Senate Statement

By

Senator, The Hon. Kim Wilkerson, JP

Attorney-General and Minister of Justice

A Tribute to Commissioner Keeva Joell-Benjamin on Her Retirement

25th November 2026

Madam President, I rise today to inform this Honourable Senate that Commissioner of Corrections Keeva Joell-Benjamin retires effective 30th June 2027 and goes on leave from 26th February 2027, ahead of her retirement, after more than 35 years of service to the Department of Corrections and to the people of Bermuda.

Madam President, Commissioner Joell-Benjamin's career is one of steady, earned progression. She joined the Department in 1991 as a Basic Officer and went on to serve in the majority of our correctional facilities. She rose through every rank. As Assistant Commissioner (Administration), she held responsibility for Policies, IT, Works and Accounts. She then served as Acting Commissioner for four years before her substantive appointment in January 2022.

With that appointment, **Madam President**, she made history as Bermuda's first female Commissioner of Corrections. That milestone matters. It speaks to every young woman who has put on the uniform and to every officer who joins as a Basic Officer and wonders how far service can take them. Commissioner Joell-Benjamin answered that question by example.

Madam President, the Commissioner has always held that the Department's purpose is to help those in our custody return to the community as responsible and productive citizens. She has championed that purpose consistently. Under her leadership the Right Living House programme has continued to change lives with more than eighty per cent of graduates who complete its residential and aftercare phases remain in the community for three years or longer without returning to custody.

She has invested in her officers too. She welcomed new classes of recruits and reminded them never to forget their purpose and why they chose this work. She has represented Bermuda in the region and internationally, serving as Secretary of the Association of Caribbean Heads of Corrections and Prison Services and as a member of the International Corrections and Prisons Association.

Madam President, Honourable Senators will know that the challenges facing our correctional system did not arise in recent years and were not created by any one individual. When I tabled the Detention Standards Review, I said plainly that it documents years of underinvestment. Commissioner Joell-Benjamin led the Department through the period in which those challenges were confronted honestly. She has overseen the Department's work on the Action Plan now being delivered and she will continue to lead the Department until she proceeds on leave in February. Having given more than 35 years to this Department, she has now chosen to begin a well-earned new chapter, and she does so with the gratitude and

full respect of this Government. **Madam President**, to ensure continuity, a suitable candidate will be appointed to act as Commissioner of Corrections with effect from 26th February 2027, and that appointment will be announced in due course. The substantive post will be filled through the established Public Service process. The Government's commitment to the Action Plan is unchanged and I will continue to report to this Senate on its progress.

Madam President, on behalf of the Government and the people of Bermuda, I thank Commissioner Joell-Benjamin for more than three and a half decades of dedicated service. I also thank her family, who have shared her with this Department for so long. I am sure Honourable Senators will join me in wishing her good health and every happiness in a well-deserved retirement.

Madam President, at a Right Living House graduation, Commissioner Joell-Benjamin recited Maya Angelou's poem *"Still I Rise"* to the graduates. She told them that we must all find the strength, determination and support to rise above our circumstances. Her own career is the clearest example of that belief as she began as a Basic Officer and rose to become the first woman to lead the Department.

Thank you, Madam President.