



Statement on Immigration Reform Implementation on May 1, 2026

Hon. Michael Myles, MP

**Minister for Caymanian Employment and
Immigration**

“May 1 is not just a date on a calendar. It is the day Caymanians take back our rightful place at the centre of our own nation's immigration framework — after decades of waiting, after months of preparation, and after [one of] the most transparent parliamentary process this country has seen on immigration.”

Mr. Speaker,

Today is not routine.

Today is not procedural.

Today is transformational.

This is a moment that future generations will look back and say:

That was when Cayman decided to reset its course.

Because this reform is not just about immigration.

It is about our identity.

It is about our opportunities.

It is about fairness.

And it is about the future of every Caymanian.

1. A Mandate Rooted in Reality

Mr. Speaker,

This reform did not come from theory.

It came from lived experience.

From conversations in our districts.
From young Caymanians returning home with degrees but no doors open to them.
From families asking: “*Where do we fit in our own country?*” And “*Who are we building the country for?*”

Let us be honest about what the NCFC Government inherited:

- A system where **54% of the population is expatriate**, shifting the national balance
- **Between 2015 and 2025, over 9,000 PR permits and 7,098 status grants were issued — 1,518 in 2024 alone**
- Caymanians are facing barriers to employment not just at senior levels—but at entry level positions
- Our government invests approximately **\$40 million on scholarships per year**, alongside tens of millions more in financial and healthcare assistance
- Yet despite that investment, many Caymanians are still finding it challenging

to access meaningful employment and advancement

Mr. Speaker, the truth is simple:

The system stopped working for the very people it was meant to protect, Caymanians.

And so, we remind ourselves:

“Doing nothing would have been the real risk.”

This NCFC Government did not get elected to manage the decline of our people.

We came to correct a course.

Because:

“We have a mandate, a plan, and the courage to act.”

2. Fairness, Not Perfection — The NCFC Philosophy

Mr. Speaker,

Let me say something clearly—because it matters.

The NCFC Government was never about perfection.

We are about fairness.

Because perfection delays action.

Perfection protects the status quo.

Perfection excuses inaction.

But fairness?

Fairness demands courage.

Fairness demands decisions.

Fairness demands change.

And so we approached this reform with five guiding principles:

- **Caymanians must be prioritised in our own country**
- **Opportunities must be accessible, not theoretical**

- **Systems must be transparent, not ambiguous**
- **Enforcement must be real, not optional**
- **Reform must be responsible, not compromised**

We did not promise perfection.
We promised fairness.

And today, Mr. Speaker—we are delivering fairness.

But let us be clear:

“We are improving a complex system — this is much more than just passing laws.”

3. Not Anti-Expat — Pro-Fairness and Balance

Mr. Speaker,

There is a narrative that must be corrected.

The idea that protecting Caymanians somehow means rejecting others.

Let us be absolutely clear:

“Caymanians first is not anti-expat — it is pro-fairness.”

This reform stands on balance:

- Cayman’s success is built on investing in **local talent while drawing on global expertise**
- Work permits will continue where **Caymanians are genuinely unavailable**
- Cayman remains a **globally competitive, stable jurisdiction**
- Long-term residents are **protected through transitional provisions**
- Expatriates who uphold our values and contribute positively are **respected partners**

And importantly:

- **37,000+ work permits remain in place**

- . Existing work permits are **not negatively impacted**
- . The system is being **responsibly corrected** —**not dismantled**

Because, Mr. Speaker:

A fair system does not divide a country.

It strengthens it.

4. A Reform Built on Listening, Engagement, and Leadership

Mr. Speaker,

This reform stands as one of the most transparent and consultative processes in our nation's history.

Let us remind ourselves of that process:

- . A full **White Paper consultation**

- **Three town hall meetings, two of which were aired on the radio and/or via social media**
- **Eight stakeholder sessions which engaged over 80 company representatives prior to passage**
- **Many radio, TV and newspaper appearances prior to passage**
- **A 16–0 vote in this Honourable House**

But Mr. Speaker, our engagement did not stop there.

The Ministry for Caymanian Employment and Immigration, ... Our Ministry and the Department of WORC have **continued to actively engage stakeholders on a monthly basis**—because reform does not end at legislation.

Our most recent engagement was on April 23rd, where we met with approximately 110 representatives from the Cayman Islands Society of Human Resources Professionals.

Mr. Speaker, that speaks volumes.

