



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **COVID-19: One Year Later**

#### **Minister of Social Development and Family Services Optimistic about Recovery**

Minister of Social Development and Family Services (MSDFS), Senator The Honourable Donna Cox has stated that she is quite optimistic about our recovery, as the country marks one year following the first COVID-19 case entering our shores.

According to the Minister, COVID 19 presented to the country as an unprecedented occurrence, which resulted in several challenges for both the vulnerable as well as individuals and families that experienced a loss in income, due to retrenchment and job loss in some instances; and reduced income in other cases. However, Minister Cox was quite optimistic that the citizens have what it takes to recover. The Minister said: “COVID -19 allowed us to unearth undiscovered potential, work smartly, improve our systems and procedures and embrace technology.”

Given the demand on the Government and by extension the MSDFS to provide a quick response through the various social support measures, it meant that the Ministry’s staff had to mobilize and come out to work despite the associated restrictions, which threatened their personal safety. In excess of 60,000 applications for COVID Social Support were received. To date, a total of \$351 Million Dollars have been expended toward COVID relief. Added to this, existing beneficiaries of grants from the Ministry were also catered for with measures to address any challenges they would have encountered during the restrictions. Persons were also offered free counselling and psychosocial support and special arrangements were made to safeguard older persons who were most susceptible to contracting the virus.

“For this, I want to express gratitude to the Executive and Staff of the Ministry, as an essential agency, for the yeoman service they have provided for the people of Trinidad and Tobago”, said Minister Cox. She went on to indicate that among the various new measures to be undertaken by the Ministry for a more responsive, and multifaceted social support system were:

- STEP-UP – Social Transformation and Empowerment Programme, Uplifting People
- Digitalisation of all Social Support Grants and Services
- The Tobago Help Desk for all social services queries and concerns and
- An expanded Call Centre facility for easier access to the Ministry, and
- A Community First Responders System where the Ministry will undertake outreach exercises at the community level to reach the vulnerable where they are

The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services remains committed to helping, empowering and transforming lives and continues to work with key stakeholders to overcome the COVID-19 crisis together.

**End-**

**For more information:**

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