Ministerial Statement
To The House of Assembly
By
The Hon. Diallo V. Rabain JP, MP
Minister of Education

Ministerial Statement
'Government's $150 Relief Initiative

Friday, September 30th, 2022

MR SPEAKER,

I rise this morning to update this Honourable House and the listening public on the Government's $150 Relief Initiative for parents and guardians who have children enrolled in the public school system. The $150 Relief is part of the Government's overall $15 million economic relief package to ease the financial burden on working families in Bermuda.

MR SPEAKER,

Parents know their children's needs to prepare them for a good start in school fully. This Government has provided $567,000 to help alleviate parents' yearly school expenses. The primary purpose of the relief is to help parents and guardians purchase school supplies, whether school shoes, sneakers, uniforms, sweaters, school bags, lunch kits, etc.

MR SPEAKER,

While the Ministry of Education is responsible for education in Bermuda, including private schools, funding for the provision of schooling is reserved for public schools only, Bermuda's only comprehensive system. As such, the provision of the $150 per student Grant is available to students in the public school system only.

MR SPEAKER,

The $150 relief is a one-time payment to parents and was rolled out on September 2nd, 2022. Technical officers from the Ministry of Education and
Ministry of Finance took the time to ensure the application and payment process was thorough and payments were provided to eligible persons only. The Department of Education's PowerSchool System has been set up so that eligible parents can submit their applications directly into the System.

**MR SPEAKER**

Every parent or guardian of public-school students has access to this system. When a child is enrolled as a public-school student, they are given an account with log-on details. Parents are positioned to check their child's school grades and daily attendance and obtain any other information that the school or teachers may share with parents. The $150 relief application form has been designed within PowerSchool and is linked directly to each student's PowerSchool account using the student's school ID number. Only parents and guardians listed as the primary contact on the student's PowerSchool account are eligible for the $150 relief.

**MR SPEAKER,**

Parents were provided with an 8-step easy-to-follow list of instructions on how to apply for the $150 relief. Visual graphics were issued so they could follow the steps on the graphics for re-setting their PowerSchool account and completing the application form. A list of FAQs or frequently asked questions was also prepared and shared with parents. Should parents have further questions or require additional assistance, they should email relief@moed.bm.

**MR SPEAKER,**

Like anyone being paid from the public purse, all payments must adhere to the financial compliance requirements of the Accountant General's Office. This means that for the person applying for the relief, a Government issued ID must be submitted along with proof of document showing a bank account number with the same name and address as the applicant.

**MR SPEAKER,**

A completed application is one where the primary parent listed in PowerSchool has submitted the application form providing all required
information and emailed the banking confirmation details per the Government's financial compliance requirements. Once the application and banking information has been verified, a payment request is sent to the Accountant General. After their due diligence and compliance checks, the funds are sent to the parent's bank account. I take the opportunity to remind parents and guardians to ensure that all the information sent is accurate. The minimum time for the process from application to payment is 10 business days after submitting a completed application.

MR SPEAKER,
While, in theory, the application process is straightforward, this exercise has revealed various scenarios that have led to unforeseen delays in some payment disbursements. To date, the team working on the vetting has come across:

1. Applications by persons who are not the Primary Parent.
2. Applications are submitted, but the required supporting documents are not being sent in a timely fashion or following the process for it to be easily vetted.
3. The Office of the Accountant General required Banking and ID documentation not matching the person who has applied.
4. While having PowerSchool accounts, parents either have never accessed the system before or have not accessed it in a long time leading to difficulties remembering login details, passwords or how to navigate to the application form.
5. Children in the same household, having different primary parents assigned in PowerSchool
6. Parents not recognizing that an application must be made separately for each child in order for the Government to maintain a clean accounting and auditing record

MR SPEAKER,
We are always encouraged to see opportunities instead of problems. The various unforeseen issues I just listed have helped uncover improvements that can be made to operate the PowerSchool system. Parents who may have never used the system before now have an opportunity to see what
information they can get from effective use. Lastly, it has helped update parents' contact info and correct incorrect or outdated information. I take this time to apologize to anyone who has applied and has not received their $150 relief payment. We are bound by the Government’s financial due diligence, and want to ensure the correct parent receives the payment.

MR SPEAKER,

We recognize that not every parent or guardian has access to a computer. The application form can be completed from a desktop computer, a Laptop, a Tablet, or a Cell Phone using the internet. We are confident that our parents have one of these types of devices in hand to use. In fact, to date, the Ministry has experienced only two parents who have called in or visited the Ministry office to share that they did not have a computer. In these instances, immediate assistance was provided to show them how to apply for the $150 relief using their cell phone.

Similarly, MR SPEAKER, we understand that not all parents or guardians have bank accounts. Therefore, a process has been put in place for parents to inform the Ministry, and with the correct information provided, payments can be made by cheque.

MR SPEAKER,

The $150 Relief initiative was launched on Friday, September 2nd. A total of 434 parents submitted applications on this day. During the remainder of that weekend, including the Labour Day holiday, 426 parents submitted applications to claim the $150 relief. We can report that as of yesterday, September 29th, the Ministry has received 2,253 applications from parents and guardians, of which 1,725 applications have been vetted for approval by the Ministry of Education and forwarded to the Accountant General’s office for payment. Of those 1,725 vetted applications, the Accountant General’s Office has processed 933 for payment.

MR SPEAKER

This Government is mindful that some parents may choose not to apply for the $150 relief. Some say I have finished purchasing school supplies, while
others say we are not in need right now. Although this may be the case, the $150 can still be used later in the school year; their child may lose their brand-new school shoes or need a new sweater during the cooler months or a replacement gym uniform. The Government’s financial support can cover these instances.

Therefore, MR SPEAKER, in closing, I encourage all eligible parents to apply for the $150 relief as this provision by the Government is to ease the financial burden on our families with children enrolled in public schools. Parents have until Monday, October 31st, 2022, to apply.

Thank you, MR SPEAKER.