



MEDIA RELEASE

March 26, 2020

Priority: HIGH

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Update #3 on Implementation of Social Support Measures for COVID-19

Port of Spain--- Minister of Social Development and Family Services (MSDFS), The Honourable Camille Robinson-Regis, provided another update on the social support measures to be implemented to assist the vulnerable impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic at a Media Conference hosted by the Ministry of Health. According to Minister Robinson-Regis: “We at the Ministry empathize with persons experiencing job loss. We understand the anxiety and fear you may be experiencing, but we want you to know that these social packages are in place to address those issues.”

The Minister also indicated that she was aware that persons are crowding Social Welfare and NIB Offices and advised that this is not the best practice, as social distancing is the best approach to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus. It was also stated that effective tomorrow, March 26, 2020, **Customer Service Representatives will be assigned to all of the 11 Social Welfare District Offices, including the Social Welfare Office in Tobago. The CSRs will address issues and queries from persons who were retrenched, terminated or have experienced a reduction in income.**

All guidelines for accessing the Social Assistance will be posted on the websites and facebook pages of the Ministries of Social Development and Family Services, Labour and Small Enterprise Development and Communications, as well as that of TTConnect.

The Ministry’s Call Centre is now up and functioning at the following numbers. Available from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm, Monday to Friday:

- 800-1MSD (1673) – Toll Free
- 800-OPIC (6742) – Toll Free
- 623-2608; Extensions 1120 to 1132
- 753 – CARE (whatsapp only) – available 24 hours

The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services wishes to assure the national community that the Government has the ability to care for, and to ensure that the vulnerable populations are protected and supported during the COVID-19 crisis. According to Minister Regis: “We are all in this together and we will get through this together”. Highlights of what the Minister said about the implementation of COVID-19 Social Support Assistance are as follows:

Payment of Salary Relief Grant for Persons Registered with NIB

The National Insurance Board will be addressing persons who are currently making contributions to the NIBTT, with the Salary Relief Grant of \$1500.00. It was also noted that the NIB is not yet ready with the operationalization of this grant as they have indicated that the guidelines would be ready within the next seven (7) days.

For Persons who are Self-Employed and NOT Paying NIS

Self-employed and other persons who are not paying NIS will be assisted by the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. Persons will be required to register via the portal of the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development. Completed forms should be emailed to undermentioned addresses relevant to your area:

- supportforyou.east@gov.tt (Barataria/Blanchiessuse to Toco)
- supportforyou.north@gov.tt (Morvant to Maraval/Las Cuevas/Diego Martin/Petit Valley/Chaguaramas)
- supportforyou.central@gov.tt (Chase Village; Caroni; Felicity; Chaguanas; Tabaquite; Manzanilla; Couva; Talparo; Freeport; Claxton Bay and surrounding areas)
- supportforyou.south@gov.tt (Pointe-a-Pierre to Moruga/Icacos/Rio Claro/Guayaguayare)

Once verified by the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, disbursement of the grant will be completed by the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services.

Food Support to families with children registered to receive meals under the School Feeding Programme and do not have a Food Card:

- Distribution to the 41 MPs is ongoing at the MSDFS Head Office for Food Support Cards valued at \$510.00. Only the parents of the children who are registered on the Ministry of Education's School Feeding Programme will receive temporary food support. Persons will be contacted by their MP Offices, and should only visit their MP office when they are called;
- It should be noted that each family will receive one card. Each person will be required to sign a **declaration**. Recipients are asked NOT to dispose of their Temporary Card as these cards will be topped up for an additional two (2) months during the month of April, 2020.

Support to existing recipients of Food Support, Public Assistance and Disability Assistance Grants (including the DAG for children),

- **Food Support:** Additional support will be provided via a top up during the month of April for three (3) months, depending on the size of the family, to be paid in April 2020;

- **Public Assistance:** Additional income support in the sum of \$150.00, \$300.00, \$450.00 and \$500.00, depending on the size of the family to be paid in the month of April, for a period of three(3) months. This will be paid via a separate cheque, by April 15, 2020;
- **Disability Assistance Grants:** Persons who receive DAG (including the DAG for children) will receive \$150 per month for the three (3) months, to be paid via a separate cheque by April 15, 2020.

Food Support for persons who are Retrenched, Terminated or now experiencing Reduced Income:

- Where there are persons who are retrenched, terminated or experiencing reduced income, Temporary Food Support Cards valued at \$510 will also be issued for a period of three months, following assessment by the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development and further verification by the Ministry of Social development and family Services to ensure that such persons are not already in receipt of Food Cards.

Rental Assistance Grant

- Rental Assistance will be provided to the value of \$2,500 per month for a period of three (3) months initially, and up to six (6) months as required. If this support is required beyond the six months, the rental assistance grant will be reduced to \$1,500 and then a further reduction to \$1,000.00 for any additional months required. The total period of rental assistance must not exceed twelve (12) months.

Socially Displaced Persons

- The MSDFS, working with the Ministry of Health, the TTPS and the Local Government bodies to institute the “*move along system*” for street dwellers to come off the streets and go to shelters. Additional financial support will be provided to NGOs that operate these shelters to ensure that they are equipped to provide enough meals for this anticipated increase. MSDFS will be working with NGOs to ensure that socially displaced persons are provided with additional subsistence. The MSDFS will be continuously working with the TTPS, the Regional Corporations and the MOH to help remove these persons off the street.

End-

For more information:

Communications Unit
 Ministry of Social Development and Family Services
 (868) 623-2608; Ext 5405/5424/5432
 Website: www.social.gov.tt
corporatecomm.msdf@gmail.com