



Ministerial Statement

by

**Senator the Hon. Kim Wilkerson, JP
Attorney-General and Minister of Justice**

“The State of Corrections”

Monday, 29th September 2025

Madam President, I rise today to lay before this Honourable Senate the Annual Reports for the years 2022, 2023, and 2024 for both the Parole Board and the Treatment of Offenders Board, and to update this Chamber on the state of our correctional system, acknowledging both the challenges we face and the significant steps this Ministry is taking to advance reform and restorative justice. These Reports were submitted by the respective boards to comply with the requirements of the Treatment of Offenders Board Act 1979 and the Parole Board Act 2001.

Madam President, the reports from the Treatment of Offenders Board are forthright in their assessment, detailing significant challenges,

particularly concerning the physical infrastructure of our facilities and the critical lack of rehabilitative programming. I acknowledge these findings without reservation, but I also wish to assure this Honourable Senate that my Ministry and the Department of Corrections have been actively working to address these long-standing issues.

Madam President, when I joined Cabinet, I specifically requested that the portfolio for Corrections be moved to the Ministry of Justice. I firmly believe that the administration of justice, especially restorative justice, requires seamless collaboration between all arms of the justice system. I am passionately committed to ensuring that we do not merely incarcerate, but that we actively equip individuals with the skills, support and opportunities needed to lead productive lives upon release, thereby strengthening community safety and reducing the cycle of reoffending.

Madam President, to that end, we have initiated a comprehensive reform agenda. Monthly meetings with the Department of Works & Engineering have now resumed following the summer period, during when their focus was rightly concentrated on school readiness for the new academic year. To expedite vital repairs, the Department of Corrections and Works & Engineering have engaged private contractors, including Kaissa, Wilson's Painting, Air Pro, BAC Group, Virgil's Plumbing, Thomas Enterprises and Mason & Associates to work alongside the W&E team as a matter of urgency, with ventilation and roofing repairs being a top priority.

Continuation of the refurbishments of the Medium Housing Units at Westgate Correctional Facility and electrical upgrades also remain a priority during this fiscal year. To improve ventilation at Westgate and Co-Ed Facilities, assessments and repairs of exhaust fans and windows at Westgate Correctional Facility will take place as will assessment and repairs of windows at the Co-Ed Facility.

Planned plumbing refits for this fiscal year include upgrades to aging infrastructure across facilities. Westgate sewage pit upgrades will address antiquated equipment and infrastructure. Completion is targeted within the current fiscal year to ensure improved functionality and compliance. There will also be a modernisation of the hot water pipe system at the Co-Ed Facility as well as improvements to the water tanks.

Madam President, as mentioned in this year's Budget, we have prioritised the hiring of additional Corrections officers to support our Corrections team. I am pleased to report that the first tranche of recruitment from local applicants will be completed in October, adding at least 18 officers to our ranks. We continue to recruit to fill the remaining 17 posts, based on submissions from regional applicants. These additional officers will ease the burden on existing staff, underscoring our recognition that officer wellbeing is of paramount.

Madam President, to that end we have engaged a consultant psychologist to assist the Department of Corrections' leadership in

strengthening executive decision-making. This licensed psychologist, formerly with the New York City Department of Corrections on Rikers Island, brings a wealth of experience in correctional psychology and staff wellness, which will be crucial in improving conditions for our officers and inmates. The consultant psychologist will also guide us in identifying the required credentials for the new Wellness Officer post, ensuring we recruit the right professional to strengthen working conditions and boost morale among our officers. For without healthy officers, there can be no healthy Corrections system.

Madam President, it should be noted that whilst psychological services are primarily provided for the incarcerated, the department's psychologists also provide consistent support and consultation for staff in times of crisis. This support and consultation are offered for staff to enhance their understanding of the needs of incarcerated persons how best to work with them. The department has provided training for staff to enhance their skills and knowledge; and have added reflective practice sessions for staff to support with enhancing their well-being and their practice.

Madam President, in the Chair's Report for the Treatment of Offenders Board, it is stated that "The objective of the board is to operate co-operatively and collaboratively with The Department of Corrections to ensure matters relating to a prison or prisoner are dealt with expeditiously

and in the best interest of all parties”. I am grateful for the dedication of the members of the Treatment of Offenders Board in their advocacy on behalf of inmates.

