

VERBATIM NOTES OF THE SEVENTH MEETING OF THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE APPOINTED TO INQUIRE INTO AND REPORT ON SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, HELD (IN PUBLIC) IN THE J. HAMILTON MAURICE ROOM, MEZZANINE FLOOR OFFICE OF THE PARLIAMENT, TOWER D, THE PORT OF SPAIN INTERNATIONAL WATERFRONT CENTRE, #1A WRIGHTSON ROAD, PORT OF SPAIN, ON WEDNESDAY, MAY 18, 2016.

PRESENT

Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir	Chairman
Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine	Member
Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein	Member
Mrs. Glenda Jennings-Smith	Member
Mr. Hafeez Ali	Member
Miss Khadijah Ameen	Member
Mr. Julien Ogilvie	Secretary
Miss Kimberly Mitchell	Assistant Secretary
Miss Katharina Gokool	Graduate Research Assistant

ABSENT

Miss Nadine Stewart	Member [<i>Excused</i>]
Mr. Esmond Forde	Member

OFFICIALS OF THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY SERVICES

Mrs. Jacinta Bailey-Sobers	Permanent Secretary
Mr. Haimdath Ramoutar	Deputy Permanent Secretary

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Ms. Loraine Reyes-Borel	Executive Director, Social Displacement Unit
Ms. Sarah Rambaran	Deputy Director, Inter-Agency Unit
Dr. Barry Ishmael	Legal Officer II

OFFICIALS OF THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Ms. Donna Ferraz	Permanent Secretary
Dr. Clive Tilluckdharry	Chief Medical Officer (Ag.)
Dr. Rohit Doon	Advisor, Health Promotion, Communication and Public Health
Mr. Lawrence Jaisingh	Director, Health Policy, Research and Planning

OFFICIALS OF THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO POLICE SERVICE

Mr. Deodat Dulalchan	Deputy Commissioner of Police, Operations (Ag.)
Mr. Sterling Hackshaw	Assistant Commissioner of Police, Operations (Ag.)

OFFICIALS OF THE PORT OF SPAIN CITY CORPORATION

Councillor Keron Valentine	Mayor of Port of Spain
Mrs. Annette Stapleton-Seaforth	Chief Executive Officer
Miss Lystra Parke	Deputy Chief Executive Officer
Ms. Erica Prieto	Acting Superintendent, City Police

Meeting resumed at 10:23 am

Mr. Chairman: Good morning to our invited witnesses, good morning to all of our viewers on the Parliament Channel who are viewing in faithfully whenever there is

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a public enquiry. Welcome to this, our Seventh Meeting of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration. We are starting a little bit later this morning because we do have to have meetings in camera before we come in public as we need to determine how exactly the enquiry will proceed.

This is the Committee's first public hearing pursuant to its enquiry on the effectiveness of the state's intervention directed at socially displaced persons, and by socially displaced persons we mean individuals who really are having to find accommodation on the streets and elsewhere because they do not have their own accommodation and they are basically homeless. This particular live proceeding is being broadcast live on Parliament Channel 11, Parliament radio 105.5 FM and the Parliament's YouTube channel, *ParlView*.

I would invite members of the listening and viewing audience to send their comments to us via email at parl101@ttparliament.org or on our facebook page at [facebook.com ttparliament](https://www.facebook.com/ttparliament) or on [twitter@ttparliament](https://twitter.com/ttparliament). And we invite members of the population of Trinidad and Tobago who think that they may be able to help us solve this problem in particular, to send to us solutions that we may add as part of our proposals to solve the problem that we are addressing. I would like at the outset to welcome, as our witnesses this morning, officials of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, officials of the Ministry of Health, the Port of Spain City Corporation and the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

First, I would like to invite Members of the Joint Select Committee to introduce themselves and then I will invite the lead members of the four organizations, the lead spokesperson from the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, the Ministry of Health, the Port of Spain City Corporation and the TTPS to also introduce themselves. So may I start on my left.

[Introductions made by the members of the Committee]

[Introductions made by Officials of the various entities]

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Mr. Chairman: Thank you all. There are some very familiar faces that I see and I know that there would be a lot of assistance to the Committee from the people who were students of mine at the University of the West Indies, some of them as far as 30 years ago. [*Laughter*] Before we proceed, just for guidance to our witnesses, the Chair will intervene as little as possible, really the members of the Committee will be posing their questions. First, the questions will be posed and the four team leaders from the four departments invited will then decide to answer or direct the question to a member from their agency as they see fit.

There are a number of objectives in our enquiry proposal, but if we could summarize, what we want to do is this. The Committee would like to obtain an understanding of the problems of the socially displaced. Why do some persons in our society, despite all the assistance given to them by various arms of the state, the opportunities for training, find themselves in a situation where they are socially displaced? And second, having found themselves there, what could we do at the level of the state, at the level of the NGOs, what are the solutions to rehabilitate these persons? So that over time, there would be fewer and fewer people who find themselves in this particular state.

Now that the introductions are made and the objectives of the enquiry are identified, can I ask Sen. Hafeez—oh sorry, my apologies, the opening statements from the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Social Development and Family Services.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Thank you, Chair. I will begin by saying as the Ministry with the key responsibility for addressing the challenge of social displacement in Trinidad and Tobago and for ensuring the Government's achievement of its social development objectives, we are happy to have this opportunity to dialogue and to share with the Committee and the public at large and our stakeholders here this morning to enable a better understanding, as you said, of the situation and the

requirements for addressing it. Persons living on the nation's streets is a common, unfortunate occurrence in Trinidad and Tobago and has proven to be quite a challenge to address.

In 2004, when the then Ministry of Social Development undertook a survey to determine the number of street dwellers and the characteristics of the population, it was determined that there were 905 such persons on the streets and in various centres. That was in 2004. Compare this statistic to the outcome of a street count of the population in January 2015 last year which registered a total of 539 such persons, including persons in centres and such facilities and quite timely, we just completed a two-day count which went into this morning and the outcome of that preliminary was 349 persons on the streets but not including persons who are in the various centres.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, just for clarification, in Trinidad and Tobago or just in Port of Spain?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: In Trinidad, sorry.

Mr. Chairman: And not in Tobago?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: For this two-day, Trinidad.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, thank you.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Now the phenomenon of street dweller is indeed a social problem, we know that and like so many social issues, it is complex and by extension, it requires a comprehensive range of strategies for successful intervention. Over the years, a number of strategies have been pursued beginning in 1996 when the then Ministry of Social Development was formally tasked with the responsibility of addressing social displacement in Trinidad and Tobago.

In March of that same year, the committee to formulate an action plan for treating with the problem of social displacement presented to the then Cabinet, the holistic plan for addressing social displacement in Trinidad and Tobago. Then, in July of

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that same year, 1996, a Cabinet-appointed task force was given the assignment to develop an action plan to operationalize the holistic plan. The task force developed the action plan and presented it to Cabinet in 1997.

Then we had the establishment of the Social Displacement Unit—which still exists in our Ministry—in 1999 and the Social Displacement Act being passed in 2000 but never proclaimed and a board to oversee the work of the unit appointed with its term ending in 2006. In 2008, a national strategy to address the socially displaced was approved by the then Cabinet and then we had inter-ministerial committees being appointed in 2008, 2013. A new interagency unit established in 2012. All these efforts to address the situation of social displacement with limited success, it would seem, to date.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Mrs. Bailey, I will ask if you could summarize the rest of the statement and during the course of the proceedings, you advise the Joint Select Committee on some of the issues you would like to raise that would guide us in own deliberations on the matter. Thank you very much.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Chairman: May I ask Ms. Donna Ferraz to make a brief opening statement as well? Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Health.

Ms. Ferraz: Thank you very much, Chair. The Ministry of Health recognizes its role and responsibility as part of the whole of Government system for the care of the socially displaced. Our role, in particular, has been the clinical care of such persons. They may not have come from the streets but traditionally, the medical facilities might have been inappropriately used by discharged but abandoned social cases following episodes of acute illness.

I can bring us fast-forward to date and say that across the country, across Trinidad, we have currently 212 such cases at either hospitals or to extended care facilities. Of note, 78 of such cases reside at the St Ann's hospital. The Ministry has continued

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to be in discussions with the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, because in 2010 there had been Cabinet agreement that we would be decanting some of these patients to different kinds of long-stay facilities within communities.

As my colleague, PS, has indicated, there has been limited success and it is a work in progress. We have had some stops and starts but we really do need to continue because at the end of the day, the number of such clients at hospitals is 59 and what that translates to, is 59 less beds for persons who need medical care. So we do recognize our role, we commit to working with all the partners but it is work that needs to be done. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Ms. Ferraz. May I ask Councillor Keron Valentine, Mayor of the Port of Spain City Corporation, to address us briefly?

Mr. Valentine: Thank you, Chair. Firstly, I want to record our appreciation on behalf of the Port of Spain Corporation for having us here this morning. And I will start by saying any serious society must take care of its most vulnerable and I say this in the context of socially displaced persons. The situation with the state of homelessness in the capital city is near epidemic. The Port of Spain Corporation had engaged in about four exercises in attempting to remove homeless persons from the streets of the capital city and we found out that there were four categories of homeless persons. There are drug addicts which is the highest number of socially displaced persons, there are the mentally ill persons, there are the deportee population and there are those persons who are just socially displaced. I will elaborate further into the discussions.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Mayor and now finally, Mr. Deodat Dulalchan, Deputy Commissioner of Police, Operations, briefly address us on the issue.

Mr. Dulalchan: Chair, I want to indicate that the Summary Offences Act, section 75, the police has a role to play but I think in further discussions, we would realize

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how difficult it is for the police, as a single entity, to just arrest people by sharing some of our experiences. I just want to indicate that between October 29, 2015 and April 07, 2016, 29 persons, street dwellers or homeless persons, would have been arrested in San Fernando, and we had issues with the people at St. Ann's refusing to take them because of overcrowding and so on and we were plagued with them. We had to reconvene with the Magistrate. They had to find some solution. But at the end of it all, I think what is noteworthy here is that 22 of these persons, although they would have pleaded guilty, they were reprimanded.

10.40a.m.

