

**HONOURABLE PREMIER
JULIANA O'CONNOR-CONNOLLY**

**SPEAKING NOTES FOR THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE ONE-TIME EX-GRATIA
PAYMENT TO PENSIONERS**

10 DECEMBER 2024

Mister Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I am announcing today, that the Government has approved a one-time ex-gratia payment of \$500, which will be paid to each Public Service Pensioner during the month of December. This special payment is made in recognition of the significant contributions retired public servants have made to building these beloved Islands. As has occurred in past years, this payment will be made to pensioners via the Public Service Pensions Board.

This programme is fully funded by savings realised elsewhere within the Government's existing HR budget. These HR savings were realised as a result of prudent financial management by the Deputy Governor and his team of Chief Officers. This expense is therefore budget neutral in 2024, whilst providing much needed relief for retired public servants.

Mister Speaker, you may recall that last Christmas the Government approved a payment of \$250, for each pensioner. This year, the Government has been able to double that amount, taking into account increasing pressures on pensioners' purchasing power.

As we enter the holiday season, it is fitting that we remember the past sacrifices of this group of older persons, most of whom devoted lengthy careers in service to the people of these Islands. As the Cayman Islands are glistening with holiday lights and families prepare to gather, we have an opportunity to reflect upon the sterling contributions of past public servants, who devoted themselves to building these beloved Cayman Islands, that we all cherish today.

The recipients of this stipend, contributed to the advancement of the Cayman Islands in ways too numerous to list exhaustively. As a former educator myself and the proud minister of Education, it would be remiss of me not to cite the contributions of former teachers, from our primary schools to the Truman Bodden Law School. The contributions of our past teachers continue to bear fruit for this country today. They equipped successive generations of Caymanians with the knowledge necessary to lift themselves and their families out of poverty and to participate in Cayman's thriving economy as employees or even as being employers. They equipped Cayman's leaders with the knowledge and character to take this country forward, including myself and all of my learned colleagues in this Honorable Parliament, including you Mister Speaker.

These men and women included retired firemen and police officers, who throughout their service ran into the face of danger whenever called upon to keep our community safe. It represents men and women, ranging from those who have fought valiantly to protect our borders, to those who have work collaboratively with elected officials in order to realise their visions for taking this country forward, by delivering policies, programmes and services which Make Lives Better across the Cayman Islands.

It is hoped that this small token of financial assistance, as the holidays approach, will give these former stewards who are now contending with fixed incomes, some comfort in knowing that their contributions are not forgotten. The Government is therefore happy to offer this one-off payment of \$500 to retired public servants participating in the Public Service Pensions Plan, in order to lessen their financial concerns during the holidays and to ably demonstrate the country's gratitude for their past service.

Mister Speaker, I should also note, public service pensioners also receive inflation protection automatically in their annual pensions in accordance with the Public Service Pensions Act. Since 2022, pensioners have received a cumulative total increase of 15.5% through annual inflation adjustments, which has partially offset the total inflation experienced in the Cayman Islands over the 3-year period, as measured in the Consumer Price Index by the Economics and Statistics Office.

Retirees rely upon a mere portion of the salaries they earned during their active careers. Regrettably, while all face a reduced income, their expenses do not always decrease proportionately. This means for so many pensioners, every month comes with its own set of difficult financial decisions. It is hoped that built-in inflation adjustments funded within the Plan and the Government's one-off Christmas payment, will allow our public service pensioners to live with modest dignity and the knowledge that their contributions are remembered and highly cherished.

Therefore, Mister Speaker, this one-time ex-gratia payment, which is expected to benefit more than 2,500 existing pensioners within the Public Service Pensions Plan, will hopefully create some added capacity for our valued pensioners to enjoy the holidays.

I would like to use this opportunity to thank the members of my Government for their unanimous support of this payment and to the management and staff of the Public Service Pensions Board for facilitating this much needed support for our pensioners at Christmas.

Thank you, Mister Speaker and may God continue to bless our beloved Cayman Islands and those who have served it faithfully during their active careers!