Madam President, I have further strengthened the Treatment of Offenders Board by adding new members **Robyn Swan, Eron Hill,** and **Reverend Dr. Emily Gail-Dill**, who began their tenure on the first of July. Robyn Swan brings a broad and balanced background in public service, compliance, and governance to the Treatment of Offenders Board. She began her career as a Prison Officer, gaining first-hand insight into Bermuda’s correctional system, before going on to serve as a Senator. Professionally, Ms. Swan worked as an Assistant Compliance Officer at Appleby, and subsequently founded her own firm, Swan Consulting, which provides both compliance and data privacy advisory services. Her governance and board experience includes serving as Compliance Officer for the Mirrors Alumni and Friends Association (MAFA) and supporting the Bermuda Boxing Federation Board in an ex officio capacity.

Eron Hill is the Founder and Executive Director of the Bermuda Equal Justice Initiative (BEJI) and holds a LLB degree in law from the University of Law. As Executive Director of BEJI, Mr. Hill has spearheaded public education campaigns, legal interventions, and community-based advocacy to advance fair treatment for all, particularly the disfavoured and forgotten.

Rev. Dr Dill is a passionate advocate for youth development, community service, spiritual leadership, and the Arts. She is an ordained Minister in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and the Member of Parliament for Constituency 36, Sandys North. Rev. Dr. Dill also has extensive experience in public service and education having worked within Bermuda's public school system as a teacher, educational therapist, and counsellor, focusing on at-risk youth. Together, they bring fresh thinking and spirited advocacy to the Treatment of Offenders Board's vital work.

Madam President, the Bermuda Parole Board plays a critical role in balancing the rehabilitation of offenders with the safety and confidence of the public. As we strengthen our restorative justice framework, I am pleased to announce the appointment of a renewed Board effective October 1st 2025 – one that reflects the need to diversify perspectives and explore new approaches as we modernise Bermuda's justice system. I must express my profound gratitude to the four outgoing members of the Parole Board, Mr Derrick Burgesss, JP, Member of Parliament Scott Simmons, Mr Roderick Burchall, JP and Ms Tori Burgess – who have served with dedication for several years. Their contribution has been invaluable. We have retained three experienced members: Legal Counsel Mr. Vaughan Caines, psychologist Dr. Cherita Rayner and therapist Dr. Ernest Peets.

Mr Caines is a barrister in Bermuda, and the Founder and Executive Director of Forensica Legal. Alongside his work on the Parole Board, he serves as Occasional Legal Aid Counsel for the Bermuda Drug Treatment Court. Mr Caines is also a forensic scientist and has completed diverse international scientific internships. As a defence and human rights lawyer, he has published and presented globally on critically important interactions among law, science and human rights.

Dr. Cherita Rayner is a Registered Clinical Psychologist and is active in the psychological community, currently serving as President to the Bermuda Psychology Association. Dr. Rayner has previously held the role of Clinical Psychologist and Professional Practice Lead with the Bermuda Hospitals Board. She has also served as a member of the Bermuda Hospitals Board's Ethics Committee. Dr. Rayner is a co-developer of the Mental Health First Aid Bermuda programme and currently serves as programme coordinator.

Dr Ernest Peets is a Certified Family Therapist, and an International Certified Alcohol and Drug Counsellor. Dr. Peets received his BA in Business from Howard University, and his doctorate in Marriage & Family Therapy from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Dr. Peets is also the Pastor of New Life Church of the Nazarene. Dr. Peets is an experienced counsellor who is able to blend biblical and psychological principles that bring insight and healing.

Madam President, I am delighted to welcome all three back to the Parole Board and thank them for their continued service.