Mr. Dulalchan: So, I think the question here is: what happens after that, to prevent that revolving door of people just going through the system and getting back on the street? And I have every reason to believe that this enquiry will certainly assist to ensure that there is some stop to prevent this revolving door of persons just being arrested and going back into the streets.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Deputy Commissioner of Police. Now having had brief opening statements I would ask members of the Committee to pose their questions, and the first online is Sen. Hafeez Ali.

Mr. Ali: Thank you, very much, Mr. Chair. As the Assistant Commissioner indicated earlier, this Act has been here since 1921. So we have a problem almost 100 years now and we still cannot get it right. That is to start with. My question is outside in the public, most laymen see this as a simple solution. Why it is the Ministries cannot identify the individual, whether it is the social development Ministry, the Ministry of Health and the police service, and deal with the individuals? Not in a harsh manner. And it has to be such a systematic manner because I am in the Barataria area, so usually when there is a programme that is going on in Port of Spain, we have mass migration into Barataria, and so on. They will keep moving down, all the way to Arima and Sangre Grande, as you all carry

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out your exercises.

My first question is: What are the challenges that are in the system that are preventing the Ministries from acting, I do not want to use the word seriously, because I believe you all are trying, but to get the individuals rehabilitated back to society? What are those challenges that you spoke about earlier, Permanent Secretary?

Mr. Chairman: Is that to the Permanent Secretary Social Services?

Mr. Ali: Yes.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Thank you, Chairman. Well, in my statement I did say that the challenges are many. We have challenges in terms of the resources of the units that we have in the Ministry. We have challenges in terms of facilities, where they will do the assessment for the persons on the street. We have challenges, in terms of, as we heard, the accommodation. We have challenges in terms of the staffing external to deal with the issues that present with the clients. So the challenges are many. And we also have challenges in terms of, you know, the operations of the various agencies that must be involved to treat with that particular street dweller.

I believe the person who would be able to go into it a little more would be our Executive Director of the Social Displacement Unit because they actually treat with the clients on the streets, and also they are responsible for working with the agencies to ensure that the issue is addressed. So I would ask Mrs. Reyes-Borel to go a little further into those challenges that we spoke about.

Mrs. Reyes-Borel: Thank you, PS. As indicated earlier by the Hon. Mayor, there are categories of persons on the streets, and while it would be great if they were all singular categories, that would be relatively easy to deal with. But in most cases we have persons with a mix of those problems and challenges, which means that they require a mix of services and the mix of services is available in various departments and agencies, which have their own systems within which they operate, which is not

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always operating at the same. Given challenges of resources, et cetera, they may not be in the same place at the same time as the client needs it.

In addition, these clients are particularly vulnerable and disenfranchised. So their capacity to engage many of the services that we have is really quite reduced. So the fact is the system has to become very tight and work together so that the system can engage the client and keep them engaged. So what we speak of, usually is that we need to have a continuum of care for our clients and also in that continuum of care, there is coordination and collaboration from the various agencies that must happen.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Any further questions, Senator?

Mr. Ali: So you are simply saying it has no coordination at the moment?

Mrs. Reyes-Borel: No, I am saying that the coordination and collaboration is sporadic. There are times when we would be able to have—there are things happening quite quickly with two particular agencies, maybe the Ministry of Health and our Ministry, maybe with the corporation. But for all the players to be on the same place on any given time, that is something that we have not had. Sustained activity, we have not had that.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Just a point of clarification before I move to another colleague. You said that these citizens, because they are citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, are vulnerable and disenfranchised. When an individual is identified, does that person have an ID card, a birth certificate? Does that person qualify for a food card? The services of the State seem not to be available to him or her. What happens? How is that person vulnerable? Disenfranchised, to me, means that he is not qualified to obtain some of the benefits of the State. What exactly is the status of this individual to give him the title of being disenfranchised?

Mrs. Reyes-Borel: It is his capacity to engage the services. And it has everything from—to get a birth certificate you need to know the name of your parents. You need to have their date of birth. Many of our clients cannot remember that. They

also do not have someone that they can identify to say that this person can do this for us. So they have that first hurdle to get a birth certificate. And even that process then, okay fine, the process could be long and onerous for them to do all what they need to do to get that so they just disengage, because they are not having success. Success is difficult.

So even in a simple thing as to get a birth certificate that for John Public you go down to South Quay and you get your birth certificate within half an hour, our clients cannot do that.

Mr. Chairman: Just as a solution, because our Committee is a solutions-oriented Committee and I promised that I will not intervene but a solution is now jumping at me, and that is, could we have social workers in the State work with the socially-displaced and in an attempt to rehabilitate, assist these individuals to obtain the ID card, the food card and whatever other things that they are entitled to? Do you think there is a role for social workers to work with each of the 300 or 400 of them that you have identified, to simply have them fully documented?

Mrs. Reyes-Borel: Certainly, and the unit has had social workers. We do not have the complement of social workers that we need to have. So to be able to, again, resources. That presents a challenge. But that has been done and is done for clients by social workers.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. So we will ask, as a point to ponder from members and the witnesses, how many social workers do you think you would need to ensure that every individual who is socially displaced is fully documented? Because I tell you, being an undocumented individual without an ID card in Trinidad and Tobago is going to make it impossibly difficult for you to get anything done. So could you put your heads together and find out how many social workers, perhaps, you would need?

Miss Ameen: A ratio.

Mr. Chairman: A ratio of social workers to the socially displaced. Thank you so much. MP Christine Newallo-Hosein has to come in at this point.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Chair. I just would like to hear from the IA Unit on this matter please.

Ms. Rambaran: Thank you, Chair and thank you member. The Inter-Agency Unit has been doing just that. When a client, we call them clients, comes in to us, that is the first thing that we assist with; getting their birth certificate in the first instance and then their National ID in the second instance. We have been able to get the birth certificate successfully. We have had problems with the ID but we have been getting them.

Chair, what we need to note is that, that is not the solution to the problem. What we find is that after we get the ID and the birth certificate and then they qualify for, for example, the TT smart card, the food card or whatever grants, they are back out on the streets because then they are happy. They are like “oh I got a grant.” They do not want to stay in the programme, become rehabilitated or get the help from the Ministry. Because for them they got what they wanted. So in order for us to address the issue of them being on the streets, we need to look at the rehabilitative care that comes after that first point of entry.

What the IAU has been doing, though—*[Interruption]*

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Just a second. I want to ask a question. You are saying that the unit assists in getting ID cards and birth certificates, and so forth. Why is there a disconnect between the both units inside of the Ministry? Why is it that the displacement unit is saying that there is a problem and IAU is saying that it is not a problem. It is in the same Ministry, are you not?

Permanent Secretary, you indicated that there were 349 persons on the streets as of this morning. I find that number to be relatively small, compared to what it is I have heard. Is that in all of Trinidad? Is that San Fernando, Arima, San Juan, all over?

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Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Mrs. Reyes-Borel, could you clarify, as you were actually on the team?

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: And Mrs. Reyes-Borel, if you can indicate what is the methodology that was employed to determine this number, and what happens after you analyze it?

Mrs. Reyes-Borel: The methodology, I will start with. The street count is a point-in-time survey. It is a headcount. So, what happens is officers go out at nights. It is usually between the hours of 10 going into the early morning. The rationale for going out at that hour is that we do have persons on the streets who are not street dwellers during the course of the day.

Also, during the course of the day the clients are very mobile. So double counting is a greater risk in the daytime. So, the rationale is at nights they would have bed down by that time and it is going to be easier to have a better idea as to the number. So that is essentially the methodology. No person is—we do not interact with persons. You do not wake anybody up. You are doing a headcount.

The areas that we would have counted. We would have done the central/south region on Monday night and then we would have done essentially the East-West Corridor on Tuesday night going into this morning. I would just give you some major areas: Port of Spain and environs, there were 152 males, five females; San Juan, 14 males; Tunapuna, 10 males; Arima, 23 males; Marabella, 15 males; Princes Town, 2; San Fernando, 61; Sangre Grande/Valencia, 11. So there are other areas that we would have counted, but essentially those are some of our major areas. Chaguanas was 8.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you. I do not think that a headcount at nights really counts for how you do it. I mean, I am a little bit opposed to the methodology that you have employed. Perhaps Your Worship, you can indicate what you have done in the City of Port of Spain.

Mr. Valentine: Thank you MP. I am a little alarmed and concerned of the sentiment

expressed because back in 2010/2011, when the Port of Spain Corporation engaged in exercises, we would have recorded in excess of 300, close to 400 homeless persons. We can tell exactly where those persons reside on the streets.

And also, may I add that the Port of Spain Corporation is presently before the courts by a member of the public. We did some renovations at Tamarind Square and we fenced it off and we are currently before the courts. A member of the public is suing us for removing those persons from Tamarind Square. Our records would have indicated close to 400 persons and that was back in 2010 and early 2011. So I think that figure is badly off. I think we have that just in the capital city alone. It is close to 400 persons.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thanks, Your Worship. Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development, what relationship do you have with the NGOs? Why are the NGOs not playing a more pivotal role in this whole socially displaced process?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Member, I am very aware that we have a number of NGOs who are involved at the different levels of the continuum. We have those that are involved with when we do the assessment that the street dwellers are accommodated and that is at CSDP.

We have those who provide services, with respect to deportee services. We have those that deal with children who are socially displaced. So we have a number of NGOs, actually. I think we have 10 NGOs that we provide subventions to that are directly involved in social displacement and providing services, and then we have those that are indirectly involved, because they are providing for persons who have substance abuse problems and mental health problems.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Do these persons, do these NGOs, assist in going to the streets and actually taking persons off the streets?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: I am not aware that they are involved in the count. It is

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generally the staff of the Ministry.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Can anyone from the Ministry indicate if that is so or not? Mrs. Reyes-Borel of IAU?

Mrs. Reyes-Borel: We have used NGO support for the street counts in the past, if we do need to have the NGO support and also we, for example, last night we would have been accompanied on our count by the Port of Spain City Corporation police. So it is not done in complete isolation of the unit staff. What we do at least is advise each corporation or state police that we are in the area and we ask their advice, in terms of where we may find persons.

Mr. Chairman: You have a follow-up question, Sen. Ali?

