

TWELFTH

REPORT
FROM

THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
AND APPROPRIATIONS
COMMITTEE

EXAMINATION
OF

An examination into the Accessibility and Availability of Diagnostic Imaging Services at Public Health Institutions in Trinidad with specific reference to Regional Health Authorities under the purview of the Ministry of Health

Public Administration and Appropriations Committee

The Public Administration and Appropriations Committee (PAAC) is established by Standing Order 102 and 92 of the House of Representatives and the Senate respectively. The Committee is mandated to consider and report to Parliament on:

- (a) *the budgetary expenditure of Government agencies to ensure that expenditure is embarked upon in accordance with parliamentary approval;*
- (b) *the budgetary expenditure of Government agencies as it occurs and keeps Parliament informed of how the budget allocation is being implemented; and*
- (c) *the administration of Government agencies to determine hindrances to their efficiency and to make recommendations to the Government for improvement of public administration.*

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Mr. Symon de Nobriga	Member

Committee Staff

The current staff members serving the Committee are:

Ms. Keiba Jacob	Secretary to the Committee
Ms. Hema Bhagalo	Assistant Secretary
Ms. Khisha Peterkin	Assistant Secretary
Ms. Rachel Nunes	Graduate Research Assistant
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Publication

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MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE



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Chairman



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Ms. Amrita Deonarine
Member



Mr. Laurence Hislop
Member



Ms. Lisa Morris-Julian, MP
Member



Mr. Symon de Nobriga, MP
Member

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Report of the Public Administrations and Appropriations Committee (PAAC) for the Twelfth Parliament contains the details of the examination into the Accessibility and Availability of Diagnostic Imaging Services at Public Health Institutions in Trinidad with specific reference to Regional Health Authorities under the purview of the Ministry of Health (MOH).

The objectives of the Inquiry were:

- i. To determine whether the resources and Diagnostic Imaging equipment at the public health institutions are sufficient in order to operate efficiently;
- ii. To assess the impact, accessibility to diagnostic imaging services at public health institutions has on the population; and
- iii. To examine the maintenance process of essential equipment at the public health institutions.

In conducting this examination the Committee employed three (3) mechanisms:

- i. Written Submissions;
- ii. Review of current news; and
- iii. Public Hearing.

The Committee conducted a review and analysis of the written submissions made by the MOH and subsequently conducted a Public Hearing on December 8, 2021. The Committee made recommendations related to the issues identified. Observations and recommendations are presented in **Chapter 3**.

1. INTRODUCTION

THE COMMITTEE

The PAAC of the Twelfth Republican Parliament was established by the revised Standing Orders to:

- examine the current public expenditure, thereby capturing the full budget cycle by providing Parliamentary oversight of the implementation of the budget; and
- conduct a real-time examination of the expenditure of Ministries and Departments.

Change in Membership

1. In the Twelfth Parliament the Members of the Committee were appointed by resolutions of the House of Representatives and the Senate at sittings held on Friday November 9, 2020 and Tuesday November 17, 2020 respectively.
2. Senator Clarence Rambharat's appointment to the Senate was revoked on March 16, 2022. As such, he ceased to be a Member of the Committee.
3. Senator Yokymma Bethelmy's appointment to the Senate was revoked on March 16, 2022. As such, she ceased to be a Member of the Committee.
4. By resolution of the House of Representatives at a sitting held on June 13, 2022, Mr. Symon de Nobriga, MP was appointed a Member of the Committee in lieu of Mr. Stephen Mc Clashie, MP.
5. By resolution of the Senate at a sitting held on Tuesday June 14, 2022, Senator Laurence Hislop and Senator Randall Mitchell were appointed Members of the Committee in lieu of Senators Yokymma Bethelmy and Clarence Rambharat respectively.

Chairman & Vice-Chairman

By virtue of S.O. 109(6) and 99(6) of the House of Representatives and the Senate respectively, the Chairman of the Committee is the Speaker and at its First Meeting held on November 25, 2020, Dr. Lackram Bodoie was elected as the Vice-Chairman.

Quorum

Additionally, in order to exercise the powers granted to it by the House, the Committee was required by the Standing Orders to have a quorum. A quorum of three (3) Members, inclusive of the Chairman or Vice-Chairman, and a representative from each of the Houses, was agreed to by the Committee at its First Meeting.

2.METHODOLOGY

Determination of the Committee's Work Programme

At an in-camera meeting of the Committee held on Wednesday, December 12, 2021, the Committee agreed to conduct an examination into the accessibility and availability of Diagnostic Imaging Services at Public Health Institutions in Trinidad with specific reference to the RHAs under the purview of the MOH.

Review of Documents

In conducting this examination the Committee deliberated on the following, namely:

- i. Written Submissions;
- ii. Review of current news; and
- iii. Public Hearing.

Written Submissions were requested and received from the following:

- i. Ministry of Health (MOH);
- ii. North-West Regional Health Authority (NWRHA);
- iii. North-Central Regional Health Authority (NCRHA);
- iv. South-West Regional Health Authority (SWRHA); and
- v. Eastern Regional Health Authority (ERHA).

The Inquiry Process

The Inquiry Process outlines steps to be taken by the Committee when conducting an inquiry into an entity or issue. The following steps outline the Inquiry process followed by the PAAC for its examination into the Accessibility and Availability of Diagnostic Imaging Services at Public Health Institutions in Trinidad with specific reference to RHAs under the purview of the MOH.

- i. Identification of entities to be examined: MOH and the RHAs;
- ii. Preparation of Inquiry Proposal for each of the selected entities;
- iii. A request for a written response was sent to the MOH on December 14, 2021. Responses were received on February 09, 2022;

- iv. Preparation of an Issues Paper which identified and summarised matters of concern with the RHAs and the MOH regarding the accessibility and availability of Diagnostic Imaging Services;
- v. Based on the recommendations and the issues identified, the Committee agreed to have a Public Hearing. The relevant witnesses were invited to attend and provide evidence on **December 08, 2021**;
- vi. Following the Public Hearing, a request for further details was sent to the MOH on **December 14, 2021**, and the responses were received on **February 8, 2022**;
- vii. Report Committee's findings and recommendations to Parliament upon conclusion of the inquiry;
- viii. Request for Ministerial Responses;
- ix. Review responses; and
- x. Engage in follow-up.

3. ISSUES, OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ISSUES

1. Patients being sent to other RHAs for Diagnostic Imaging Services

Other RHAs have come to rely heavily on the diagnostic imaging services at the NCRHA due to their respective challenges with their own equipment.

the RHAs.

The diagnostic imaging services offered by the RHAs include:

- C-Arm;
- Cardiac Catheterisation;
- Computerised Tomography (CT);
- Echocardiogram;
- General X-ray;
- Interventional Radiology Mammography;
- Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI);
- Fluoroscopy; and
- Ultrasound.

In its written submission dated February 9, 2022, the MOH indicated that the NCRHA possessed the highest number of functioning diagnostic imaging machines among all RHAs and provided diagnostic imaging services to the highest number of patients among all RHAs in FY 2021.

The MOH also explained that there were continuity plans in place to ensure services were not interrupted when an RHA's equipment was undergoing repairs or maintenance. Where no functioning machinery was available at any facility within an RHA's catchment area, assistance was sought from other RHAs. The NCRHA provided the most of this assistance.

At the public hearing on December 8, 2021, the Committee noted that new MRI equipment was needed at the ERHA, which therefore outsourced MRIs to the NCRHA. Officials from the ERHA advised the Committee that MRI services could only be resumed after the completion of the Sangre Grande Hospital, which was expected by February 2023. The NCRHA highlighted that

the competing demands of the other RHAs caused a strain on the NCRHA's ability to efficiently provide MRI services to patients in its own catchment area, resulting in backlogs..

The CEO of the NWRHA stated that a MRI machine was expected to be made available once the Central Block of the POSGH had been completed, further indicating that a MRI machine would be installed at the St. James Medical Complex by mid-2022.

At the public hearing, it was highlighted that the radiology department of the POSGH had been destroyed by a fire in 2019. This hampered the provision of diagnostic imaging services at that Hospital. Consequently, the NWRHA also had to outsource diagnostic imaging services to the NCRHA, thereby creating a further strain on the resources at the NCRHA. It was also indicated that the number of persons who had been unable to access MRI services for fiscal year 2020-2021 at the NWRHA was 1,150. The Committee learnt that this problem was expected to be resolved within the second quarter of FY 2022 with the completion of renovations at the radiology department of the POSGH.

Observation:

- ***Article 12(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), to which Trinidad and Tobago is a party, provides for “the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health”. This includes “the creation of conditions which would assure to all medical service and medical attention in the event of sickness” (Art 12(2)(d)). The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) monitors ICESCR compliance. In its General Comment² on Art 12, the CESCR highlighted the primary importance of “the provision of equal and timely access” to health care, “within safe physical reach” and “preferably at community level” as basic elements of the right to health.***

The PAAC therefore emphasises the importance of each RHA making every effort to provide diagnostic imaging services to the public within their respective

¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Accessed February 9, 2023. Available: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights>

² United Nations Digital Library, General Comment no. 14 (2000) – the right to the highest attainable standard of health. Accessed February 9, 2023. Available: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/425041?ln=en>

catchment areas, in an effort to ensure that citizens enjoy the highest attainable standard of health in line with relevant international norms to which Trinidad and Tobago adheres.

Recommendations:

- *The MOH should provide an update to Parliament by July 31, 2023 on the following:*
 - *Efforts to strengthen the diagnostic imaging capacity of the ERHA, the SWRHA and the NWRHA to reduce the reliance on the NCRHA’s machinery;*
 - *The status of the completion of the Sangre Grande Hospital, which was expected by February 2023, including a revised completion timeline if it was not completed by that time;*
 - *The status of the completion of the POSGH Central Block;*
 - *Whether the MRI machine was installed at the St. James Medical Complex;*
 - *The plans in place to obtain more MRI machines for RHAs in T&T;*
 - *The plans to make the General X-Ray Unit, Accident and Emergency at the POSGH operational; and*
 - *The progress of operationalising the Main Radiology Department at the POSGH, which was due to be done by the second quarter of FY 2022.*

2. Accessibility Challenges – Non-emergency Patients

Non-emergency patients have had difficulties in attempting to access Diagnostic Imaging Services at the NWRHA.

At the public hearing, officials of the NWRHA indicated that access to diagnostic imaging services was prioritised for use by emergency patients at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The NWRHA’s management was in the process of determining solutions to balance the provision of MRI services to emergency and non-emergency patients.

Routine cases were rescheduled to be completed within a week of the original date on which the patient was seen, while emergency cases were facilitated as soon as possible. Prompt service to emergency patients was facilitated by “equipment redundancies” which were built-in to the RHAs

systems. With respect to machinery, redundancy is defined as “the provision of duplicate systems or equipment that functions in case an operating part or system fails”³. The example was given of having multiple x-ray units on hand at the NWRHA which could be used to assist other RHAs if the need arose.

The MOH provided the following data to the Committee on the number of patients who were unable to access selected diagnostic imaging services across the RHAs due to the unavailability of the relevant machinery in fiscal year 2021:

Service	Number of Patients
MRI	1,150
Mammogram	650
Fluoroscopy	70

The following data was also provided on the waiting list time for diagnostic imaging services at each RHA in fiscal year 2021:

IMAGING	ERHA	NCRHA	NWRHA	SWRHA
C-Arm	No wait time	No wait time	No wait time	No wait time
CT	1-4 weeks	6 months	- 24 hours (inpatient) - 3 weeks (outpatient)	- Same day (emergency) - 4-6 weeks (non emergency)
Dental	No wait time	No wait time	No wait time	No wait time
Echocardiogram	No wait time	1 year +	No wait time	- 48 hours (inpatient) - 1 year (elective outpatient)

³ Dictionray.com, efnition of “Redundancy”, accessed February 8, 2023. Available: : <https://www.dictionray.com/browse/redundancy>

Fluoroscopy	NO DATA	1 month	NO DATA	Same day (emergencies)
General X-Ray	No wait time	No wait time	24 hours	Same day
Mammography	6 weeks	2 months	NO DATA	1-2 weeks
MRI	Patients sent to other RHAs	- 72 hours (inpatient) - 1 year (outpatient)	Patients sent to other RHAs	1 year
Ultrasound	2-6 weeks	7 months	24 hours	2 weeks (if non-urgent)

Recommendations:

- ***The MOH should report to Parliament on the following by July 31, 2023:***
 - *The conditions that allowed C-Arm, general X-ray and dental diagnostic imaging to be successfully provided to patients with little to no waiting time;*
 - *The possibilities for replicating the success at (i) above with each of the other types of diagnostic imaging referred to in the description of this issue, including the specific constraints and the requirements to address them;*
 - *Whether the pandemic-related prioritization of emergency patients for access to diagnostic imaging has been maintained; and*
 - *The missing data on wait times for Fluoroscopy at the ERHA and the NHRA, as well as for mammography at the NWRHA.*

3. Accessibility Challenges – Mammography

Accessing Mammography Machines has remained a consistent problem for patients across RHAs The table below shows the number of patients accessing Mammography Services on a monthly basis at each RHA in 2021:

RHA	SWRHA	ERHA	NCRHA	NWRHA
Number of Mammograms	193	15	96	55

During the public hearing held on December 08, 2021, officials of the ERHA explained that mammography services had been temporarily outsourced to other RHAs while that Authority replaced its mammography machinery. As at the time of the public hearing, the requisite mammography equipment had been procured via a donation and was in the process of being commissioned. The Authority added that the recently replaced older mammography machine had been retained for use in the provision of primary care.

