



MEDIA RELEASE

Friday, July 19, 2024

PRIORITY: HIGH

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Minister Cox, Mayor of Port of Spain and key stakeholders to tackle street dwelling frontally

“The issue of street dwelling in Port of Spain and environs must be dealt with in a firm and serious manner through a collaborative and unified effort to yield effective results.” This is the view of Minister of Social Development and Family Services, Senator the Honourable Donna Cox. Minister Cox made the statement at a meeting held with Port of Spain Mayor, His Worship Alderman Chinua Alleyne and a team of officials from the Port of Spain City Corporation, North West Regional Health Authority’s (NWRHA) Mental Health Unit, officials from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS), the Public Health Division and officials from the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (MSDFS). The meeting was held at the Ministry’s Head Office on St. Vincent Street, Port of Spain on Wednesday 17th July, 2024.

Minister Cox indicated that the issue of street dwelling is a serious one that requires urgent attention. She lamented the fact that even though the staff of the Social Displacement Unit of the MSDFS monitors the homeless persons across in the capital city, they are unable to take real action as they cannot move them involuntarily, although the Field Officers have persuaded some street dwellers to voluntarily relocate from the streets through referrals to Shelters, Community Care Programmes and other social programmes.

This combined with the fact that they are not trained to action involuntary engagement of persons living on the streets with mental health issues has made their task a daunting and somewhat dangerous one. However, the Minister is currently working on legislation to enable them to do so, as the MSDFS is presently overseeing the construction of an assessment centre for homeless persons at South Quay, Port of Spain.

Mayor Alleyne, concurred that this ongoing issue is indeed a worrying one and indicated that while the Port of Spain City Corporation is currently engaged in some initiatives that assists in alleviating some of the issues, he stands ready to collaborate with the MSDFS and other stakeholders to ensure that an enabling environment is created so that the capital city can become attractive to investors, visitors, and the general public. He stated that a street washing programme is in effect between 2 a.m and 5.a m on a daily basis, and that the City Corporation is looking to further expand this initiative. Also high on the agenda to mitigate the problem is to urgently secure a temporary location in the city to serve as a common area for the street dwellers, where they can access the convenience of showers and toilet facilities, so that the streets can be cleaner.

Meanwhile, the Mental Health Unit of the NWRHA, suggested that a “day of engagement” be held to assess and test the street dwellers, so that they can be placed in institutions relevant to their needs, such as rehabilitation centres, mental health facilities, homes for older persons and places for persons with disabilities. This would be done in collaboration with the MSDFS, the TTPS, the Port of Spain City Corporation, the Public Health Division and all the stakeholders involved to ensure that the exercise is a fruitful one.

Several other issues and suggestions were discussed and Minister Cox expressed her delight with the enthusiasm and commitment of all involved to address the long standing issue of street dwellers. She stressed that legislative reform is absolutely necessary to deal with the issue, and hopes that it comes in effect by the time the new assessment centre is opened. She reiterated her commitment and mandate to addressing the problem, and immediately convened another meeting with the team and their technical personnel on 24th July, 2024.

-END-

For more information:

Communications Unit
Ministry of Social Development and Family Services
(868) 623-2608; Ext 5402-5404

Email: cccu@social.gov.tt



Minister Cox (centre) Mayor Alleyne (right), Permanent Secretary (MSDFS) Lenore Baptiste and others discuss important matters related to the street dwellers



Minster Cox and Mayor Alleyne discuss issues to alleviate the street dwelling issue.



Minister Cox chairs the meeting at the MSDFS Head office.