Mr. Ali: Permanent Secretary, the Public Sector Investment Programme, I see you all were allocated \$9.9 million to assist the non-governmental organizations. How many people really are being helped in these different organizations?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Well, under the PSIP that would really be the developmental aspect of the work. So this is where we will do infrastructure and we will refurbish the CSPD or Piparo Empowerment Centre. We would also be looking at finding an assessment centre location in Port of Spain to set up a new assessment centre. Initially, we had identified Queen Street but we are not moving forward with that and we are still in the process of looking for an assessment centre. So that is the PSIP element.

On the other side, the recurrent side. We do provide a subvention, as I said, to CSDP and they have a capacity of 160 persons there. We also assist Court Shamrock with a capacity of 50. Their occupancy is currently 42. At CSDP it is around 115. We also have Hernandez Place, which is in Arima, with a capacity of 17. This is for older persons who are socially displaced and they are usually filled. New Horizons and Piparo, they are both in Piparo, with a capacity of 80 for New Horizons, 27 persons actually residing there presently, and at Piparo, a capacity of 60 and an

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occupancy of 41.

Of course, we also provide support through the Community Care Programme, which you probably would hear more about later on, where the Ministry of Health has actually placed persons from the hospitals who have nowhere to go, in facilities and we also pay for those services. So we have actually provided quite an amount of funding for the socially displaced.

Mr. Ali: Now, these individuals, we are talking about the socially displaced here, when they go into these homes, is it a voluntary thing that they could walk out anytime?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Yes, they are free to leave. They are not required to—

Mr. Ali: Then we are defeating the purpose before we start. Because if they could walk out and go back into the drug life and go back on the streets and sleep then we are just spinning top in mid.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: There is no authority for us to keep them in these facilities.

Mr. Ali: And what suggestions have you put forth where you try to get that type of authority to the Government who is—I do not know. Have you all put any suggestions forward that you need that type of authority?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Well, it is still a human rights issue, Member.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Sen. Khadijah and then afterwards Brig. Gen. Ancil Antoine.

Miss Ameen: Chairman, through you, I am a bit concerned about the issues that are showing themselves here with regard to the gathering of data and information. I wanted to ask earlier, in terms of how you conduct your count and another member, your answer did come out there.

What I want to ask you is if you have considered engaging, for instance, the University of the West Indies or other professionals, when I say academic research, as a research resource to, perhaps, re-examine the method you use to gather data?

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And further, to go into, not only having a total count, but in terms of maintaining a database on each person identified so that you could better track their progress. So those are about three questions. So have you engaged any research resource to support the Ministry in examining your method of data gathering?

Secondly, do you collect and keep information on each displaced person, maintain a database with those persons and track their progress? And I wanted to also ask for the Port of Spain City Corporation, because it is our capital city and you do have a high population of socially displaced persons, whether you too would have looked at doing your own data collection? Because I believe that having the proper data is the first step in solving your problem and if there are challenges in that, you may be doing a lot of good work, with good intentions, but missing the spot.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Thanks member, and I agree that data collection is critical if we are to really make a dent in the problem. I need to say that as a Ministry we have always placed focus on research. We have a research division, social investigations division. Actually in 2004, it was the Social Policy and Research Division that did the survey, which was really a robust survey, that identified the numbers that were on the streets. Just to also say that I believe the street count is not as in-depth as the survey but we do have an investigations division.

We also have a research council which operates under the Ministry of social development and we have networked with the university. Actually, quite recent I got a request from the university to do a survey on social displacement and I believe one of the persons who would be involved in that survey was probably observing the count, I believe. So we do have the university, one of their students actually doing a survey and working with the unit to do a survey soon.

Just to say also, in terms of the database we do not keep a database on all the persons, the socially-displaced persons, but I do know that the unit, when they are interacting with street dwellers through the process that the social workers would use, that they

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will keep information on each street dweller in order to monitor them. So I know that happens.

I think the other question had to do with tracking, but I think I spoke to the tracking, that the social workers will do the tracking.

Miss Ameen: Is there a fixed interval, say for instance, that you do a survey every two years, every five years?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: I think this is probably one of the weaknesses and we have identified that what we need to do is actually institutionalize the surveys so that we would be able to track and understand the trends in the problem. So I think that is one of the ways in going forward, we have identified that we need to address.

Miss Ameen: Is there anything that prevents you even now from mandating your research unit to do something like that?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: No, there is no reason we cannot and we have indicated it to them and it is actually on the research agenda, but as I said since we have had this request from the university, we have decided to actually collaborate with them to do it.

Mr. Valentine: The Port of Spain Corporation, we collected our data by way of our exercises that we would have conducted. We partnered with the Living Water Community. We wrote to the Amalgamated, I think. We had the Amalgamated prison van come out; the Port of Spain Corporation. We also partnered with the Mental Health Unit of the Ministry of Health. We divided ourselves in teams, based on volunteers from the City, and we apprehended the homeless persons under the supervision of our City Police Officers and we took them up on the basis of loitering. We took them to the Living Water Community. We gave them a shower. We gave them hot meals and they were brought before the court the other day.

We wrote to the Chief Magistrate and the Chief Magistrate accommodated us by way of a Sunday, a special sitting on a Sunday morning, at the Magistrates' Court.

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Our challenge there was that we had human rights attorneys who ended up in the court on that Sunday morning and since then we were told that we had to back off and one of the reasons being, that is not one of the core functions of the Port of Spain Corporation. So since then we have just been trying to highlight our plight to the Ministry with responsibility for social services.

Mr. Chairman: Just the prerogative of the Chair, could I follow-up on that because let me read from the Summary Offences Act, Chap. 11:02, the same one past 1921, amended subsequently, 45(c), because I am amazed you are getting challenges. It is very clear to me what your powers are. It says under clause 45:

“A person committing any of the offences mentioned below in this section may be deemed an idle and disorderly person, and shall be liable to a fine of two hundred dollars, or to imprisonment for one month—”

Under (c):

“any person found sleeping or loitering in or under any building, including any open outhouse, verandah, gallery, passage or gateway, or in any vehicle or vessel, without leave of the owner, occupier or person in charge thereof, or on or under any wharf, quay, jetty, bridge, footway, or in any street or other public place, and not giving a good account of himself;”

It appears to me that the law is very clear, that the police officer can charge this person for being an idle and disorderly person, take him before the Magistrate, of course, properly sanitized, for which—I do not know if the wanderers now have \$200 but if they cannot pay the \$200, then they are liable to a month imprisonment. So that, is this the law that was being challenged?

Mr. Valentine: Well, I am not sure Chair, but I know that we were just written to and we had to back off and that is why I continuously state that the system has failed us, with respect to, we do not seem to have the will to treat with this.

Mr. Chairman: Again, the Chair has his prerogative and I would not take up the

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members' time. But to raise—and it involves the City Corp, it involves the police, Mr. Dulalchan, it involves the Ministry of Health. Is there a solution here where, as Sen. Hafeez Ali indicated, that they go into a home and they leave the next day because the homeless persons are wanderers. That is what they do. Is it that since you have the authority under the law to have them confined for a month, that there is some way that the State, together with the NGOs, could be involved by having a half-way house where someone brought before the court would not be sent to the overcrowded prison system, but he is sent to this place for a month if he cannot pay the \$200 and once he is in this place where the Ministry of Health will attend to him or her, the police will check in, the social workers, this person then becomes accustomed to living in one place for 30 days? Do you think that this half-way house concept for the socially displaced can go some way in rehabilitating them and making your lives a little bit easier? From the police, from the Ministry of Health and from the City Corp and then, of course back to the Committee.

11.10 a.m.

Mr. Dulalchan: Chair, if you permit me. I walked with an article, published on November 17, 2010. It is an *Express* article. It would just probably take me about two/two and a half minutes to read, so that we can get an appreciation. It is termed:

“Homeless return home after Monday night round-up:

A NUMBER of ‘homeless’ people who were taken off the streets of the capital city on Monday night were allowed to return ‘home’ after Senior Magistrate Lucina Cardenas-Ragoonanan said she did not believe they were socially-displaced based on their explanation.

As a result, even though she commended officers of the Port of Spain City Corporation for attempting to rid the streets of homeless people, she also advised that they be extra careful when doing so as some of those people were able to properly account for themselves.

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Ninety-one 'homeless' people were arrested after the commencement of an exercise by the Corporation entitled 'Utter-riser' on Monday night.

On Tuesday approximately 30 of them were taken to court charged with loitering. The rest were taken to court in two Port of Spain Corporation trucks and appeared before Cardenas-Ragoonanan yesterday. Approximately ten of them were allowed to leave after the magistrate said she believed they were telling the truth. Some were placed on their own bond in the sum of \$500 and warned to return to court at later dates with the family which they claimed to have, while others were allowed to freely leave.

Brian Curtis told the magistrate he lived in Diego Martin but worked as a maintenance worker at a car park at Charlotte Street, Port of Spain. He said he was standing along the Brian Lara Promenade watching a 'movie' on the big screen installed on Express House when he was taken away by the officers. 'I was watching a movie and was about to go home. I was startled when they take me away,' he said.

Another man said he was standing close to his home at Pembroke Street where he lived with his cousin when he was arrested. 'They tell me I looking like a vagrant and take me away but I am not no vagrant. I am a hard-working law-abiding citizen. They kept us in custody at the (Central) market, and that was not an easy thing that we went through,' he said.

In addressing the officers involved in the exercise, Cardenas-Ragoonanan said: 'I commend you for your attempts in getting homeless people off the streets because that is not an easy task, and I understand that you are going to be back here again on Friday (with more of the homeless).

'But let me advise you that when you are doing your work you need to look at the people on the side and have an eye for who is who. Some of them are legitimately there. Some of them are genuinely there and could account for

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themselves,' she told the officers.”

Now, when you really look at the Act carefully, I think what is important there is whether or not you are satisfied with the account given by the person on the street.

Mr. Chairman: Just a follow-up, someone who says he is going back to his home in Diego Martin, should he not supply to the courts some evidence that he has a home, somewhere like—a bill, or some documentation to say, Mr X lives at this address? Is it that somehow there is a failure in enforcing the law and not asking further questions of these persons?

Mr. Dulalchan: Well, Sir, in this case the magistrate—my information was that he had to come back with his family and so on.