The SWRHA stated that walk-in patients were accommodated for mammography procedures, while routine symptomatic patients had been given outpatient appointments with waiting times of up to two (2) weeks.

At the NCHRA, it was noted that there was an increase in the number of patients who required diagnostic imaging services as a result of frequent referrals by other RHAs to the NCRHA. There was therefore a mammography waiting time of two (2) months.

The NWRHA reported that six hundred and fifty (650) persons had been unable to access mammogram services in FY 2021. In a written submission to the Committee, the MOH indicated that the NRWHA's mammography machine had been damaged by the same fire to which reference was made at issue 1 of this Report. The NWRHA intended to increase the number of mammography machines within its catchment area when the new Central Block at the Port-of-Spain General Hospital (POSGH) is commissioned in 2023.

Observation:

- ***The Committee notes the donation of the mammography machine received by the ERHA and the savings that this donation would have facilitated.***

Recommendations:

- ***The MOH should provide a status update to Parliament by July 31, 2023 on the following:***
 - ***The commissioning of the mammography machine at the ERHA; and***
 - ***The commissioning of the new Central Block at the POSGH, specifying a timeline for its completion and the number of additional mammography machines to be brought on stream.***

4. Maintenance Costs for Diagnostic Imaging Equipment

The high maintenance costs of diagnostic imaging equipment was a challenge for the RHAs.

Repairs and maintenance of the RHAs' diagnostic imaging equipment are conducted by a combination of in-house biomedical technicians and external service providers, the selection of which depended on factors including the complexity of necessary repairs and applicable service contracts or warranties.

Maintenance of diagnostic imaging equipment across the RHAs was conducted according to the following schedule in FY 2021:

EQUIPMENT	SCHEDULE OF PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE (times per year)			
	ERHA	NCRHA	NWRHA	SWRHA
Ultrasound	3	1	1	1-2
Mobile x-ray	3	1	1-2	2
X-ray	4	1	1-3	2
CT System	4	2	3	1
C-Arm	4	1	2	1
Echocardiogram	1	1	1	2
Mammography	1	2	N/A	1
Fluoroscopy	N/A	1-2	N/A	1-2
MRI	N/A	2	N/A	3

The RHAs incurred repair and maintenance costs in FY 2021 as follows:

RHA	SPENDING
NCRHA	\$5,192,845.08
NWRHA	\$5,043,640.00
SWRHA	\$2,792,029.83
ERHA	\$1,128,750.00
TOTAL	\$14,157,264.91

From the table above, it can be observed that the NCRHA accounted for 36.7% of the total diagnostic imaging equipment repair and maintenance costs incurred by RHAs in FY 2021. This was closely followed by the NWRHA with 35.6%. In comparison, the SWRHA accounted for 19.7% and the ERHA – which outsourced considerable diagnostic imaging services to the ERHA – accounted for and 8% of the total. In a written submission to the Committee, the MOH explained that gap between NCRHA’s spending on repairs and maintenance and that of other RHAs was due to a combination of factors. These included the NCRHA having more equipment than other RHAs – including specialised equipment with high maintenance costs – and the high volume of usage of the equipment, given the NCRHA’s large catchment area and target population, resulting in greater wear and tear leading to the need for repairs and maintenance.

Observation:

- *The Committee notes that, in addition to the factors determining the NCRHA’s repairs and maintenance costs identified by the MOH, there is a strong likelihood that the added workload taken on by the NCRHA when work is outsourced to it by other RHAs (as described at issue 1 of this Report) will contribute to wear and tear on the Authority’s diagnostic imaging equipment and create even greater need for costly repairs and maintenance unless diagnostic imaging capacity is restored and maintained across the other RHAs.*

5. Human Resource Issues - Staffing and Training

Recruitment and training were needed to strengthen RHAs’ capacity to provide quality diagnostic imaging services to the public.

Staffing

As at the time of the public hearing, the following vacancies for radiography and biomedical technician positions were noted across the RHAs:

	ERHA	NCRHA	NWRHA	SWRHA
Radiographer I	0	11	21	19
Radiographer I	0	16	2	22
Radiographer II	0	0	0	8

Radiographer III	0	5	0	0
Senior Radiographer	0	2	0	0
Chief Radiographer	0	1	2	5
Biomedical Technician I	1	0	1	5
Biomedical Technician II	0	6	0	0
Biomedical Technician III	0	0	0	8
Senior Biomedical Technician	0	0	0	3
Biomedical Supervisor	0	0	0	0

Training

At the public hearing, the Committee learned that a number of training initiatives were being offered by the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO). One (1) of these initiatives was ongoing and is a healthcare technology management training programme developed to meet the specific needs identified by biomedical engineers and technicians in Trinidad and Tobago. Another initiative focusing on technical capacity building was in the planning stages with input from the MOH.

The Committee also noted at the public hearing that, in the case of biomedical professionals, training is available at local tertiary education institutions. However, no training is available locally for sonographers or echocardiographers. The MOH identified the lack of trained sonographers and echocardiographers as a limitation within the public health system.

Recommendations:

- ***The MOH should report to Parliament by July 31, 2023 regarding the following:***
 - ***The status of the initiatives to fill the vacancies outlined for radiology and biomedical technician positions at each RHA;***
 - ***The needs identified by biomedical engineers and technicians and the initiatives being developed to meet those needs;***
 - ***The status of the development of the technical capacity building training in collaboration with PAHO, including the benefits of this training; and***
 - ***The feasibility of developing or making available locally training for sonographers and echocardiographers.***

6. Diagnostic Imaging Equipment Downtime Due to Maintenance

Lengthy downtimes remained a challenge, even though mitigation measures were put in place.

Although each RHA had its specific maintenance schedule, the employment of preventative maintenance was a common feature across all the Authorities. The MOH explained that preventative maintenance involved ordering replacement parts before the ones in use were completely out of service, as a means of ensuring the availability of the new parts immediately as the need arose. This was part of measures implemented to reduce equipment downtime, thereby shortening waiting times for the public to access diagnostic imaging services. At the public hearing, MOH officials explained that preventative maintenance schedules across RHAs were closely monitored and strictly adhered to.

RHA officials further noted at the public hearing that equipment downtime was, in some instances, impacted by the unavailability of the required parts and other inputs to service and/or repair the equipment. This was also reflected in the MOH's written submission, which identified unavailability of replacement parts due to the time needed for them to be shipped from abroad as a major challenge to limiting disruptions in the provision of diagnostic imaging services. This clearly highlights the importance of preventative maintenance measures.

In its written response to the Committee's questions for additional information, the MOH explained that when there were lengthy downtimes for a particular piece of equipment, diagnostic imaging services are provided using other machines within the RHAs' catchment area. When no other machine was available within that area, non-emergency patients were rescheduled and assistance was sought from other RHAs for emergency patients. At the public hearing, RHA officials expressed confidence that successful inter-RHA support and collaboration would continue to minimise the impact of downtimes on patients.

Despite the merits of preventative maintenance in terms of reducing downtime, the MOH's written submission detailed the RHAs' reported downtimes for diagnostic imaging equipment ranging from two (2) months to several years. In six (6) of the sixteen (16) instances listed, the length of the downtime was attributed to delays in the delivery of parts. In five (5) instances, the requisitions for parts and / or repairs were completed. The submission also indicated that the NCRHA planned to purchase a new gamma camera during FY 2023.

Observation:

- ***The Committee notes that the support provided among RHAs, while beneficial in limiting the impact of downtimes on service provision, ultimately feeds in to the problems previously discussed at issue 1 on RHAs' outsourcing services to other RHAs and the resulting challenges, and issue 4 of this Report on maintenance costs.***

Recommendation:

- ***The MOH should provide an update to Parliament by July 31, 2023 on the status of the measures indicated in its written submission dated February 8, 2022, which are intended to ensure that diagnostic imaging equipment is functional.***

CONCLUSION

During the Second Session of the Twelfth Parliament, the PAAC conducted an examination into the *Accessibility and Availability of Diagnostic Imaging Services at Public Health Institutions in Trinidad with specific reference to Regional Health Authorities under the purview of the Ministry of Health.*

During its examination the Committee noted the challenges experienced by patients with utilising mammography machines; the implications of RHAs outsourcing MRI services to other RHAs; the challenges non-emergency patients experience when trying to access diagnostic imaging services; the high costs associated with the maintenance of diagnostic equipment; staffing shortages in the Radiology Departments; and the fluctuation in the timeline associated with the downtime of diagnostic imaging equipment for scheduled maintenance.

The Committee is of the view that the adoption of its proposed recommendations will lead to greater efficiency in the operation of the public health institution and the public being able to access Diagnostic Imaging Services. Moreover, the Committee intends to monitor the progress made in the implementation of the recommendations proposed in this Report.

This Committee respectfully submits this Report for the consideration of the Parliament.

Sgd.
Mrs. Bridgid Mary Annisette-George
Chairman

Sgd.
Dr. Lackram Bodoë
Vice-Chairman

Sgd.
Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy
Member

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Mr. Symon de Nobriga
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Mr. Randall Mitchell
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Member

Sgd.
Mrs. Lisa Morris-Julain
Member

APPENDIX I

The Inquiry Process

The Inquiry Process

The Inquiry Process outlines steps to be taken by the Committee when conducting an inquiry into an entity or issue. The following steps outlines the Inquiry process followed by the PAAC:

1. Identification of entity to be examined;
2. Preparation of Inquiry Proposal for the selected entity. The Inquiry Proposal outlines:
 - Description
 - Background;
 - Overview of Expenditure
 - Rationale/Objective of Inquiry; and
 - Proposed Questions.
3. Consideration and approval of Inquiry Proposals by the Committee and when approved, questions are forwarded to the entity for written responses;
4. Issue of requests for written comment from the public are made via Parliament's website, social media accounts, newspaper and advertisements;
5. Preparation of an Issues Paper by the Secretariat for the Committee's consideration, based on written responses received from the entities. The Issues Paper identifies and summarises any matters of concern in the responses provided by the entity or received from stakeholders and the general public;
6. Review of the responses provided and the Issues Paper by the Committee;
7. Conduct of a site visit to obtain a first-hand perspective of the implementation of a project (optional);
8. Determination of the need for a Public Hearing based on the analysis of written submissions and the site visit (if required). If there is need for a public hearing, the relevant witnesses will be invited to attend and provide evidence. There is usually no need to examine the entity in public if the Committee believes the issues have little public interest or the Committee believes that the written responses provided are sufficient and no further explanation is necessary.
9. Issue of written request to the entity for further details should the Committee require any additional information after the public hearing.

10. Report Committee's findings and recommendations to Parliament upon conclusion of the inquiry.
11. Engage in follow-up.

APPENDIX II

Minutes of Meetings

**THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
SECOND SESSION, TWELFTH PARLIAMENT
MINUTES OF THE SIXTH MEETING HELD VIRTUALLY ON
WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 8, 2021 AT 1:39 P.M.**

Present were:

Mrs. Bridgid Mary Annisette-George	-	Chairman
Dr. Lackram Bodoie	-	Vice-Chairman
Ms. Yokymma Bethelmy	-	Member
Mr. Stephen Mc Clashie	-	Member
Ms. Keiba Jacob	-	Secretary
Ms. Hema Bhagaloo	-	Assistant Secretary
Ms. Khisha Peterkin	-	Assistant Secretary
Ms. Rachel Nunes	-	Graduate Research Assistant
Ms. Rebecca Rafeek	-	Procedural Officer Intern
Ms. Kelly Cipriani	-	Parliamentary Intern

Excused were:

Mr. Clarence Rambharat	-	Member
Mr. Wade Mark	-	Member
Ms. Amrita Deonarine	-	Member
Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy	-	Member

Absent were:

Mr. Hassel Bacchus	-	Member
Mrs. Lisa Morris-Julian	-	Member

COMMENCEMENT

- 1.1 At 1:39 p.m. the Chairman called the meeting to order and welcomed those present.

EXAMINATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE FIFTH MEETING

- 2.1 The Committee examined the Minutes of the Fifth (5th) Meeting held on March 31, 2021.
- 2.2 There being no omissions or corrections, the Minutes were confirmed on a motion moved by Dr. Lackram Bodoie and seconded by Ms. Yokymma Bethelmy.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE FIFTH MEETING

- 3.1 As per item 3.3, page 2: the Chairman informed Members that the responses to the request for written response from the Ministry of Trade and Industry with regard to the “Green Economy” were received by the Secretariat and uploaded to the rotunda (e-repository).

- 3.2 As per item 10.2, page 4: the Chairman informed Members that questions for additional information were sent to the Ministry of Health with a deadline of April 22, 2021. The responses were received by the Secretariat on April 30, 2021 and uploaded to the Rotunda (e-repository).

CONSIDERATION OF WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE SECOND SESSION, TWELFTH PARLIAMENT

- 4.1 The Chairman invited Members to review the Draft Work Programme for the Second Session of the Twelfth Parliament that were uploaded to the Rotunda (e-repository) for consideration. A discussion ensued. Amendments were made to the work programme. The Committee agreed to the following:

- Order of inquiries:
 - i. An examination into the internal controls, expenditure and the accessibility and availability of diagnostic imaging services at Public Health Institutions with specific reference to the Tobago Regional Health Authority (TRHA);
 - ii. An examination into the implementation of the Public Sector Investment Programme; and
 - iii. An examination into the progress of the digitalization of the education system during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The Secretariat would prepare a list of questions for written response for the TRHA, with regard to the accessibility and availability of diagnostic imaging services at Public Health Institutions with specific reference to the TRHA.
- That a follow-up inquiry into the response of public authorities to the COVID-19 pandemic with specific focus on the procurement and disbursement of COVID-19 Vaccines and drugs by March 2022.

- 4.2 The Chairman suggested a division of tasks regarding the various inquiries, with Members 'championing' specific inquiries. This does not preclude Members from reviewing any number of additional inquiries. The Committee agreed to the following champions:

- Dr. Lackram Bodoie - An examination into the internal controls, expenditure and the accessibility and availability of diagnostic imaging services at Public Health Institutions with specific reference to the Tobago Regional Health Authority (TRHA) and any other Health inquiries;
- Ms. Yokymma Bethelmy - An examination into the implementation of the Public Sector Investment Programme; and
- Mr. Stephen Mc Clashie - An examination into the progress of the digitalization of the education system during the COVID-19 pandemic.

OTHER BUSINESS

5.1 The Chairman informed Members that the following reports were laid in the House of Representatives on Wednesday November 10, 2021 and Tuesday November 16, 2021 respectively:

- The First Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee – A summary of inquiries undertaken during the Eleventh Parliament for the period 2015-2020;
- The Second Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an examination of the efficiency of the delivery of services to the public by the Regional Health Authorities and a follow-up on the implementation of the recommendations presented in the Welch Report;
- The Third Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an examination of the follow-up on the implementation of the recommendations of the Twenty-Fourth Report of the PAAC on the examination into the Processing of the payment of Pensions and Gratuities of Retired Public Officers and Contracted Employees; and
- The Interim Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an examination of the response of Public Authorities to the COVID-19 pandemic in Trinidad and Tobago.

PRE-HEARING DISCUSSION: AN EXAMINATION INTO THE ACCESSIBILITY AND AVAILABILITY OF DIAGNOSTIC IMAGING SERVICES AT PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTIONS WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO REGIONAL HEALTH AUTHORITIES UNDER THE PURVIEW OF THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH

6.1 The Chairman reminded Members that this meeting would be an examination into the accessibility and availability of diagnostic imaging services at public health institutions with specific reference to Regional Health Authorities under the purview of the Ministry of Health.

6.2 The Chairman invited Members to review the Issues Paper prepared by the Secretariat based on the written response received by the Ministry of Health.

6.3 The Chairman invited Members to raise any issues or concerns on the examination into the accessibility and availability of diagnostic imaging services at public health institutions with specific reference to Regional Health Authorities under the purview of the Ministry of Health. Members discussed the issues of concern and the general approach for the public hearing.

SUSPENSION

7.1 There being no further business for discussion *in camera*, the Chairman suspended the meeting at 2:17 p.m., to reconvene in public.

AN EXAMINATION INTO THE ACCESSIBILITY AND AVAILABILITY OF DIAGNOSTIC IMAGING SERVICES AT PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTIONS WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO REGIONAL HEALTH AUTHORITIES UNDER THE PURVIEW OF THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH

8.1 The Chairman called the public meeting to order at 2:35 p.m.

8.2 The following officials joined the meeting:

MINISTRY OF HEALTH (MOH)

Mr. Asif Ali	-	Permanent Secretary
Ms. Melanie Noel	-	Deputy Permanent Secretary
Mr. Paul Taylor	-	Biomedical Engineer Consultant PMU
Dr. Roshan Parasram	-	Chief Medical Officer
Dr. Stewart Smith	-	Senior Health System Adviser

NORTH WEST REGIONAL HEALTH AUTHORITY (NWRHA)

Ms. Salisha Baksh	-	Chief Executive Officer (Ag.)
Mr. Anil Boodram	-	Head, Radiology
Mr. Shemaih Walcott	-	Manager, Policy & Planning (Ag.)

SOUTH WEST REGIONAL HEALTH AUTHORITY (SWRHA)

Mr. Brian Amour	-	Chief Executive Officer
Mr. Stephen Alleyne	-	Chief Operations Officer
Dr. Pravinde Ramoutar	-	Director of Health
Dr. Anthony Ameerall	-	Head of Department - Radiology

NORTH CENTRAL REGIONAL HEALTH AUTHORITY (NCRHA)

Mr. Davlin Thomas	-	Chief Executive Officer
Dr. Malachy Ojuro	-	Director of Health (Ag.)
Ms. Stacy Thomas-Lewis	-	Chief Operating Officer
Ms. Shantee Mongroo	-	Regional Coordinator, Radiology Services
Mr. Anil Lutchman	-	Manager IS/IT

EASTERN REGIONAL HEALTH AUTHORITY (ERHA)

Mr. Ronald Tsoi-A-Fatt	-	Chief Executive Officer
Dr. Allana Best	-	County Medical Officer of Health – St. Andrew/St. David
Dr. Sasha Sankar-Maharaj	-	Medical Director (Ag.)
Ms. Silla Bissesar	-	Acting Manager – Para Clinical Services
Ms. Amy Ali	-	Manager, Para-Clinical Services

8.3 The Chairman welcomed the officials.

8.4 The Chairman outlined the mandate of the Committee and the purpose of the hearing. Introductions were exchanged.

8.5 **Key Issues Discussed:**

1. The types of equipment that fall under the terminology ‘diagnostic imaging’;
2. The attainment of the goals with regard to the provision of diagnostic imaging by the MOH and the RHAs;
3. The factors considered when determining the number of imaging equipment at the RHA versus the population catchment;
4. The challenges encountered by the RHA’s providing diagnostic imaging services;
5. The procurement and total cost of diagnostic imaging machines;
6. The outsourcing arrangements at each RHA;
7. The process of outsourcing from a patient’s perspective;
8. The reasons for outsourcing diagnostic imaging services;
9. The functionality of the 64-slice CT Scan and the MRI machine at the SWRHA;
10. The implications of the ERHA not having its own MRI machines;
11. The challenges non-emergency patients experience in accessing imaging services;
12. The challenges with receiving imaging results in a timely manner;
13. The delays experienced by patients when diagnostic imaging equipment are in use;
14. The increased demand of diagnostic imaging services as a result of the COVID - 19 pandemic;
15. The waiting time for a patient to access a imaging service at each RHA;
16. The backlog issues associated with patients accessing diagnostic imaging services;
17. The high costs associated with the maintenance of diagnostic imaging equipment;
18. The time taken to complete an MRI service;
19. The additional technical support required for performing diagnostic imaging services;
20. The meaning of the term ‘downtime’;
21. The fluctuations in the timeline associated with downtime of diagnostic imaging equipment for scheduled maintenance at each RHA;
22. The supply chain challenges and the delays experienced when receiving parts to repair imaging equipment due to COVID-19;

23. The status of the utilization of the 2021 allocation;
24. The challenges expected during fiscal 2022 in the procuring of diagnostic imaging equipment;
25. The factors determining the life cycle of diagnostic imaging equipment;
26. The feasibility of engaging suppliers to conduct repairs and enhancement work to imaging equipment;
27. The average cost per patient to utilise imaging services;
28. The determination of the cost per service by the RHAs and the “market rate” when pricing imaging services;
29. The costing exercise to be conducted by the MOH in fiscal 2022;
30. The infrastructural challenges at the Port of Spain General Hospital;
31. The human resource limitations with regard to radiologist consultants, biomedical technicians and other general radiology staff;
32. The developmental training for Biomedical Technicians in collaboration with the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO);
33. The training opportunities needed for radiology staff; and
34. The impact of COVID-19 on the provision of diagnostic imaging services.

Please see the verbatim notes for the detailed oral response by the witnesses.

8.6 The Chairman thanked officials for attending and they were excused.

SUSPENSION

9.1 At 5:41 p.m., the Chairman suspended the public meeting to resume for a post- hearing discussion with Members only.

RESUMPTION

10.1 At 5:42 p.m. the Chairman resumed the meeting.

POST-HEARING DISCUSSION

11.1 The Chairman sought Members’ views on the public hearing. A discussion ensued.

11.2 The Committee agreed that additional questions would be sent to the Ministry of Health.

[Please see Appendix 1]

ADJOURNMENT

12.1 The Chairman thanked Members for their attendance and the meeting was adjourned to **Wednesday January 12, 2022 at 1:30 p.m.**

12.2 The adjournment was taken at 5:48 p.m.

We certify that these Minutes are true and correct.

CHAIRMAN

SECRETARY

December 8, 2021

APPENDIX III

Additional Information Requested

Additional Questions to the Ministry of Health

General Questions (pages 1-5 of the Written Response)

1. Clarify what the term 'emergency' in relation to receiving diagnostic imaging services.
2. In relation to **Table 1**, what is the process/practice each Regional Health Authority (RHA) utilizes to assess suppliers to ensure value for money is achieved.
3. What is the sum allocated for Diagnostic Imaging Services for fiscal 2021-2022?
 - a. Regarding the allocation of funds for the purchasing of Diagnostic Imaging Services for the North Central Regional Health Authority (NCRHA), what methods were used for assessing the needs of the NCRHA?
4. What 'other types of medical equipment based on the needs' would be purchased?
5. What is the sum of funds allocated for the purchasing of 'other medical equipment'?
6. Provide a list of the 'other medical equipment and the frequency of use of these equipment'.

Based on Response to Question 3 (pgs. 3-4)

1. What type of illness, ailments or medical condition requires an echocardiogram, ultrasound, MRI and CT Scan?
2. Describe the process for a person applying to access the service of diagnostic imaging machine at each RHA.
3. How many persons could not obtain access to the services of a diagnostic imaging machine due to the unacceptable wait times and unavailability of machines?
4. What measures, if any, will be explored to reduce the waiting time for accessing imaging services besides General X-Rays, Dental and C-Arm?
 - i. What is projected timeline for the implementation of these measures?
5. How many persons have died while waiting to access diagnostic imaging machine?
 - i. Is there a mechanism in place to track whether a patients' conditions worsened while on the waiting list?
 - ii. If yes, state.
6. Of the persons who died, which machine/machines were they waiting to utilise and at which RHA?

7. Based on the waiting time for the use of the services of the MRI Machines, what measures are being explored to obtain more MRI machines?
 - i. How many persons did not access the service of MRI machine due to the availability of the machines at only two RHAs and one of these RHAs, NCRHA, has a waiting time of one (1) year?
8. What measures are being explored to obtain mammography machines at the NWRHA?
 - i. What is the projected timeline for the implementation of these measures?
 - ii. What measures are being explored to obtain fluoroscopy machines at the ERHA and the NWRHA?
 - iii. What is the projected timeline for the implementation of these measures?
9. Why is the wait time for NCRHA significantly longer for each service (excluding Dental and C-Arm)?
 - i. How many person uses this services on a daily basis per RHA?
 - ii. Will any measures be explored to reduce this wait time?
10. How many persons have had to schedule appointments for another diagnostic imaging machine while waiting for their initial appointment?
 - i. At which RHAs does this occur?
 - ii. Which machines did these persons' schedule appointments for initially?

Based on Response to Question 4 (pg. 5)

11. Based on the challenges faced in the provision of diagnostic imaging services, will any measures be explored to mitigate these challenges?
12. What measures are being explored to mitigate the increased demand for imaging services?
 - i. What is the projected timeline for implementation?
13. Why are the required parts for service of the equipment unavailable?
 - i. What measures are being explored to mitigate the challenge of availability?
 - ii. Can the required parts can be sourced locally? Can it be stocked?
 - iii. What alternative measures are available to persons awaiting a diagnostic machine that is not functioning due to unavailability of parts?
14. What were the delays with the Picture Archiving and Communication System?
 - i. What has been the impact of the delays?
 - ii. How long do the delays last?

