



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Ministry of Social Development and Family Services

MEDIA STATEMENT

Monday 14th April 2020

Priority: HIGH

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Minister Robinson-Regis responds to queries about Government Expenditure

Port of Spain--- Following a query made by the Honourable Bhoë Tewarie, Member of Parliament for Caroni and a subsequent newspaper article regarding Government spending related to the COVID Pandemic Social Support, the Minister of Social Development and Family Services, The Honourable Camille Robinson-Regis wishes to state that the Government has recognised the concerns raised as real ones, particularly for those who are vulnerable and will become vulnerable as a result of the measures taken to stymie the spread of the coronavirus.

Accordingly, the Government has responded immediately by providing a range of assistance for the most vulnerable and those in need including those who are already within the social safety net, as well as an expanded allocation to cater for those who would not, but for the exigencies of this crisis gripping the entire world, would not normally be within the social services system, but now must be catered for as we respond to the demands now placed upon us as a nation at this time, as we respond to the corona virus pandemic.

The public should also be advised that during this Pandemic, all involved in bringing assistance to the citizens who will be most affected was of paramount importance, particularly where the welfare of the citizens is at heart of the matter. The issues raised in the newspaper article of April 11th were effectively explained by the Minister of Finance in his presentations during debate in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. One may recall his lucid explanations of the emergency situation in which we, like all of the countries of the world, find ourselves given this Pandemic and the consequent need for us to have access to the funds saved in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and the government's additional need to be able to immediately increase our borrowing limit to be able to fund the outlined measures.

According to Minister Robinson-Regis: "As a government, we have transparently brought to the attention of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, every step that we have taken, through the use of that Parliamentary debate and at the daily Press Conferences when Ministers talk frankly to the citizens and face questions from the media. We have inter alia, undertaken to assist the business community by assuring the payment of outstanding bills for services already rendered to the government which remain unpaid; VAT refunds, all in an effort to keep businesses whole, to the extent that the government has a role to play financially, at all levels. The Minister of Finance and the Honourable Prime Minister have both detailed every aspect of this expenditure at a time that the crisis of this Pandemic is upon us.

Colonial Life Building, 39-43 St. Vincent Street, Port of Spain, Trinidad, W.I.

Telephone: (868)-623-2608

www.social.gov.tt

Follow us: Facebook



With regard to the social issues and the attention to be paid to the most vulnerable amongst us and those who may at this time be experiencing loss of jobs or a reduced income, I as Minister of Social Development and Family Services, have said on several occasions, that the government has also increased the Social Safety Net which is already provided. As you are well aware the food cards given to each MP are linked to the established School Feeding list of school children from the Ministry of Education's records, but not those who are already in receipt of food support; as a substitute for the school feeding, in order to ensure that their nutritional needs continue to be met. By now each of 8,077 families have food cards of \$1,530.00 representing three months support in their hands, once all MPs have given out their cards. Expenditure for this is \$12,357,810.00.

The other persons who are already in the system with food cards have all received their normal amount of either a \$510.00 or \$700.00 card, which have all been topped up in the order of \$150.00 for families between one to three persons, \$300.00, for families of four to five persons and \$450.00 for families of six or more per month for three months which they have already received. This expenditure for top up to Existing Food Support Clients is in the amount of \$17,144,100.00. Each person in receipt of a Public Assistance Grant who at this time receives as follows: \$1,300.00 for 1 person, the top up is \$150.00; \$1,550.00 for up to 3 persons, the top up is \$350.00, \$1,750.00 for up to 4 persons, the top up is \$450.00 and \$1,900.00 for 5 persons and more, the top up is \$500.00 all of the top ups is that amount per month for three months. The 17, 834 current recipients have all benefited from this measure and the expenditure thus far is in the order of \$11,438,100.00.

Regarding the recipients of the Disability Assistance Grant, each recipient now receives \$2,000.00 for adults and children receive \$1,500.00, the top up for each recipient is in the amount of \$150.00 per month for three months, they have all received their Grants with the three-month top up. This Income Support by way of the top up to the 24, 627 current recipients of the Disability Assistance Grant inclusive of the 1,535 children with a disability is in the amount of \$11,082,150. All Senior Citizens Grants have been paid. These recipients receive the following amounts depending on their existing income: \$500.00, \$1,500.00, \$2,500.00, or \$3,500.00. We continue to make payments to the 168,950 recipients of all our other various Grants on time and in the correct amount on a monthly basis.

This monthly expenditure is in the order of \$436,000,000. Further, each of the Disaster Management Units in the Municipalities have received 100 hampers, valued at \$350.00 each, that is an expenditure of \$490,000.00, which are available for the most vulnerable who are in dire need of assistance. There is also a Call Centre manned by 10 persons and there are also 15 Emergency Lines manned by 15 persons to respond to calls from the public who are in dire need of such support. Concomitant with this, there are several NGOs and CBOs providing food support, some in partnership with the government. Among these include F.E.E.L, the Living Water community and many others. We have also enhanced and outfitted accommodation for the Socially Displaced in Port-of-Spain at the Centre for Socially Displaced Persons at Riverside Plaza and provided both this location and the Shamrock Court in San Fernando with the additional food support that they require at this time.

I trust this allays any concerns you may have. Thank you for your enquiries and we anticipate your support of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Camille Robinson-Regis, MP

Minister of Social Development and Family Services

-END-