that many victims of abuse and/or exploitation are at greater risk. Therefore, let me stress that the TIPS Hotline is available to all irrespective of legal status, nationality, race, gender and/or age. Those needing help may dial:

- 376 – 8477(TIPS) which is operational 24-hours;
- Family Islands can dial 300–3339 toll-free; and/or
- 919/911 for Police assistance

NATIONAL ANTI-DRUG SECRETARIAT (NADS)

Mr. Speaker,

I now turn my attention to the National Anti-drug Secretariat (NADS) which is responsible for coordinating national efforts of anti-drug agencies; facilitating reporting national obligations to the various international treaties, conventions, and agreements on drugs; conducting scientific studies and surveys aimed at determining trends and the prevalence of drug use within our nation; and advising policy makers on the results of such studies and surveys.

For the 2020/2021 budget period, NADS was allocated **one hundred and ten thousand dollars (\$110,000)**, however, only **fifty-nine thousand, nine hundred and fifty dollars (\$59,950)** or 54.5 percent

was released. Consequently, many of the activities that were proposed were unable to be implemented due to the unavailability of the required funds, on the one hand, and the limitations due to the necessary public health measures in place to address the spread of COVID19, on the other.

Nonetheless, the goals and objectives that NADS had set for the 2020/21 budget cycle followed the five (5) specific strategic areas outlined in the current 5-year National Anti-Drug Strategy (2016-2021), along with other priorities identified through deficiencies exposed during the completion of the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism and the Annual Report Questionnaire.

Mr. Speaker,

Priority activities for which NADS had carriage and sought to address in this budget, were primarily related to institutional strengthening, international relations and research. Other ways in which NADS was

impacted included how it normally accessed its primary audience and interacted with its stakeholders. With the coordination of activities between the various government and non-government agencies involved in drug control being a major part of the work of NADS, operational priorities had to be reviewed and new measures introduced to facilitate the work of the Unit.

To accomplish its objectives, resources were reallocated and partnerships further developed to take advantage of available services. Emphasis was placed on the digital delivery of programmes and stakeholder capacity building. This allowed NADS to reduce its dependence on interpersonal interactions, to increase collaboration with experts through the use of existing digital platforms to deliver content, while maintaining or strengthening stakeholder relationships.

Mr. Speaker,

This approach afforded the country the opportunity to receive

stakeholder training in the key areas of Early Warning Systems, the control of precursor chemicals, in the development and the use of drug supply data, and many more during this budget cycle. To support the same, NADS is seeking to finalize an agreement with the UNODC regarding full access to its e-learning platform. The platform allows interested professionals to gain access to over 400 online courses in all areas that fall within the portfolio of the UNODC.

Mr. Speaker,

To highlight the benefits of strengthened partnerships, through the use of tools and questionnaires developed by CICAD and the United Nations, and with the assistance of local stakeholders, during the past year NADS was able to complete in-depth situational assessments of aerial drug trafficking; maritime drug trafficking; COVID-19's impact on drug treatment and prevention; the status of helplines for individuals with drug and/or alcohol use problems; and is currently wrapping up a comprehensive training and other needs assessment

survey. All of which, Mr. Speaker, are to be used in the strengthening of the country's response; particularly as work begins on the drafting of the new 5-year National Anti-Drug Plan (2022-2027).

Mr. Speaker,

Like the rest of the country, while NADS has been challenged, the Secretariat will continue to adapt in the 2021/2022 fiscal period. The Secretariat has been allocated **sixty thousand dollars (\$60,000)** in the 2021/2022 budget and it will continue with ongoing efforts to address those priority activities targeting problems faced in the field of drug control; some with budgetary implications and some without.

The goals, objectives and activities for the 2021/2022 budget cycle will concentrate on enhancing staff complement to meet needs; building staff and stakeholder capacity; strengthening data collection and monitoring and evaluation systems; sourcing additional funds to help meet programme needs; building on partnerships that were developed; and ensuring the country's compliance with its various

international commitments, as outlined in the various treaties and agreements.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Speaker,

I wish, in closing, to thank the Permanent Secretary (Acting) Mrs. Cheryl Darville and the staff at the MNS, the Commissioner of Police and staff, the Commodore and staff, the Commission of Corrections and staff, Acting Parliamentary Commissioner and staff, NCIA Director and staff, for their exceptional performances, especially during times of crisis. Our nation is better off because of what you do each day to keep us all safe. May God Bless you All. May God bless the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.

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