



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Ministry of Youth Development and National Service

MYDNS: 36/3/3 Vol. III

January 18, 2022

Mr. Brian Caesar
Clerk of the Senate (Ag.)
Office of the Parliament
Parliamentary Complex
Cabildo Building
St. Vincent Street
Port of Spain

Dear Mr. Caesar

Response to the Request for Written Submission on the Interim Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the Response of the Public Authorities to the Covid-19 Pandemic in Trinidad and Tobago

I refer to your letter Parl: 5/6/15 dated November 30, 2021 on the subject at caption and attach herewith the response approved by the Honourable Foster Cummings, Minister of Youth Development and National Service on recommendations/comments contained in the Interim Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee of the Public Authorities to the Covid-19 Pandemic in Trinidad and Tobago.

Submitted as requested.

Sincerely

.....
FAROOK HOSEIN
PERMANENT SECRETARY (AG.)
MINISTRY OF YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND NATIONAL SERVICE

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Ministry of Youth Development and National Service

Response to the Request for Written Submission on the Interim Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee (PAAC) of Parliament on the Response of the Public Authorities to the Covid-19 Pandemic in Trinidad and Tobago First Session, Twelfth Parliament

The Ministry of Youth Development and National Service (MYDNS) recognizes the tremendous work of the Public Administration and Appropriation Committee (PAAC) of Parliament in preparing its interim report on and examining the response of Public Authorities to the COVID-19 pandemic in Trinidad and Tobago. The Ministry is pleased to respond to the comments/recommendations in the interim report.

The MYDNS acknowledges PAAC's observation of the Ministry's adoption of the 'new normal' measures owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, the Ministry reiterates that it updated and implemented the 'Return to Work Guidelines'. These Guidelines were updated to include the: Standard Operating Procedures in handling positive Covid-19 cases and Employee Notification Procedures of the Covid-19 Positive. Additionally, the MYDNS submits the following comments/information on the recommendations contained in the interim report:

RECOMMENDATION	RESPONSE
2. Challenges Faced	i.Impacts of the Covid-19 Pandemic
<p>The MYDNS should submit to Parliament by January 31, 2022:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An update on the steps taken to resolve the challenges faced in light of the COVID -19 pandemic 	<p>The Ministry notes this recommendation and is pleased to provide the following update:</p> <p><u>Return to Work by Staff</u> In keeping with the Government's Return to Work Policy, the staff at the MYDNS returned to work in November 2021 and continues to perform their duties amidst Covid-19 protocols and guidelines.</p> <p><u>Youth Development</u> The Youth Development Officers who work at the community level have implemented a blended engagement approach, communicating and engaging online with youth where possible and making community visits on an as-needed basis. Similarly, the Fiscal 2022 programmes at the District Level and the non-residential Youth</p>

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	<p>Development Centres are being adjusted to increase online interaction. Collaboration is being sought with training institutions such as MIC Institute of Technology (MIC-IT) and the National Energy Skills Centre (NESC) that have been granted permission by the Ministry of Health to facilitate on-campus, practical workshop training on behalf of the MYDNS.</p> <p><u>National Service</u></p> <p>(1) Specialized Youth Service Programmes (SYSP), including the Military-led Academic Training (MiLAT) Programme and Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), provide the target group of at-risk youth with a mixture of behavioural change strategies in a quasi-military environment. An analysis was done of services provided to the community and risks involved in the non-delivery of those services. Findings showed that the programmes' inability to operate would negatively impact the national youth skills bank and can potentially lead to an increase in crime perpetuated by at-risk youth within the catchment age group of 16 – 25 years.</p> <p>(2) Further, having analyzed the risks, mitigation measures were identified and implemented to lessen the potential disruption to the SYSP in the future. Physical infrastructure and signage were put in place to support the mitigation measures, thereby ensuring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) The continual practise of hand hygiene. (b) Adherence to respiratory etiquette including, mandatory mask-wearing by staff, trainees, and visitors. (c) The practice of physical distancing was enforced in all work and training spaces where practicable. <p>(3) Subsequent to the re-opening of Secondary Schools and Skill-based Learning Facilities, the MiLAT Programme (residential) and CCC (non-residential) resumed training, with the nationally mandated measures and additional measures implemented to restrict the spread of the infection amongst staff and trainees/cadets.</p> <p>(4) Primarily, a hybrid model of training utilizing video conferencing technology such as Google Classroom and Microsoft Teams was implemented by all the SYSP operated Programmes.</p> <p>(5) An education initiative, supported by the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force (TTDF) and the Ministry of Health (MoH), was embarked upon for all staff members and the participants of the SYSP. Topics included the</p>