Madam President, I am pleased to announce that I have appointed **Dr. Emily Ross** as the new chair of the Parole Board. Dr Ross holds a BSc in Social Policy from the University of Bristol and a PhD in Criminology from the University of Oxford, where she published her paper on *Responses to Gang Violence in Bermuda*. Dr Ross previously served as administrator of the Parole Board and Treatment of Offenders Board. Dr Ross has also volunteered with Focus Counselling Services and various Bermuda theatre groups. Her expertise and experience make her ideal for leadership at this crucial point in time. The additional new members are **Ria Mayes, Tarik Bean-Darrell, and Shawnette Somner.**

Ria Mayes (nee James), a married mother of three, is a seasoned public service professional with 39 years of experience in law enforcement, including 13 years with the Bermuda Police Service and 26 years with the Bermuda Customs Department. She holds certifications in Behavioural Analytics and a Certificate in Customs Management from the University of Canberra, Australia. Ria, an active member of the Paget Lions Club, has served as Secretary on the board of Lefroy House Care Home and is currently a long-serving member of the Warwick Parish Council.

Tarik Bean-Darrell is a Career Development Officer at the Office of Workforce Development and holds a Bachelor of Science in Biology from

St Mary's University. He has previously worked in the education sector and serves on the Board of Governors for Cedarbridge Academy. Mr Bean-Darrell is a proud member of the Pembroke Hamilton Club and is deeply involved in service in the St Paul AME Church. He has also assisted individuals in obtaining their GED through the CARE Learning Centre. Mr Bean-Darrell is passionate about helping inmates to become functioning and contributing members of society by finding work opportunities upon their release.

Shawnette Somner is a seasoned educator who spent 13 years as the Education Officer for the Department of Corrections. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Education and a Master's degree in Educational Leadership and Supervision from Miami University. Ms. Somner is a leadership coach who brings a wealth of expertise, and immense interest in the wellbeing of former and current inmates, to the Parole Board.

Madam President, my Ministry has also commenced discussions with members of the UK Parole Board in an effort to secure training for our new members as we modernise our processes. We are keen to strengthen the fairness, transparency, and consistency of our parole process, especially as I have just appointed a new Board. At present, for example, the hearings do not accommodate oral representations from lawyers, external psychologists or impacted victims. As a consequence, deliberations may be conducted without the procedural safeguards that are

typically found in more established parole systems. To that end, I am in the process of making a formal request that members of the Bermuda Parole Board and members of staff of the Ministry of Justice be permitted to observe the deliberations of the Parole Board for England and Wales. Our purpose is to learn from their procedures and practices, with a view to identifying improvements that will allow us to formalise our own processes in line with recognised standards of justice and fairness. I am confident that this renewed Board has the energy, expertise and passion to move our Parole processes into the modern era.

Madam President, recognising that unaddressed trauma is a root cause of offending behaviour, we will be engaging **Gina Spence Productions (GSP)** to deliver a six-week Grief & Loss Pilot Support Initiative. This programme will provide critical clinical and educational grief support through group and individual counselling for both inmates and correctional staff, addressing unresolved trauma and equipping participants with healthier coping strategies. GSP is a registered charity with programmes currently running in schools, churches, and community centres. They have over 30+ years serving Bermuda's most vulnerable through grief support with a clinical team that includes certified grief recovery specialists and on-call credentialed clinical staff.

Madam President, starting in October, Bermudian educator and literacy specialist **Ajala Omodele** will deliver the **Sankofa Education and**

Empowerment Programme (SEEP). Many inmates struggle with literacy and a lack of personal empowerment, which negatively affects their ability to rebuild their lives once they are released. It is also a critical factor in how they became disconnected from society in the first place. SEEP recognises that literacy and empowerment are critical factors in reducing recidivism and providing incarcerated individuals with the tools they need to successfully reintegrate into society. SEEP will provide comprehensive literacy, reading, math instruction and post-secondary education tutoring support to inmates across all Corrections facilities. SEEP aims to inspire and educate participants, fostering a sense of self-worth and possibility. The objectives of the programme are to increase literacy rates, enhance numeracy skills, empower through history, improve communication skills, enhance the existing GED programme, support rehabilitation and reduce recidivism.