- iii. What measures are being explored to reduce/alleviate the delays?
15. Why are the imaging machines being retrofitted rather than obtaining machines built for their intended purpose?
- i. What are the benefits of retrofitting?
 - ii. Which imaging machines in each RHA have been retrofitted?
 - iii. What were the issues caused by the retrofitting of the machines which resulted in delays in the availability and access to diagnostic imaging service?

Status of Maintenance (pages 5-11)

Based on Response to Question 1 (pg. 5)

16. In relation to the length of downtime for maintenance stated in the **Appendix**, what measures, if any, are being implemented to reduce this downtime for each Diagnostic Imaging Equipment?
17. Why does the maintenance plan for the same diagnostic machine vary in different RHAs?

Based on Response to Question 2 (pg. 6)

18. What are the types of arrangements made with the other RHAs when maintenance is being undertaken at a specific facility?
19. How many persons were impacted by the scheduled maintenance of each RHA?
- i. What service did they apply for?
 - ii. State the initial RHA the person went to and which subsequent RHA were they directed to?

Based on Response to Question 3 (pg. 6)

20. Why is the cost of maintenance for the fluoroscopy and dental machines not indicated in **Table 4**? State the cost of each service.

Based on Response to Question 4 (pg. 6-7)

21. What is the process for the procurement and release of funds for repairs above \$100,000.00?
22. How long does it take to replace and repair machines that are under active warranty?

Based on Response to Question 5 (pg. 7-10)

23. Are standards in place to ensure that the RHAs are obtaining the best value for money regarding the maintenance of machines? If so, state the standards?
24. Regarding the response to part (iii) on page 10, why are the annual repairs and maintenance cost for the NCRHA much higher than the others?

Based on Response to Question 6 (pg. 10)

25. Why are other suppliers not contacted if there is a local sole provider in the instance that the other suppliers may be costlier and/or time effective?
26. What are the terms of reference used to contract suppliers?

Based on Response to Question 7 (pg. 10)

27. Has any comparison been made between renting/leasing and purchasing Diagnostic Imaging Equipment to determine the best option to achieve value for money?
28. Are the RHAs planning to renting or leasing Diagnostic Imaging Equipment in the foreseeable future?

Based on Response to Question 11 (pg. 11)

29. How many persons have not had access to the requested equipment after these arrangements have been made?
 - i. What machine did each person apply for?
 - ii. Which RHA did the person initially go to and which RHA were they directed to?

Status of Availability (pages 11-12)

Based on Response to Question 1 (pg. 11)

30. Why are there non-operational machines at the NWRHA, SWRHA and NCRHA?
 - i. How long have these machines been nonoperational? Which types of machines are nonoperational?
 - ii. What measures are being explored to ensure these machines are operational as soon as possible?

31. How many persons access diagnostic imaging equipment at each RHA on a monthly basis?

Provide a detailed breakdown by:

- i. Age;
- ii. Sex; and
- iii. Type of equipment.

32. How many persons make appointments/seek to access diagnostic imaging equipment at each RHA on a monthly basis? Provide a detailed breakdown by:

- a. Age;
- b. Sex; and
- c. Type of equipment.

Based on information presented in the Appendix

1. What is the expected life of each equipment?
2. How do you determine when the life expectancy of equipment is coming to an end?
3. What is the role of the MOH when purchasing diagnostic equipment?

Based on information in presented Table 1 by the NWRHA

1. What mechanisms are in place to identify 'life threatening' cases?
2. In light of the downtime of 70 hours, what alternative measures are in place to treat with life threatening cases during the downtime?
3. Given the length of downtime for the maintenance, what are the alternative arrangements during this time?
4. What mechanisms are in place to ensure maintenance is conducted during this fixed time?
5. Does the downtime given for the equipment refer to the time to start and complete maintenance? Explain.
6. Regarding warranties, what systems are in place when the warranty for equipment has expired?
 - a. What steps are taken, if any ,prior to the expiration of a warranty?
 - b. How soon after the expiration of the warranty are steps taken to address this situation?

Based on information in presented Table 2 by the NWRHA

1. In reference to the high frequency use equipment, does the patients with routine cases and emergency cases require use of the equipment?
2. How does the RHA treat with routine cases versus emergency cases requiring the use of equipment during maintenance?
3. Has consideration been given to a Diagnostic Imaging Centre?
4. Has the RHA identified equipment that the frequency of use is high and require parts for regular replacement in order to reduce downtime e.g. A printer requires ink frequently, as such, ink is purchased regularly to ensure a constant supply.
 - a. What is the possibility of restocking these parts?

Provide the following:

1. Details on the servicing of diagnostic imaging equipment at the NCRHA, ERHA and SWRHA;
2. The cost incurred when an RHA outsources its services to another RHA;
3. The outsourcing arrangements at each RHA;
4. The downtime of the General X-Ray Unit, Accident and Emergency at the NWRHA;
5. The status of the receipt of parts, that were to be delivered and installed by November 2021;
6. The diagnostic equipment procured by the NWRHA for fiscal 2020-2021;
7. The timeline for the rectification of the infrastructural challenges at the Port of Spain General Hospital's Radiology Department;
8. The contracted working hours of consultant radiologists at each RHA;
9. The clinical guidelines for the use of each diagnostic imaging service;
10. The number of persons who access/did not access diagnostic imaging services for fiscal 2020-2021;
11. The status of the PET Scan machine at the relative RHAs;
12. The waiting list for diagnostic imaging at each RHA for fiscal 2020-2021;
13. The start date of the cost benefit analysis;
14. The number of established positions for diagnostic imaging technicians per service; and
15. The number of vacancies at each RHA for radiographers and biomedical technicians.

Appendix IV

Verbatim

**VERBATIM NOTES OF THE TWELFTH VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION AND APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE HELD, (IN PUBLIC),
ON WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2022, AT 2.43 P.M.**

PRESENT

Mrs. Bridgid Annisette-George	Chairman
Mr. Laurence Hislop	Member
Mr. Randal Mitchell	Member
Mr. Hassel Bacchus	Member
Mrs. Lisa Morris-Julian	Member
Ms. Keiba Jacob-Mottley	Secretary
Ms. Khisha Peterkin	Assistant Secretary
Ms. Hema Bhagaloo	Assistant Secretary
Ms. Rachel Nunes	Graduate Research Assistant

ABSENT

Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy	Member
Mr. Symon de Nobriga	Member
Dr. Lackram Bodoie	Vice-Chairman
Mr. Wade Mark	Member
Ms. Amrita Deonarine	Member

AUDITOR GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

Ms. Lorelly Pujadas	Auditor General
Ms. Jaiwantie Ramdass	Deputy Auditor General
Mrs. Brenda Ragbir-De Jean	Audit Executive I (Ag.)
Ms. Anita Mangra	Senior Legal Officer

MINISTRY OF FINANCE

Ms. Catherine Laban	Comptroller of Accounts
Mrs. Avonelle Rostant	Treasury Director, Pensions Management Branch (Ag.)
Mrs. Vashti Maharaj	Treasury Director, Financial Management Branch (Ag.)

PERSONNEL DEPARTMENT

Dr. Daryl Dindial	Chief Personnel Officer
Ms. Hazel Villafana	Deputy Chief Personnel Officer (Ag.)
Ms. Lorris Alfred	Director Human Resource Management

OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL AND LEGAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Natasha Barrow	Permanent Secretary
Ms. Cher Augustine-Hamilton	Deputy Permanent Secretary
Ms. Solange De Souza	Senior Legal Advisor
Mr. Ian Macintyre	Chief Parliamentary Counsel
Mr. Reynold Price	Senior Legal Officer

MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. Gary Joseph	Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
Ms. Denise Phillip	Deputy Permanent Secretary (Ag.) General Administration & Human Resources
Ms. Enez Moore	Director of Human Resources (Establishment) (Ag.)
Ms. Indira Harripaul	Director of Human Resources (Contracts) (Ag.)
Ms. Tricia Lakhansingh	Senior Human Resource Officer (Ag.) Employee Relations
Mr. Anil Gosine	Assistant Chief Staff Officer Sustainment
Mr. Glen Deverteuil	Prison Officer II
Mrs. Sherma Maynard-Wilson	Senior Superintendent

Mr. Seon Raphael

Fire Sub Officer

Mr. Clint Arthur

Superintendent of Police (Finance
Branch) (Ag.)

Mr. Ian Caldeira

Legal Officer (Finance Branch)

Madam Chairman: [*Technical difficulties*]*—*this Committee is to assist the stakeholders in achieving the efficient delivery of services while ensuring that expenditure is embarked upon in accordance with Parliamentary approval; to determine the challenges being faced and possible solutions to these challenges; and, to make recommendations for improvement of public administration.

This meeting is being broadcast live on Parliament’s Channel 11, on Radio 105.5 FM and the Parliament’s YouTube Channel *Parlview*. Viewers and listeners can send their comments related to today’s enquiry via email parl101@tpparliament.org, via [facebook.com\tpparliament](https://www.facebook.com/tpparliament), and via Twitter @tpparliament. Participants are kindly being asked to keep their microphones muted until recognized by the Chair. I will therefore now invite the members of the Committee to introduce themselves, and then the officers of the various departments. So could the members of the Committee kindly introduce themselves.

[*Introductions made*]

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. And therefore, can I call upon the Auditor General’s Department and have their representatives introduce themselves?

[*Introductions made*]

Madam Chairman: And therefore, I will now invite the members of the Ministry of Finance to introduce themselves.

[*Introductions made*]

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. Might I ask now the members—the representatives from the Personnel Department to introduce themselves?

[*Introductions made*]

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. May I ask the representatives from the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs to introduce themselves?

[*Introductions made*]

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. And may I invite the members from the Ministry of

National Security to introduce themselves.

[*Introductions made*]

2.50 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So, might I just ask all participants in this meeting to kindly turn on their cameras so that we are not speaking with a black board? Thank you very much.

[*Introductions made*]

Madam Chairman: So, at this stage, might I ask each department or Ministry to make an opening statement, and I will start with the Chief Personnel Officer to bring a brief opening statement with respect to this enquiry.

Cmdr. Dr. Dindial: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Personnel Department would have collaborated with other agencies to provide recommendations and to implement recommendations, rather, of the Committee. So, we are pleased to have the opportunity to provide updates and statuses on recommendations made by the Committee in treating with the improvement of, one, terms and conditions of employment and the processing of pension and leave for officers in the civil service.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. And might I now invite the Auditor General to make a brief opening statement.

Ms. Pujadas: Good afternoon, Chair. Thank you very much for inviting the Auditor General and our team to, once again, address the issues that are facing us with regard to the processing of pension payments. As did the Chief Personnel Officer indicate, there has been some collaboration with various stakeholders, with a view to coming up with, addressing the recommendations that were made by the PAAC. So, we thank you very much and we look forward to providing further updates as we go along. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much, Auditor General. And might I now invite the Permanent Secretary from the Ministry of Finance?

Ms. Laban: Chair, I am representing the Permanent Secretary, as the main person, Comptroller of Accounts, so I will make the opening statement. So, the Pensions Management Branch of the Treasury Division is responsible for the administration of pensions and gratuities and terminal benefits to retired public officers, as well as contract officers. We have collaborated with the other stakeholders over the past few years to ensure that, you know, there is a continuous processing of the pension benefits. So, we welcome any remarks and recommendations as we go along with

this session. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. And might I also invite the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of National Security to make a brief opening statement.

Mr. Joseph: Good afternoon, Madam Chair and members of the Committee, as well as to the viewing and listening public. The Ministry of National Security is pleased to be before the Committee this afternoon to lend whatever assistance that is required that would allow us to ventilate the issues surrounding the payment of gratuities and pensions to public officers as well as contract employees. We are here, we are ready to assist the Committee as well as other arms within the service and I look toward to our engagement this afternoon. Thank you, Chair.

Madam Chairman: Thank you. And, finally, the Permanent Secretary of the Office of the Attorney General and the Ministry Legal Affairs.

Ms. Barrow: Good afternoon everyone. The Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs, its overall concern is with the administration of justice as well as the drafting and review of legislation. As I would have mentioned in our correspondence that we would have submitted, we would have met with the Auditor General as late as last week Friday, and we would have aired out a lot of concerns regarding the process with regard to the legislation, and we are—and I do have with us here, the Chief Parliamentary Counsel, Mr. Ian Macintyre, who will be happy to provide any further guidance with regard to the process to moving forward and changing the legislation. I thank you.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much to you all. And I think I would like to start the conversation off with addressing the issue of training and, particularly, directing this to the Personnel Department. Certainly, I think the Committee was happy to see in your submission of the September 07, 2022, that some training took place with respect to processing of pension and leave records. This was geared to all Ministries. You know, it was a long time in coming but, you know, we are happy to see that it took place.