It speaks to:

- Our commitment to partnership
- Our respect for the business community
- Our willingness to listen beyond legislation
- Our openness to continuous improvement
- And our accountability as a government

And to be clear:

This Ministry and our Department will continue our engagement with stakeholder groups.

We will lead by example.

We will show up.

We will listen.

We will collaborate.

We will make changes where necessary.

Because that is what good governance requires.

And that is why we say:

**“We consulted, We legislated, We listened,
We adjusted, and We implemented.”**

5. What This Reform Delivers — Real, Measurable Change

Mr. Speaker,

Let us move beyond rhetoric and focus on results.

This reform delivers:

Stronger Pathways and Protections

- Residency pathway extended from **15 to 20 years**
- Marriage pathway extended from **7 to 15 years**
- Naturalised persons — total lawful and ordinary residence extended from **15 to 20 years**

- Naturalised persons —period after naturalisation/ registration extended from **5 to 10 years**
- BOT citizen connected to another overseas territory extended from **15 to 20 years**

By changing this legislation, it ensures long-term commitment to our country.

Labour Market Rebalancing

- Work permit holders' salary threshold **raised from \$3,500 to \$5,000 per month per household to support a dependent, plus \$1,000 per additional dependent.**
- Work permit holders cannot change employers within a two-year period **without returning home for at least one year** — closing the job-hopping loophole.
- Exemptions to the two-year employer rule are clear and published: **discrimination, bullying, unpaid overtime, and other circumstances the Director of WORC considers sufficient.**

- Advertising requirements strengthened: **jobs must be posted on the WORC portal and in a local newspaper for 21 days before a work permit can be applied for.**
- Persons on work permits tied to their **spouse's term limit** – going forward, the **lesser term limit will be observed**

The previous system had far more ambiguity — that is precisely what created 15 years of legal risk. **We are replacing uncertainty with clear rules.**

Recognition of Caymanians

- Approximately **2,618 born Caymanians, born in Cayman between January 1, 1969 and March 26, 1977** are now automatically Caymanian — no application needed, restoring identity and belonging

Modern Enforcement

- WORC's enforcement and **data-sharing powers are expanded significantly, covering 13 public agencies.**
- More checks and balances to identify and address marriages of convenience.
- Real-time data sharing
- Improved compliance and oversight

Modern systems require modern tools – this is effective regulation.

Continuation of RERC: After divorce, dissolution, or annulment

The revised Act gives the Board or the Director of WORC discretion to revoke an RERC where the marriage or civil partnership:

- **has dissolved or been annulled, and**
- **had lasted for at least 7 years but less than 15 years at the time of dissolution or annulment**

Revocation is not automatic, and individual circumstances can be considered.

Applications based on Caymanian children

A detailed set of changes applies where a person seeks continuation of an RERC on the basis that they have Caymanian children. The law now requires more proof than that a child exists and instead, seeks to ensure that the applicant has:

- . financially supported the child**
- . continued to contribute positively to the child's life**

It also gives the Director of WORC or the Board the ability to request a social inquiry report from the Department of Children and Family Services or the Department of Community Rehabilitation.

Because, Mr. Speaker:

“The system is fair, transparent, and sustainable — and it puts Caymanians first – including our children.”

6. Certainty for Business, Opportunity for Caymanians

Mr. Speaker,

To our business community, let me say this clearly:

This reform brings certainty.

Because:

“Businesses need certainty. Today, we deliver it.”

- Work permit fees have **not increased**
- Administrative fees have been modernised responsibly after 15 years of remaining status quo
- Revenue is being reinvested into efficiency
- Workforce systems are being strengthened

A broken system creates uncertainty.

But a fair system?

Builds confidence.
Attracts investment.
Supports growth.

7. Immigration Reform Is Part of a National Transformation

Mr. Speaker,

This reform does not stand alone.

It is part of a broader national strategy.

