Last week, the Executive Committee of the Bermuda Public Services Union (BPSU) attended the reading of the Government’s 2023 Throne Speech.

Recognizing that the purpose of the Throne Speech is for the Government to outline their 2023/2024 legislative agenda, the BPSU was pleased that the Government chose “Serving the People” as the theme. Using this theme as our guide, the BPSU Executive Committee highlights the following areas of concern:

**Healthcare:** There is an undeniable urgent need to address Bermuda’s ever-increasing cost of healthcare. According to the Bermuda Health Strategy 2022-2027, an estimated $736 million was spent on health in 2021, which equates to the third highest amongst OECD countries. The BPSU is deeply concerned about Government’s proposed timeline to implement its long-promised, universal health coverage. This is especially true given the alarming rate the cost of healthcare continues to rise. The Union strongly advocates for the Government to not only tackle the runaway cost of healthcare but to also address the healthcare inequalities that are preventing equal access to care.

The Minister of Health recently reported the Government Employee Health Insurance (GEHI) plan, covers all Public Officers, will be merged with other plans currently under the Health Insurance Department e.g., HIP and Senior Care. It will be vital for stakeholders to closely monitor the impact of this amalgamation to ensure that persons covered by these plans benefit from the economies of scale of having a shared pool.

**Discrimination on Age or Disabilities:** The BPSU welcomes the commitment to eradicating discrimination based on age or disability, and celebrates the positive impact this will have on workforce diversity and expanding employment opportunities. With projections that 25% of Bermuda’s population will be over the age of 65 by 2026, however, the Union urges the Government to also address the critical need for sustainable pensions and access to affordable healthcare coverage for retirees.

**Tax Reform:** The economic impact resulting from the implementation of the global minimum tax will be watched closely by both local unions and union federations worldwide. While understanding the importance of the international business sector to our economy as well as the need for the Island to remain competitive, the BPSU encourages the Government to continue to find ways to further ease the burden on working-class citizens through a comprehensive reform of our tax structure.

**Cost of Living:** Recognizing the challenges Government has historically had with addressing Bermuda’s high cost of living, the BPSU will be closely monitoring the findings of the Cost of Living Commission as well as the effectiveness of Government’s promised amendments to the Regulatory Act 2022, the Electricity Act 2016 and the Electronic Communications Act 2011.

**Digitalization of Services:** The BPSU acknowledges the rapidly changing world of work and urges Government to properly prepare Public Officers for its planned digital transformation of some Government services. The protection of human capital is paramount; the Government must not only invest in new equipment and technology, but also in the upskilling and training of its employees. To
avoid redundancies resulting from digitalization, Government must also allow transfers to other roles where appropriate.

**Government Recruitment:** While supportive of Governments’ plan to streamline recruitment, the BPSU stresses the need for timely implementation. There is an urgent need for Government to address the placement of individuals who have been serving in acting roles for extended periods into substantive posts.

**Cyberattack:** In the wake of the recent cyberattack, the BPSU is pleased that Government has made a commitment to provide security training for Public Officers. The Union further recommends that the Joint Select Committee tasked with investigating the incident and making recommendations, engage in dialogue with union partners to collate critical data relative to Public Officers’ concerns. The BPSU stresses the importance of establishing a comprehensive response to potential future cyberattacks.

**Education:** The Government has committed to tabling a Bill to establish the Education Authority in this legislative period. To this end, the Minister of Education recently advised that he will be seeking “specialized and dedicated legal advice” regarding the Education Authority. This is anticipated to have a wide-sweeping impact on the employment contracts of over one thousand employees within the Ministry & Department of Education. It is therefore essential that Government engages in meaningful consultation with its Union partners regarding this governance and structural change.

In summary, the BPSU reiterates it ongoing call for collaborative, consultative social dialogue. In order for and to ensure the effective implementation of human-centered economic initiatives with fair and equitable outcomes, a tripartite consensus that includes the Government, the Private Sector and Unions, is key. The Union will continue to advocate for collaborative decision-making, data-driven policies, and measures that enhance the working conditions and overall quality of life for all Bermudians.