



**Statement by
the Honourable Minister for Social Development and
Innovation
Initiatives Overview for Q1 2025 Year to Date
Fourth Meeting of the 2025-2026 Session of Parliament**

Mister Speaker, since I took responsibility for the portfolio of Social Development, it has been a priority of mine to address gaps in the system to improve the lives for Caymanian families.

One of the key gaps which exist is that there are very limited social supports for adults between the ages of 18 and 64. At present, the Department of Children and Family Services provides services for children until the age of 18, with some provisions for aftercare, and to older persons aged 65 years and older. My Ministry is taking several steps to address this gap.

Adult Safeguarding Task Force

The first step is to launch the Adult Safeguarding Task Force. This Task Force is a multi-agency group chaired

by the Ministry of Social Development and Innovation and comprises of the Ministry of Health, Environment and Sustainability, the Department of Children and Family Services, the Department of Financial Assistance, the Health Services Authority and the Royal Cayman Islands Police Service.

The Task Force will be responsible for coordinating support to adults at-risk to ensure that they get support necessary in the short-term. The Task Force will seek to address safeguarding concerns, including homelessness or housing insecurity, food insecurity, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. The work of the Task Force will inform adult safeguarding policy and legislative recommendations made by the Ministry for Cabinet's consideration to address the identified gaps in services for adults with long-term solutions.

Amendments to the Disabilities (Solomon Webster) Act, 2016

Further, Cabinet approved the Ministry to issue drafting instructions to amend the Disabilities (Solomon Webster) Act, 2016 in August 2025. A critical at-risk group within the adults is adults with disabilities. The

current Disabilities Act remains largely uncommenced from 2016, except for the establishment of the Council.

The work my team is undertaking is to look at how persons with disabilities are impacted by policies and initiatives across the civil service. In addition, the critical amendments to address the safeguarding gap for persons with disabilities who experience exploitation, abuse, neglect or self-neglect, there is also work being done to enhance and commence existing aspects of the Act and make provisions for Departmental support.

In order to ensure that the amendments are fit for purpose and can be meaningfully commenced, my Ministry team has been meeting with teams across the civil service, the National Council for Persons with Disabilities, service providers, persons with disabilities, and their families. Consultation will be continuing and additional groups will have the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed amendments. So far consultations have led to further refinement, and critical operational considerations, but the feedback has been immensely positive with families sharing that this has been “an answer to their prayers”.

We expect to debate the proposed amendments to the Disabilities (Solomon Webster) Act, 2016 in this House within the later half of this year.

Cayman Islands Disability Policy (2014-2033) and National Council for Persons with Disabilities

When the National Coalition For Caymanians was established, we took the decision to move the Cayman Islands Disability Policy (2014-2033) and the National Council for Persons with Disabilities from Cabinet Office to the Ministry of Social Development and Innovation to sit with the full portfolio. Since this transition, the team has been meeting with all the critical Ministries and teams to get an update on implementation and to develop an action plan for meaningful change in the upcoming years. We are now further away from 2014 than we are from 2033 so we want to make sure we can achieve the goals outlined in the Policy. The Council has been instrumental in helping to identify key priority areas and initiatives within the Policy.

Children and Child Safeguarding

Mister Speaker, I would now like to turn my attention to the Children Portfolio of the Ministry of Social Development and Innovation, which continues to progress various policy frameworks for child protection, family support, and child safeguarding systems across our Cayman Islands.

At the heart of our work is the **protection of children, promotion their rights and support of the adults who take on the care and protection of a child**. I want to emphasize to everyone in this Honourable House and everyone listening that every child matters, and every child deserves protection, stability, dignity, and an opportunity to become their best selves from the earliest possible moment in life.

Mister Speaker, the work that the Ministry is currently undertaking is coordinated evidence that this country will work to protect, support, listen to, and empower its children.