Alongside immigration reform, we are advancing:

Employment Reform

- Restructuring our Immigration boards
- Strengthening job access for Caymanians
- Improving workforce matching systems
- Increasing accountability

Labour Reform

- Enhancing worker protections

- Strengthening compliance
- Promoting fairness across industries

Pension Reform

- Securing long-term financial stability
- Strengthening employer obligations
- Protecting the future of Caymanian workers

Workforce Development

- A **National Workforce Plan** is being developed collaboratively with representatives from Chamber of Commerce, CI Society of HRProfessionals, Cayman Finance, Contractors Association, CITA, POCS, Ministry of Education, and other business representatives to **identify short, medium and long term strategies for increasing Caymanians' likelihood for success in the workforce.**
- I have tasked them not with providing **another report** about what is not working, but with providing **solutions** to issues that we have known for years

- The first of the Committee's recommendations was to **create a single point of reference** where our young people could easily find **summer internship opportunities**
- **This has been implemented**
- The Committee, WORC and the Ministry have worked with the **Cayman Islands Computer Science Society** through the recently-launched **FutureMe app**
- The solution not only pulls information that currently exists on available summer internships, it also provides employers with the ability to **directly upload information**, which will be particularly **beneficial for smaller businesses.**
- This is a **first step** towards **better connecting Caymanian students with opportunities.**

Mr. Speaker, immigration alone cannot fix or create opportunity.

It must work in alignment with national systems.

And that is exactly what this Government is doing.

8. Enforcement — From Words to Action

Mr. Speaker,

A law without enforcement is not reform.

It is theatre.

That is why this legislation strengthens enforcement:

- The information-sharing powers allow WORC to assess character, criminal history, family contributions, and workforce planning in a ‘joined-up’ way. That is basic administrative competence.
- All powers remain subject to the law, due process, and legal review. They are not unchecked executive discretion.

Because:

“These powers make the system work. Without them, the law is just words on paper.”

9. Fairness for Those Already in the System

Mr. Speaker,

We have ensured fairness for those already here with facilities approved or in progress.

- Protection applies to **people who had already applied in a listed category before 1 May 2026**, where that application is later granted.
- The transitional provisions cover nine protected categories, including: **eight-year PR applicants, spouses of Caymanians with existing RERCs, persons of independent means, and asylum-related dependent children.**

- Where status was previously granted through **marriage or civil partnership, annual declaration requirements apply for the first seven years** — a compliance measure, not a penalty.
- Clear guidance is available on our Immigration Reform website: at **gov.ky/immigrationreform**

“We did not move the goalposts for those applications already in play.”

10. Phase One — And the Future Ahead

Mr. Speaker,

It is important to note:

This is not the end.

This is re-building a solid foundation.

“Phase One is complete. Additional reform is coming.”

This will include:

- Reform of the **PR points system**
- Implementation of an **Employers Accreditation Framework**
- **Modernization of all Immigration policies**
- Implementation of a **National Workforce Development Plan** and a **National Workforce Database**
- Launch of a **National Internship/Apprenticeship programme**
- Modernizing our residency by direct investment legislation that allows high-net-worth persons **to diversify their investment by investing in our country's infrastructure and social programming instead of limiting investment to real estate, and stemming the tide of increasing real estate costs for our people**

We will also continue our engagement with stakeholders

Because:

“You build the house after you fix the foundation.”

Closing

Mr. Speaker,

This moment is about more than policy and legislation.

It is about our people.

It is about restoring belief that Caymanians belong at the centre of our own future.

Because at the heart of this reform is one simple truth:

“Our people matter, our people come first, and our people deserve better.”

And so TODAY—

Cayman turns a page.

Not towards perfection.

But towards fairness.

Not towards exclusion.

But towards balance.

Not towards uncertainty.

But towards confidence.

A stronger Cayman.

A fairer Cayman.

**A Cayman that works for all Caymanians
and that puts Caymanians first.**

We are, after all, the National Coalition For *Caymanians*. This is what our government has promised and this is what this legislation is building.

Mr Speaker, I would like to acknowledge that this was not a one-person effort, as so many members of our Cayman community were involved:

By their comments

By their participation in group sessions

On organized committees

and Boards ... past and present,

By their text messages, emails, and phone calls

By their conversations when met in the
community or at events

Mr. Speaker, the list could go on ... however
many of these groups were mentioned earlier.

The various ways in which members of the
community contributed to immigration reform
in the Cayman Islands is phenomenal ... even
the naysayers brought value as it caused us to
pause and reflect on their point of view.

And this is why Immigration Reform can bear
the ownership and responsibility of us all as

It is what our government has promised

It is what this legislation is building.

I would like to express my personal appreciation to the staff in the Ministry of Caymanian Employment, Legal Drafting the other key partners within the Cayman Islands Government, each and every member of our community who made such a significant addition to the implementation of immigration reform.

Thank you to my colleagues for the dialogue in and outside of these parliamentary meetings.

Mr. Speaker, Thank you for the opportunity,.