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	<p>nature/symptoms of the virus, how to mitigate the spread and the benefits of being vaccinated. Consequently, the SYSP was able to achieve the following results:</p> <p>CCC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ninety-one per cent (91%) of the staff were fully vaccinated • Thirty-four per cent (34%) of trainees were vaccinated (inclusive of persons one who have had one dose of a two-dose regime) <p>MiLAT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All staff involved in the cadets' induction training have been fully vaccinated • All cadets in the programme were fully vaccinated prior to enrolment. <p>National Male Transition Home (NMTH) (residential)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All staff have been fully vaccinated. • All residents have been fully vaccinated <p>(6) Further, the CCC was able to complete its induction training, subsequently progressing to its skill phase, with a total of eight hundred and forty-six (846) trainees successfully graduating from the programme.</p> <p>(7) MiLAT also obtained special COVID-19 exemptions from the MOH as its resumption protocol. The MiLAT Programme completed the induction phase of the training and is preparing to enter the academic stage.</p> <p>(8) The NMTH successfully transitioned nine (9) of eleven (11) residents into employment and stable living arrangements. The remaining two (2) residents are supported remotely whilst engaging in tertiary education.</p>
<p>The MYDNS should submit to Parliament by January 31, 2022:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new measures 	<p>The MYDNS is pleased to provide the following update:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Ministry has provided sinks and antibacterial handwashing agents at all its offices and facilities, together with temperature testing and maintenance of contact tracing logs.

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<p>implemented to ensure business continuity concerning its mandate relating to strategic and operational issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Ministry adheres to strict Covid-19 guidelines concerning wearing face masks -at all times- in its offices and maintaining stipulated social gathering protocols for meetings and has also developed a Covid-19 Return to Work Guidelines Manual for the staff. • On confirmation of positive Covid-19 cases in the workplace, the Ministry closes the offices for sanitization. <p>Additionally, details on the updates on new measures to ensure business continuity regarding the Ministry's mandate of the Ministry addressing the peculiarities of Youth Development as well as National Service are provided below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Youth Development</u> <p>Cabinet has agreed to establish an Advisory Committee on the Youth Development and Apprenticeships Centres (YDACs) and the Non-residential Youth Development Centres that will advise, inter alia, on the modern curriculum and trade offerings that would address the development needs of Trinidad and Tobago. The Advisory Committee was established in September 2021 for six (6) months. Based on the recommendations of the Advisory Committee, the MYDNS will modernize the programmes offered and outfit the Centres with modern furniture and equipment to better support the needs of the youth.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>National Service</u> <p>(1) Within the SYSP's residential Programmes, the following additional measures were implemented and continue to ensure business continuity:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (a) A "semi-bubble" methodology was used at the MiLAT and NMTH facilities. Cadets/residents were isolated within the physical locations to limit the contact with the general public. (b) Transport was provided by both Programmes on regularly sanitized buses to and from locations to eliminate the risks involving the use of public transportation. (c) Implementation of symptom monitoring.

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	<p>(d) Encourage personal hygiene measures and enforce periodic sanitization of communal and heavily touched areas.</p> <p>(2) Programme specific risk-management strategies were implemented to minimize further the risk of contracting or spreading the virus, including the following:</p> <p>MiLAT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Rapid COVID-19 / PCR testing programme was initiated at MiLAT before Programme commencement and on entry with a seven (7) day quarantine period. This was followed by periodic testing throughout the induction period. • Classrooms and laboratories have been rearranged in keeping with social distancing health guidelines. <p>NMTH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-person contact was reduced to residents and their supervisory staff. • External visits to the facility were cancelled, and only fully-vaccinated service providers were allowed on the compound. • PCR testing was undertaken where necessary. <p>CCC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A hybrid model of training utilizing video conferencing technology such as Google Classroom and Microsoft Teams was also implemented during the Skill Training phase of the programme, thus, minimizing in-person interactions.

