



MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

by

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

“Corrections Reform: Accountability and Action”

Wednesday, 20th May 2026

Madam President, I rise to table the Report of the Review Panel commissioned by the Government, which covers a comprehensive independent inspection of the Department of Corrections conducted between 6 and 14 October 2025.

Madam President, I want to be candid with this Honourable Senate. The Review Panel Report contains difficult findings. It identifies serious and systemic challenges within our correctional system, particularly at the Westgate Correctional Facility. The Ministry of Justice does not shy away from those findings. We commissioned this review precisely because we believe that accountability is not a sign of weakness, it is a prerequisite

for meaningful reform. We would rather confront the truth than allow problems to persist unchallenged. And that is exactly what this Government intends to do.

Madam President, let me begin where this reform effort begins, with accountability.

The independent review, conducted by a four-person panel of correctional experts drawn from the United Kingdom and the Overseas Territories, assessed all three of our correctional facilities: Westgate, the Co-Educational Facility and the Farm, against the Overseas Territories Detention Standards Framework, which is consistent with the the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules).

Their findings are thorough and welcomed by this Ministry. The report identifies 75 recommendations across four thematic areas: Treatment of Detainees, Living Conditions, Activities and Rehabilitation and Detainee Management. Some of these recommendations require immediate action. Others require sustained investment over time. I give the commitment that all of them will be acted upon.

Within weeks of receiving the Panel Report, the Department of Corrections, working closely with the Ministry and our partners in the United Kingdom, produced a *Post-Inspection Action Plan* that assigns

responsible individuals, timelines and evidential standards to every single one of those 75 recommendations. That Action Plan is now active. Work has already begun.

Madam President, I now wish to address the findings of the independent Panel Report directly, beginning with what is working well.

Because it would be easy, and indeed tempting, to allow the weightier challenges documented in this Report to overshadow the good practice that the panel observed. That would be unfair to our staff and to our system. And it would be dishonest.

The panel found that the Co-Educational Facility and the Farm Facility demonstrated significant good practice, providing what it described as a positive and hopeful regime, underpinned by effective programmes. The Co-Ed Facility was commended for the effective delivery of its intake programme, for the quality and relevance of its communal area materials and for positive staff engagement that reflected genuine good practice. The Farm Facility was recognised for its structured work programmes, including the wood workshop and computer courses which provide practical, purposeful activity that gives inmates skills, dignity and the foundations for a different kind of life.

The panel noted that healthcare provision at Westgate was particularly positive. The medical area is clean, well-maintained and appropriately

equipped. All prisoners are seen by a nurse within 24 hours of arrival, a practice the panel specifically commended as a strong foundation for early identification of health needs. Private consultation spaces are available across all facilities.

The Right Living House Therapeutic Community at the Co-Ed Facility continues to provide structured support for substance misuse, a programme this Government has championed and will continue to support.

The panel also commended the gender-sensitive approach to searches, conducted by same-sex staff in private and with professionalism. It noted that the visit room at Westgate is well-equipped and conducive to safe and respectful interactions. Free lawyer calls, which do not require phone credit, ensure that prisoners can access legal representation without financial barriers, a practice the panel rightly recommended keeping.

Madam President, these are not small things. They reflect the professionalism and commitment of our correctional staff and they deserve to be acknowledged.

Madam President, I turn now to the challenges and I will not minimise them.

The panel found that conditions at the main Westgate facility are, in several areas, not fit for purpose. Additionally, the panel identified notable

inconsistency in policy and practice and highlighted the impact of staff shortages on operations.

The panel found that the complaints process, while formally established, is slow and has lost the confidence of the inmate population. The panel's findings on discipline and record-keeping confirm that the Department of Corrections needs clearer policies, better oversight, stronger management accountability and more consistent application of its own standards.

The panel also identified a lack of structured purposeful activity, particularly for remand prisoners, who currently have access only to the gym and are excluded from work, education and most programmes. This Ministry takes the view that time in custody, at whatever stage of the judicial process, should not be wasted time.

