



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

**Ministry of Social Development and Family Services**



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

Friday, 07 January 2022

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Priority: **HIGH**

#### **Ministry of Social Development and Family Services**

#### **Statement on current status of Food Support Programme**

**Port-of-Spain** --- The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (MSDFS) wishes to inform the public that the Food Support Programme has not been suspended, but will be exposed to a review and investigation of its current beneficiaries, to ensure that those who are eligible and in need continue to receive this support.

The Food Support Programme forms a crucial part of the Social Protection System operated under the Ministry. The Food Support Programme addresses food insecurity via a cash transfer, in the form of a card or cheque, to reduce the incidence of poverty. It provides nutritional food support to many vulnerable households. Payments are as follows:

- 1-3 persons per Household - \$510.00
- 4-5 persons per Household - \$650.00
- 6 plus persons per Household - \$800.00

It should be noted that all recipients of the Food Support Grant must be assessed regularly to ensure that they remain eligible for the grants paid by the Ministry, in accordance with the legislation and policy and procedures.

According to Minister Cox, “The Ministry has considered to review all clients in receipt of food support to ensure the eligibility status and that the necessary approvals and authority to make payment are in place. The Ministry took this approach with a view to ensuring that only those clients who meet the eligible criteria receive the food support.” In this regard, the Ministry’s Social Welfare Division was instructed to take the new applications and refer these to the Central Office repository. Given that new applicants will be impacted, the Ministry is making every effort to provide temporary support to those in need, in the interim, through the issuance of temporary food cards and food vouchers, where necessary.

Adding to the basis for an urgent review of the Food Support Programme, Minister Cox also highlighted some irregularities, which includes the following:

1. There were persons on the Food Support Programme who were now gainfully employed and never reported their change of status to the Ministry, or indicated that they no longer require this support;

2. There were food support clients also in receipt of Senior Citizens Pension, Public Assistance Grants and Disability Assistance Grants;
3. There were clients on food support who were assigned to community care facilities and the Ministry met the full cost of their upkeep, including all meals;
4. There were persons on the Food Support Programme who reside abroad;
5. Persons were also utilizing Food Cards to make purchases like alcohol and cigarettes, but not food;
6. Persons were utilizing their food cards in exchange for cash;
7. Persons applying for cards and being assessed based on the need to feed their children in the household, but the children did not benefit from the grant.

The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services reassures that none of the existing clients have been removed and this will only be done based on a proper assessment of each individual case. Clients on the Programme are also guaranteed that they can continue to use their card and cheques provided to acquire food for their household. The Ministry recognizes that in order to manage the Food Support Programme and its related expenditure, several policies, procedural and other changes must be made to efficiently manage the Programme.

**-End-**

**For more information:**

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