Madam President, Ajala Omodele is an educator, historian, writer, speaker, and literacy specialist who has taught at every educational level. His expertise in Bermuda's history, coupled with his commitment to social justice, makes him uniquely qualified to lead this initiative. Mr Omodele holds a BA in Philosophy and an M.Ed. in Literacy Education, both from Mount Saint Vincent University. He is the author of several books on Bermudian history and has experience teaching primary school, middle school and designed and delivered a graduate-level course at York University in Canada. He has developed and delivered professional

development seminars on Bermudian history for Bermuda's teachers. He is a specialist in teaching reading and writing to individuals with Dyslexia, a condition that many incarcerated individuals experience. Lack of support or recognition in childhood of this condition has often robbed them of learning experiences they should have received. We look forward to them benefitting from Mr Omodele's expertise.

Madam President, this month, a team from the Ministry met with **Belong UK**, a leading justice reform organisation who provide hope, rehabilitation and recovery to victims and perpetrators of crime. We will soon engage them to assist in modernising our vetting processes and developing a peer mentoring programme for those with lived experience of incarceration. Belong UK's priority to help develop a fairer, more humane and more effective criminal justice system aligns with my Ministry's desire to put restorative justice at our core. Belong's restorative justice initiatives and creative arts therapy programmes are innovative, evidence-based programmes which have been independently evaluated by Royal Holloway University and have led to impressive outcomes in inmates' mental health, recidivism rates and access to education, employment and training. We are deeply appreciative of Belong's willingness to engage with the Ministry of Justice.

Madam President, my Ministry is also in discussions with **His Majesty's Prison & Probation Service** to adopt their evidence-based

programming for treating violent and sexual offenders, with training planned for early next year.

Madam President, the existing services provided by the psychology department include clinical interventions on a one-to-one basis and within a group setting. The individual interventions are person-centred and aim to meet the specific needs of the clients. Psychological provision within Corrections extends to risk-focused and wellbeing interventions which include but are not limited to individual therapies like Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, including Trauma-Focused Therapy and Management of Deliberate Self-Injurious Behaviours. To enhance the services provided, psychologists have engaged in continuous professional development and, last year, introduced Eye-Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), an intervention to address trauma which has been delivered on a one-to-one basis. During the past year the group intervention Life Minus Violence Enhanced was delivered for violent offenders. The service has also been involved in conducting psychological risk assessments for the purposes of pre-sentence planning for the Courts of Bermuda and for the Parole Board.

Madam President, while there have been some challenges delivering vocational programming, there have also been some successes. The Animal and Garden programme at the Farm and Co-Ed Facility produces eggs and vegetable produce for consumption by the inmate populations in

the respective facilities, resulting in a reduction in food purchases. In the last year, the programme produced 2,114 eggs for consumption, which equates to a savings of approximately \$1,585.00. The gardens managed to produce a variety of vegetables including corn, beans, pumpkin, butternut squash, lettuce, mustard greens, onions, beets, spinach, Swiss chard, sweet potatoes and turnips. The Farm also houses goats which are a part of a robust animal husbandry/therapeutic programme aimed at teaching inmates a beneficial skill, which may be utilised upon release.

Madam President, the Department of Corrections is currently compiling an Inmates Skills Bank, which will identify what skills every inmate currently possesses and those they wish to obtain. This will help us to identify which courses to provide access to going forward as we seek to equip inmates with skills for use upon their release. During fiscal year 2024/25 whilst undertaking of the refurbishment of one of the medium classification housing units, the department entered a pilot programme with the Department of Works and Engineering to enlist nine (9) inmates to supplement the refurbishment work in the unit. The inmates who were remunerated, were selected based on their skills and some based on their willingness to learn a new skill. This initiative was a six (6) week project that ended in the successful completion of sanding and repainting of the unit with results exceeding expectations. This programme will be repeated and expanded in the coming months to include more inmates who are interested.

Madam President, during last year, a new work release initiative ‘Step-Up Work Readiness Initiative’ started with the aim of providing inmates with significant opportunities to develop their social skills, work ethic and gain valuable experience outside of the facility compound. This programme also reinforces in inmates a sense of confidence, purpose, responsibility and ultimately contributes to reducing their chances of reoffending upon release from custody. Through this programme they have assisted with the removal of invasive trees from Coney Island and at various spots around the island have assisted with the clearing of foliage which encroaches on roads and main thoroughfares.

Madam President, the Work release programme out of the Co-Ed Facility continues and this past year saw ten (10) inmates participating with two (2) inmates who completed their sentence securing gainful employment upon their release.