Sir, but if I may, and I think this is really important for us to understand and appreciate. I could have recalled this incident. It totally brought the institutions to a standstill, because we had—about 10 persons were taken to court, and they were not in a position to have them properly well groomed, with a change of clothing and have a bath. You could have seen police officers, the court staff and so on, actually hiding behind kerchiefs. They brought pressure into the cells and not too pleasant aroma started to invade the precincts of the court, through the air-conditioned unit and so on. It was there that these people had to be taken to the central market, given a bath. My information was that they were groomed. They had to get clothing from St. Vincent de Paul, and then they had to—the magistrate had to reconvene court on the Sunday to deal with the issue. But at the end of the day, most of them would have ended up back—and the same thing I said initially—on the street.

Now, the thing is, let us be factual here. Yes, the law tells you this, come on, where is the heart? Where is the heart? Here it is you are going to actually effect an arrest on a man who is telling you, “Look, I am homeless”. You are interviewing him with a kerchief. Whether he is homeless or not, he has dignity. You are interviewing him with a kerchief. You could barely make out his complexion. His clothes are, in fact,

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tattered. He has no money. He does not know where a next meal is coming from. That in itself invoked the compassion of a police officer.

There are instances when—because I enquired from officers before I came here, and they said there were instances when officers were moved to tears in communicating with another human being. There were times without them asking, officers dipped their hands in their pocket to provide them with money for a meal. So whilst we understand, yes, there is a role for the police, the whole question is, how can the other agencies supplement that role, so that that revolving cannot take place?

Mr. Chairman: And just to re-emphasize the point. This thing has to be treated very, very, very holistically, and with a certain amount of thinking through the problem. The solution I am proposing again is this, a police officer arrests someone he knows, he has good cause. This person is a homeless person. Is there a role for one of these halfway houses that this person can be taken to, if he is brought before—properly sanitized—to the magistrate, that the magistrate will then commit him to one of these homes, and then all conscience in the society will be cleared? Do you think that that is a recommendation that will solve the problem in some way?

Mr. Dulalchan: Certainly. Certainly.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Thank you very much. Then we have Brig. Gen. Ancil Antoine, subsequently Mrs. Glenda Jennings-Smith will come in.

Brig. Gen. Antoine: Good morning, and this brings me to my question. In 2008, the national strategy for the socially displaced was approved. The strategy was to address the problem of persons living on the nation's streets. My question, how many accommodations are available for socially displaced persons in Trinidad and then in Port of Spain? I want the Mayor to say that. How many are provided by Government? How many are provided by the private or religious sector? What resources are provided by the Government to assist both public and private? And what percentage of socially displaced persons can be accommodated in our present

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facilities?—because there is a strategy that was approved eight years ago. I have no doubt that funding was provided for this strategy as well. So what have you been doing over the last eight years?

Mrs Bailey-Sobers: Thank you, member. I indicated some time aback as I answered another member's question, in terms of the facilities that are owned by Government, that is CSDP. Well, CSDP is actually managed on behalf of Government, yes? So that is right across from us to the east, with a capacity of 160 persons and occupied by 115 currently.

We also have Court Shamrock in San Fernando, with a capacity of 50, with 42 as the occupancy. Hernandez Place in Arima for older persons, 17, and it is filled. New Horizon and Piparo, both in Piparo. New Horizon with a capacity of 80 and an occupancy of 27, and Piparo a capacity of 60, with an occupancy of 41.

We also have the NGOs which provide facilities. We do have—and I have listed them somewhere here. We do have Vision on Mission that provides deportee reintegration. We have the St. Vincent de Paul Society, with free shelters, and also prisoner reintegration. In Brazil, we have Centre of Hope, managing our Hernandez Place facility. We have Rebirth House, which treats with the substance abuse rehab; persons with those issues. We have Living Water Community. We have the Credo Foundation dealing with the children. So those are some of the other NGOs that support the Ministry in its work with treating with the target group.

Brig. Gen. Antoine: What percentage of our socially displaced persons can be accommodated in these facilities?

Mrs Bailey-Sobers: My understanding is the majority of the persons who are socially displayed are still on the street, I believe—many of them not opting to go to these facilities.

Miss Ameen: Mr. Chairman, through you, it was mentioned that the laws that treat with street dwellers or loiterers may be quite dated. Based on your experience or

those of the technocrats—I know you may have come from another Ministry as a Permanent Secretary. Do you think it is time to review those laws, to give the authorities a little more flexibility, rather than treating with these displaced persons either as criminals, or as volunteers or for them to come voluntarily into the centre?—for example, that time of imprisonment, where if they do not pay the fine, they can be imprisoned for one month, it should be one month of rehabilitative care that is mandatory, as opposed to if they walk into a shelter, they can leave at any time. Do you think that it is time to have some collaboration with the police and the authorities in the various units, the technocrats to make some recommendations?

Mrs Bailey-Sobers: Yes, I fully agree. Just to say that we did have the Socially Displaced Persons Act passed in 2000, but it was never proclaimed. We have agreed that there is need for review of the legislation. Just to say also that I recall, with the issue of substance abuse, that provision was made to allow somebody who comes before the court and is deemed to have an issues of substance abuse, that they could actually be sent to a centre, and they would really have to stay there, because it is a court order that would be granted, and probably that is a system that we could look at. But I believe the legal officer in the Ministry, Dr. Ishmael, and Ms Reyes-Borel could throw some more light on this in terms of the review of the legislation.

Mr. Chairman: But before we move on, there is a follow-up that—and we need to bring in the Ministry of Health in here. The Ministry of Health is involved in a significant way, and I would like to know whether the Ministry of Health is of the view that there is any need for legislative changes as advocated by member Ameen?

Ms. Rambaran: Thank you Chair. It is not something that we had considered, but I would like to ask to maybe ask Dr. Tilluckdharry, under the Mental Health Act and the placement of persons at the St. Ann’s Hospital, because sometimes we persons who have to go there by order of the court. So that it might actually be looking at various pieces of legislation to try to come up with what would be the optimal

solution for this problem.

I think as we have recognized just by virtue of the composition of the team here, that it is multi-sectoral. It is across Ministries, so it probably—yes, I would think that we do have to look at various pieces of legislation, because we do recognize that right now, none of them seems to be working in the interest, I would say, of the socially displaced persons, to help get them rehabilitated.

Mr. Chairman: Dr. Tilluckdharry, do you have any position on the changes of the laws, mental health laws?

Dr. Tilluckdharry: Thank you, Chair. Yes, I think that the Mental Health Act needs to be revised, and I draw reference to the case that happened in October last year. Then, one night, a busload of 24 homeless persons from San Fernando were brought straight up to the St. Ann's Hospital. At the hospital, they scrambled to get beds for these 24, well, from the court—who were sent through the court; that was mentioned before. Eventually, these persons were taken to Arouca where they were evaluated, and subsequently admitted; some were admitted.

But yes, I mean, each homeless person on the street, they may have a mental health issue, and they need to be evaluated, and proper medical care given. But we are dealing with a bigger problem, the socially displaced persons, and not all may fall into that category. So, yes, I think that in terms of addressing the whole Act, and certainly I agree with you, Chair, that it has to be with inter-ministerial involvement, like a committee to overlook these legislations that are available to address these bigger issues.

Mr. Chairman: Before I move on to MP Jennings-Smith, just clarification on this point, because you see, if it is that—I am hearing the problems of the police and hearing the problems of the Port of Spain City Corporation, that the people are brought before the courts and they are released the next day, but if it could be proved that at least a subset of that population is mentally ill, do you have the powers under

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the existing laws to insist that these individuals who are deemed to be mentally ill can now be confined for the period that you will determine as a medical doctor is the appropriate period?

Dr. Tilluckdharry: Yes, Chair, that exists.

Mr. Chairman: And is it that you are then recommending that all of these socially displaced persons be subject to some kind of mental evaluation to determine their mental status?

Dr. Tilluckdharry: Well, any medical evaluation will involve a mental status aspect. So that is part and parcel of any proper evaluation medically.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, and to the Ministry of Health, to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services now, when you are numbering the people on the streets, do you have a system where they are mentally evaluated, the 300-plus? Are they subject to a mental test? We need to know.

Ms. Reyes-Borel: The head count is a head count. It is not an assessment, and it is not an engagement. Engagements of clients would happen at the assessment centres, so that is when you would have the medical—the psychiatric and those kinds of interventions done with the clients.

Mr. Chairman: But then again a solution, we need to know to get the facts to make the decisions. We are speculating, but are you seeing a need to evaluate the persons to determine how many—what percentage of them appear to have mental challenges? What percentage are substance abusers? And what percentage simply seem to be hard luck and unemployed? Do you think there is a need to disaggregate and to identify the hard data in that way, so that we can make appropriate decisions for the subgroups?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Chair, I fully agree. We need to do it, actually the survey that was done in 2004 broke it down into those categories, and probably Ms. Rambaran also, they would have done some work and they identified those persons who had

mental health issues. Ms. Rambaran?

Mr. Chairman: And the question I am asking is this, given the—let us say 400 persons out there, could you say with some measure of confidence that X per cent would be mentally challenged, X per cent would be substance abusers, X per cent would be hard-luck cases, could we say that at this point in time?

Ms. Rambaran: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, PS. Over the course of the last three years, spanning December 2012 to present day, the Inter-Agency Unit would have come into contact with 208 persons to date that would have entered the programme voluntarily. We would have engaged them, told them about the programme, what we can do to help, and to some extent, they would have agreed to be helped. For example, as I told you earlier about the identification card or the birth certificate or whatever grants we offer, for those who want us to get in touch with their families—

Mr. Chairman: The question I am asking is this, of the 400 persons, let us say, could we at this point say, 25 per cent of them have mental challenges, which mean that they ought to be under doctor care and review for an extended period of time? Can we say that? Do we have the data?

Ms. Rambaran: Yes, Chair. In terms of the 208 persons, 90 per cent of them had dual diagnoses of both some form of chronic addiction, as well as a form of mental disorder, along the range of spectrum of mental disorders. So what that points to is that we need care to accommodate their dual diagnoses or their multiple diagnoses, as the case is.

