



Cayman Islands Government

STATEMENT TO
THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
BY
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HOUSING

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Statement to the Legislative Assembly by
Minister of Health, Environment, Culture and Housing,
Hon. Dwayne S. Seymour, MLA, JP.

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Ministers and Members of this Honourable House,

Good afternoon,

I rise to share with you some recent notable achievements by the Ministry of Health, Environment, Culture and Housing.

Over the last several months we have taken decisions and begun the implementation of projects that, going forward, will shape the future of physical and mental healthcare all for persons within our Islands—including those aged 65 and over.

As many of you will be aware we have also made some headway recently on the very important area of environmental health.

Given the venue for our discussion today I would like to begin by reporting on where we are with two very important pieces of legislation.

We are about to begin a 60 day consultation period on the first, which speaks to the decisions that patients and their families must make surrounding the sensitive topic of end of life care and treatment. The other adds regulations to already-existing legislation, that aims to facilitate the ability to transplant donated human tissue, and is set for imminent implementation.

With regards to the first of these, earlier this spring Cabinet approved a 60 day consultation period for the Health Care Decisions Bill 2018. My Ministry is set to begin this project immediately, pending approval the consultation plan currently before Cabinet.

I would like to say a few words here about the reason we believe this legislation is so important. At the annual Health Care Conference three years ago, at the end of a session on the same subject, stakeholders expressed the need to develop appropriate legislation and guidelines. They felt this would allow medical professionals and family members to uphold patients' expressed preferences about their treatment and end of life decisions.

We currently have no such legislation in place. As a result healthcare providers face many difficulties with families and caregivers of patients, who are unable to make decisions for themselves or whose preference for treatment cannot be honoured.

The bill is the outcome of substantial work over the past year by the team within my ministry and by a committee, chaired by our Chief Officer, comprised of all relevant healthcare stakeholders.

A second key public consultation is already complete and focused on fine-tuning already-existing legislation concerning human tissue transplant and donation. This is all in preparation for the law which regulates this process to take effect.

Earlier this year Cabinet approved and the Ministry undertook a 60 day public consultation period for the draft Human Tissue Transplant and Donation Regulations. This was preceded by work by a Review Committee to finalise these documents for public consultation and Cabinet consideration.

During the consultation period, members of the public were in full support of the legislation. They particularly supported the Cayman Islands joining an overseas organ donation network, whereby our patients would gain priority on other international registries.

Work on this has been ongoing for some time and spanned many previous administrations. In 2010 another Review Committee developed legislation to allow for human organ and tissue transplants to be performed in the Cayman Islands, which was eventually passed by this house three years later. That team built on the work of another committee established in 2005 by the then Ministry of Health.

Given the painstaking pace of progress in this area we are excited that we are now in the process of taking the final steps to prepare the Cayman Islands for the imminent implementation of the Human Tissue Transplant and Donation Law and Regulations.

Some noteworthy measures called for by the legislation, and which the public will soon notice, include the creation of a Human Tissue Transplant Council. This body will monitor the donation of tissue by living persons, and the removal of tissue from deceased persons. It will also regulate the collection and use of human tissue for medical, commercial, and incidental or connected purposes.

We are all aware that transplants of human organs and tissues can save lives and improve health. Having this legislative framework in place is an essential first step towards establishing an organ donation registry in the Cayman Islands.

As such I would to personally thank all stakeholders from the Ministry, the Health Services Authority, as well as our professional and community partners, who have worked to progress both pieces of legislation to this point.

The process of seeking input from the people of the Cayman Islands that makes their wishes clear, is something that further enriches our understanding of these important topics. I believe it will stand us in good stead as we progress both pieces of legislation to their natural next steps.

While we are on the topic of healthcare I would like to take this opportunity to offer up kudos for recent sterling work done by the National Working Group on Anti-Microbial Resistance, known as the One Health Group. This interdisciplinary team led by the Public Health Department recently held their second annual symposium.

The conference brings together local, regional and international experts to share with each other information and best practice on how we can combat the scourge of anti-microbial resistance in humans and animals. I understand that attendance grew by more than 60% this year over 2017.

The local effort is part of a larger collaboration amongst the global healthcare community, led by the World Health Organisation.

Standing on the podium to address the audience, it gave me considerable reassurance to look out and be aware that some of the brightest minds in our local community are dedicating themselves, to tackling this serious issue and other related matters.

Among other relevant topics discussed at the conference were climate change, health reporting by the media and social concepts surrounding the integrated approach that One Health promotes.

Mr. Speaker, I turn next to the area of mental health—which we can all attest is every bit as important as physical well-being. You may know that a few months back we received planning approval for the long term residential mental health facility.

