

## **Parliament Statement**

**Deputy Governor Franz Manderson**

**Chair, Cayman Islands Child Safeguarding Board**

**Thursday, 30 April, 2026**

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**Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of this Honourable House,**

I rise today not only in my capacity as Deputy Governor, but as Chair of the Cayman Islands Child Safeguarding Board, to address an issue that demands our full and undivided attention: the protection of our children.

I applaud the Honourable Minister for Social Development for his statement outlining the grave concern for the safety of our children. Minister Speaker I know it is unusual for two members of the Government to give Statements on the same subject – but I cannot think of a subject that is more important than safeguarding our children.

Mr Speaker there are moments in public service when we must pause and ask ourselves not what we have achieved, but what we are willing to confront.

**This is one of those moments.**

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Mr. Speaker,

Many of us in this Honourable House were raised in communities where neighbours knew each other, where children were not invisible, and where, if something was wrong, someone stepped forward.

I reflect, personally, on a life shaped by discipline, service, and community; values instilled not only by family, but by a society that understood its shared responsibility for its young people.

That sense of collective duty... that quiet, watchful care is something we must not lose.

Because today, the reality is this:

**Too many of our children are not safe.**

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Mr. Speaker,

I have been the Chair of the Cayman Islands Child Safeguarding Board since its inception in 2016. The membership of this Board consists of Chief Officers and leaders from across the civil service. We come together because, while this work has never been easy, it has always been important and cannot be addressed by one entity alone.

When we started this Board, I reflected on how we were stepping up and enhancing our child protection structure. We wanted to ensure that social workers, policy and other professionals were communicating at the highest level to ensure that everything that could be done was being done to protect our children.

In this time, we have been able to truly begin to understand that extent of the child safeguarding concerns in our community. Mr. Speaker, the issues are graver than I had imagined. Mr Speaker the statistics provided by the Minister in his statement must concern all of us.

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Mr Speaker In 2017, the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (“**MASH**”) was established. This intentional decision brought together the Department of Children and Family Services, the Royal Cayman Islands Police Service, the Health Services Authority and the Department of Education Services to safeguard children.

Since the inception of the MASH, we have seen significant increases in awareness and reporting. In 2017, 490 child safeguarding reports were received; 747 in 2018 and 1,036 in 2019. Since then, child safeguarding reports have continued to increase and in 2025, 2,773 reports were received.

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Mr. Speaker,

The data before us paints a sobering picture.

We can take some encouragement in the fact that more people are coming forward; that awareness is growing. Professionals and community members are noticing that children are having experiences they should not have and those people are stepping up to report it so that action can be taken.

This means that our efforts to increase awareness in the Cayman Islands and equip professionals across the civil service and other key organisations to identify child safeguarding concerns are working. Mr Speaker allow me highlight a case to this honorable house. Mr Speaker recently a member of our library team witnessed a child attend the library during school hours and remain all day – Mr Speaker a report was made to MASH and as a result of that a serious child

guarding case was brought to light- Mr Speaker that is an excellent example of what can happen when we train our people, and shine the light on an issue.

But we must not mistake increased reporting for resolution.

Because alongside these numbers is a deeper, more troubling truth:

**We are still not seeing everything.**

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Mr. Speaker, as the picture of child safeguarding becomes clearer to those of us who work to address it every day, it is evident that protecting our children will require the commitment and efforts of each and every person in our islands.

Child safeguarding, at its core, is both simple and profound. Mr Speaker the Elected Government and the Civil Service will do our part. However, it is every person's responsibility to ensure that we do no harm to children, and that we do everything within our power to protect them from harm.

It requires us to recognise risk, **to listen, truly listen** to children, and to act decisively when their safety is threatened.

It requires us to identify the signs that indicate when a child is not okay and to report these concerns so that the appropriate safeguards can be put in place.

It is not theoretical.

It is not abstract.

It is immediate, and it is urgent.

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Mr. Speaker,

Safeguarding is often spoken of as a system.

But it is more than a simple system. **It is a network of human responsibility.**

And right now, that network is under strain.