Mr. Chairman: Mrs. Jennings-Smith has been very, very patient for the longest while, and I do need to bring her in.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: True.

Mr. Chairman: And we will ask the Mayor to come in as well. We are at a very interesting point.

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Mrs. Jennings-Smith: You would have asked most of the questions that I was concerned about. What really impacted upon me is the Mayor's approach. I was quite intrigued with your approach, when you said you categorized the persons when you found them.

Secondly, when police officers are engaged to pick up persons on the street, they must be satisfied that those persons are indeed to be taken before a court. What I am not seeing here is really collaboration between the different units, but I see there is a unit there, the IAU Unit. So it is not about reinventing the wheel. What I gathered here at this morning's sitting is that we had to attend this session this morning, and we went and did a head count. I am not getting the impression that there was continuity in terms of—from 2010 to now—that something had happened, and there was continuous tracking. Tracking, and the word "tracking", was used quite often this morning; tracking of persons.

We targeted persons. We brought them before a system, but what about tracking each and every one of them from then to now, because we talk about—I heard a word mentioned this morning, "Last night we work into this morning getting the numbers". That quite clearly suggests to me that it was done only for this purpose, for today, and I am not seeing a strategy across all the units here, all the Ministries or, as we had indicated before, any standard operating procedure that would guide all the Ministries into this whole-of-government approach, which this Government is now engaged in; a whole-of-government approach.

We have been talking that for the past eight months and today, we come this morning, I am thinking we should have had something much more coordinated to put before this Committee. I am suggesting that the unit that is engaging this, the IAU Unit. I think you are already the lead agency for doing this. A lot goes to you because this morning, when you answered, you said the birth certificate is not the problem, and there were other issues being the problem, but this is also one of the

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problems.

If we have a lead agency to do this type of job, the Social Displacement Unit, and we have an IAC Unit, which is tasked to collaborate, then you collaborate with all the agencies. The thing about it is everybody is passing the buck. Which one is taking it on? Which is the lead agency? And which one is really taking that responsibility to collaborate? Because I know for a fact, many times in my past profession, that police were called upon to do this exercise, last night: “We want you all to be on the streets to pick up people”. Then we will have a crowd of people; and Mr. Dulalchan was quite right, that year, when these people were brought before the court, socially displaced people, what about the families? What engagement are we having with the families?—because we put them into mental institutions and they could walk out.

So when we are developing something to find answers, it is not about reinventing the wheel. Let us start with what is happening now, and collaboration. That is why I am saying again, the Government of the day, we are talking whole-of-government approach, and we must think whole-of- government approach.

So, I really want to ask IAU Unit, you spoke clearly earlier, when you indicated that there were other problems. I want to know, what are the problems that are stopping you from engaging all the other agencies in collaboration and for tracking? Because I can also ask you, what is the success of these centres that we place these persons in? So we have socially displaced persons, some are mentally challenged, some are drug addicts, some are deportees, are we checking, are we tracking those persons to see what is the success rate of those persons that we are placing at these centres?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, a response now—that is a challenge that was posed to the Committee for there to be more collaboration, a response from committee leaders, and we do have the—I know the Mayor will like to come in. Mayor, I would like to

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get a response to MP Jennings-Smith's question and then definitely the Mayor will come in second.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Thank you, Chair. I know the question was actually pointed to the Inter-Agency, but just to say, member, it so happened that the count coincided with this hearing. The count was planned before and it just happened to coincide. So, we also did one in January 2015. So although we have not institutionalized it, we have been doing it, you know, periodically.

The collaboration has been taking place, okay—

Mr. Chairman: Okay, very good.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers:—but it is happening—I am coming to the collaboration—but it is happening in an ad hoc way. It is not official. It is unofficial, and we proposed to move towards ensuring that it is institutionalized and not only that, but that it is ongoing. So we propose to recommend that we start the board up again. We had a board way back in 2004. We will be recommending that that is reconstituted, and also we may be looking at an interministerial committee. So we have recommendations.

Mr. Chairman: PS, may I recommend the following, because clearly, what MP Jennings-Smith has indicated is that there seems to be a disparate amount of individuals not coming together. Could I recommend to you, as PS in the Ministry, to have a quarterly meeting with the police, with the City Corp, with the NGOs to find out once every three months, what can we do as a collective group with a vested interest in reducing this problem?—and to help each other out so that we could minimize the problem? Do you think quarterly meetings amongst the agencies here will assist in solving the problem for the society?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: There is no hindrance to that, Chair, no hindrance.

Mr. Chairman: So as another solution, quarterly meetings. Thank you very much, and before I move on to MP Newallo-Hosein, the Mayor wanted to say something

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as well.

Councillor Valentine: Yes, Chair. Thank you. I want to be very clear, this issue is not the core function of the Port of Spain Corporation, but we are continuously under pressure from our burgesses, constituents, even the transient population.

Since 2010, the Port of Spain Council has been making recommendations to have proper legislative framework put in place to treat with this issue and to include properly mandatory rehabilitation. Our records and our data base, based on our rounding-up of the homeless persons, would have shown that of the largest population of homeless persons in the capital city are the drug addicts, and second are the mentally ill persons. We have received numerous, tons of legal action, against the city from mentally ill persons who would have attacked our burgesses and people who use the city on a daily basis; violent attacks. When these persons are apprehended, they are shown to be mentally unstable.

So, again, I am really lobbying on behalf of the city for the state agencies to get their acts together, because everything that happens, there is a spin-off effect. You will hear the cry that the city is dirty. It is unsightly, but that is as a result of the homeless persons. We wash down the city centre every single day, but by the time the working population and the school children come out to the city, it is back in a state of decay, because we have the homeless persons, they are trashing the bins. They are defecating on the sidewalks, urinating. The East Dry River is another eyesore. So one thing leads on to a next, and we are really calling on the state agencies to get their acts together. The system has continuously failed us.

Mr. Chairman: And, Mr. Mayor, not only the state agencies, could I propose another solution, since we are solutions oriented? You mentioned two types of individuals who are living in the streets in the city under—four types; two major types. The first is the mentally-challenged individuals. Is it that there are people who are walking and living in the streets of Spain, who ought not be on the streets

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of Port of Spain, but who ought to be in a medical treatment facility?

Councillor Valentine: Yes, that is correct.

Mr. Chairman: Right. Okay, that is one of the solutions. We want to get people who have these mental issues in medical care, and that is where the Ministry of Health, of course, will have to come in.

Councillor Valentine: Well, Chair, if you permit? When we did our exercises, we would have had mental-health officers with us, and they would have evaluated. And surprisingly to us, a lot of the mentally unstable folks that they would have interviewed, they could have recognized them by names, because they would not have gone for their medication, et cetera. So we had made recommendation for—maybe to have an on-going programme of mental health officers throughout the city to treat with, you know, such instances.

Mr. Chairman: Right. And second, so we do have to focus on mental issues, but second, we have substance abusers, those who are taking—

Councillor Valentine: Drug addicts.

Mr. Chairman:—various types of narcotics. Is it that there is then a role for agencies to ensure that they are in rehabilitation, they are in rehab? If they are not in rehab, and they are on the streets, then they are in violation then, of the rules of the rehab. And, therefore, they can then come under the direction of the police.

11.40 p.m.

Councillor Valentine: Well that is the thing. Many of the drug addicts who we would have apprehended on the exercises would have been in possession of smoking apparatus and even drugs in their possession. So I think that is where the police and the court system come into play.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. MP Newallo-Hosein, who has been silent for quite a while.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Chair. I just want to find out, what is the core

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responsibility of the Social Displacement Unit and what is your core responsibility of the IAU? Also, I am very much aware of the temporary implementation strategy that was done in 2013 and as MP Jennings-Smith said, it makes no sense reinventing the wheel. If there is something that has functioned in the past, can we not find out what may have been the gaps, the weaknesses and developing the strengths. If we can find out what the core responsibilities are, because I want to find out why there is a disconnect between the two units, please.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: I will ask Ms. Reyes-Borel and Ms. Rambaran to respond, but member, I am not aware that there is a disconnect, at least not since I have been in the Ministry which is three months now, because we have been working as a team and having discussions in terms of the issue on how we want to move forward. Yes?

Mrs. Reyes-Borel: The Social Displacement Unit, in accordance with the Socially Displaced Persons Act is responsible:

“...for...assessment, relocation, care and rehabilitation of the socially displaced persons.”

It is in close—

- “(a) co-ordinating and monitoring...the voluntary and involuntary removal of...persons from the streets and other public places;
- (b) co-ordinating and monitoring of activities pertinent to the rehabilitation of socially displaced persons;
- (c) identifying the factors that lead to social displacement and implementing educational”—programmes—“and other programmes aimed at preventing”—the—“increase...;
- (d) the establishment and monitoring or care standards for the socially displaced;
- (f) advising and making recommendations to the Board”—which will be the Social Displacement Board and—“all other matters”—pertinent—

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“to the care of the socially displaced...”

That is the role of the Social Displacement Unit.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Thank you. Ms. Rambaran, quickly, the Inter-Agency.

Ms. Rambaran: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, PS. The Inter-Agency, established since 2012 via Cabinet Minute 2073, was established with the mandate or the responsibility for voluntary and involuntary removal of street dwellers from off the streets, the “move along” activity, as well as the referral and transfer of such street dwellers for intervention and treatment as determined by the unit. The unit has been doing that in the form of the Street Dweller Rehabilitation/Reintegration Programme which started off with the pilot project since 2012/2013 which was then called the Temporary Implementation Strategy, as mandated, as corroborated, by the Interministerial Committee of 2013 as well as the Interministerial Steering Committee of 2008.

It is a four-stage programme.

The first stage is engagement, which I would have spoken about earlier. The second stage is brief intervention, screening and assessment; the third stage, rehabilitation; and the final stage is reintegration back into society when they have reached the stage where they can be productive members of society again.

To date, out of the 208 persons that we have assessed and assisted, 49 of those have been successfully reintegrated into society, some of them with their families, some of them independently.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you. So, in fact, the SDU would be policy and the IAU would be implementation.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: That is right. That was the intention.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: But the board that you suggest, PS, do you think that would add to the bureaucracy?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: I do not think it would add to the bureaucracy. It will just be

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a mechanism to pull all the key stakeholders together and it will have some authority.