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2. Challenges Faced	ii. Implementation of the COVID-19 Response Plan
<p>The MYDNS should submit to Parliament by January 31, 2022:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An evaluation of the efficacy of the steps taken to implement the COVID-19 Response Plan 	<p>The MYDNS notes the recommendation of the PAAC and is pleased to indicate that the following measures taken thus far have proven to minimize the transmission of the virus among employees effectively:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>1. Employee Safety Sensitization.</i> The collaboration between the Health and Safety Unit and the Communications Unit of the MYDNS ensured that various email alerts were sent out to staff daily on all of the Ministry of Health's updated guidelines. This system kept the Ministry's COVID-19 response plan relevant, as such safety discussions helped employees be more vigilant toward the virus. <i>2. Respiratory Etiquette and Hand Hygiene</i> By establishing a no mask no service policy within the MYDNS and adequately installing hand washing stations at all its facilities, the Ministry was able to minimize the potential spread of the virus. <i>3. Employee Screening</i> The Ministry installed a talking infrared thermometer at main entrances, indicating normal or elevated temperatures. Heads of Divisions have been monitoring unwell employees and/or displaying any flu-like symptoms and taking immediate precautionary action. These measures significantly reduce the likelihood of sick persons entering and staying in the building/facility, thereby lessening the possible transmission of the virus. <i>4. Mandatory Physical Distancing</i> Signage and social distancing markers were deployed to alert persons on the MYDNS' social distancing policy. The Information Technology Unit developed an electronic platform to facilitate virtual meetings. They have also made available a remote file sharing system where staff could perform their duties away from the Ministry. <i>5. Disinfecting and Cleaning</i> A monthly building/facility deep cleaning exercise has been implemented. The National Maintenance Training and Security Company Limited (MTS) has upgraded its cleaning safety protocols to clean heavily touched surfaces regularly. Additionally, the Ministry has purchased sanitization equipment and has trained employees in the proper

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	<p>use. This approach allows the Ministry to respond at a much faster rate than an external sanitizing company. These sanitizing protocols have been effective in minimizing the potential spread of the virus throughout the Ministry.</p> <p>6. Shared Workspaces Internal administrative and engineering controls were developed to ensure employees avoided gathering in conference rooms, lobby areas and lunchrooms. Signage was placed identifying the number of persons allowed in each space at any given time. This promoted physical distancing, which reduced the chance of employees being exposed to respiratory droplets, thereby averting the likelihood of a potential spread of the Covid-19 virus.</p> <p>7. Mental Health The Ministry offered an open door policy to support staff in understanding the "new normal", assisting where possible, and facilitating employee needs during these times. To combat impending fears of the fallout of the pandemic, staff was assisted in getting help through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) system. These measures brought a sense of comfort and relief to employees who were initially unable to grasp the concept of the COVID-19 pandemic fully. This, in turn, allowed them to understand and comply with the COVID-19 response plan.</p> <p>8. Contact Tracing The detailed recording system at the Ministry's front entrances has been effectively identified persons who were in the building/facilities on the days when a positive case was reported. This operational recording system assists the Ministry when it becomes aware that an employee has tested positive. The Ministry's Health and Safety Unit then investigates to determine the co-workers who may have had close contact with the confirmed positive employee and advises those individuals who have been in close contact to be tested. This system has allowed the Ministry to quickly identify and eliminate the potential spread of the virus within the Ministry.</p>
<p>The MYDNS should submit to Parliament by January 31, 2022:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The steps taken to overcome the 	<p>The steps taken to overcome the challenges faced in the implementation of the Ministry's Covid-19 Response Plan include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Virtual safety conferences were held with staff members outlining the Ministry's COVID-19 response plan. b) The Ministry's Health and Safety Committee members were deployed as COVID-19 safety wardens to conduct inspection and audits on facilities to: -

