



Cayman Islands Government

STATEMENT TO
THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
BY
HONOURABLE MOSES KIRKCONNELL, JP
DEPUTY PREMIER AND MINISTER FOR
DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION, TOURISM
AND TRANSPORT

OCTOBER 2020

Tourism Stipend Programme for Displaced Employees

Mister Speaker, it has been seven months since it became necessary to close our borders to international travel due to the global pandemic. Cruise ship calls were ceased on 16 March and international passenger flights were stopped a week later, on 23 March 2020.

With no stayover or cruise business on Island, tourist-reliant industries have been hit hard. In addition, workers employed in the tourism and hospitality sectors have had no viable means of supporting themselves and their families.

With the agreement of my colleagues in Caucus and Cabinet, the Ministry of Tourism initially funded stipends of \$600 to approximately 767 individuals. Following this initial payment, the Ministry of Tourism encouraged Caymanians who worked in the tourism sector and had no other means of income, to register with us to receive a stipend of \$1,000 per month for a period of three months. A total of 2626 individuals were verified to receive this payment.

With support from Caucus and Cabinet, the tourism stipend programme was subsequently extended for a further three months from July to September.

Mister Speaker, the Government has taken the decision to further extend the tourism stipend from October to December 2020. In order to action those payments the Ministry requires supplementary funding to be approved in this Finance Committee.

I am very grateful to my Government colleagues for their agreement in allowing my Ministry to be considered first on Monday. Once approval has been granted, I can assure this Honourable House that we will do everything possible to process the payments and release the stipends on Wednesday of next week.

While we are mindful of the needs of those who are reliant on these funds as a source of income, and we regret the delay in effecting the payments, we also have a duty to ensure that the Ministry remains in compliance with the Law.

This new vote for supplementary funding is in the amount of CI\$9M and should be sufficient to take the programme through to the end of this year.

In the meantime, Government will continue to take a balanced approach with respect to reviewing the needs of the tourism industry, in tandem with maintaining our economy and keeping our Islands safe. It is fair to say that my goal between now and the first quarter of 2021 is to protect the people and businesses that service the industry, till tourism can safely resume and is in a position to stand on its own.

The tourism industry typically contributes 25-30% to the country's GDP so the impact from its sudden unexpected demise cannot be understated. But with that said, I am incredibly proud of the fact that years of strong economic performance and prudent financial management by this government, has enabled the Government to step in and provide assistance where it is needed most.

The members of this Honourable House may not be aware that the range of initiatives implemented through the Ministry of Tourism since March of this year extends beyond the provision of stipends.

It is worth noting that micro, small, medium and large enterprises in the tourism value chain are being supported in a number of ways because it is recognized that in time, they will be part of the driving force behind the industry's recovery.

When that time comes, businesses will need skilled employees to operate effectively. Consequently, programmes are being developed in partnership with WORC, UCCI and the School of Hospitality Studies to upskill our people to give them the best possible chance to join the tourism industry and flourish when it reopens.

- Sign up for the Department of Tourism's PRIDE webinars;
- Register with WORC for assistance with employment and educational courses;
- Learn about the different areas to work within the sector, such as accommodations, dive, restaurants, etc., and sign up for tourism courses with University College of The Cayman Islands.

Government remains committed to helping and supporting all displaced workers, as well as to the needs of businesses that have been negatively impacted by this pandemic; not just those that are tourism based.

Given that the COVID pandemic has affected every sector in our community; all sectors of government have looked at ways to provide assistance, to alleviate the pressures being felt by our people.

By way of example, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, working in collaboration with local retail banks, has led the development of an economic stimulus programme which provides tourism businesses with access to low interest loans. As well as the repayments being deferred for one year, Government is also guaranteeing a percentage of the loan.

The Ministry of Commerce has also spearheaded three programmes to assist small, medium and micro businesses.

At the start of this year no-one could have predicted how life would change on a global scale, or how deeply our tourism industry and economy would become affected, virtually overnight. In the face of unprecedented adversity this Governments response to the crisis has been exemplary and has protected lives and safeguarded our islands from the worst ravages of the coronavirus. In much the same way, the variety of relief packages and assistance programs and initiatives that this Government continues to put in place clearly demonstrates that this

is a caring Government that puts the needs of our people first and can be depended on in good times and bad.

Thankyou Mister Speaker.

ENDS