Mr. Ali: I have a couple of questions. The first thing I want to ask is this, to the IAU and the displacement unit: Why it is if the City Corporation has a problem with the displaced person and they call the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services through the IAU or the displaced unit simply to call the police, contact the Ministry of Health and deal with the situation? It is as simple as that in my view, you know. That is the collaboration there. Why is that not being done?

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: Chair, I just want to ask one last question. I am looking at the figures now and you said you took up—at least 400 persons were picked up, 208 accepted the programme and 49 persons were successful. What do you think about that success rate?—and we have all these agencies engaged. Out of roughly 400 persons, 49 persons were successful.

Mr. Chairman: It is open now to all our witnesses. Please respond to Sen. Hafeez Ali and Mrs. Jennings-Smith, MP. Yes, Ms. Donna Ferraz.

Ms. Ferraz: Thank you, Chair. And I just wanted to put us back a little bit when we were asking or talking about the percentage of socially displaced persons who might be afflicted by some mental illness or disease. And I just wanted to share information with the Committee that, of the 212 persons who are currently within the facilities of the Ministry of Health, are 78 persons—what would work out to be about 39 per cent or so are at St. Ann's, having been diagnosed with the need for some kind of mental care.

It is recognized that, except for a couple of Ward 1 which I know would be the forensic ward, patients do walk in and out of St. Ann's. Some of them would have been there for quite a number of years. It is also recognized at this time that mental care cannot be singularly provided at the St. Ann's Hospital. So, in fact, mental illness is an illness; it is not something that we hide.

So, the Ministry through the RHAs has started to establish mental health

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wards at the various RHAs and, in fact, I think one opened very recently at the North West Regional Health Authority, at Mount Hope Hospital. Our role, as I said, is either going to be for us, that patients would have come in for some care and on discharge they are not picked back up by relatives and they happen to remain. And again as I said, across the hospital system there are 59 such patients.

Other than that, we may either get patients through the courts or through the collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services and, in fact, we have a number of persons who had been decanted over the years to privately run homes, NGOs and so. So that we continue to have a role within the whole system for taking care of socially displaced persons.

As I indicated, what has not been happening, and you have recognized it and PS has indicated the way forward through greater and more continuous collaboration, that has not taken place as it should have; and therefore, the thing is our role we have to be able to assess, to treat where we can, whether it is a mental or a clinical issue and then according to, not category of person, for us it was categories of care that was needed. Levels one to four, where one to three would be somebody who could live in a home with minimal assistance and continue to get care through our primary health system. But for the level four where they needed nursing or medical care on site, the Ministry would have responsibility for those persons and those would be cared for at our Extended Care Centres.

So we have, our role is mainly about physical and mental care. Our collaboration is clear, we do have a role but it is how we come into it and what happens after we give the care. After we give the care and the person is able to move on, this is where we should be handing them back over or working with the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services for the continuum of care to them. So I just wanted to share that, please.

Mr. Chairman: Out of curiosity again, there seems to be a process where someone

is living on the streets, he is socially displaced, he has a number of problems and then there is a process through which that individual can go and he is rehabilitated. From your experience in the Ministry of Health, how long would that on average take someone who has a problem with narcotics abuse, someone who is a narcotics abuser—he is on the streets—how long do you think on average it will take to get that person to live in his own home and become a member of society with respect again?

Ms. Ferraz: I would like to hand that over to Dr. Tilluckdharry. That is beyond my expertise. Thank you.

Dr. Tilluckdharry: Thank you, PS and Chair. Limited experience, but certainly someone, a drug addict, within a couple of years can be rehabilitated.

Mr. Chairman: Very well. Thank you very much. So the answer for me that was important was that the person is re-habitable and that I think is an important point, because if the majority of these persons can be reformed that seems to be a solution that we will have to go, different targeted programmes, of course, but it is heartening to hear that they are not confined to the streets forever, to the end of their lives. They can, in fact, with the targeted assistance, in a few years, if they have the will, with the assistance of society they can become regular normal members of society once again. Thank you very much.

MP Newallo-Hosein—and before I go on to MP, I want to take a stock from the old lecturing days to see what we have achieved so far.

Thus far in the hearings, if I may recap, we have agreed that every socially displaced person should be properly documented, so that that person will be able to access the various resources offered to him or her by the State. Second, the police and the City Corp together, I would imagine with other participants, have indicated that if there is a properly run halfway house, either from the State or NGOs, to which an individual who is on the streets and taken before the courts can then be sent to

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spend his month, and he gets accustomed to living in a home under structure and guidance that may go somewhere towards his rehabilitation.

Third, we have identified the need, perhaps, for quarterly meetings between the police, the City Corp, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services to simply find out where we are with respect to the programmes in place. And fourth, we need to categorize the individuals who are mentally challenged, determine who should be institutionalized, who should be under medical care. I do not know if there is a need for these individuals to be so identified as well, in their ID card; I do not know but that is a different matter. But mentally challenged and substance abusers on the streets to my mind ought to be identified so that if they are in fact taken by the police before the courts the courts will immediately know that this person has a problem and will be able to direct accordingly to the agencies which can help.

Thus far there seems to be consensus there. Is there disagreement with the solutions offered so far from any member of the Committee, from the witness? Any participant disagrees with what we have come up with so far as solutions? Very well. Thank you.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: Chair, I want to ask a last question. I just want to ask the persons responsible if they can give us an idea, because a lot of reference was made this morning to persons at a particular home, some were at Piparo, some were at the Vision on Mission. Could I have an understanding about as to who are those persons—well, not the who—the numbers of the persons at the various homes at this present time? Could I be given that information today? Could I be told that, okay, we had certain persons with drug addictions, so they are at this home. We had some persons who are mentally challenged and they are at this home receiving attention. Could I be given that today?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: We do have some information, member, which we shared. I

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will share it again. Vision on Mission, we do not have that information but we do have it for the CSDP. Currently, 115 persons at the CSDP; Court Shamrock in San Fernando, 42; Hernandez Place in Arima, 17; New Horizons in Piparo, 27 and at the Piparo Empowerment Centre, 41 persons. A total of 242 in the facilities which we have jurisdiction over.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: And how do you categorize those persons? Are they persons facing drug addiction, are they socially displaced?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: They are all socially displaced, but I do know that Piparo Empowerment Centre is particularly for rehabilitation of persons with drug abuse issues.

And there may be persons in CSDP with those issues but it is really general for CSDP.

11.55 a.m.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Do you have any follow-up because Sen. Hafeez Ali has to pose—

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: No, it is the very said question, Chair. You see, if we have them in various places, we should have them properly categorized and then you know, I will feel confident that listen, there is some collaboration taking place with those persons because we talk about care. We talk about care of these socially displaced persons, we talk about care about persons who are in drug addiction situations, we talk about care with mentally challenged persons, so when we have them at the various places, we should know what they are in there for, what kind of treatment they are getting and what is their present status from then to now.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Chair, if I may ask Ms. Borel to just clarify on that.

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mrs. Reyes-Borel: Thank you, PS. At the CSDP and Court Shamrock, those two facilities essentially represent the first interaction or where we would want to do

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assessments with persons. They are essentially shelters but it is where you do the assessments. So there, there will be all categories of clients. You would find the mentally ill, you would find substance abusers, you would find what we refer to as the strictly homeless which includes deportees; you would also find some elderly persons. At Hernandez place, that is a specific facility for street dwellers who are elderly so the 17 persons there are living there. The only way they—is on death. And at New Horizons, that is a programme of preparation for independent living so the focus on that programme is on persons developing their own skills for living independently—budgeting, obtaining training opportunities and that kind of thing. And well, of course, as explained by PS early, the Piparo Empowerment Centre would be the substance abuse rehabilitation facility. So that would be the breakdown in terms of persons in these facilities that we have here.

As I pointed out earlier, continuum of care is what is needed and that requires different types of facilities in a long—a continuum. So it is everything from when you engage them, which is at the assessment, to what your problem is, if it is substance abuse, you do that. And while, yes, every one of our clients can come into a better life experience, sometimes the expectation of rehabilitation, when you look on the streets, we have chronic mentality ill homeless persons who, in terms of rehabilitation, they are not “gonna go get ah job” and live happily ever after anywhere. They are age 50, 55 going into 60, they need care facilities. A place they can live and have quality of life. So it is really—halfway houses are among what we need but we need a range of services.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. So just before Sen. Hafeez and you will get your chance, I am just interested in the age range then of persons living on the streets. What is the range? From as young as to as old as. Do you have a range?

Mrs. Reyes-Borel: Where you can get a range would be at the assessment centre because on the street, it is going to be difficult, you will be guessing. So from the

CSDP Port of Spain and Court Shamrock, you find that you have, among the substance abusers, those are the younger population, between 35 so—with the mentally ill, again, it is a population between the ages 35 going into 60 plus. So we do have that kind of information coming out of the assessment centres which is where it will be reliable.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. And now finally, Sen. Hafeez Ali again.

Mr. Ali: Thanks, Chair. This is to the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Health. In your submission with reference to the community care programme, I would like to find out or would you confirm whether the socially displaced unit is notified when persons are referred to a rehabilitation centre via the RHA?

Ms. Ferraz: As far as I am aware, they would be because there would have been initially the agreement where the Ministry of Social Development would have then had to take up the cost for the socially displaced person to remain at the new facility. So that it is my expectation, without having it in front of me, that that would have had to happen. Other than that, you could not be able to bill the Ministry of Social Development.

Mr. Ali: So are you saying that the Ministry does not engage with private homes and pay those private homes?

Ms. Ferraz: Through the—the RHAs would do it. That was the approach taken.

Mr. Ali: While the Ministry of Social Development has places in their homes to deal with it?

Ms. Ferraz: One of the issues that was brought up early by my colleague PS is that we do not have enough facilities. So that some of them would have been under the Ministry and then the Ministry of Health, when we had to decant persons, would have been looking as well for homes that were available and that were suitable. So that there were actually a number of agreements and contracts that were made between the various RHAs and the homes. But after the 2010—there was a 2010

Cabinet decision that sought to transfer the responsibility for the contractual obligations for the persons when they moved on to the Ministry of Social Development.