We are seeing the same families come to the attention of multiple agencies, often over generations.

We are intervening, but too often, we are intervening late.

We are responding, but much do better in preventing.

It is as if we are standing at the edge of a river, pulling children out, one by one — but not yet walking far enough upstream to understand why they are falling in.

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In addition to the efforts outlined by the Minister with responsibility for Social Development, as a civil service, Mr. Speaker, we have been reviewing our own effectiveness to be able to safeguard children through the Cayman Islands Child Safeguarding Board. We are reviewing the approach that all agencies involved are taking to understand where intervention could have taken place sooner or more effectively.

We are taking steps to make sure that we do better the next time.

This is critical to making sure that we improve our response.

But what we are also learning in this process is that someone else may have known sooner than it ever came to any agency.

As a community we could have done more.

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**This is why safeguarding cannot be the sole responsibility of one Agency.**

It spans health, education, policing, justice, and social services.

It requires coordination across Ministries and Departments.

It demands accountability across Statutory Authorities and Government entities.

And beyond government, it calls upon every member of our society.

**This is a national responsibility. And we must all be a part of the solution.**

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I commend the Cabinet and the established multi-agency working group for their efforts to address the gaps in our legislation and in the system.

But as the Minister said, legislation alone will not protect a child.

Frameworks alone will not change a life.

**People will.** Mr Speaker if you are harming children, if you are neglecting our children, if you are having sex with children you need to stop NOW! We are coming for you! stop today!

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We need foster parents who are willing to open not just their homes, but their hearts.

We need our educators to look beyond behaviour, to recognise distress for what it is, and to speak up with courage when something does not feel right.

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We need social workers who are not only deeply committed, but consistently supported, resourced, and equipped for the demanding work we ask of them.

And we must be clear: this is not about criticism, but about responsibility. Every one of our institutions must continue to challenge itself to do better, to learn, to adapt, and to improve. That means sustained and deliberate investment in the Department of Children and Family Services, in education, and in safeguarding systems — ensuring they are not only in place, but truly effective for the children and families who depend on them.

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Mr. Speaker,

We must also confront a cultural shift that is required.

We must move away from minimising harmful behaviours.

We must recognise that what may once have been dismissed or misunderstood must now be clearly identified for what it is.

Abuse must be called abuse. Exploitation must be called exploitation.

And children must be seen, not as problems to be managed, but as individuals to be protected.

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Mr Speaker the Civil Service that I am honored to lead has a proven tract record of working with our elected leaders to solve Cayman’s most vexed issues whether

it is reducing juvenile crime from 77 in 2011 to 15 in 2024 or whether it is reducing burglaries from 777 in 2014 to 209 in 2024. However, we cannot do it alone. We need everyone's help – our children or future deserve our love and protection.

In closing, I wish to acknowledge those on the front lines – our social workers, police officers, educators, healthcare professionals, and civil servants. They carry the weight of this responsibility every day.

They see the realities many of us do not.

And they continue, with resilience and commitment, to serve.

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They cannot do this work alone.

And we, as a people across these Islands, cannot remain at a distance from it.

Because the true strength of any society is not measured solely by its economic performance, its infrastructure, or its global standing — but by how intentionally it prioritises and protects those most at risk, particularly our young people

Minister Speaker, I say to the people of the Cayman Islands:

Your role matters.

The child you notice.

The concern you raise.

The call you make.

These are not small acts — they can alter the course of a life.

We must rebuild a culture where communities are truly connected, where neighbours are attentive, and where no child is ever unseen or unheard. Safeguarding children is not the responsibility of a few — it is the duty of us all.

If you suspect that a child may be at risk, do not hesitate. Report your concern to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub by calling 945-0545 or emailing [MASH@gov.ky](mailto:MASH@gov.ky). If the situation is urgent, call 911 immediately.

In our homes, in our workplaces, and in our communities, each of us has a role to play. And together, we must ensure that every child is safe, protected, and given the chance to thrive.

That is the standard we must set across our three Islands.  
And it is the standard we must now meet - together.

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Thank you, Mr. Speaker.