Now, what I would like to find out in terms of this, from your report, 17 Ministries and departments participated in all—I mean, if my addition is correct—and, therefore, I would like to ask: How many Ministries and departments this was either initially targeted to or you envisaged would have participated in this training?

Cmdr. Dr. Dindial: Thank you, Madam Chair. Currently, we have 24 Ministries and departments, so all were targeted. This is the response grade that we got.

Madam Chairman: Okay. All right. It means that all did not participate, at least, seven did not participate. Did you get any explanation why?

Cmdr. Dr. Dindial: Well, we got some information of people who were engaged in preparing for budget, because at that the time it was the end of July, and there were issues surrounding those things. So we did not get participation from some Ministries based on that reason that they provided. But what we intend to do is, of course, go back out and capture those Ministries that were not present in that training.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So do you have—so, if I understand well, you are going to target the seven that did not participate. Am I correct in understanding that?

Cmdr. Dr. Dindial: We are going to target those Chair, but we also want to expand as well for all the Ministries because there may be new people there who may have assumed duties to discharge responsibilities on issues of pension and leave.

Madam Chairman: Okay. All right. So, I think, because when we look at your actual evaluation, it seems clear that there is a high demand for further training and continuous training by the respondents who have taken the time to fill out your evaluation form. So that, it is really comforting to hear that you intend to do further training. Are you in a position, at this stage, to let us know when your next module of training will be rolled out?

Cmdr. Dr. Dindial: Sure, Madam Chair. We are looking at the first quarter in the next year, so January.

Madam Chairman: So January 2023?

Cmdr. Dr. Dindial: Yes, Chair.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Thank you. And looking at the evaluation of the workshop, it appears—you said that 58 of the 158 attendees completed the evaluation form and, therefore, that will be like about 36 per cent of your participants and, therefore, I wanted to know, with that kind of percentage, if you felt that you were in a position to rank the success of your training at all?

Cmdr. Dr. Dindial: I mean, it is statistics, Chair. I mean, we were comforted that those who did respond and the responses that they did provide, allowed us to have a good sense that the training was successful for those who did in fact respond. Of course, we would have hoped that more persons would have participated in the evaluation questionnaire; that did not occur. What we intend to do on the next occasion is to alert all participants of the requirement, the mandatory

requirement to participate and fill out the evaluation questionnaire, so we will have a truer sense of the full grouping perspectives on the training that we will conduct.

Madam Chairman: [*Technical difficulties*] It appears that the signal here has dropped. I am not sure if the wider meeting can hear me but I cannot hear the wider meeting at all.

Cmdr. Dr. Dindial: Can you hear me, Madam Chair?

Mr. Bacchus: It appears not. So, as soon as they get it rectified. We can hear you but Madam Chair is not hearing us. So, they will sort it out.

Madam Chairman: Can you all hear me now?

Cmdr. Dr. Dindial: Yes, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Okay. I am so sorry, my apologies. I completely lost signal and audio. So that I do not know if the CPO, if you need me to repeat the question.

Cmdr. Dr. Dindial: No, Madam Chair, I will repeat the response, Madam Chair, for you.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much.

Cmdr. Dr. Dindial: So we noted that only 58 persons out of the 158, as you indicated, 37 per cent, responded to the questionnaire. But for those who were inclined to respond to the questionnaire, we were satisfied based on the responses that it was a success. On the next occasion, we will mandate that persons fill out the questionnaire as part of the exercise, to complete the exercise, so we will have a better sense of what is the true representation of all participants. So that is what we hope to do, to present on the next occasion when an opportunity is provided to us.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So, thank you very much. So, maybe then I could ask the Comptroller of Accounts—because this would have taken place, I think, in June of this year—whether from your end, have you seen any improvement, change in submissions that may have come since this training? Because it is one thing to look at the evaluation exercise assessment. But in terms of what is the output, are you in a position to say or if it is still too early?

Ms. Laban: Chair, I think it is a bit too early to say, but we will continue to monitor maybe over the next three months to get a better idea of the response.

Madam Chairman: Thank you. Thank you very much with respect to that. So, in terms of monitoring the pension and leave records, as you say, precisely what is done so that we get an idea of what is involved in what you call this monitoring?

Cmdr. Dr. Dindial: Chair, who is the question for?

Madam Chairman: This question is for—I am sorry—the Comptroller of Accounts because they monitor.

Ms. Laban: Chair, well, we do receive the pension and leave records. However, one of the measures we had instituted was really for the Ministries to submit returns on whether they have been processing their pension and leave records on time and submitting them to Comptroller. However, there has been a delay. We have not been seeing the returns as we had expected.

Madam Chairman: So, if I understand—well, firstly, you said it is a bit too early to assess, but the major tool then you have for monitoring, if I understand well, is the returns and you are saying that you still find that there is a delay?

Ms. Laban: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So, apart from the returns in monitoring, is there any other way you can assess how this training has worked out? Because if I understand well, it means that there has not been an improvement.

Ms. Laban: One of the other ways we do look at as well, is to see how much the payment of pensions has improved on a timely basis, and we have been seeing over the months, maybe over this year, an improvement in the timeliness of the payments of pensions for 2022.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So, the improvement in the timeliness, would that be—and you say the timeliness of payment—would that directly follow from the types of submission or is it from your improved staffing? What will be attributed to that? Because, I mean, there are many areas from our initial engagement with you all and the stakeholders that would cause concern. Training was one, but I think staffing was one too. So, when you tell me that you do see an improvement, and yet you say, hear what, there is still some delay in the actual submissions, what is the cause of the improvement? Have you been able to identify that?

Ms. Laban: Well, one of the things we look at is the accuracy of the information sent by the Ministries and they have, in order to get that improvement, it means that the Ministries have been sending in the information in a more timely manner and complete information. Because without the information, we cannot process a complete file for payment. So it really stems from the Ministries submitting all their information and correct information as well.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. So, I guess we could expect that with continuous training, that we would see some overall improvement in the whole system for delivery. So, what I want to ask Comptroller is that when you say that there—could you give us some sort of actual,

you know, details with respect to the improvement in the timeliness? So that if there was a delay, a delay of however long in the year or whatever, you now see an average of what kind of shortened delay, that sort of thing. If you could give us some sort of statistical information for us to come to the same conclusion as you.

Ms. Laban: Chair, I will have to ask that I give you that statistical information on another date. But I can say that from the approvals that we have been sending to PS, we have been seeing that for the 2022 financial year, we have been seeing pensions being paid for persons who have retired this year, pensions are being paid for those persons. So that is in terms of the improvement. But we are currently collating the information to get a more accurate idea of the percentage paid on time.

Madam Chairman: All right. Thank you very much. And I have one more question for the Chief Personnel Officer that maybe he could help us. In your submission of the September the 7th, 2022, you ended with a statement that:

Training is only one component in the suite of activities required to make a positive impact on the timely processing of retirement benefits for public officers.

Okay? So, in terms of the benefiting, this whole process, could you expand a bit on this and give us some examples of what other activities you think will impact the improvement of this process?

Cmdr. Dr. Dindial: Thank you, Chair. And Chair, if you permit me, just before I respond to that, to add for clarity on the response of the Comptroller of Accounts, information I think might be important relating to your previous question. So, the Personnel Department is also charged with the responsibility to provide advice on incremental matters to Ministries and departments. We have actually seen a reduction in requests coming from Ministries and departments asking for advice of incremental matters. So, that is one indicator for us that some things seem to be going in the right direction.

The other thing I want to point out is that we would have submitted to all Ministries and departments, a comprehensive circular collating issues concerning increments and that was issued since December 2019. But, of course, right there afterwards, the pandemic and so on. So that circular provided a lot of clarity on issues that we normally would have received for advice from Ministries and departments. So, in my respectful view, that circular, in addition to the training, would have supported the outcome that we have now which is a reduction in requests coming from Ministries and departments to determine increments.

However, I have to also share that we have approximately 140 incremental matters before us, at this point in time and, at least 30 per cent of those incremental matters are persons who would be retiring shortly. So we have to put priority on those because it would impact person's pension payments and so on. So, there is a reduction on matters coming to us in terms of increments. The circular and the training, in my view, would have helped that, but we still have a backlog that we have to pay attention to, and I have to direct that our priorities be placed on those officers who will be retiring soon as opposed to those who are looking for an increment and they have time to serve.

Madam Chairman: Cmdr. Dindial, can I ask you one other question on that? Are you seeing a sort of trend with respect to those that are requiring or giving some sort of issue? Is there a sort of trend that one could zero-in and, therefore, maybe target the training or further questionnaires or frequently answered question memos to?

Cmdr. Dr. Dindial: Thank you, Chair. We would have seen trends relating to a circular we would have issued called Circular 4 of 2004. So, the recent circular that we sent out in 2019, attempted to clarify some of the misunderstandings and misinterpretations of that circular. That was one of the circulars we felt was problematic for public officers to understand.

And to be quite frank, incremental matters on the whole, based on how the compensation scale is for the civil service with the bands and the longevity points and so on, it can be very complicated. So you have to have a real keen awareness of many circulars, at the same time, to be able to pronounce on where an officer's incremental points should be. So, it is not as simplistic an exercise at times. It does require a lot of thinking. And even when the CPO has to review them, I would concede Chair, sometimes it gives me headaches, because you have to go back through all of the circulars. So, there is a recommendation that we hope will address all of these issues in the future and that is to say, a revised compensation classification plan for the civil service and not the one that we have now that is not modern. It is quite outdated. So, we are hopeful that if we do complete the job evaluation exercise for the civil service that we will have a new compensation and classification plan that would limit some of the challenges we are having now in the treatment of increments.

In other words, we are simplifying the process, have a separate type of plan and we would avoid some of the administration challenges and burdens placed on Ministries and departments to rectify the issues. One of the key problems is the compensation plan that we have. It is dated

from 1966, and it does not provide us with the flexibility to have timely decisions on matters of increments.

So, the themes, to go back to the question, in our view, really came out of challenges in the interpretation of various circulars, because you have to use sometimes two and three circulars at the same time to determine where it should be. It is a complex and sometimes convoluted exercise to determine where a person's increment should be and that is one of the challenges that the Personnel Department must be able to rectify to allow Ministries and departments, through their HR departments, to have an easier opportunity to rectify these issues with a new system.

So, Madam Chair, going to your question to me which is the last sentence in the paragraph of the document dated the 7th of September, where you sought clarity on what other things should occur. From a training perspective, we recognize that you could train as much people as you want and you could fill out how many evaluation forms and to get all the positive results, but if you do not have terminal behaviour after the training, you are not going to get the type of outcome that you need.

One of the things that must occur is that the Personnel Department must go out to Ministries and departments to assist those HR departments, be assessed and monitored for compliance issues to ensure that they are, in fact, doing what they are supposed to do. So, we may still have issues, the Comptroller of Accounts may still have issues where Ministries and departments will send things and they will pick up the errors. So, in other words, training is one thing, but we need to have terminal behaviour, and to have terminal behaviour, you need to be able to assess for compliance and where there is not compliance, Madam Chair, I will have to add, there have to be consequences. You must be able to deter and, of course, put the point across where persons are able to do what they are supposed to do. You give them the tools, you train them, you provide the opportunities for them to understand what is expected of them, and you assess them for compliance. And, of course, if they do not meet the standards, there is remedial training and there is a process. And once you go through the cycle and you recognize that with all the efforts and all the good intent that these officers are not doing what they are supposed to do, then other courses of action should be considered.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much for that clarification. And just to push the envelope a bit Cmdr. Dindial, two things I wanted to ask you on. You spoke about this new compensation and classification plan, and I guess we are all anxious to see things better for people as they retire.

Do you have an idea of a timeline or a guesstimate of when this process will be completed of, you know, the evaluation exercises and so on, for this new plan to be instituted to make the computations simpler and I guess modern and more reflective of the reality of civil servants at this stage?

Cmdr. Dr. Dindial: Thank you, Madam Chair. We began the exercise on the 1st of July, 2020. The exercise was expected to be completed in two years, so we are over the limit. The exercise was expected to be completed this year, June 2022. We have had significant challenges along the way, but I would add that this is the third time in 30 years that the State has committed resources to do a job evaluation exercise for the civil service, and this is the furthest we have reached. We anticipate the exercise will be completed by June 2023. We are actually beginning the actual evaluations of the jobs this month, and we have about 1,600 jobs to evaluate. So the exercise is split up into benchmark and non-benchmark jobs. So, 250 of those jobs are benchmark jobs, so the consultant will evaluate. And what we do have is job evaluation committees that are represented by persons from the Public Services Association, the PSA, persons from the Personnel Department and persons from the consultant. So, we are beginning the actual exercise of evaluating the jobs this month. The market survey information has already started in terms of going out to get a sense of what are the market rates. So, we expect, we are very optimistic that this exercise will be completed by—the evaluation side of it—by June 2023. I am hopeful by December of 2023, a report is submitted to the Cabinet for consideration of the implementation of recommendations coming out of this exercise.