Mr. Ali: The last thing, well it is just a statement. I just would like to see come out of this whole session that it has greater institutional collaboration between all the Ministries, police service, all the boroughs, corporations, to try to work together to move the—or help and assist and rehabilitate these displaced persons. That is the end result we want. And putting a lot of bureaucracy into the system and thing is just creating more obstacles rather than dealing with the individual itself. Spending a lot of money on institutions—when I say institution, within the Ministry itself—and not on the individual itself to get them rehabilitated, I find, sometimes, it does not make much sense at all. So we have to put our resources where it is needed and that is in the end result in helping the individuals themselves. Thank you very much.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: Chair, I want to ask a last question. I want to know, can you tell us in your institution who conducts the site visits and how are observations of these persons being monitored. How are they recorded or how are they documented? When these visits are made, how often the visits are made, and how are the observations documented?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: I am asking for a little clarity. Is it when the officers visit these centres where persons who are socially displaced are actually residing to monitor what is happening with them?

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: Where she indicated—

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Interagency Unit, yes, Ms. Rambaran.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: She stated 100 and—

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: I think we have it clear, member, we will respond. Ms. Rambaran, Ms. Reyes-Borel, could you respond?

Ms. Rambaran: Thank you, Chair, thank you, PS. Just to clarify, member, you

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were asking about CSDP in particular, the 115 there or you are asking about the total socially displaced population in all of our centres?

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: You indicated that there is a population that accepted the programme and you have placed them—that is the last question I asked, where are they placed and you indicated different places. Some at Piparo, New Horizons, CSDP. I want to ask you how they are monitored. When you visit them, how often do you visit them? What is the practice? And when you make your observation, how is it documented?

Ms. Rambaran: Thank you. We maintain an internal database where from the time a person—we engage them from the time they enter the programme, we record the date of entry, we record whatever details we get at the time of the assessment interview, the intake interview. Throughout the course while they are with us in our care, we would be responsible. We take an initiative to take them to and from their hospital and clinic appointments. Everything is tracked and recorded in that database. Everything that we do for them, including the ID, birth paper, grants, whatever, clothing; contact tracing, because we do contact tracing to try to identify their family, where they came from, make contact with next of kin or relatives or the community. Everything is done in such a manner that it is recorded in that database. So at a glance, you can see what is going on. We colour-coded the database as well so at a glance, you can see who stayed until the first stage only, who went on to rehab, who was successfully reintegrated, and then you can read details to see what is going on with them.

In terms of monitoring at the centre while they are in the programme at a centre, as often as we can get the transport organized, we go. For example, our clients who are at Piparo Empowerment Centre, sometimes we go down as often as three times a month. It would, however, depend on the advice of the centre manager, the facilitator, because for something like substance rehab, they do not advise that you

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visit for the first three months of entry into the programme for rehabilitative purposes. At CSDP, we go as often as twice a week, every week because we are always taking persons to CSDP and whenever I go, whenever the team goes, we check up on whoever else is there, that we would have taken there.

So we do it in the form of building rapport. From the time the person comes into the programme, each member of the team would have been introduced to the team and they build rapport. So that when they finish the programme, there is this sense of validity where they want to stay to go on to rehab. When they are finished and they are reintegrated with their families or into society, they want to be followed up. They want us to call and find out what is going on.

The most recent example of a good rapport that maintained was one where he finished rehab, he got reintegrated. He is working now with a sanitation company. He met a nice girl in the village that he is in, they got married and they have a baby together. I was the first person he called at Port of Spain General Hospital to come and see the baby. This is an example of how successful it can be when the programme is done right but that is voluntary.

One of the questions that was raised earlier by one of the members of the Committee was what are the issues and how we can solve them? Out of 208 persons we have engaged, only 49 were reintegrated successfully. What that tells you is that a lot less than half of them would have stayed on and that is approximately a quarter, I think. And what that tells you is that in solving this problem, we cannot just look at voluntary engagement as the solution. Involuntary has to be taken into consideration.

While there is legislative framework for it, there are a lot of flaws. For example, let me draw your attention to the Mental Health Act, Chap. 28:02 in section 15. While it provides for how the mental health officer might be able to take somebody who appears to be a street dweller, or appears to be mentally ill, off the street and admit

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them to St. Ann's for psychiatric care, it does not provide for a clean-up of the person superficially. Because what ends up happening, you know, a street dweller is very, in their raw form, they are malodorous, they are difficult to deal with, they are mentally unstable. And this is the same reason why, although when they are arrested, they stay for probably a maximum of six hours in a police cell because they smell really bad, speaking plainly, and it becomes very difficult to work with them.

Especially if you take into consideration, for example, Magistrates' Court is a very close-fitting small room. You cannot expect to have members of the public sitting in-between these persons. In 2014, I saw an article in the *Newsday* that spoke about mental health courts which, in effect, is a community court that would address persons with dual diagnosis, drug addictions as well as mental health issues. I do not know what became of this. This was something that was being proposed by the Judiciary.

Mr. Chairman: In the interest of time, I need to interject. Are you recommending then that you work with the specialist medical officers, Ministry of Health, who are specialist in mental health issues, to review the Mental Health Act as it is now to see how it may be tightened to allow both agencies an opportunity to really give the person, the homeless person a chance to be rehabilitated? Because what I am hearing you saying is that there are some challenges in getting the person into rehabilitation. Are you suggesting that you work with the Ministry of Health to tighten up the Mental Health Act?

Ms. Rambaran: Yes, Chair. That is definitely one of the suggestions and the second one is looking at Summary Offences Act, Summary Courts Act as well, those two. While it provides for an involuntary, again it does not cater to a superficial clean-up, so again, the same problem happens there. And as the Acting Commissioner would have said early, you know, it is a problem so we need to look at addressing that.

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Mr. Chairman: Very well. Thank you very much. And we do have Sen. Ameen but with respect to—I heard a lot about the sanitization and the cleaning up, it is a shower. I think the NGOs could have a shower, that the police will simply take them St. Vincent de Paul or something, make sure they have a nice warm shower and you can clean them up before you take them to the Magistrates' Court.

12.10 p.m.

So that is something we will be looking at as a suggestion. You see, I think just before I go to Sen. Ameen, it is not all the problems that we have that can be solved by the State, you know. There are NGOs, there are agencies out there which we can work with to ensure that the person we want to help is actually helped in the most efficient way.

Miss Ameen: Chairman, today in our society there are a number of people who are faced with job loss, have potential to become homeless. They may not be mental health cases, they may not be drug addicts, but because of the frustration and so on, you may see people heading towards drugs. You may see them battling with depression or other mental health struggles. Are there any provisions for persons who have the potential to become homeless, in terms of half-way houses or support and, so on, to prevent homelessness?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: I would seek to answer that. Actually the continuum of care programme was one such where we will ensure that persons who do not have a place to go after they are hospitalized are actually put into facilities so that they do not end up on the streets. So that particular programme is one such that is sort of a mitigating programme that will allow them to have somewhere to stay so they would not go on the streets.

Also, the Hernandez Place Programme where we actually put in some of our older persons. Moving them into those facilities was another, and we do work with some of the agencies, for example, Vision on Mission on the deportees. We understand

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that if you are coming back and you are a deportee, you have no one here. That is also a factor that may cause you to be on the streets so we have that deportee programme with Vision on Mission. So we do understand that we have to take mitigating measures to ensure that persons do not go on the streets.

Miss Ameen: I am talking about thousands of people who you see on the news every night, more and more people are losing their jobs, losing their income, facing eviction, who may not be able to pay their rent or mortgage, who may not have a family to go to beg a lodging and who could be—I mean, it would affect them mentally, psychologically and so on, people who are willing to work, and so on, who are simply out of a job and facing the streets literally?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Well, we do have our social programmes in the Ministry that treat with that. Under the Social Welfare Division we do have grants that provide for persons who are experiencing issues with paying their rent and they are provided with some funding for a period to allow them to get on their two feet.

We also have programmes that we are looking at with the Ministry of Labour, in terms of persons who have lost their jobs. We are looking at centres where they could come and actually get information and get support. We are working to provide psychosocial services through our National Family Services Division. So there is a collaborative effort with the Ministry of Labour, and we are also working as a Ministry on a social mitigation plan that would cushion the impact of the economic downturn.

Miss Ameen: I hear your answer but in reality many of those programmes are being cut. Many people are coming forward to say that their assistance is being discontinued. So I trust that may mean a realignment, perhaps, but the fact is that what has been said, in terms of the policy of the Ministry and advocated by the Minister, it is not happening in reality.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Just to respond. At the Ministry we are not cutting any

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programmes. We have actually ensured that none of our votes that deal with our social programmes have been cut and just to indicate too that the persons who may be saying that their cards have been discontinued, we have a programme where we are actually enrolling people to ensure that they still qualify for the card and that is just 13,000 of the 46,000 persons who are on the food care, who have not come in, in spite of our attempts to identify them and communicate with them and we have given them a deadline, and those are the persons who may have their card put on hold. So it is not about cutting the programme or it is not about, you know, ensuring that that support is not available for the vulnerable.

Miss Ameen: Chairman, I know that is a whole other discussion but we do know of people who have submitted their biometric data, and so on, as required/requested and their cards have been cut. I know that is a totally different discussion, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Just a follow-up question again because I am learning about this issue, and the question is: the street dwellers have to eat. They have to shower. They have to do a number of things. They do not shower, from what we were told, often enough. But can you say definitively, Permanent Secretary, that all of them have access to a food card? How many of them, would you say, have access to a food card? Because I am concerned about their nutrition. That is a basic need.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Chair, they can actually come and apply but if they do not have the documentation, then it prevents them and that is how your solution would really fit into the milieu of things.

Mr. Chairman: Right. But from your experience for those of you who are working on the field, what percentage of them do you think need the card and do not have it because of an absence of documentation or because they do not know how to apply for one? Any guess as to what percentage of them may be so affected?

Mrs. Reyes-Borel: The food card programme would be relevant when they are

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reintegrated at the point of reintegration. And at that point, because they are quite likely to get a referral from within the Ministry, they will be able to access the food card. Because having a food card while living on the streets really is not very useful. Where are you going to cook the food? What they do have is access to meals and also the hygiene services where they can have a bath and that kind of stuff.