Madam President, the panel was frank about leadership and governance at the senior level within the Department of Corrections. It found that while senior managers demonstrated a strong desire to deliver positive results, there was a lack of visible leadership and insufficient oversight and accountability. This Government accepts that finding. It is not a criticism of individuals in isolation, it is a systems observation and it requires a systems response.

Madam President, I wish to address a specific matter of governance raised both by the Review Panel and independently noted by this Ministry.

The Panel has recommended that the Treatment of Offenders Board be fully removed from the adjudication process. It identifies a conflict of interest inherent in a body that simultaneously monitors prisoner welfare and participates in their discipline. The Board's primary purpose should be the independent monitoring of welfare, the investigation of complaints and the upholding of prisoners' rights.

A formal Classification and Assessment Policy is being developed to ensure that admission procedures, including risk and needs assessments are completed within 72 hours. The adoption of a simplified version of the Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCT) system, already in use in other Overseas Territory prisons, is being progressed, with supporting training materials being provided by His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS).

Madam President, I said at the outset that accountability matters and that work has already begun. Let me now speak to the specifics of what is underway.

The *Post-Inspection Action Plan*, developed jointly by the Executive Leadership of the Department of Corrections and the Prison Officers Association, with direct support from the UK Ministry of Justice, assigns all 75 recommendations a status, a responsible officer, a target date and an evidence standard. The fact that the plan was built collaboratively, with the voices of those who lead our facilities and those who work on the front

line both present at the table, is itself a signal of the kind of reform culture we are building. Recommendations have been prioritised according to urgency.

Madam President, in a further demonstration of this Government's commitment to meeting and exceeding international detention standards, the HMPPS Staff Profiling Team is currently on the ground in Bermuda. Their presence reflects the active and ongoing partnership between the Department of Corrections and the United Kingdom in strengthening the management, capability and professionalism of our Corrections team. This engagement is a positive step in the broader reform programme and signals continued momentum beyond the immediate action plan.

The profiling exercise, being led by specialists from HMPPS, will ensure that staff roles and responsibilities are properly aligned with operational needs and staff capacity. It will produce a report that forms the basis for smarter, more effective workforce deployment across our facilities. This kind of structural rigour is essential if we are to close the gap between the regime we aspire to provide and the regime our staff are currently able to deliver.

This is not the first time UK expertise has been brought to bear on this reform effort. The Ministry has benefited from support in developing the Action Plan itself and in accessing specialist services across a range of

operational areas. We continue to work closely with our UK partners and are grateful for their sustained engagement.

Madam President, the Ministry also continues to work closely with the Executive Leadership team at the Department of Corrections and the Prison Officers Association to execute this work. Our staff are not watching this reform from the sidelines, they are driving it. Their wellbeing, their development and their professional capacity are non-negotiable priorities. The panel's staff survey, conducted during the review, reflected the pressures officers are under. This Ministry heard it. And we are responding to it.

Madam President, I want to return to something the panel said, because it matters.

The panel specifically noted that the Co-Educational and Farm facilities demonstrated what is possible. They represent a model, of purposeful activity, rehabilitative culture, consistent staff engagement and hope, that the Department of Corrections can and must replicate at Westgate. The panel has not presented us with an impossible standard. It has pointed to evidence, already existing within our own system, that a different kind of correctional experience is achievable.

Madam President, let me close with this.

The independent Panel Review report I have laid today documents years of underinvestment and a gap between the standards we are bound to meet and the conditions that have, in some areas, been allowed to persist.

But it is honest. And honesty is the beginning of change.

We have 75 recommendations, a clear action plan and the combined commitment to improve this system. We have staff who, as the panel itself noted, expressed a clear willingness to engage in further training and development. We have programmes at the Farm, at the Co-Ed Facility, in the Right Living House, that prove what is possible. We have a Ministry that is committed to seeing this through, not in a single statement to this Chamber, but in the sustained, essential work of institutional reform. I commit to return to this Senate quarterly, to report on that progress.

Bermuda deserves a correctional system it can be proud of. One that is safe, humane and purposeful. One that does not merely detain people, but genuinely prepares them to return to their families and their communities as better, healthier, more capable individuals. That is the commitment of this Government. And I am determined that we will deliver on it.

Thank you, Madam President.