This year we will finalise regulations which will allow the commencement of the Children (Amendment) Act, 2024; Adoption Act, 2024; and Maintenance (Amendment) Act, 2024. We also intend to bring the Status of the Child (Amendment) Bill, 2026 to this Honourable House as well. These modernised legislative frameworks will strengthen safeguarding measures and cement the principle of child-centred decision-making. I want to emphasise that commencement will be supported by structured training of all relevant stakeholders to ensure legislation is operationalized effectively and efficiently by users across the civil service and private sector.

The Ministry continues its commitment to best practice and will observe the relevant requirements as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

International Conventions

Additionally, Mister Speaker, the Ministry through inter-ministerial collaboration, continues work in relation to the ratification to the 1993 Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry

Adoption (“Hague Convention”) and the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (“Lanzarote Convention”).

The extensive inter-ministerial work that has been done in respect to ratification to the Lanzarote Convention has identified the various gaps that exist in the services and legislative provisions available in the Cayman Islands, which will need to be addressed in order to ratify to the Convention. At this time Mister Speaker, I am pleased to update this Honourable House that after the Ministry shared a summary of the work that has been done with the Council of Europe, the initial feedback was very positive and the Cayman Islands is well on track to be ratified to the Lanzarote Convention in this current budget period.

Mister Speaker, I must emphasize that when this ratification happens, the Cayman Islands will be the first Overseas Territory to do so, further solidifying our place as leaders in child safeguarding regionally and amongst our peers.

Commissioner for Children and Young Persons

Mister speaker, I stated earlier that this Government is committed to listening and empowering its children and young persons. The Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young Persons - which was established in the Children (Amendment) Act, 2024 will be a vessel for child advocacy and empowerment. This Office will not only advocate for children but include children and young persons. The Office will be supported by an advisory panel made up of children and young persons aged 13-25 with representation from each district. This panel is established in the Act and will give children and youth a direct line of communication and influence into the policy development and practice of child safeguarding, a first in the Cayman Islands.

Recruitment for the post of Commissioner for Children and Young persons is expected to be done in 2026.

Mister speaker, It is our intention as a Government to:

- move from reactive to preventative safeguarding and
- to see a reduction in harm of children,
- improve the stability of foster placements,
- enhance the strength of families, and
- enhance confidence of children in the Government systems designed to protect them.

This Government is not simply managing child safeguarding and child protection. We are working to ensure that the frameworks and systems are designed to meet the needs of those they are in place to serve.

Older Persons

Mister Speaker, I now wish to provide this Honourable House with a brief overview of the work being undertaken within the Older Persons Portfolio under the Ministry of Social Development and Innovation. As it relates to this demographic of our society, our focus is to strengthen protections, enhance services and promote dignity, independence, and active participation for older persons across the Cayman Islands.

Mister Speaker, the Ministry has been engaged in activities contributing to legislative reform, the development of a Community Calendar, capital investment and the review of our financial support framework.

Mister Speaker, a key priority for this Portfolio has been legislative reform and we are currently engaged in activities for the drafting of Regulations to support the

implementation of the Older Persons (Amendment) Act, 2024. These Regulations are essential to operationalise the Act, through which standards of care and oversight will be strengthened, a mandatory reporting process will be established, safeguarding mechanisms to protect older persons will be enhanced and accountability and transparency will be promoted.

Mister Speaker, within the Government's 2026-2028 Strategic Policy Statement one of the key projects and initiatives is to Promote an Age-Friendly Society: creating comprehensive programmes and policies that enable older persons to actively participate in society.

To this end Mister Speaker, social inclusion and active ageing are critical to overall wellbeing and the Ministry is developing a centralised and accessible Community Calendar of Events for Older Persons in the Cayman Islands. This initiative will provide a single, easy-to-access source of information on social, cultural, health, faith-based, and recreational activities; reduce isolation by increasing awareness of available programmes; encourage community engagement and

intergenerational participation; and support organisations by promoting events more effectively.

By improving access to information, we empower Older Persons to remain active, engaged, and connected members of our society.