In Port of Spain it is available on Duncan Street, free of charge. They can access a breakfast and lunch Monday to Friday. That is available.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, but I think the food card can still help with Crix and sardines. You do not have to cook that and it will add some nutrition. But anyway, that is just tongue-in-cheek comment.

MP Newallo-Hosein, you wanted to come in for quite a while now.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Chairman. Permanent Secretary, I am a little bit concerned as to your answer in relation to member Ameen, simply because of the fact, having been in the Ministry, I am very well aware that when persons come in to apply for rental assistance there is the issue of landlords not wanting to come unto the programme simply because it takes very long to get their rent.

There is also the problem of the rental assistance. It is a certain amount that is not really what anybody could get outside and we do not have a database. There is no database. As a matter of fact, sometimes I myself got involved personally trying to locate places for a number of persons to be housed, and I do not know if much has changed since then.

But there is still an issue of the socially-displaced having anywhere to stay. I do agree with an increasing number of unemployed persons coming on to the system that there may be an increased number of homelessness. And to date, a number of persons who have been affected, have not been able to access a number of grants, and I am referring specifically to the Arima Discount Mart employees who were displaced with fire, and as well, MDCUM. They have not, to date, received

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anything.

To indicate that persons can come in and access the grants, when currently—and I am not making this statement out of turn, I have done my investigations—people cannot access, not even temporary food cards. It is not available. So I am asking the question: how is the Ministry going to cope with an increased level of persons on the streets, if there are not basic grants available to the current population that you serve?

But in addition to that, I want to ask some questions because I know it is going to be time to wrap up. Is there any survey done on street children, in terms of what number of street children are there on the roads at night, and so forth?

And also to concur with my colleague who has repeatedly said that we do not have to reinvent the wheel. There is a good model that has been recommended to the Ministry and that is the Chapman Facility that is based in Miami that really put forward a really comprehensive plan, how to cope with homelessness. They do not refer to them as homeless. They treat you as a client. And, therefore, from off the street into total and complete rehabilitation into the programme and it is mandatory and it involves all the ministries working together, collaborating together, including the business persons. And so, I would like to recommend, Chairman, that we do not have to reinvent the wheel. There are programmes out there that are working. We just have to look at them and customize them to suit our society.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, member. A quick response. I do want to wrap up in about 10 minutes. There is a question I would like to pose as well. I have been very silent during most of the proceedings. A quick response to MP Newallo-Hosein's question, with respect to the types of alternatives she is recommending.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Thank you, Chair. We are aware of the model starting from the last question and comment going back. We are aware of the model. I know it

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was proposed to the Ministry and I am aware that what was supposed to happen is that we would actually follow the model and then evaluate to see if it was working but I am not sure that we were able to even implement the model because there were some challenges, much more to evaluate it.

So we agree that we do not have to reinvent the wheel and when we meet with our key stakeholders, we would be looking at all the models that have been proposed and all the approaches, because most of the strategies are still relevant and we understand that. It is just getting to the place of implementation.

Speaking to the issue of the grants, and so on, we recognize that we are in an economic downturn and at the Ministry we have come together. We are looking at all the services that we provide. We are looking at some of the gaps, some of the weaknesses, and we are working towards improving and also treating with any backlogs that we may have for some of the grants.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Before we can go on to that, it has to be a very short question because we are pressed for time and the Chairman has to ask his question. Go ahead.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: I just want to reiterate my Government's approach, a whole of government approach. We need to track. We need to monitor. We need to collaborate to get this thing going. We need to have a set pattern of collection of data. It must be data-driven. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much MP and I want to endorse MP's position because in a time of economic contraction, we do need to be very efficient and to ensure that those who really need the assistance get it and those who do not or those who are defrauding the system are excluded from the system to ensure equity.

I really want to make one point. We do not have data for Tobago and I would request of the Ministry if they could liaise with the THA to find out what is the extent of the problem in Tobago. Their needs may be different. Their issues may be different. If

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we can get that in writing, that would be appreciated by the committee.

The Chairman's question is this: I really would like to know the following, not every substance abuser ends up living on the street. Not every individual who is mentally finds himself getting accommodation at Woodford Square. I want to ask all members this simple question: what causes someone to become a homeless person in Trinidad and Tobago? Your insight into the causes. Because you see, one person who abuses narcotics or alcohol may have a home and yet another person could not. What is the root cause of homelessness in Trinidad and Tobago? Difficult question but you may have an insight into answering that question.

12.25 p.m.

Mr. Dulalchan: Chair, if I may? I just want to indicate that I had my officers do some research for me, and very interestingly, some students of law, would have interviewed 316 persons on the street. And just permit me, I know time is short. Just permit me—

Mr. Chairman: Take your time because it is, in my mind, the most important question.

Mr. Dulalchan:—to read one of the interviews. I could just pick any one at random, but I will probably read this one, so that we will probably have an idea of it:

Mr. Chairman: Most important part.

Mr. Dulalchan:

I am 23 years old and I have been homeless for a couple of months now. I was kicked out of my home when my parents discovered that I did not believe in God. They found my beliefs very unacceptable, and so there was no place for me under their roof, so long as I held my belief that God does not exist. Since then, neither my parents nor my brother or sister ever tried to contact me. I would not contact them either. I have nothing to say to them. I live in the forest in Tacarigua now. I feel safe there, but it is really difficult to live

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there around this time of the year, when it is rainy.

I use my bike to get around. I even ride my bike most Sundays from Tacarigua to here, Harris Promenade in San Fernando. I make do.

It is also hard for me to get a job since I never finished my educational programme because of family problems. I am still trying though.

Even though I am on my own, I have no family, no place to call home, I rather be here on the streets, than have to face constant judgments each and every day. If I go back, they would never let me be. They would constantly be on my case and try to change my beliefs.

Mr. Chairman: In the interest of time, I will just want to pose a recommendation to you then. Is it that as we try to address the problem, we also include the families of these individuals if we can identify them, to provide some counselling and guidance, on how they may treat with their relative who is living on the street.

Mr. Dulalchan: Exactly so, and Sir, whilst I am on the microphone, I just want to indicate, and just to back-pedal to indicate that the Ministry, in fact, has retired police officers who, my information is they are, in fact, SRPs, and they fall under the auspices of the Ministry, and they were, in fact, specially trained to deal with socially unstable or displaced persons on the streets. So they also have that capacity for quite a while ago.

Mr. Chairman: Question from MP Antoine.

Brig. Gen. Antoine: Looking at the categories, you have given us, people with mental health, people—drug abuse, socially displaced, but I am not seeing anything on street children. Is that a category? And how prevalent is it in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Chairman: Quick response, we do have a cut off time, but how prevalent is the problem of street children in Trinidad and Tobago?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: What we have found is that in the 2004 survey, while we had

66 children who were identified, in the recent count, we had not found children on the street; living on the street.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Is there any other witness who would like to offer the Committee a suggestion on what causes someone to be an inhabitant on the streets of Trinidad and Tobago? We have indicated family. He has been divorced from his family, any other reason that could generate that particular outcome?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Chair, from the same survey, I am using it because generally it would not have changed in terms of some of these reasons. Some people said physical abuse, home; stress; fed up of responsibilities; unable to afford a home, and social housing becomes an issue, that is a major issue; ill health; could not pay the rent; loss of my job.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. While—

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: Mr. Chairman, I want to question data collection, you know, because you said there are no street children, and this is alarming. I do not want question your integrity, but I want to still question data collection. I am really serious about this. I need to question the integrity of data, and data presented to us today.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Chair, if I may? The issue of street children is also an issue of definition. A street child is a child who lives on the street as in Brazil, but we have children who would be on the streets with adult sometimes, and begging and so on, and even that, I am not sure we see much of it any more.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Committee members are pleading with me for one last question. Okay, MP Newallo-Hosein.

Mr. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you so much, Chair. Just on the same issue of the street children. What happens to a mother who with her children, who would come in for help?—the halfway houses that are available there, accommodate the children or are they forced to be separated from their mother?

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Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: As far as I am aware, yes, they take the children in with them. The only inhibition sometimes is the age of the child. Usually if the child is probably 16/17 and it is a male child, it becomes a little challenge.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much members of the Committee. Thank you very much witnesses. Thank you very much our audience on social media, television and on radio. We have come to the end, a minute past the time, but we have come to end of today's hearing. Normally I will ask for closing remarks. Is there anyone of the four group leaders who would like to leave us with a closing remark? Or if you can confine the closing remarks to a minute, we can deal with that, and then we will conclude. Any closing remarks?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Chair, if I may? Just to say that the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services as the lead agency with respect to this issue, that we commit to moving forward; with respect to the collaboration, with respect to the data collection; with respect to all the recommendations that have been made, so that we would be able, not to rid the country of this situation, but certainly to significantly reduce it. So we make that commitment.

M. Chairman: Thank you very much, Madam Permanent Secretary. I would now like to thank all witnesses for appearing before us. This has been an extremely informative session. It is the first time, as far as I am aware, that a joint select committee of Parliament is addressing such a critical social issue.

Over the last few months we have had a number of hearings on school violence and bullying, and we are drawing all the stakeholders together to try as the PS indicated, not to eliminate the problem, but to minimize its occurrence.

We have today, identified at least five solutions which seem to be workable in the short period, and we will be in communication with you, once we have concluded our second hearing, where we deal with some of the other stakeholders, because the objective of the enquire is a simple one. Once we have understood the

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problem, then we can offer solutions which will hopefully minimize the incidence, and ensure that people in Trinidad and Tobago, no longer live on the streets, because housing is a basic need. Accommodation is a basic need. Health care is a basic need. Food is a basic need. Security is a basic need, and we are looking at the basic needs of all of our citizens, especially the most vulnerable, so that the various arms of the State can be focused on addressing these concerns.

I want to thank all of you for participating, all of our faithful viewers on Parliament Channel and on radio. I look forward to some of the solutions which may be offered by members of the public, who themselves may have been in a situation of homelessness, and who can then advise the Committee on how we can solve the problem, and also others in the community who have ideas on how we may address these critical issues.

I thank you all, good afternoon.

12.34 p.m.: *Committee adjourned.*