



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
Ministry of the People, Social Development and Family Services

The Honourable Vandana Mohit
Minister of the People, Social Development and
Family Services

Response to the Standing Finance Committee
Mid-Year Review

Thank you Mr. Chair,

The Ministry of People, Social Development and Family Services remains people focussed and steadfast in its mandate to build a strong, resilient, and inclusive social safety net for all citizens; one that places the dignity and well-being of our most vulnerable individuals and families at its core. As a new administration, this mission has taken on even greater urgency as we navigate the national recovery process. Every programme we deliver is guided by a single question: how do we improve the lives of our people?

The allocation of \$5.5 billion dollars to this Ministry is a powerful statement. This Government is committed to investing in people, not just in infrastructure or systems, but in families, children, the elderly, persons with

disabilities, and communities in need. We do not take that responsibility lightly.

We will manage these resources with integrity. Accountability, transparency, fairness, and efficiency will guide every decision and every dollar spent. Our focus is not just on delivering services, but on delivering results that can be measured in lives improved, burdens lifted, and dignity restored.

To do this, the Ministry is actively transforming itself, modernizing how we work, using data to target those most at risk, and ensuring that help gets to the right people, at the right time, in the right way.

The staff and leadership of the Ministry are united in purpose: to serve with compassion, and efficiency, and above all, to serve with the people at the centre of everything we do.

When this administration took office, as Minister of the People, Social Development and Family Services, I ensured that we make an immediate impact in addressing the needs of vulnerable citizens.

This Ministry was established to serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago, especially those in greatest need.

In a period still marked by economic recovery, climate risk, and social adjustment, we have remained focused on our mission to uplift, protect and empower.

- **Senior Citizens' Pension Processing backlog addressed**

Faced with the dire appeal from many of our senior citizens and other applicants, with respect to the processing of their Senior Citizens Pension and other Grants, and the backlog that was created due to verification delays, particularly from the Immigration Division and the National Insurance Board of Trinidad and Tobago, I convened an urgent meeting with parties involved to address the matter. A coordinated response from both Ministries and the NIBTT, have drastically reduced the number of outstanding applications from over 6,400 to just 175 as of June 4, 2025.

A dedicated team is now in place and is actively processing cases. We are also developing a long term

action plan that will improve verification, reduce wait times, and ensure timely delivery of pensions to our elders.

- **Social Support and Crisis Response**

The Ministry has provided emergency social relief to individuals and families affected by disaster and hardship. Recently, in Laventille we responded to the collapse of a family home following heavy rainfall. The occupants received immediate relief including a temporary food card and eligibility for rental, clothing and household assistance through the National Social Development Programme. The site was assessed within 24 hours, and she was supported with psychosocial services.

In Esperance Village, San Fernando, we provided support to another family, following national media attention. Our assessment confirmed serious need. The family is now being assisted with house repair materials, food support, sanitary plumbing and house wiring assistance. The National Family Services Division is also providing counselling and referrals.

These responses demonstrate our capacity to act quickly and compassionately. We are guided not only by policy, but by people.

- **Supporting Older Persons and Preventing Elder Abuse**

We continue to celebrate our elders and safeguard their well-being. Over the past six months, the Division of

Ageing has received reports through the Older Persons Information Centre and social media. These include cases of financial exploitation, neglect, psychological mistreatment and abuse within institutional settings.

The Ministry has launched formal investigations in collaboration with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and the Ministry of Health. Homes identified in reports are being closely monitored, and appropriate action is being taken to protect residents.

We continue to call on the public to report suspected cases, and to support a culture of dignity and respect for older persons.

- **Child Protection and the Children's Authority**

Mr. Chairman, I turn now to an area that deserves the unwavering attention and support of this Committee. That is the protection of our nation's children.

Since assuming responsibility for the Children's Authority and the Gender and Child Affairs Division, the Ministry has prioritised safety, stability and accountability. I take this opportunity to strongly defend the investment made in the Children's Authority and those facilities that fall under this agency. Every dollar spent has been aimed at protecting those who cannot protect themselves and improving their conditions. I direct you to the St. Mary's Children's Home which has received supplemental funds of \$3.07 million dollars. Mr. Chairman these funds are earmarked to go towards improving the conditions at the facility and needed

repairs to the dormitory. It will also cover the payment of salaries for the facility's continued operations, repairs to vehicles as well as grocery and market supplies.

The Ministry continues to support the invaluable work of the Authority in the protection of the Nation's children.

In June, following the circulation of disturbing images on social media, the Authority launched an immediate investigation into alleged abuse at a residential facility for children with disabilities. The team conducted interviews, reviewed the conditions of the facility and has since implemented a schedule of follow-up visits. This matter is being treated with the utmost seriousness.

In Tobago, the Authority is also managing a case of sexual abuse involving minors. This case was reported in March. The children and their mother have received

ongoing psychosocial care. Food card assistance has been approved, and counselling has been extended to siblings.

I have also met with the Chief Executive Officer and senior leadership of the Authority. Together, we are reviewing the status of current projects, finalising draft budget proposals for fiscal 2025 to 2026, and preparing to launch improved child welfare programming. Additional technical meetings have been scheduled to strengthen case management and support services.

The Children's Authority is performing a critical role and we will continue to support its work with the resources required and the oversight necessary to ensure excellence and accountability.

- **Youth Empowerment and Inclusion**

During the review period, we marked the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty with a national spoken word competition. This was organised by the Social Investigations Division of the Ministry.

Under the theme “Poverty has a face, a name and an address,” the competition welcomed submissions from secondary schools across the country. The winner and runners up all delivered powerful messages of social justice and inclusion. Their voices represent the conscience of a generation. We remain committed to creating platforms for youth engagement, especially as we pursue the goal of ending poverty by the year 2030.

- **Infrastructure and Accessibility**

We are pleased to report that the Ministry has implemented national accessibility standards across all our facilities. This includes visible signage and designated parking for Persons with Disabilities.

This initiative supports the Trinidad and Tobago Standard for Accessible and Usable Buildings and Facilities. It also reflects our broader effort to promote inclusion, dignity and respect in all public spaces.

- **Strengthening Governance and Partnerships**

As part of our commitment to transparency, the Ministry has also taken note of governance challenges within some of our civil society partners.

We have advanced diplomatic cooperation. Recent meetings with the United States Embassy and the British

High Commission focused on areas such as gender empowerment, women's leadership, and child protection. These partnerships will play a vital role in expanding our programmes and sharing best practices.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, Honourable Members,

The Ministry of the People, Social Development and Family Services is not only delivering services, but also delivering hope.

We have:

- Taken action to resolve pension backlogs
- Provided timely relief in times of disaster

- Protected our children and elderly from harm
- Promoted dignity for persons with disabilities
- Empowered our youth to raise their voices
- Strengthened institutional accountability
- And built bridges of international cooperation

As we move into the second half of the fiscal year, I reaffirm this Ministry's commitment to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We will act. We will listen. And we will serve.

I thank you.