This development will allow Caymanians in need of long term mental health care to finally be able to receive such treatment within our shores. You may not yet be aware that more recently still, we received approval from the Central Tenders Committee to pre-qualify the successful bidders for construction of this much-needed facility.

With construction of the facility expected to commence this fall, the project team which is led by my Ministry anticipates a very busy summer, as we look to move forward with this much needed project.

Another demographic on whose unique concerns I am glad to report we have been able to make progress, is our population of some 4,000 persons aged 65 and over.

You may be aware that the Department of Health Regulatory Services and the Health Insurance Commission have been working with a Canadian firm. Their objective is to investigate the feasibility of the Cayman Islands introducing a health insurance plan that targets the specific needs of seniors.

This work included a public consultation with all stakeholders on the subject, which took place in March and April. In addition a 22-question survey sought to gauge general public opinion on the need for such a specialized plan and was available online and in print.

I am pleased to say that we received close to 900 responses from the community and very high quality information from healthcare providers and insurance vendors.

The consultants are set to produce an interim report next month that will use input from the consultation and other measures, to determine a suitable schedule of benefits for the local environment. It will also produce an actuarially determined health insurance premium rate for persons aged 65 and older. A final report is expected in the fall which will be made public.

With this information in hand the Cayman Islands Government should be able to take the best informed decision possible on how we can provide current and future seniors, with cost-effective and cost-efficient healthcare that affords them the best possible quality of life.

Mister Speaker, Members of this Honourable House will know that I am equally passionate about the need to address some of the issues we are facing in regards to the health of our children and youth, and my concerns about some of the barriers that families may be facing in

accessing healthcare for this important cohort of our population. Once the feasibility study for the older persons health insurance is completed, the next area that I plan to turn my Ministry's attention to is that of affordable, accessible healthcare for our children and youth.

As Members of this Honourable House, we hear too often about the challenges that families are facing with health care for the children and youth, and the concerns regarding the affordability of that care and their health insurance. Mister Speaker, every one of us knows that chronic non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes and hypertension, are a huge burden on our health system – not just in terms of costs, but the negative impacts they have on our quality of life. The incidence of chronic non-communicable diseases has been increasing across all ages, and I believe one of the keys to reversing that trend is to invest in preventative care for our youth. By building healthy habits from the very youngest age, and ensuring that our children and youth are getting regular access to preventative care, I believe Mister Speaker that we can turn the tide. We need to invest in our children's health now, Mister Speaker, to improve the health of the Cayman Islands in the future.

In the fall of this year, I plan to convene a multi-stakeholder task force to make recommendations to the Government on how we might proceed to address some of these issues and ensure a healthy future for our Cayman Islands. I will look forward to updating the Members of this Honourable House as this important work progresses.

Staying with the subject of youth, and the important role our young people have to play in securing a healthy and sustainable future for our beloved Cayman Islands, I would like to take this opportunity to share two recent interactions I was fortunate enough to have with some of our amazing young people.

Many will be aware of the increasing concerns regarding plastic pollution globally, and some of the fantastic work that is being done to raise awareness and encourage consumers to make individual choices to help minimize this problem. As a country of three islands, Mister Speaker, we are particularly susceptible to the impacts of plastic pollution from outside our borders. I'm sure everyone here has had an experience along our beautiful shoreline that was sullied by plastic that had washed ashore. While the plastic pollution we see on our beaches has mostly been caused by actions of others far away, we have a duty, Mister Speaker, to ensure that we are taking steps to minimize our contribution to this problem.

On World Ocean Day, I had the pleasure of meeting with students from a number of schools from across the island who gathered on the steps of the Government Administration Building to present me with their letters imploring the government to take steps to address plastic pollution. Ranging from the youngest children in reception to high school students, these children and youth were united in their desire to see the Cayman Islands take positive and tangible steps to address this issue. Mister Speaker, I am still working my way through all the letters that the students gave me that day, but I have to say that I have been very impressed by their level of knowledge and their passion for the cause.

I also had an opportunity that week to meet with some students who had done a school research project on how to deal with impacts from sargassam and whether it could be used as a fertiliser. I was very impressed, Mister Speaker, with the level of research the students had done and their application of the scientific method in their experiment. Their curiosity and critical thinking were remarkable.

I have to say, Mister Speaker, that after my interactions with the young people that week, I was left with a real sense of optimism and hope for the future. The passion, curiosity, and commitment to make things better are qualities that I hope these young people will continue to embrace as they move forward in their lives.

