



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Ministry of Social Development and Family Services



MEDIA RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Priority: **HIGH**

Ministries to collaborate for more healthy functioning families

Port-of-Spain --- As incidents of domestic violence continue to make news headlines in Trinidad and Tobago, and in keeping with the mandate of helping, empowering and transforming lives, Senator the Honourable Donna Cox, Minister of Social Development and Family Services (MSDFS) met with the Honourable Ayanna-Webster Roy, Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister, Gender and Child Affairs, to discuss collaborative strategies in addressing the many challenges facing families today. Topping the list was the fight against domestic violence. The meeting took place earlier, at the Office of the Prime Minister, Gender and Child Affairs, St. Clair, Port of Spain.

Minister Cox was accompanied by the Chief Technical Officer, at the Ministry, Michael Reid, Deputy Director of Social Welfare, Christine Guy and Deputy Director of the National Family Services Division, Kathleen Sarkar. Also in attendance was the Permanent Secretary at the Office of the Prime Minister, Gender and Child Affairs, Jacqueline Johnson.

During the meeting, Minister Cox indicated that prior to joining Government, and even more so since assuming the role as Minister, she has always taken a keen interest in issues surrounding vulnerable families and welcomes any opportunity for the advancement of this particular cohort of persons, in Trinidad and Tobago. She stated further, that the meeting of both agencies was of critical importance, as there is a great sense of urgency surrounding the care and protection of vulnerable children at present. She said “A collaborative approach is important, particularly where shelters and housing facilities are concerned, since there are many instances of single parents with children who need affordable, low income housing to assist in the transitioning process. The Minister also indicated that her Ministry has already been in contact with the Housing Development Corporation regarding low income homes to support its clients.

The burning issue of Domestic Violence, which continues to receive attention from all spheres of the society, was also tabled for discussion, particularly in light of the present COVID-19 situation. Consequently, Minister Cox advised the attendees of the available services for victims of Domestic Violence, namely, counselling from the National Family Services Division, as well as referrals to access public assistance, food support and the rental assistance grant.

The Ministry’s plans to introduce a Family First Responder System was also revealed by Minister Cox, as she explained the need for such a System to provide support to families from the level of the community. According to Minister Cox “This project will enable us to have the collaborative approach that is needed, as we must ensure that there is clear contact with the Gender and Child

Affairs Ministry and Children's Authority, at all times. Victims of domestic violence and human trafficking, are in need of the type of support that will require the efforts of multiple stakeholders, inclusive of Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, Local Government and the Ministry of Labour, all who are fully on board with this initiative. It takes a village to truly tackle this issue effectively.”

In response, Minister Ayanna Webster-Roy, reiterated her commitment to help support any efforts by the MSDFS, for the various vulnerable target groups and indicated that her team is ready to join forces to deliver on each Ministry's mandate. Permanent Secretary at the OPM, Jacqueline Johnson in endorsing the initiative, indicated that Office of Prime Minister, Gender and Child Affairs, is planning to scale up social services in some areas and looks forward to the launch of such a system.

In closing, Minister Cox shared that she was confident in the whole of Government approach to tackling social issues; and firmly believes that with plans to establish an Integrated Social Enterprise Management System (ISEMS) for a single door approach to accessing social services, through shared data, there will be a greater streamlining of grants and services for a more responsive and cohesive social safety net system.

The Meeting ended with both parties agreeing to work closer to increase public awareness and sensitization efforts so that there is greater public involvement in issues related particularly to children. Both Ministers agreed that their priorities are *indeed* developing families, as they form the backbone of society.

The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services remains committed to engaging all key stakeholders and proactively exploring opportunities to ensure that no one is left behind.

ENDS



Minister Cox greets the Honourable Ayanna Webster-Roy, Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister, Gender and Child Affairs.



Minister Cox highlights the importance of collaboration between the two Ministries to the Honourable Ayanna Webster Roy, Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister, Gender and Child Affairs.

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For more information:

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