Mister Speaker, this Government also recognizes the importance of investing in infrastructure that supports quality care for Older Persons and provided seed funding in the amount of CI\$600,000 to the Pines Retirement Home, toward the development of the New Silver Thatch Residences. The new residences will offer a nurturing environment for older persons who require minimal living accommodation whilst combining care services in modern facilities.

Mister Speaker, this capital investment contributes to the current and projected, increased need for assisted living in the community and is an incentive for private sector philanthropy to assist with the completion of this project.

Mister Speaker, the Ministry has also turned its attention to strengthening the operations and policy framework of

the Department of Financial Assistance, working to establish a dedicated Working Group to conduct a comprehensive review to ensure that services provided are appropriate to meet the needs of the Caymanian people within this financial climate. I know that this is a topic that carries a lot of interest on both sides of the aisle, so I look forward to support in this House if the recommendations from this Working Group include amendments to Legislation.

With all things being equal, Mister Speaker, I expect to receive at least draft recommendations before the end of Q2 2026.

Mister Speaker, this is just a general update of the ongoing work and priorities of the Social Development division of the Ministry. A lot of hard work continues to happen quietly in the office and I look forward to providing more updates as we bring all of our priorities for this budget cycle to fruition.

Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Finally, Mister Speaker, I would like to provide an update on the work of the Gender Affairs portfolio of the Ministry.

Mister Speaker, As I begin to address updates related to Gender Affairs it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge that this Sunday, March 8th is International Women's Day. I would like to take this time to wish all of wonderful women and girls of this country a happy International Women's Day when it comes. It is truly my privilege to serve in Caucus, Cabinet and in this Honourable House alongside so many brilliant and hardworking Caymanian women, all of whom are serving this country well.

Mister Speaker, it is well known that I have a wide range of responsibilities under my two Ministries which require diligent and astute leadership to manage effectively. I can say here today Mister Speaker, without a shadow of a doubt, that I am blessed to have two tremendous Chief Officers leading my Ministries and both of them are women! To my Chief Officers and all of the talented female staff in virtually every area of both Ministries, I say "thank you" for all of the excellent work that you do as Civil Servants.

To my constituents in East End and all of the women and girls across these three islands, I extend to you by best

wishes and appreciation for your contributions to our community in your professional and family lives.

Mister Speaker, the theme of Women's Day this year is "give to gain" and I want to make sure that I articulate to this Honourable House and to the listening public what that theme means to me. Mister Speaker, despite the significant strides that have been made in this country and globally towards equality between men and women, there is still a ways to go. This is why we have to have a Gender Affairs portfolio, to ensure that policy work is progressing the movement towards equality. Mister Speaker, in order for this country to **"gain"** from all of the skill, talent and potential that is too often hidden inside of our women and girls, we must **"give"** them what they need to fully share it with us. We need to give our women the respect that they deserve; the support that they need to overcome obstacles that we have not yet removed from their path; and most importantly, we need to give our love and appreciation to them in recognition for all that they do for their families and for these Islands.

Mister Speaker it is in this vein of giving, that I would like to highlight the efforts being made by the Ministry in recognition of Honouring Women's Month. I am pleased to advise that the Gender Affairs Portfolio is facilitating several workshops, including the Female Farmers and Artisans Market on 20th March, Women and their Wheels (a car care workshop) in conjunction with Superior Auto on 14th and 21st of March, and Women in the Garden in conjunction with Proplus Nursery on 21st March.

I encourage everyone to support these various workshops which are designed to provide beneficial skills to our women and girls. I also encourage the wider community to support all of the other events that are taking place in the Islands to honour women and girls this month.

Lastly, Mister Speaker, I would like to share that the Gender Affairs portfolio continues its efforts to educate the community through training sessions with both public and private sector agencies, as part of their preparation to enact the Anti-Sexual Harassment Act. I know that we are all supportive of ensuring that this Act

is properly implemented and I look forward to providing further updates as we reach our implementation goal.

Thank you, Mister Speaker & May God continue to bless these Cayman Islands.