



**Summary of Proceedings**

**Public Hearing**

Held on Wednesday, September 18, 2019

[10:10 a.m. to 12:13 p.m.]

**Public hearing re: An inquiry into the challenges of prisoner re-entry into society and prisoner reintegration services in Trinidad and Tobago.**

**Venue:** J. Hamilton Meeting Room, Mezzanine Floor, Office of the Parliament, Tower D, The Port-of-Spain International Waterfront Centre, 1A Wrightson Road, Port-of-Spain.

**Committee members**

The following committee members were present:

1. Mr. Paul Richards – Chairman
2. Mr. Esmond Forde, MP
3. Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine, MP
4. Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein, MP
5. Ms. Khadijah Ameen

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**Witnesses who appeared**

The following officials were present:

Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service

1. Mr. Gerard Wilson - Commissioner of Prisons
2. Mr. Sherwin Bruce - Assistant Commissioner of Prisons
3. Mr. Hayden Walcott - Chief Welfare Officer

Ministry of National Security

1. Ms. Annmarie Dookie - Director, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit (M&E)
2. Mr. Walter Alexander - Research Specialist, Penal Reform and Transformation Unit (PRTU)

Vision on Mission

1. Mr. Wayne Chance – Executive President
2. Mr. Gordon Husbands - Programme Director
3. Mr. Brian Skinner – Facilitator

**Key Issues Discussed**

The following are the key subject areas/issues discussed during the hearing:

Issues discussed with the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service (TTPrS)

- i. Therapeutic-type drug intervention and treatment programmes are necessary for the rehabilitation of offenders and reduction of recidivism.<sup>1</sup>
- ii. There is a need for the provision of more rehabilitation programmes in both the prison system and within communities.
- iii. Previously published recidivism rates should be examined with caution. Although high, the rates may be inaccurate due to multiple factors affecting detection of re-offending.

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<sup>1</sup> This was also expressed by officials of Vision on Mission (VOM).

## Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration

(Including Education, Health, Gender, Tourism, Public Administration, Labour, Culture, Community Development, and other Social Services)

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- iv. Given that some remand inmates are detained for periods between 4-14 years, there is also a need to offer rehabilitation programmes to the remand population.
- v. The current remand facilities are inadequate for inmates' psychological and social needs.
- vi. The Commissioner provided a positive rating of the current rehabilitation programmes offered within the prison system. However, he re-emphasized the need for follow-up programmes within the wider communities to complement the prisons' initiatives.
- vii. The TTPrS has an official complement of 55 Prison Welfare Officers. However, no Welfare Officers are assigned to the Tobago Prison depot. Currently, 10 Officers are on leave and there are 18 acting positions.
- viii. Interviews were conducted regarding fourteen (14) vacancies for Prison Welfare Officers, which are expected to be filled by the end of September 2019.
- ix. The caseload of Welfare Officers varies according to each prison and remand facility and the needs of inmates. As a result, there is no limit on the size of Officers' caseloads.
- x. Welfare Officers also provide follow-up support to ex-prisoners up to 2 years after release. However, ex-prisoners are not legally mandated to accept this support.
- xi. A ratio of 1:15 or 1:20 Welfare Officers to inmates may be effective. It was noted that there are 100 youth offenders and 5 Welfare Officers at the Youth Transformation and Rehabilitation Centre (YTRC).
- xii. A formal assessment is conducted for each incoming prisoner, after which a case plan is developed which considers their social support systems.
- xiii. Efforts are made to engage family members in the programmes and general rehabilitation of inmates.
- xiv. The need for legislation and court orders to mandate that prisoners participate in rehabilitation programmes. Alternatively, participation in programmes can be made a requirement for the remission of sentences or conditional release.
- xv. Religious programmes have higher participation rates given that the annual religious celebrations are incentives for participation.
- xvi. Prisoners express resistance to being taught by prison officers.
- xvii. A request was recently sent to the Ministry for the recruitment of additional, trained teachers to administer basic literacy and other academic programmes.