3.20 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So if I conclude well, it is a long time in coming because I—you have anticipated what was going to be my next question, is that once your evaluation exercise was completed, what are the next steps. And you have anticipated that by saying, “Look, it finally has to go to the Cabinet,” and that is outside of your purview, so I appreciate that.

And I also want to say that, in terms of the initial question about the training, I was gratified to see—because that sentence could have been interpreted like shifting the buck, but I was gratified to see that in your clarification you still saw there is a role for the Personnel Department in this, in terms of, you know, doing the sort of compliance testing, not just monitoring but going in there and seeing whether people have complied with all the learning and the tools available to them. And I am asking, one, how easy it would be for your department

to embark on this? What hindrances that you see that may occur, or challenges, in having to do the compliance assessments?

Dr. Dindial: Thank you, Chair. One of the things that we must do—we are actually in a process right now with the Ministry of Public Administration, its Public Management Consulting Division, PMCD. We are restructuring the Personnel Department. One of the recommendations I have asked—well, one of the things I have asked PMCD to consider, and it will form a part of the recommendations, I am advised, I have asked for a monitoring and compliance division to be created for the Personnel Department, whose sole responsibility will be going out to Ministries and Departments on a continuous basis, not just to assess issues of pension and leave but all matters that we have devolved to Permanent Secretaries. There is a requirement for the State to have, through the office of the CPO, a sense of what is occurring with powers that have been devolved from the Personnel Department to all PSs to ensure that there is compliance, because there is at times a misunderstanding, a misapplication of how one Ministry will do something as opposed to another that is not in compliance.

So we intend to have the structure provide that support for what we have to do. Of course, the structure has to be filled, Madam Chair, and currently we have 66 per cent of vacancies, but I am pleased to advise that the Cabinet did provide some relief to the office of the CPO in 2020. We got some additional contract positions, specialist positions in 2020, 10 of them, and the DPA or the Service Commissions Department and the Personnel Department has been speaking and communicating frequently and we have gotten the approval from them to also lead a recruitment exercise to fill our technical positions in 2023.

Recently, I would add, Madam Chair, we conducted some interviews at the Service Commissions to fill senior positions in the Personnel Department. Unfortunately, we will not get the type of output that we would have expected because it was an old ad that we were treating with; one that was six years ago. So we have to go back out.

The DPA has provided a commitment to us, to allow us, with their support, to do the interviews and to shortlist, and, of course, the interviewing process to fill those vacancies. So we are expecting by the end of 2023 to have a new division, called the monitoring and compliance division, that would be staffed primarily in the interim with contract individuals and then to be filled with permanent and pensionable positions to do this work on a continuous basis.

Of course, the other thing we intend to do is publish reports by Ministries and

departments for compliance, which Ministry is performing better than the next and, of course, that is going to feed into information to the Ministry of Public Administration, Public Service Academy, to identify areas that we need to collaborate to train Ministries and departments. We must take a more proactive approach and that is the approach that we undertake to take.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So thank you very much, CPO. And while I hear you with all of this, I could not help but hearing that compliance will be not just pensions, it would be all broader issues, and therefore, you know, we are putting a plug that pensions do not get lost in all of the—because in everything there is going to be a hierarchy. We do not expect that it is utopia that you will ever have all the resources but that pension and leave, you know, does not fall to the bottom of the ladder. Okay? So I thank you. So, at this stage, I just want to ask any member of the Committee who, at this stage, would maybe want to deal with the issue of training and the submission of the Personnel Department to ask any questions they may have now so that we could complete this area of focus and maybe move on.

Mr. Hislop: Madam Chair, I am—

Madam Chairman: This is member Hislop? Yes.

Mr. Hislop: Yes—comfortable to an extent with regard to the training that you spoke to Cmdr. Dindial about. But I want to find out whether Ministries, divisions and agencies are really taking responsibility for the training or is it that the Ministries and all these other agencies are waiting on, whether it is the Personnel Department, to come in to do the training or are the Ministries taking responsibility for their training?

Madam Chairman: So, I guess, CPO, you might be the best one in a position to answer that question.

Mr. Hislop: Yeah. Yeah.

Dr. Dindial: Thank you, Madam Chair. Member Hislop, I would add that the central human resource agencies, and in this case where increments are concerned, the CPO is the authority to trade on increments for Ministries and departments. That is where the CPO is responsible for the compensation and classification plan and out of that compensation and clarification plan, there are principles in the treatment of increments. That notwithstanding, since—I would go back as far as the early 70s, the Personnel Department has been issuing circular memorandums on the treatment of increments. And as I have indicated earlier, it is because of how the plan is designed, it is not a simplistic issue. You do require a very keen awareness in all of the principles in the

treatment of how you determine increments; that is one issue. The second issue is Ministries and departments do lose staff because people are sent from one Ministry to the next. They are probably not working on the same desk from one Ministry to the next, so there is a constant requirement to train new people the way how the civil service operates.

So one moment you would have competent and qualified cadre of individuals who might take up an acting elsewhere and you will have other persons you will have to train and develop. So, my perspective is that training should be continuous and should be available. We have to also use the technology to have—one of the things we want to do is to have videos on the treatment of increments. So anyone can go and use the resources to seek clarity that they may need but, of course, to have periodic training, face-to-face training, virtual training as the case may be, to provide face-to-face or virtual responses on questions they may have.

Added to the issue of what we want to treat with, compliance, means that persons will have to pay—I will say it this way, more diligence in what they are treating. In other words, “Even if I make an error, somebody else will pick it up.” That kind of mindset has to change because the Comptroller of Accounts, when they receive it, they will not accept any errors. They will send it back and ask for information because there are cost implications.

So the mindset of simply, “Well, I think it might be this point and not that point, I will send it through still,” that mindset has to change and that is an issue of culture. So I am hopeful that the evaluation of issues pertaining to compliance, you know, provides an impetus for Ministries and departments to allow themselves to be more diligent in applying the application of the treatment of increments. So training does have a role to play and I think it is critically important that we understand that. Even if you train department X today, in two or three months department X might need to be retrained because persons move on.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So thank you very much. So in terms of the training, I know you said that you are hoping, CPO, to do a next batch of training very early in 2023. Do you have an annual training schedule? I mean, I think that is one of the things that are in the recommendations that was suggested, an actual training schedule for each year. So if there is for 2023, if that could be shared with us. If it is not yet developed for 2023, we will then, you know, give you a date by which that could be shared with us.

Dr. Dindial: Madam Chair, we do have a training schedule. I am not sure if we would have put dates for 2023 as yet, so I will need to confirm. But what we do is we also train in other areas as

well and we collaborate with other agencies, so we are training as well. The idea is we do have a training plan but I am not sure if dates were populated for 2023.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So therefore then, what I would ask is that, in terms of the training schedule or plan you would have had for 2022, if you could share that with us and show where the training has occurred, and the sort of quantitative kind of information, numbers trained, you know, and sort of evaluation process as a separate and distinct thing so we could see what is going on. And therefore, what I would be asking for is not training in the whole wide sense; that will be the subject of another discussion, which I think we may have had with your department in another enquiry, but certain as it zones in on pension and leave. Okay? I recognize member Bacchus.

Mr. Bacchus: Thank you, Madam Chair. In notice—I was not at the last meeting so, again, you will forgive my ignorance if something was addressed, but the focus of the training has—seems to have a heavy component of work related to increments and things of that particular nature. Is it that that is so—one, is it that that is really so? And two, is it that that is so because in your evaluation of what remedial things needed to be done to improve the efficacy of what was happening within pension and leave that that was the main component, or is it that there are other things as well that are addressed in the training and just that this is what is being highlighted now? And if that is not the case—in other words, if pension and leave is not—if increments are not the only major thing affecting it, what else is being done relative to being able to address those things?

Dr. Dindial: Thank you, hon. member, hon. Minister Bacchus. So the training was focused on increments because it was an outcome of a recommendation made by this honourable Committee. We focus heavily on the determination of increments and how persons understood application of various circulars to allow them the ability to make decisions in assessing the increments for members in their Ministry. So that was the primary focus of the training.

The other things that could be done, which is to improve, you know, the accuracy of how the submissions are made are the issues that I spoke about earlier, which is the issue of the monitoring and compliance to ensure that persons are really doing due diligence. In other words, we are not training for training sake, we are training but we are also assessing whether or not there is terminal behaviour that persons are in fact implementing what they have learnt. And one of the things that the Personnel Department is seeking to have addressed is to get a new

division, a monitoring and a compliance division, to allow us to do that, and staff in the interim with contract employees, but to go out to Ministries and departments to assess compliance on these issues pertaining to pension and leave, but other things as well. And as Madam Chair would have aptly reminded me, pension and leave ought not to be forgotten when we go out there. It ought to be taken into consideration and it will be because it is one of the issues that is confronting our public officers; it is the issue of timely payments of pensions and gratuity.

So training is one aspect, hon. Member, but the other thing is, how do you assess that there is terminal behaviour. Because everybody could say, “Very good and excellent training,” and “We liked it and we want more,” but there is no terminal behaviour. And so, the office of the CPO has to provide a lot of support to Permanent Secretaries and other heads of departments by ensuring that their Ministries’ HR units have the adequate training and competency levels to be able to do what they have to do. We have to provide that ease of burden for those PSs. And, of course, I did indicate that, if we go through the cycle of training and training and we recognize that the issue is not being resolved, other courses of action should occur. There must be a deterrent impact, or effect, rather.

Mr. Bacchus: Chair, if I may, just to follow up on that, in the evaluation responses that you got from the ones that—for the people that did respond, was there a component in that that requested any other intervention that may assist in, again, improving the efficacy of what is happening within pension and leave? And if so, could you share any of those with us?

Dr. Dindial: We did ask a question about what they think the workshop could have been—what could happen for the workshop to be improved, and they did provide some responses to that question. Some of them said they wanted more time for the workshop; they felt it was too short, more time on training, specifically on pension and leave processing. They preferred a face-to-face engagement, not the virtual training. They felt that we should have limited the technical difficulties because the training had, actually, scenarios and group work and quizzes, and so on. It was very interactive. But they also felt that more training, as I indicated, is required and they should invite more real-life scenarios, but we did have a few real-life scenarios in there but, of course, we did not tell them it was real-life scenarios we were presenting. So, those are some of the things that the respondents felt that could be considered and should be considered to improve the efficacy of workshops in the future.

Mr. Bacchus: Thank you very much. Thank you, Chair.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So, again, I just wanted, again, to direct to the CPO, in the submission you spoke about Ministries and departments taking on greater responsibility for coaching, monitoring, supervising their staff to ensure pension and leave records and computation, and so, are done accurately. But even though that statement is made there is no idea with respect to how is that addressed. Now, I heard the part about the compliance but, you know, is it personnel or is it public ad, who addresses that aspect with Ministries and departments accepting responsibility for what they have to do?

Dr. Dindial: Madam Chair, thank you for the question. The buck stops with the PS. The PS is the accounting officer in the Ministry and department. A PS is ultimately responsible for everything that occurs in the Ministry. So while the PS does require support from the office of the CPO and other agencies to strengthen the cadre of human resource professionals they have, ultimately the buck stops with the PS and the PS has a support. The PS has a structure below him or her, which is directors of HR, senior HR officers, legal advisers who could provide advice and opinions on matters they are not comfortable with. All PSs, I would add, Madam Chair, have access to the CPO if they require advice as well, but the buck stops with the PS initially. The PS is responsible for the administration of all matters that occur in a Ministry or department.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So thank you—thank you for that. I just want to ask one or two other things just for an update from your perspective and this is really with respect to the staffing issues. I heard you say that there was some relief. That you all were able to advertise and hire some people, but particularly with respect to the issues that we had treated with recently—previously, when you all spoke about there being the need to recruit two human resource specialists and, you know, that sort of thing, has there been any sort of progress in terms of recruiting the Human Resource Adviser I position, in filling the senior human resource specialist positions? I know it was—you all had explained that it was affected by the policy freeze in the public service of not hiring people for a year. Have you got relief in respect to those specific posts that you all had identified where you had a critical shortage?

Dr. Dindial: Thank you, Madam Chair. We got relief but not for those positions because of the position that was undertaken. The Cabinet, in considering the challenges that the office of the CPO was confronted with, did grant us the approval and the creation of 10 positions; all we have filled but they are contract. So we have not treated with the recruitment of the HRAs as yet. The Service Commissions Department is going to begin that process soon with our support. So

we did get some relief in terms of human resource capacity coming into the department in the form of contract human resource specialists to support the work of the Personnel Department. So that is at the lower level.

In terms of the senior HRA level, we completed interviews, I think it was in September of this year, for those positions. We got a very low—I will say 25 per cent of a very small group of persons—small group was successful. So the DPA has agreed for us to re-advertise along with re-advertising the HRA IIIs and the Is for us to be able to recruit to fill those positions, but we did get some relief. The Cabinet made a decision that allowed us to recruit some persons on contract to help hold the work that we have to do at this point in time.

