



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

Friday, 24 April 2020

**Priority: HIGH**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Ministry warns against fraudulent practices for COVID-19 Social Support**

Trinidad and Tobago along with the rest of the world is learning to manoeuvre in a COVID-19 environment. In these perilous times we have been witness to numerous examples of random acts of kindness and displays of goodwill by the vast majority of our citizens, for which we must commend them. Unfortunately however, there have also been instances where we have seen displays of the worst examples of human nature.

In an attempt to relieve citizens of economic challenges incurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has heavily invested in a structured relief programme to provide social assistance. As Minister of Social Development and Family Services, it is my duty to ensure the fiscal responsibility of this process.

In the disbursement of food cards and while processing declaration forms for persons who have received cards, the Ministry detected the incidence of attempted fraudulent activities by persons attempting to access food support whilst already in possession of a food card.

I strongly condemn attempts by some citizens to defraud the State during this crucial time. Every time a fraudulent applicant is unwittingly paid by the state, a person in genuine need could potentially be denied or forced to wait for a longer period to put food on their table, because of someone else's dishonesty.

There have been several attempts to defraud Government in the following ways:

- Applying for the rental grant, intended for payment of rent for housing accommodation, but using it to pay commercial rent
- Claiming via Declaration, that persons do not have a food card when in fact they are already recipients.
- Persons preparing falsified employment letters stating that they have been laid off from work due to COVID when they were never employed.
- Employers requesting applicants to take a salary cut, and apply for the grant to make up the difference, so that the employer could continue to make money at the expense of the government;
- Persons claiming to be renters at a location for 7 years, the recommender claiming that they know them at that location for 10 years and the landlord attesting that the applicant has been renting at that location for only 6 months.

We at the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services strive to treat our fellow citizens with care and compassion in these extraordinary times and we urge people to do the right thing because it is the right thing to do. The Government will not tolerate the indecency of any citizen who attempts to defraud the system. Recommenders are urged to verify all persons before signing. Persons who are guilty of any of these actions will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

For further information and enquiries, please call the Ministry's hotline numbers 800-1673, 800-6742 or 623-2608 ext.'s. 1120/1132.

\*\*\*ENDS\*\*\*

**For more information:**

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