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(Including Education, Health, Gender, Tourism, Public Administration, Labour, Culture, Community Development, and other Social Services)

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- xviii. Academic programmes are delivered by: trained prison officers, inmates, volunteers (private citizens) and teacher trainees from the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago (COSTAATT).
- xix. Prison Officers trained in teaching basic literacy are rotated across the various prisons to ensure that academic classes are provided in all facilities.
- xx. A request for assistance with programmes will be sent to the Trinidad and Tobago Association of Psychologists (TTAP).
- xxi. Consideration is given to the unique challenges of adult education within the prison system including some prisoners' learning disabilities.
- xxii. The Welfare Department prepares bio-social reports for inmates serving five or more years in prison, which includes their history, needs and recommendations for programming and aftercare.
- xxiii. Case management reports are similarly prepared for inmates serving three or more years in prison.
- xxiv. Referrals are made to public and private external agencies, including Vision on Mission (VOM), to assist with ex-prisoners' aftercare needs, including housing.
- xxv. Many inmates who receive in-house training in agriculture and husbandry subsequently establish their own businesses after release. Efforts are made to facilitate these ventures through collaboration with VOM.
- xxvi. There are examples of former prisoners have excelling at the University of the West Indies (UWI) after completing educational programmes in prison.
- xxvii. In response to VOM's concern regarding the relatively low rate of participation in its programmes, the TTPrS indicated that attempts are being made among Prison Officers to encourage inmates to attend.
- xxviii. Due partially to the larger population of remandees, participation in periodic agricultural work is higher among remandees than convicted inmates.
- xxix. The TTPrS looks forward to the development of a parole system, and a shift towards corrections within prisons.

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Issues discussed with the Ministry of National Security (MNS)

- i. The Monitoring and Evaluation Unit evaluates the outcomes of projects under the purview of the MNS, including VOM.
- ii. VOM is the only entity under the purview of the MNS that receives a subvention for providing comprehensive, re-integration services to ex-prisoners.
- iii. An evaluation of VOM was initiated in May 2018 to determine the value of the subvention to be provided by the Ministry.
- iv. The final evaluation report of VOM will be completed within the following week.
- v. Draft legislation on conditional release was developed by the Penal Reform and Transformation Unit (PRTU) in 2008 and draft legislation on parole was developed by the former Ministry of Justice circa 2012.
- vi. The annual allocation of the PRTU declined over the years from approximately \$5 million to the current value of \$1.2 million. The current allocation is insufficient.
- vii. Between 2015 and 2019, the PRTU utilized the majority of its allocation to provide vocational training and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) to prisoners.
- viii. The PRTU recently financed computers for the YTRC and stationery for the Prison Programmes Department.
- ix. Cross-divisional teams including the TTPrS, PRTU and Probation Department of the Ministry will conduct an in-depth review of existing policy to identify gaps and needs.
- x. A report that will soon be submitted to Cabinet identifies the current recidivism rate as 51%.
- xi. The Probation Department was consulted in plans to introduce electronic monitoring.

Issues discussed with Vision on Mission (VOM)

- i. The VOM manages a preparation for release (“pre-release”) programme in all prisons. After release from prison, participants can enrol in the resettlement programme.
- ii. Walk-in services are also provided to ex-prisoners who did not participate in the pre-release programme, which include individual and group counselling, housing and job placement.

