



## MEDIA RELEASE

Friday May 01, 2020

Priority: **HIGH**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

***Many express gratitude as Ministry of Social Development and Family Services begins bank transfers for COVID-19 Social Support Grants.***

**Friday May 01, 2020** --- Following weeks of verification, leading to the processing and approval of applications for COVID-19 social support, several individuals and families across the island are now breathing sighs of relief as the *Ministry of Social Development and Family Services* began payments to persons for income and food support during the week of April 26, 2020. This follows a period of extensive checks and balances, as well as some queries due to fraudulent activities, which was interpreted by many as administrative bureaucracy but is in reality due diligence. However, payments of social support measures are well underway at this time.

According to Ministry records, there are an estimated thirty thousand (30,000) applications in its database, that have been received from citizens who have been retrenched, terminated or are experiencing a loss of income. To date, *two thousand nine hundred and ninety one (2,991)* of those applications have been approved by the *MSDFS*, and such persons have received their payments via a direct transfer to their bank accounts or by a debit card for those without one. The total value of payments to date has been recorded at **\$7,677,000 TTD**.

During the past week, several recipients opted to convey their gratitude to the Ministry's Executive and staff. Many like Ms. Jennifer Riviera\*, who is a self-employed caterer and single mother from Arouca, stated that since the stay at home restrictions had commenced on March 30<sup>th</sup> she had been living in a constant state of anxiety as the sole bread winner of her household. She also recounted how that anxiety soon led to depression, as people within her community openly mocked the Government's social relief efforts, alluding to it being a gimmick by the State to *quiet them down with false hope*. She was however elated to receive a call confirming approval of her application for income support and expressed her intention to spread words of faith to those who she knew were still waiting. Her advice to many is: "Submit your application and pray, God answers prayers".

Speaking from his home in Sangre Grande, Keilon who is a self-employed construction worker, highlighted that he was the first within his community to receive the call. Noting that the process was very straightforward, Keilon commended the expediency with which his request was addressed, given the volume of applications. He however, was also quick to point out

that the entire process was done on his own merit. *I printed my forms, completed them myself and within three or four weeks it was done! There was no friend thing*, he advised. He has since received food support in the sum of \$1,530 and income support of \$4,500.00 which represents the total payable sum for both grants over a three-month period.

Ganesh R\* was also amongst those beneficiaries who received deposits via their personal bank accounts earlier this week. A self-employed mechanic from Rio Claro, Ganesh too noted that he was happy to have been one of the first from his community, which largely comprises farmers and poultry workers, to have benefitted from the financial assistance. In commending the Government for its assistance, he suggested that it was because of his discipline and responsible nature, that he was able to readily complete and submit his application. This included having a valid national identification card, as well as, recent bank statements that helped to validate his application.

It is to be noted that while the direct deposit payments are already in persons' accounts, TTPost commenced the distribution of debit cards on May 1, 2020 via courier. The Ministry has initiated mechanisms to fast track payments and it is expected that an estimated 4,000 payments will be made on a weekly basis, for rental assistance, food and income support, all for a three-month period.

The Ministry wishes to assure the public that it remains committed to bringing relief to those who have been negatively affected by the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic to ensure that no one is left behind as we begin to chart the road to recovery.

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