On the topic of sargassum, Mister Speaker, I am sure that all the Members of this Honourable House are aware of the apparent increased incidence of this aquatic plant arriving on our shores. While this is not a new issue, this year it seems that we are seeing increasing amounts of sargassum on our beaches and waterways.

The Department of Environment issued some guidelines in 2015, however the scale of the issue has increased over the last couple of years and we are now experiencing problems in our canals and coastal embayments, which is creating further environmental problems due to oxygen depletion in the water column.

While it is something of a nuisance when it reaches our shores, sargassum is a natural part of the oceanic system and provides habitat for over 120 species of fish and crustaceans as well as juvenile turtles, so any proposals to remove sargassum from the sea, before it reaches our shores, will need to be carefully thought through.

The accumulation of sargassum on our shores and in our waterways, and how best to deal with its removal, are going to be considered by a multi-stakeholder committee being convened by the Department of Environment this week. Representatives from the DoE, Planning Department, Department of Tourism, Department of Agriculture, the Recreation Parks and Cemeteries Unit of Public Works and my Ministry will be getting together to discuss a coordinated response and set of protocols to deal with this issue. This sort of cross-government collaboration is essential to identifying and implementing sustainable practices to address this issue, and I want to take this opportunity to thank my fellow Cabinet colleagues for supporting their technical staff coming together to address this issue.

The final area that I want to cover today is environmental health. I would like to begin with a few words about the Integrated Solid Waste Management Systems project.

As most of us know CIG and the Decco Consortium are continuing negotiations through the list of technical, financial and legal reserve matters, that need to be resolved before the contract for this project can be finalised. This is expected to take until the end of the year.

I understand the frustration that some members of the public have expressed concerning the pace of these negotiations. Yet I must point out that we are obligated to ensure that the Government and people of the Cayman Islands receive the best possible value for money, and will take every step necessary to do this. It is of the utmost importance that we get this matter right before the contract is signed – I believe it is time well invested.

I want to further reiterate that the new waste management facilities depend on the completion of an environmental impact assessment (or EIA), as per National Conservation Council directives. Accordingly the Decco Consortium has been working on a draft terms of reference for this assessment in tandem with contract negotiations. Once the Environmental Assessment Board approves the release of the draft terms of reference, these must also undergo public consultation. Members of the public will be invited to attend meetings to review and discuss the draft terms of reference, and I encourage everyone to take advantage of the opportunity to participate in this important component of the project process. Mister Speaker, details of these meetings will be published in the media as soon as the dates have been confirmed.

In addition to an acceptable EIA is completed, planning approval must be in place before any construction work starts. It is hoped that planning approval will be received by the first quarter of 2019. It should be noted that even if negotiations are complete at this point, the contract cannot be finalised until both the EIA is completed and planning approval is received, as both of these may impose conditions on the proposed system.

Of course the highly desirable end goal to which we are all working is that, when awarded, there will be a long-term, 25-year, design, build, finance, operate and maintain contract in place, between CIG and the Decco Consortium. The outcome of this will be a historic transformation of solid waste management across these three Cayman Islands.

On this note, Mister Speaker, I am pleased to end by informing members of this Honourable House that we are very, very close to the end of the tyre shredding project. Shredding has been ongoing at the George Town Landfill for just over a year. Accordingly I hope to soon

invite you all to watch the last tyre from the stockpile being placed on the shredder, and I will look forward to sharing that moment with you.

This brief ceremony will mark the removal of an unsightly and potentially dangerous waste product that for many years took up considerable space at our current landfill. The tyres have now been recycled to be productively re-used elsewhere. We estimate that the shredding process has already produced 6500 metric tonnes of material, or the equivalent of 650,000 tires. Of these approximately 5000 tonnes have already been recycled and used in a local residential development, rather than having to fill with aggregate. The rest will be used in the proposed integrated solid waste management system.

Esteemed colleagues I am pleased to have been able to summarise for you some of the areas that my Ministry has been able to progress over the past few months, and on which you can expect to hear more of in the months ahead. I would like to thank all the staff of the ministry and relevant departments, so ably led by Chief Officer Jennifer Ahearn.

They have worked very hard and made many sacrifices to ensure that this work is able to go forward in as timely a way as possible. I want them to know that their contributions are much appreciated.

I also want to note that while the work that I have reported here is mainly focused on health and environmental health, that there are other projects ongoing and upcoming in the areas of the environment, culture and housing. By the time we meet next I should have more news on these areas that I am able to share with you.

Mister Speaker, in the months ahead I look forward to continuing collaboration with the team within my ministry for the advancement of all areas under our remit and the wellbeing of people in the Cayman Islands.

Thank you Mister Speaker.