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(Including Education, Health, Gender, Tourism, Public Administration, Labour, Culture,  
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- iii. Services are also offered to youth, socially displaced persons and deportees.
- iv. Re-entry services contribute to offender management and can reduce the likelihood of re-offending.
- v. It is important that prisons utilize appropriate tools to assess prisoners' risks and needs, develop correctional intervention plans and provide appropriate programming/therapies.
- vi. CBT is utilized in the pre-release programme to treat with the attitudes and character of inmates that may affect employment prospects and reunification with family members.
- vii. The need for the Probation Department, MNS to assume greater responsibility in the supervision of ex-prisoners as part of its role in the process of community corrections. The VOM has proposed the need for a Community Corrections Act to clearly define roles in this process.
- viii. Deportees with housing needs are referred by the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (MSDFS) to VOM, which provides temporary housing for up to 2 years.
- ix. The VOM has a good relationship with the executive of the TTPrS.
- x. One challenge to prisoner participation in the pre-release programme is that participation is not mandatory and there are no major incentives for participation.<sup>2</sup>
- xi. There is a need for Prison Officers to provide more encouragement to inmates to attend VOM's programmes. Attendance declined significantly over the past few years.
- xii. In 2018, the VOM was able to register approximately 176 prisoners in the pre-release programme, although more than 500 attended. Over 300 participants of the programme are released from prisons annually.
- xiii. A Conditional Release and Rehabilitation Act drafted in 2008 can treat with issues related to ex-prisoners' reintegration into society, such as the expungement of sentences, mandatory participation in rehabilitative programmes and a parole policy.
- xiv. Vision on Mission Enterprise Limited was established with the aim of partnering with private employers to provide jobs for ex-prisoners. Fifteen (15) businesses are currently involved in this arrangement.
- xv. An arrangement with CEPEP allowed 30 ex-prisoners without a valid ID card to be employed with the company immediately after their release.

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<sup>2</sup> The TTPrS also indicated that this is a challenge to participation in prison programmes.

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- xvi. Increased government support is needed to address the employment needs of ex-prisoners.
- xvii. Attempts to collaborate with the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development to address the employment needs of former prisoners were unsuccessful.
- xviii. Between 2004 and 2018 the government subvention to VOM increased from approximately \$150,000 to \$7 million. This subvention was provided to finance programmes for all clients served by VOM.
- xix. VOM is very satisfied with the value of the current subvention. In 2019, approximately \$4 million of the allocation was received.
- xx. There is a need for Prison Welfare Officers to increase their follow-up support to ex-prisoners.
- xxi. The Probation Department should perform a key role in providing supervision of former prisoners, beginning with engagement from entry into prison.
- xxii. A project delivered in partnership with the European Union (EU) provides agricultural training and a stipend to graduates of the pre-release programme. The programme is implemented on 12 acres of land owned by VOM.
- xxiii. Upon completion of the agricultural training, ex-prisoners are granted a parcel of land for agricultural use. There are plans to acquire an additional location to sustain the programme.
- xxiv. A housing facility with a capacity of 85 tenants will be opened at the agricultural site. The facility will also have provisions for in-house vocational training.
- xxv. Another facility in Champs Fleurs provides housing to approximately 30 persons. However, the official capacity of the building is 20 persons.
- xxvi. The construction of a housing complex in Claxton Bay to accommodate 65 women will be completed in 2019. The project is financed by Republic Bank and the government.
- xxvii. In the interim, female ex-prisoners are housed in inns and hotels. Attempts are also made to reunite them with family members.
- xxviii. Thirteen (13) persons are currently employed full-time at VOM. Five (5) case workers are employed but 4 additional case workers will be required when new housing facilities are commissioned.

**Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration**  
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- xxix. Former prisoners are encouraged to relocate to a different community to avoid risk factors that may be present in their community of origin.
- xxx. Due to the stigma of incarceration and other challenges, it is difficult for former prisoners to access rental housing. As a result of these challenges, a housing complex in Laventille was established with 16 apartments rented to ex-prisoners for approximately one year at a minimal cost.
- xxxi. The average duration spent in the out-base programme is 2 years.
- xxxii. The programme success rate among clients is 80%, and the rate is 95% specifically among deportees.

**View the Hearing**

The hearing can be viewed on our YouTube channel via the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sj2S-nh6sTI>

**Contact the Committee's Secretary**

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*Committees Unit*

*October 15, 2019*