Madam Chairman: Okay. And based on that relief, has there been an improvement in your service delivery? If so, how do you assess that there has been?

Dr. Dindial: It is difficult, Madam Chair, to outrightly say there has been an improvement because, quite frankly, in the last year—because we have been engaged so much in so many other things, you know, at the same time. For instance, I would add that, we are doing two and three job evaluation exercises simultaneously and also treating with public sector negotiations. Also, dealing with—CPO also treats with matters before the Salaries Review Commission, and we have those things happening there as well, in addition to submissions to the Human Resource Advisory Committee and it is the same staff. So the same staff that will do operational work for Ministries and departments are called, depending on the division that they reside, to support all those other things happening simultaneously. So I will add that perhaps there is improvement on dealing with matters under the SRC. There is improvement in some element of contract terms and conditions and ministerial committee work, but barring that, it is difficult to assess that, you know, we have improved significantly, operational advice to Ministries and departments.

I will add, Madam Chair, that the job evaluation exercise I spoke about earlier, a lot of the work before the Personnel Department will be picked up in that exercise. So, for instance, we have numerous requests from Ministries and departments and directions from the Cabinet to classify positions under the current compensation plan. If that job evaluation exercise is completed and accepted in 2023, all of that work would be picked up in that exercise, including, for instance, the 40 per cent of contract employment that we have that are standardized, all of that would be permanent and pensionable positions. It means to say that the focus on that job evaluation exercise would allow the Personnel Department an opportunity to rectify and

complete a lot of outstanding work that we have for Ministries and departments.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Thank you very much. And the last area I wanted to find out is this, you had spoken about a Note for revised guidelines for contract appointment, that final Note on national policy document should have been submitted in March 2022, so I just want to know whether that was done and what is the status of that.

Dr. Dindial: Thank you, Madam Chair. The status—the document, I would say is 98 per cent completed. It has gone through several rounds of consultation. It was presented at the PS board, the HR forum, the PS forum. It was sent out for comments. We received comments from the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Public Administration. Last week I was able to receive the last set of feedback from the Ministry of Public Administration. Minister West has taken, as she always does, a leadership role in this exercise and there are some areas that require rephrasing or clarity. That submission—our response to those queries would be submitted on Friday. I do anticipate, Madam Chair, that the document will be completed by the end of November and subject to Minister's decision be sent to Cabinet either in December of this year or January 2023. I will add that the document has revised several of the clauses that exist right now, including recruitment and vacation leave, terminal leave, issues pertaining to leave of absence and maternity leave as well. So there are new areas we have included in the document. So the document is actually called a national policy for contract employment, so it would also encompass other guidelines or policy position the State would have adopted for other categories of contract employment under the State. For example, issues pertaining to personal staff of Cabinet Ministers and non-Cabinet Ministers, and parliamentary secretaries will be included, including Foreign Service personnel and non-career diplomats and attachés, we will have those things in there as well. And for contract employees, we are actually putting in a code of conduct and a disciplinary process to deal with some of the issues that Ministries and departments are confronted with.

So the document has taken on a very broad approach. It encompasses all the things, and I will say, under the sun that contract management should consider and all of the policy positions will now be found on this singular document. So it took some time to go through because we did not believe that we should have just addressed one issue. We actually reviewed the clauses. We would have looked at judgments coming out of the Industrial Court pertaining to what they deem to be unfair industrial relation practices. We made adjustments for policy positions in the

document. So it is an all-encompassing, very comprehensive document that any practitioner in any Ministry or department could have access to with all of the policy positions impacting contract employees. So I am hopeful, Madam Chair, by the end of the year the document is finalized. And with the approval of hon. Minister West, it could be submitted to the Cabinet either this year or very early next year for consideration.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So thank you. So even though 18 months late you are very hopeful that you are near the end and therefore, you know, in our recommendations we will most probably ask you for a status update by, you know, January/February 2023, so that we are ensured that this national policy for contract employment is being progressed.

And therefore, just to widen the conversation a bit, I would like to move on and focus on the Auditor General, the Office of the Attorney General and the Ministry of Legal Affairs, and really on the issue of the legislative and regulatory amendments that need to be effective to free the Auditor General of being tied into a process which does not have a constitutional underpinning. I recognize that a meeting took place. I saw it described in one of the submission as an emergency meeting and I am not sure what “emergency” meant.

I do want to pay some respect to the loss that would have occurred because of the untimely passing of the representative of the Office of the Attorney General and the Ministry of Legal Affairs in the setting up of that stakeholder committee. The fact that it took maybe nine months after his death for people to wake up tells me the critical role that he played. But if, you know, we could shift the focus to see what is going on with respect to this meeting and the formulation of the regulatory and legislative changes that would be required. So maybe, Mr. Macintyre, you might be the perfect person for me to pitch this to. If not, we will pass it on to the Auditor General. Thank you.

Mr. Macintyre SC: Yes. Thank you, Chair. At our meeting last week Friday, it was agreed that the Auditor General would draft the requisite Note for Cabinet for the amendments to take place. There are a number of regulations that need to be amended to remove the reference to the Auditor General. These are the Civil Service Regulations, the Education Regulations, the Police Service Regulations, the Fire Service Regulations and the Municipal Police Service Regulations. I do not think that there are regulations under the Industrial Relations Act or that—on looking at section 74(7) of the Industrial Relations Act, I do not think that section needs to be amended, but I would be subject to correction by the Auditor General.

3.50 p.m.

Mr. Macintyre SC: In terms of the computing and checking of the pensions and gratuities, the regulations that I mentioned would need to be amended. The Civil Service Regulations are made by the Minister. The education regulations, the police service and the fire service regulations are made by the President, and the Municipal Police Service Commission Regulations are made by the Statutory Authorities Service Commissions.

So in view of the variety of regulations, and the variety of regulation-making power that is involved, we would need to carry a note to Cabinet to get Cabinet's policy approval. That is the normal process for getting legislation, any legislation drafted, that a note is carried to Cabinet for Cabinet's approval of the policy, and upon receipt of the Cabinet Minute the Legislative Drafting Department would draft the requisite legislation.

So at the meeting on Friday, it was agreed that this matter really falls under the Ministry of Finance, being pensions, and it also may impact the CPO because we are dealing with terms and conditions of service. So we are really looking at Ministry of Finance, at CPO, to be the instructing officers, as it were. But since it is also very much in relation to the Auditor General, it is primarily with respect to the Auditor General, we would also look to the Auditor General's Department.

It is expected that the Ministry of Finance would, in finalizing that note for Cabinet, that they would consult key stakeholders, namely the CPO, the Auditor General, Comptroller of Accounts, because the reference in the various regulations to both the Auditor General and the Comptroller of Accounts are computing and checking the pensions and the gratuities.

So it is agreed, basically, that the Auditor General would prepare a draft note for the consideration of the Minister of Finance, and that upon receipt of the relevant Cabinet Minute that the Legislative Drafting Department would draft the necessary legislation. Thank you Chair.

Madam Chairman: So, Mr. Macintyre this might be outside of your remit, but could you give us an idea, assuming the Minute is obtained from the Cabinet and so on, what kind of time frame for these regulations to become effective? Are these regulations that are subject to negative or affirmative resolutions?

Mr. Macintyre SC: Yes Chair. The police service regulations are subject to affirmative resolution. All the other regulations are made by the regulation-making authority, and the

legislation without any resolution of Parliament.

In light of the number of pieces of legislation, a decision may be taken to amend all the pieces of legislation together in a Bill. Now, even though we are amending regulations, it is possible for the Government to decide to bring all the amendments together in a Bill so that they are passed and they all come into effect immediately and simultaneously, upon being assented to. But that is a decision really for the Cabinet to decide on the advice of the Attorney General, when the time comes.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much Mr. Macintyre.

I just want to ask the Auditor General with respect to this, if I understand Mr. Macintyre well, it means that the engine room is you. It seems that you have to still advise on whether section 74(7) of the Industrial Relations Act, if those regulations need to be amended.

In the submission coming from the Auditor General, I saw that there was reference that there was a consensus for a follow-up meeting after that last Friday's meeting. So an idea of who is responsible for bringing this meeting and when is this meeting likely to take place, because that meeting is, I think, the meeting that will discuss the draft note. So I expect that there is going to be some kind of working draft, and I think the Auditor General is the person who the meeting identified as that driver. So Auditor General, if we could hear from you.

Ms. Pujadas: Good afternoon again Chair. We did meet on Friday, and we did have a discussion. We did offer to provide assistance to the Ministry of Finance, being that they are the ones that are responsible under which the remit falls. Because we are the ones that it concerns, we did offer to be sort of the engine room, I guess, to drafting of the Cabinet Note with respect to. But then there are other ramifications, because the regulations that we make reference to, the 33(2), et cetera, as we have alluded to in many discussions previously with you, make reference to both the Comptroller of Accounts and the Auditor General's Department. So there is a need for an executive and a policy decision to be made with regard to that.

So what we have done, subsequent to the meeting that we had on Friday, is we have alerted both the CPO and the Permanent Secretary, the lead Permanent Secretary, the accounting officer of the Ministry of Finance, of what transpired at this particular meeting, and we have asked for the Ministry of Finance's consideration in going forward. So we issued that letter promptly, November 11th, with regard to asking them to prepare the Note. We were actually requesting them to prepare the Note with our assistance, and if they would redirect this to the relevant

executive and policymakers, first for the policy decision to be taken, if this is the way forward, and then for us to move forward speedily on the matter.

So I think, as you have alluded to, that given that we are the most concerned and the most affected, that we need to be drivers of this initiative. So subsequent to these November 11th letters that we have written, we would definitely now, through my Senior Legal Officer—by the way I only have one legal officer, one Senior Legal Officer in the department—we will definitely attempt to make firm-up meetings with both the CPO and the Attorney General's office and representatives of the Attorney General's office, and the accounting officer from the Ministry of Finance, so that we could really process this forward, because this is something that my predecessor had raised for quite some time.

Actually, we want to thank the PAAC for actually driving it, because it is through their initiative that we have been able to reach as far as we have reached thus far. But we will now take up the mantle, and try to push it forward so that at least the meetings can take place between now and January of 2023, so that we can at least come up with a Note by January of 2023. Thank you very much.

Madam Chairman: Thank you so much Auditor General. In listening to you, I was minded to think that maybe we may have to meet, have another follow-up meeting, January 5, 2023—I do not know if that is a working day—to ensure that the meeting takes place, if I look at what has happened on the last occasion. But let us hope that all the stakeholders are on a forward track.

I appreciate that some things are over and outside of your immediate control, but certainly for, not just the Auditor General, but the other stakeholders and their participation and cooperation in pushing this process forward, I really do hope that we have passed the history and on to something further.

So I thank you all, and we would see what happens by January 2023, with respect to this Draft Note and getting the Note finalized for Cabinet in its wisdom to make its determination.

What I want to ask though is, in the absence—because it appears that this is going to be some time—and in the absence of the policy and the change in the regulatory provisions, what then can the Auditor General do to improve the part it now has to play in this process, whether validly assigned to it or not, it means that there are regulations that say you do and you have to. How do you improve your ability to improve the process as it currently exists?

Ms. Pujadas: As you know Chair, we are the last in the verification process of the computation

of the pension and leave records. First of all, the verification process resides with the Ministries and Departments and their internal audit departments. Within those departments are responsible for sort of like what you would call the “first check”. Then the second verification process, of course, would rest with the Treasury. So you do know that filtration is taking place as it moves along the line. Then the last process, it comes with us.

Now we process what is sent to us. Recently, in collaboration with the Treasury, there was a great push to try, as much as those files that were on hand at the Treasury that dealt with a significant number of pensioners whose pensions were post 2022, if I am correct. I am correct. There was a push to try, and as much as possible within the final financial year ending on September 30, 2022, to try and clear out, so that the pensioners would be in receipt of what they were duly required to receive.

So, in fact, due to that collaborative effort between Treasury and ourselves, we have received within that period of October to September 2022, 3,959 files, of which 3,872 files were processed by us and returned to Treasury for payment. So that was a significant push in terms of the deliverables, to try and ensure that those officers whose date of retirement was quite some time in the past, were in fact in receipt of their pension.

We have also taken a strategy position as we go forward. Previously, our policy was first in/first out, and sometimes first in/first out did not correlate to actually a person out there who actually because of their pension and leave records not being up-to-date, and being properly calculated or computed by the relevant Ministry or department, may have been somewhat in delay in going through the process to Treasury and to us. So they may end up being not being first in, but by virtue of their date they were being—what is the best word to describe it? They were not receiving their due regard of what was rightfully theirs.

