



MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

By

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Minister of National Security

Westgate Correctional Facility Work to Rule Update

May 10, 2019,

Mr. Speaker, I rise to provide the Honourable House with an update on The Department of Corrections. I would like to say from the outset that we appreciate and value the work of our Corrections Officers.

Mr. Speaker, the Health and safety of our Corrections Officers is paramount. I would also like to highlight that I have full confidence in the Bermuda Department of Corrections Senior Leadership Team, led by Acting Commissioner Keeva Mae- Joell Benjamin.

Mr. Speaker, most recently the Prison Officer Association (POA) raised significant concerns. The Concerns centered around 1) the conditions of the Correction Facilities 2) Security 3) Health and safety.

Mr. Speaker, in 2017 the Bermuda Department of Corrections produced a Strategic Plan. The afore-mentioned plan articulated, a systematic method for 1) Security Upgrades 2) Personnel Development 3) Facility Upgrades.

Mr. Speaker, most recently there was an impasse between the Department of Corrections Senior Management Team and the Prison Officers Association (POA).

Mr. Speaker As a result of the aforementioned impasse a number of prison officers “called in sick” consequently there were not enough officers to handle the day to day operations within the Department of Corrections. Please note that senior officers were drafted in to carry out the day to day operations in the Housing Units within the Department of Corrections.

Mr. Speaker, The Bermuda Police Service was used to transport inmates to and from court and to medical visits. The impasse reached ‘fever pitch’ in turn the POA, Department of Corrections, Labour Relations Manager and Ministry of National Security Permanent Secretary Colin Anderson met in an attempt to solve the outstanding issues.

Mr. Speaker, there were concerns in reference to the correction officers dealing with mentally ill prisoners and the training required to manage prisoners with mental health issues. There are ongoing discussions with the Ministry of National Security, Ministry of Health and the Bermuda Hospitals Board, to establish a mental health forensic unit in Bermuda, there is no official timeline as of yet.

Mr. Speaker, the Westgate Correctional Facility had limited hot water supply. The budget for the new industrial heater was recently approved by Cabinet. The Industrial Water heater will be shipped to the island and will be operational by July 2019. The facility was also in need of two industrial washing machines, one was purchased in 2018 and is in operation, and the other industrial washer was recently approved by Cabinet and will be on island and in operation in July 2019. There were major leaks in the Westgate Water tank. Repairs to the Tank have commenced.

Mr. Speaker, the POA are deeply concerned with reference to the health of the Corrections Officers as a result of the mould in the Corrections Facilities and rightly so. The Acting Commissioner has implemented a Mould remediation and cleaning regime. An air quality assessment is to be completed prior the end of June 2019. Industrial Cleaners will be used to assist with remediation in June 2019.

Mr. Speaker POA have concerns with reference to staff shortages.

Please be advised that twenty five (25) new Correction Officers were hired in September 2018. The recruiting process for twenty two (22) Corrections Officers commenced in March 2019. Training and development of officers is paramount as is succession planning. The Senior Leadership team have been tasked with discussing the plan with the POA to ensure that the training and development program is robust and fit for purpose.

Mr. Speaker, the security within the Department of Corrections was also a concern. A part of the 2017 Corrections Strategic Plan included a Security Matrix. There are significant elements within that security plan that have been completed or are a work in progress.

Mr. Speaker, Please note that the Duress System in all facilities was recently upgraded. Unified Power System (UPS) was recently upgraded, Telephone System was recently upgraded, Fire Alarm System was recently upgraded, the infrastructure system for the security system at the Farm Facility was upgraded. The Infrastructure for Farm Facility cameras was upgraded.

Mr. Speaker, At the Westgate Correctional Facility, the CCTV system was upgraded. Cameras were replaced and additional cameras were installed. There was a software upgrade to the Westgate facility Camera System. Security fencing at the Farm Facility was completed. Security fencing at the Co-educational Facility has commenced and should be completed by the second week in June 2019. The Cabinet has recently approved the budget for a CCTV upgrade at the Co-ed Facility.

Mr. Speaker, there is a security plan in place for drone sightings.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Corrections have trained canine officers who use dogs to assist with drug detection at all of the Correctional Facilities on island.

Mr. Speaker last Friday representatives from the Ministry of Works and Engineering visited the Westgate Correctional Facility to tour the facility and put together a list of priorities for maintenance.

Mr. Speaker, last week the POA Executive, the Department of Corrections, the Labour Relations Manager and the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of National Security Collin Anderson, met and distilled all of the outstanding issues and agreed upon a way forward.

Mr. Speaker, the first outcome was that they would create a working maintenance list of issues. The afore-mentioned maintenance list would be set in order of priority. The Parties agreed to set a time continuum with an accompanying schedule including deadlines.

Mr. Speaker, the second outcome was that all of the elements in the strategic plan will be discussed as a standing agenda item, at the monthly Department of Corrections POA meetings. Also action points will be discussed and the progress signed off by the POA at the end of each meeting.

Mr. Speaker, the most significant concerns center on the POA's desire for an increase in pay and the POA Membership payment into the Government Employment Health Insurance (GEHI). Please note that the requested increase in salary and the payment in to GEHI are subject to the Public Sector Negotiations. The Public Sector Negotiation team and the Prison Officers Association struggled to come to a consensus, re:

Terms of Reference. Both sides have now come to an agreement. The terms of reference are now with the Attorney General's chambers for sign off. Once the Attorney General's Chambers have signed off on the Terms of Reference the Arbitration can commence.

Mr. Speaker, In July of 2019 personal from HM Prison Inspectorate will be on island to review all Department of Corrections facilities and will provide an independent assessment of all Department of Correction process and procedures.

Mr. Speaker, the POA members continue to work to rule, this means the Corrections Officers will not work overtime, programs and all classes are restricted, visits are restricted. The Dialogue between the POA, The Department of Corrections Ministry of National Security and the Bermuda Department of Labour and Training is bearing fruit. All sides are committed to resolving the outstanding issues.

Mr. Speaker, the Corrections Officers safety and wellbeing is paramount. The Acting Commissioner is tasked with executing the 2017 Strategic Plan. The POA have highlighted their concerns, the concerns have been taken seriously. The stakeholders must continue to work together to solve the challenges so that the Department of Corrections can get back to their regular schedule of duties.

Thank you, **Mr. Speaker.**