



**Statement by
the Honourable Minister for Social Development and Innovation**

Statement on Public Safeguarding Legislation

**Fifth Meeting of the 2025-2026 Session of Parliament
30 April, 2026**

Mister Speaker,

Thank you for granting me the opportunity to address this Honourable House and the broader Cayman Islands community. Today, I rise to speak about safeguarding vulnerable persons in our population, particularly children.

Children are the future of our islands, but they are also the heartbeat of our community today. This Government has a collective wish for the children of our islands: For every child to be safe, to achieve their maximum potential and to thrive. We want our children to grow up in a community that protects them from harm. Mister Speaker, too many of our children do not get to live out this wish. They do not get to experience life the same way as others due to factors outside of their control.

As parents, we have the same wish for ALL children in the country as we would for our very own.

Mister Speaker, there has been a rise in sexual offences being committed in this Country which is gravely concerning in and of itself. However, when I consider that the majority of these crimes are perpetrated against children, the most innocent and vulnerable members of our community, then this problem reaches a new height of urgency.

Earlier this month, the Royal Cayman Islands Police Service ("**RCIPS**") released their annual crime and traffic statistics report. Sexual offenses increased by 20% in 2025 to 125 and analysis showed that 58% of the victims were children – with most, but not all of them being female children. This is a painfully upsetting trend in the wrong direction, Mister Speaker.

Commissioner Walton highlighted the level of priority that the RCIPS will be placing on combating the increase in sexual offenses being committed in these Islands.

I commend the RCIPS, the Department of Children and Family Services and all other child safeguarding agencies for the incredible work they do every day; however, the entire Cayman Islands Government must find a way to do more, to quickly and effectively address this issue.

We cannot let our children continue to experience such crimes.

Mister Speaker, my team in the Ministry of Social Development and Innovation have been working very closely this year with their colleagues across the civil service to clearly understand the gaps in policy and legislation that currently exist.

Last week Monday, the team made up primarily of the Ministry of Social Development and Innovation, the Ministry of District Administration and Home Affairs, the Royal Cayman Islands Police Service and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecution presented their findings and recommendations to us as a Government and, I can tell you without fear of contradiction, the room was stunned by the data and the extent of the crimes.

Mister Speaker, as much emphasis and concern as we rightfully place on tackling robberies and gun crime in this country – Members in this House and the general public may be surprised to know that in the last five years the number of sexual offenses committed in the Cayman Islands were more than double the number of robberies or firearm-related offenses. In fact, in multiple years during that period, the number of sexual offenses committed in this country were greater than both robberies and firearm-related offences **combined**.

Mister Speaker, during that same presentation the team highlighted key inconsistencies that exist within our Penal Code and our sentencing guidelines which result in charges and sentencing for pedophiles and sexual predators being less severe than what would be appropriate for the heinous crimes they have committed.

Even when they are held to account for longer periods of incarceration, the ability for the Department of Community Rehabilitation and RCIPS to monitor these offenders on Sexual Harm Prevention Orders is limited, given various gaps in policy and legislation.

Mister Speaker, the Government heard the call for action loud and clear, and we moved to act immediately. I am happy to announce that Cabinet has approved a working group to be established to review the existing legislative landscape to address sexual offences, including offences in the digital and online spaces and for necessary bespoke legislation to be developed for consideration of the Cabinet, and upon approval, this Honourable House.

This legislative reform will also meaningfully move the needle for us to be able to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions and to reduce the risk of repeated offences against the same or other children in the community.

Minister Speaker, following the efforts of this working group, it is our intention to consult the opposition and the broader community as we understand and acknowledge that this cannot be resolved without a collective approach.

Mister Speaker, given the responsibility that I have for the safeguarding of children through the Ministry of Social Development and Innovation and the Department of Children and Family Services, I have asked my colleagues in Cabinet to support this initiative as a priority, which was unanimously supported, particularly by the Honourable Attorney General who will ultimately be tasked with bringing the Draft Bill to Parliament under the remit of his Portfolio.

We know, Mister Speaker, that policy alone cannot solve problems. We must create and implement effective solutions, we must look at the real data, and we must equip the teams on the frontline.

We are seeing patterns that demand our attention. For instance, we see that the children who are in care settings are experiencing additional challenges, such as absconding. There have been **over 200** such incidents last year alone. These incidents place children at greater risk of experiencing sexual offences.

This signals that something deeper is wrong.

And when we examine these cases, we see something we cannot ignore: Adults and young adults, some significantly older, are targeting young girls, primarily, who are at heightened risk for exploitation. Let's be honest. If these were our own sons or daughters, we would not hesitate. **We would act!** And we must bring that same urgency to every child across our Islands.

Let us speak plainly in this Honourable House.

This is not misguided behaviour. This is exploitation. This is abuse, and this is RAPE!!!

Mister Speaker, important work has already begun that is aligned with our Broad Outcome of **Health and Social Development** — work focused on safeguarding vulnerable people and strengthening the systems that protect them.

We are advancing legislative reform through the Children’s Act, which is on schedule to be commenced this year following the finalization of the necessary Regulations.

We are strengthening our international commitments through efforts to ratify to conventions designed to protect children from exploitation and abuse.

We are reviewing and enhancing our National Child Safeguarding Framework.

We have substantially increased resources for the Children and Youth Services Foundation to make sure that children in care have access to the support they need.

And Mister Speaker, we are improving coordination through the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and initiatives such as Operation Philomena — shifting our approach from simply responding to missing children, to understanding vulnerability, risk, and harm.

Mister Speaker, since I have been elected to this Honourable House and even more since I have had direct responsibility for Social Development, I have heard enough to know that there is a need for change in these Islands to better protect vulnerable populations.

The efforts that have been made by Departments and Ministries across the Civil Service are often extraordinary and I want to take a moment to commend the civil servants who 'move mountains' in order to protect and support victims of sexual and violent offences. But that should not be the norm and it certainly is not sustainable for exceptional effort to be necessary to achieve the goal that we all want, for every child to be safe, to achieve their maximum potential and to thrive.

To this end, Mister Speaker, this Government is taking a significant step forward by prioritising the work to fill the gaps that exist to safeguarding children. I have no doubt that the proposed Bill resulting from the efforts of this multi-agency working group, will be robust and I am confident that it will earn support from all Members of Parliament.

In addition to that, Mister Speaker, I also want to assure my colleagues across the aisle, as well as the listening public that the necessary resources to properly implement the legislation and to bolster the day-to-day capabilities of the safeguarding agencies to protect our children will be evaluated, so that adequate funding can be allocated.

We are moving as a Government and now we must move as a Parliament and as a Country to ensure we are doing all that we can to safeguard our children and our future.

Thank you, Mister Speaker.