Madam President, the implementation of a computer lab instructor continues to bolster supervised access of the computer lab, which allows inmates to utilise programming to on-line educational and technological programmes. This access also benefits inmates who require additional learning support or may require alternate learning styles. Inmates who are seeking employment as part of their discharge planning can be given a monitored personal email address, allowing them to communicate with potential employers

Madam President, a few months ago the Mechanics Programme was reintroduced after a lengthy absence. The intent is to engage inmates with instruction in motor mechanics teaching them viable skills, which can be utilised upon reintegration into the wider community. It is also intended that the garage operations will reduce overall cost associated with the servicing of the Department's fleet of vehicles. Preparations have also begun on the carpentry workshop, with instruction due to resume in the near future.

Madam President, in the past year, inmates took advantage of several courses on offer at Corrections facilities. These include the GED, Bermuda College online PACE Courses, and a variety of CISCO certified courses ranging from cyber security to entrepreneurship through a partnership with the Bermuda Technical Institute. The CISCO Computer programme course allows inmates to engage in computer-based programming, in a variety of disciplines and provides the opportunity to obtain certified courses/diplomas. Additional courses include a 7-week short course in Poetry taught by Letitia Washington, drumming taught by Nick Wadson, music and sound engineering taught by Shaquille Durham, and Yoga taught by Latoya Bridgewater. Three inmates are currently studying for bachelor's and master's degree courses online and three inmates recently received qualifications from the Koinonia Religious Studies institute. Ten (10) students also participated in the Fintech programme which was co-sponsored by the Economic Development

Department, with five students successfully graduating. A number of students are enrolled in foreign language classes, architecture, Graphic Design, Law Studies and individualized remedial learning. Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous bring weekly support group meetings to the facilities to encourage continued sobriety amongst those with substance misuse issues.

Madam President, last week, I had the privilege of attending a graduation ceremony at the Right Living House during Recovery Awareness Month and presenting the graduates with their certificates. The Right Living House, located at the Co-Educational Facility is a substance abuse rehabilitation programme that is segregated from the remaining prison population. Since its inception in 2010, the Right Living House has offered a structured, therapeutic environment to help participants break free from substance misuse, develop healthy thinking patterns, and prepare for meaningful lives beyond custody. The programme aims to transition residents to the broader community with an increased potential for a life free of drug abuse and criminal activity through providing tools and opportunities for change. I commend the two graduates, Mr David Hill and Mr Ernest Smith, for their commitment to maintaining sobriety and recovering, a significant achievement. This year's theme for Recovery Awareness Month, "Recovery is REAL — Restoring Every Aspect of Life," speaks to the very heart of what we celebrated last week. Recovery is not a single event. It is a journey of healing, growth, and

renewal. It is about restoring dignity, opportunity, and purpose, and building strong connections in our community. Both men are now gainfully employed, and through the support of their families, friends and the staff at the Right Living House, have demonstrated that recovery is real when one is willing to work for it. Their achievements stand as proof that change is possible and that persistence brings reward.

Madam President, over the past year, fifteen (15) inmates enrolled in the Right Living House program. The residents transition through three (3) phases of the programme with increased privileges such as day passes, spiritual passes and work release. In addition to the two graduates this year, we also had two (2) who graduated last September during Recovery Month. The programme also accommodates individuals serving shorter sentences with community supervision to follow, particularly those referred through Drug Treatment Court. In the last year, the Department of Corrections recruited five staff members for the Right Living House – a programme manager, an aftercare coordinator, two addictions counsellors and one junior addictions counsellor. I had the pleasure of meeting the staff during my visit, and cannot commend them highly enough for their dedication to the wellbeing and recovery of their charges. Visitors were given a tour by three inmates who spoke enthusiastically about the programme and the impact it is having on their lives.

Madam President, while there is much to do, there are also reasons to be hopeful. The challenges documented in these reports will not be resolved overnight. However, my Ministry is unwaveringly committed to the path of improvement and the true, meaningful pursuit of restorative justice. We are building a system that prioritises rehabilitation, ensures dignity, and ultimately contributes to a safer Bermuda for all.

Thank you, Madam President.