Government of Bermuda

Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
by:
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Minister of Youth, Social Development and Seniors

2025 – 2026 Annual Report of the Department of Financial Assistance

November 6, 2026

Mr. Speaker,

I rise today to present the Department of Financial Assistance (DFA) Annual Report for 2025 – 2026 to this Honourable House and, in doing so, to report on this Government's continued commitment to standing with Bermudians in their time of need.

In compliance with Section 3(4) of the Financial Assistance Act 2001, the report has been made publicly accessible for viewing. The report covers the fiscal year from 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026.

Mr. Speaker,

This Government believes that a fair and compassionate society is measured by how it supports its most vulnerable – our seniors, persons with disabilities, working families and those facing hardship. During the 2025/26 fiscal year, the Department of Financial Assistance delivered $52.19 million in support through the Financial Assistance Programme, the Child Day Care Allowance Programme and the Short-Term Relief Benefit Programme. That is a significant investment in the wellbeing of Bermudians, and this Annual Report demonstrates that the investment is delivering results.

Highlights of the Report include:

1. Increased support for Bermudians, with total payments across the Financial Assistance, Child Day Care Allowance and Short-Term Relief Benefit programmes rising by 1%.
2. More Bermudians supported, with the average monthly number of persons receiving financial assistance rising by 3% to 2,045.

3. More working families supported, with the average number of children covered by the Child Day Care Allowance Programme rising to 272 per month.
4. Meaningful reform for our seniors, with the pension income excluded from the calculation of financial assistance awards increased from $500 to $800.
5. Greater accessibility, through the introduction of a digital Short-Term Relief Benefit application form.
6. Stronger protection of the public purse, with more than 81,900 transactions monitored and strengthened fraud detection, staff training and compliance.
7. Greater accountability, with outstanding debt arising from investigations reduced by 62%, to $109,881.

Mr. Speaker,

The Ministry is committed to our seniors, and this reform demonstrates that commitment in action. Honourable Members will recall that the Financial Assistance Regulations 2004 were amended to increase the amount of pension income excluded from the calculation of financial assistance awards from $500 to $800. Without this change, an increase in a senior's pension could be offset by a reduction in their financial assistance award. This reform ensures that when this Government increases pension benefits, our seniors feel the benefit – and that those increases translate into real improvements in their quality of life.

Mr. Speaker,

Behind every figure in this report is a Bermudian – a neighbour, a parent, a senior – who has been able to rely on this Government for support. For the fiscal year 2025/26, the average number of persons receiving financial assistance was 2,045 per month, compared to 1,977 in the prior fiscal year. This 3% increase is mainly attributable to growth in the "pensioner" category, which increased by 48 persons, and the "earnings low" category, which increased by 22 persons. Encouragingly, the increase in "earnings low" clients partly reflects individuals moving from the able-bodied unemployed category into employment. That is precisely the outcome this Government seeks: assistance that serves as a bridge to work and greater independence. Pensioners and persons with disabilities continue to represent the largest proportion of financial assistance recipients, and this Government will continue to ensure that they are supported with dignity.

Mr. Speaker,

Total expenditure for the Financial Assistance Programme was $49.58 million, an increase of 1%, or $0.32 million, from $49.26 million in the prior fiscal year. Let me be clear: this increase is primarily attributable to this Government's reform measures, including the increase in the excluded income threshold for pensions and other benefits, which resulted in increased awards for clients, particularly pensioners and persons with disabilities. This is public money directed where it matters most – to

the essentials. The highest items of client expenditure were Rent (28%), Nursing Home fees (18%), FutureCare insurance (15%), Food allowances (15%), the Health Insurance Plan (9%), Rest Home fees (9%) and Medication (6%).

Mr. Speaker,

The Ministry understands that working parents should not have to choose between earning a living and ensuring their children are well cared for. The monthly average number of children covered by the Child Day Care Allowance in 2025/26 was 272, compared to 265 in the prior fiscal year. This represents an increase of 7 children, or approximately 5%. The Programme helps parents remain in employment while ensuring that their children have access to quality early childhood care – an investment in both today's workforce and the next generation of Bermudians.

Mr. Speaker,

Life can change in an instant, and unexpected hardship can affect any family. That is why the Short-Term Relief Benefit was introduced under the Financial Assistance (Short-Term Relief Benefit) Act 2024, providing eligible persons experiencing sudden and unforeseen financial hardship with temporary assistance of up to $1,500 per month, for a maximum of three months. During the fiscal year, payments under the Programme totalled $20,000, awarded to eight recipients. We want every Bermudian who qualifies to know that this support exists and to be able to access it with ease. That is why, effective 1st February 2026, the Department introduced a digital application form for the STRB, enabling persons to apply online, while manual application forms remain available for those who are unable to access or complete the online application. The Ministry will continue to review the Programme to ensure that it is accessible to, and meets the needs of, those it was designed to support.

Mr. Speaker,

This Government is equally committed to ensuring that every dollar of public money is spent appropriately and reaches those who genuinely need it. During 2025/26, transaction monitoring was performed on 81,905 line transactions within the Financial Assistance System Software and the Government's financial system, to ensure compliance with the Department's legislation. The Department's investigative officers received, on average, nine tips per month. The Department also finalized the documentation of its fraud typologies and delivered related training to all staff, providing officers with a standardized framework to identify fraud patterns, emerging trends and potential red flags. This initiative is expected to strengthen early detection and prevention and reduce the incidence of overpayments.

Mr. Speaker,

Those who abuse the financial assistance system take from those who need it most, and this Government will not tolerate it. The Department works closely with the

Attorney General's Chambers to recover overpayments made as a result of fraud and abuse. During the reporting period, sixteen client cases valued at approximately $82,996 were referred to the Attorney General's Chambers for legal restitution. I am pleased to report that outstanding debt arising from investigations was reduced by 62%, to $109,881 – a clear demonstration of accountability in action.

Mr. Speaker,

Financial assistance is about more than payments; it is about people. The Department's Financial Assistance Social Workers continued to streamline internal processes and improve the delivery of social services. They reinforced and expanded collaboration with government departments and community partners, including social workers at King Edward VII Memorial Hospital, Ageing and Disability Services, the Salvation Army and the Department of Health. Their work includes case conferences, referrals, individual counselling, support for overseas medical transfers, and site visits to rest and nursing homes, helping to ensure that clients are served in safe and healthy environments and receive quality care.

Mr. Speaker,

Throughout the year, the Department ensured that all financial assistance, child day care allowance and short-term relief benefit clients were serviced without interruption and in adherence to its legislative and policy framework. On behalf of the Government and the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors, I extend my sincere thanks to the Director and the dedicated staff of the Department of Financial Assistance, and to all of our partners. Their commitment ensures that Bermudians in need can access essential support to maintain a minimum standard of living.

Mr. Speaker,

This Government's vision is clear. Financial assistance must be a pathway to independence – a bridge to gainful and sustainable employment – and a safety net that protects our seniors, persons with disabilities and families with dignity. We will continue to advance financial assistance reform, expand access through digital services and strengthen the integrity of our programmes, so that support reaches those who need it most. This Government will continue to put the needs of Bermudians first.

Mr. Speaker,

The Department of Financial Assistance 2025 – 2026 Annual Report is available online at gov.bm, and hard copies will be available at the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors Headquarters, Veritas Place, 6th Floor, 65 Court Street, Hamilton, and at the Department of Financial Assistance, Global House, 1st Floor, 43 Church Street, Hamilton.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.