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<p>challenges faced in the implementation of its COVID-19 Response Plan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine the compliance of the three (3) W's, i.e. Wearing your mask, Watching your distance and Washing your hands. • Evaluate the COVID -19 screening process for members of staff who enter any of the Ministry's buildings/facilities. • Observe the interaction with members of the public entering the Ministry's facilities. • Liaise with maintenance staff to ensure regular cleaning scheduled is maintained. <p>c) Hard copies of the Ministry's COVID-19 Response Plan were placed strategically in the building to be accessible by staff.</p> <p>d) The Ministry's Health and Safety Unit conducts weekly inspections to ensure sanitizing supplies are readily available.</p> <p>e) Additional sanitizing supplies were provided to all Units to conduct daily cleaning within their personal space.</p> <p>f) The Maintenance staff implemented a robust cleaning schedule. This included periodic sanitization of frequently touched surfaces in addition to their routine cleaning schedule.</p> <p>g) Email notifications were sent via the Public Relations and Communication Unit, keeping staff abreast of the Government's Public Health regulations.</p> <p>h) Signage was placed throughout the facilities outlining:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Signs and Symptoms of COVID-19. • The course of action when symptomatic. • Mandatory wearing of masks • Health guidelines for entry to buildings/facilities. • 3 Ws • Social Distancing. <p>i) Branded reusable masks were distributed to staff to encourage mask-wearing and a sense of community.</p>

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2. Challenges Faced	iii.Addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people of T&T
<p>The MYDNS should submit a status update to the Parliament by January 31, 2022, on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The timeline for the upgrade of digital technologies at Youth Training facilities in communities upon approval of the proposed budget 	<p>Work on upgrading digital technologies at the Youth Training Facilities has commenced and is expected to be completed by the end of fiscal 2022. As part of the Ministry's Digitalization Project, all Ministry locations currently upgraded their network infrastructure. This will include upgrading or installing a Gigabit network at each site and the upgrade of their internet bandwidth. Additionally, desktop computers, some of which are as much as ten (10) years old, will be upgraded to current models with faster processing and capabilities. The conference rooms and teaching centres at the non-residential Youth Development Centres also benefit from an upgrade to allow a centrally controlled video conferencing service, which will also be tied to the new telephone service. All MYDNS sites would connect over the network and utilize voice, data and video services. In the interim, the MYDNS will use its available digital tools to complement these through collaborative efforts with other IT-based service providers such as MIC-IT. This collaborative effort will aid in meeting the varied needs of our youth.</p>
<p>The MYDNS should submit a status update to the Parliament by January 31, 2022, on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The plans to address any inequalities found to exist in the availability of digital tools to different vulnerable groups such as 	<p>The MYDNS plan of action to address the outlined inequalities will be guided by the recommendations of the Advisory Committee for Youth Development Apprenticeship Centres (YDACs) and Non-Residential Development Centres.</p> <p>It is envisaged that the plan would allow for ease of access to digital resources, inclusive of access to hardware and software, web-based platforms, and Information Technology based training programmes through the Youth Training Facilities located at the community level. The programmes at the Youth Training Facilities will consider the different youth demographics to ensure the reach of the different cohorts of youth to enhance their life trajectory through development training that will improve their state of well-being, sense of community and career pursuits.</p> <p>The MYDNS' Youth Training Facilities will offer a spectrum of training options using a blended approach and online modalities where possible. The programmes will cater to both full-time and part-time students allowing accessibility</p>

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<p>young women and girls with disabilities, youth belongings to low-income families, youth at risk</p>	<p>to youth based on their life circumstances. The MYDNS will engage in strategic partnerships and partner with information technology service providers such as MIC-IT, NESC and YTEPP Ltd. to facilitate requisite training that enables young people to adapt to the technological advances and opportunities presented by the 4th Industrial Revolution.</p>