So our present strategy is, while we still try to maintain a first in/first out, there is an analysis that is done in which we try to see the files of officers that may be long outstanding, or have some outstanding dates, and officers who have not received any pensions at all, because we also do get a variety of pensions that is called “revisions”, which may be due to some other amendments, salary increases, increment adjustments, these sorts of things. So they would already been in receipt of a pension, but they need to be revised because they need to get an amended pension.

So we also look at all of those things. So our strategy at present is still to try and focus as

much as possible on officers' date of retirement, as opposed to first in/first out. Although we still do tend to still receive documents on a first in/first out basis, that there is an analysis to see when are these officers' date of retirement, and to try and prioritize the files that we receive in that order, and to therefore address it from that perspective.

I hope this has been sufficient for you, Chair.

Madam Chairman: So let me just ask it in another way. You had indicated that there were certain hindrances to your checking: reduced staff, the loss of the head of your unit. Could you tell me if you have recovered from the impact of that? You have also indicated that you now have some senior manager, or someone senior in the management unit, who is looking at shortening your processing time, and that there would be a further update on an implemented system. Is that what you are speaking about, or is there something else to occur?

Ms. Pujadas: Actually we are basically speaking on the same things, Chair. In fact though, in terms of staffing, we are actually in a worse position. I think when we started off—

Madam Chairman: Excuse me, in terms of staffing? I lost you there.

Ms. Pujadas: We are in a worse position. When we started off this discussion in 2018, we had 12 members of staff, most of which were contracted staff, basically retired officers that returned, that were facilitating the processing. Subsequently, with the COVID coming on, a lot of the retired officers did not come back on, plus there is a resource constraint in terms of being able to financially resource the salaries of these officers. But, that being said, we do have a new executive one, and she is present here, Mrs. Brenda Ragbir-De Jean.

Mrs. Ragbir-De Jean has been working, with all these challenges that we have, to reduce the time taken, by looking at what the process, of how we have looked at it, how we have looked at computation, the nature of our scope of audit. If I may, Chair, I would like to defer to Ms. Ragbir-De Jean, but there is an indication, as you can see by the statistics that I have provided you here with today, that despite all of these challenges, we have incurred some level of efficiency in reducing the time spent in processing the file. Chair, through you, Mrs. Ragbir-De Jean.

Madam Chairman: Thank you.

Mrs. Ragbir-De Jean: Good afternoon. In terms of files that we received, we sort them according to dates, the officers' date of retirement. These are coming from Comptroller of Accounts. With respect to protective services, we process those first in/first out, and from the municipal corporations, first in/first out.

The majority of files we got are from the Comptroller of Accounts, mainly in the monthly files, which comprise of statutory bodies and revised. So our priority lies with pushing the monthly files.

Madam Chairman: So thank you very much. Do you anticipate—because I know this would have started like in January 2022—do you anticipate any sort of revision in the short-term, which could produce better results? I mean, accepting that you have improved, are there further improvements that we could look forward to, given all your constraints and the legislation remaining as it is?

Ms. Pujadas: Chair, one of the tools that we have used is we input our data into a database, so that we can be up-to-date at all times in knowing where the files are, who they have been allocated to, and their status. Originally, the database is created basically, as I said, our initial initiative was our first in/first out basis. A field that was missing was the date of retirement field. So in our discussions coming out of these meetings, and recently here with Mrs. Ragbir-De Jean, and Ms. Ramdass as the deputy who has the delegated responsibility for pensions, we were looking to liaise with our IT personnel in creating that data pool, so that our EDP operators can in fact input that data field into the database that would help us better able to prioritize the files that would need to be pushed to complete.

But I also want to draw attention to the Committee at this point that we came out of September 30, with basically 87 files coming forward, which dealt with previous years, and of those 87 files I believe we have addressed at least 40 of those, and we basically have 40 more outstanding. While we do have files on hand right now, we are crossing September—*[Audio dropped]*

Madam Chairman: Ms. Pujadas, we lost you.

Ms. Pujadas: Are you hearing me now Chair?

Madam Chairman: We are now hearing you, so I might have to ask you to repeat a bit.

Ms. Pujadas: At which point I have to recap for you?

Madam Chairman: Can you try again?

Ms. Pujadas: I said I do not know what we could recap, I do not know at which point you had lost me. Did you hear where I talked about the data field into the data base? Did you hear that far along?

Madam Chairman: I heard you up to the 87, and you processed 40.

Ms. Pujadas: Yes, 40 brought forward files [*Inaudible*], so we have an outstanding amount of about 47 that relate to previous years outside of 2022, and we are working on those diligently. We do have other files for going forward, that we have recently received from Treasury in September and October. When we analyse those file retirement dates, the retirement dates are between October 2022 and July 2023, and also December 2023. So we are working towards ensuring that those people, as much as we can, those files can be reviewed, verified, signed off and returned so that within these time periods at least these officers would be able to receive their pension requirements in a timely manner.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. Member Hislop, I recognize you. I am sorry for having delayed. I am now seeing you on the screen, I guess it is the view I had. So you can have the floor now. I am sorry.

Mr. Hislop: No, that is all right. That is okay, Madam Chair. I believe I got the answer that I was looking for from the response from the Auditor General. So I believe I got the answer, because the question I was going to ask—pardon my ignorance in terms of the public sector and how it fully functions. I was going to ask, at what stage are retirees' pensions calculated. Are they calculated after the person is retired, or is there a time frame leading up to a person's retirement that their files are sent forward and it is calculated, so that by the time the officer retires there is little or no delay in terms of the officer receiving their pensions? I do not know if that needs to be clarified a little bit more for my information, for my knowledge.

Madam Chairman: Auditor General.

Ms. Pujadas: Chair, as we have indicated previously in previous sessions, we are the last in the great wheel of the verification process. The process starts with the Ministries and Departments, and ultimately the Treasury has taken responsibility going forward. They have, in fact, over the years issued a number of circulars, I think starting from 2017, and I think just most recently there was one June 2022, which provides that Ministries and Departments take a proactive approach in dealing with the pension and leave records. They have even provided guidance as to how the pension and leave records are supposed to be done. I think the June 2022 one, they sought to standardize some of the discrepancies that use to occur by Ministries and Departments having different information in the pension and leave records. So they have sought to standardize that.

So they issued that circular in June of 2022. All of this with a view to ensuring that officers

who are due to retire, pension and leave records are done in advance, long in advance of when they are due.

I think at some point in the previous sessions, I think the Comptroller of Accounts spoke about the various returns that needed to be submitted. Part of the information that is blocking when officers are due to retire, and ensuring that Ministries and Departments submit the pension and leave records with regard to that—and so that there is a kind of forced planning by Ministries and Departments in terms of retirement and pensions for officers therein

Madam Chairman: Thank you so much, Auditor General, for doing a little recap, and I am certain we have all benefited from that.

If there are not any questions from the members of the Committee on this aspect, at this stage, I would really want to suggest that we look a bit at the responses of the Ministry of Finance. To start off the conversation to the Ministry of Finance, I needed a little clarification, in that, in one of your first responses, and I am reading the response, we were told.

The process to decentralize the payment of contract gratuity started on July 1st, 2019. There are, however 198 files as at April 2021, from the old system awaiting responses to queries from the Ministries, departments and agencies to be resolved before the Treasury Division can make payment.

Then in the response of January 17, 2022, I am seeing an outstanding balance of 258 records. So I am not sure if we are talking about different things. I am not sure if the number has moved from 198 to 258, and if so how. So maybe Ms. Laban you could help allay some of my confusion.

Ms. Laban: Some of those files that we are talking about were files that were queried and then were subsequently returned to the Treasury Division, to the pensions branch. So the 198 would have included the actual files that we had on hand that we were dealing with. However, we had on query several files and we had returned them to the Ministry get complete information. So when those were sent, it would have added up to more than we had stated previously.

Madam Chairman: I am not sure, Ms. Laban. We had a little technical difficulty, so I am not sure if I have missed something, but I am really confused, how 198 becomes 258, when we are separating a system, because you are talking here from the old system. Or is it that the old system continued after April 2021? Because what I understood is that your new system began July 1st, 2019, with what I would call a sort of incubation period of a year. That is what I seem to have understood in your submission.

So that if that were the case, and you went on to say, look, you were satisfied that the Ministries had got a good grasp of this new system, how now as of 2022 January you have 258? And it also leads me to ask, if my understanding is correct, what then is the figure as of to date?

4.20 p.m.

Ms. Laban: I can tell you the figure. As of today's date, the figure is 98 files that we have on hand currently with queries that we have written to the Ministries to get some further information and clarification on those files.

Madam Chairman: And I think that alone is cause to celebrate. Okay. That alone is a cause to celebrate and maybe I do not know if that is also another indicator that the training has borne some fruit or the standardization of the terms and conditions have also borne some fruit. I do not know if that is an indication and maybe you could guide us with that.

Ms. Laban: Well, it could partially be due to the standardization of the forms that we had sent out previously. Sorry. The terms and conditions.

Madam Chairman: As far the contract officers, it is really just the standardization of the terms and conditions that has resulted in this improvement or decrease, drastic decrease in the number of queried files.

Ms. Laban: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Yes? So you are getting more complete submissions and more timely submissions.

Ms. Laban: Yes. For those with the Ministry of Finance. Yes.

Madam Chairman: All right. I also wanted, Ms. Laban, in that you all had indicated that you had provided a template to the Permanent Secretaries and heads of departments for the preparation of pension and leave records. Could you say if this template is being used? If you have seen some success in the introduction of this template.

Ms. Laban: Yes. We had introduced this form recently, a standardized template. And, yes, is it being used by Ministries. I can get a more accurate figure to let you know but not all of them but the majority that we had seen have been using the new template.

Madam Chairman: Okay. And those who are not using the template, have you all made any enquiries to find out why? If it is a difficulty in understanding or if it means that people just need some further urging. How have you dealt with that to ensure a greater compliance with the template?

Ms. Laban: I think they need some further urging because this happened in June this year. So right now we are just looking to see, you know, how the forms are being used and how frequently and then we will undertake an exercise to impress upon the Ministries the urgency of the—importance, significance of using the standardized templates.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Thank you very much. And I have seen too that you all had also introduced a requirement for the Ministries and departments to submit a status report to the head of the public service. How has that been working?

Ms. Laban: I have to get more information on that. I have not been hearing that much is being submitted to the head of the public service so we have to make further enquiries on that end.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So what then is the date of your latest information on this?

Ms. Laban: Can I get back to you on the latest, the last date of that, by Friday?

Madam Chairman: Okay. Well, as you know, what we will do is, we will, yes, take it in writing. The Secretariat will write with respect to the outstanding matters or any further matters and you will be given some time to provide the requisite information that we would want. Okay?

So let me just also ask in terms of—you all had also done this brochure with respect to the—well, it was really done by the Personnel Department. You all were supposed to be involved in the dissemination of the brochure, circulating it to the Ministries and the departments. I want to know if that was done, by when it was done. If you find that the brochure being disseminated and being put in the hands of the Ministries and departments, if that has been effective? If there has been any feedback that may require a review of the brochure by the Personnel Department that, you know, some kind of collaboration could occur for the improvement?

Ms. Laban: Yes. We assisted in the dispersing, the distribution of the brochure by email, the net and by hand. So we did distribute it throughout the Ministries. In terms of the response we think, we understand that it was clear but seeing that the CPO did the circular, I am not sure if they got some other feedback in terms of how else the—if the brochures should have been structured differently. But from our verbal feedback, it was well accepted.

Madam Chairman: Ms. Laban, I not sure if it is, you know, an audio problem but, you know, I keep losing you so I do not know, I am sorry I have to ask you to repeat but we have lost you for some of your response.

Ms. Laban: Okay. I will repeat. We did do, we did assist in the distribution of the brochures by email, hand and on the net, on the web, the intranet. In terms of the acceptance of a brochure,

from our verbal, what we heard verbally that it was accepted and well understood. But I do not know if the CPO had any other feedback to—or any changes that they had to do with the brochure seeing that it came from—they had produced it.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So, CPO, might I ask you, have you had any feedback from the Ministries and departments about this brochure that may require some re-examination and review to sort of meet the issues or challenges which the Ministries and departments may be experiencing?

Dr. Dindial: Madam Chair, we have received no feedback, no feedback for any improvements. I mean, frankly, it is very basic frequently asked questions that are in the brochure. So no feedback at this point in time to improve what we had circulated.

Madam Chairman: Okay. All right. So thank you very much. And, Auditor General, the Ministry of Finance has sort of put you in the spot with respect to one of their responses and that was with respect to how would they assess the effectiveness and evaluate the improvements in efficiencies when it comes to the decentralization of payments. And their response was:

The effectiveness of this system can be adjudged when the Auditor General's department performs its annual audit as the required information resides with each Ministry and department.

So that really, I now throw the ball to the Auditor General in terms of your opinion with respect to whether this decentralization for the payment of gratuity to contract workers, employees, whether this is effective. Whether it is producing the efficiencies that were anticipated.

Ms. Pujadas: Chair, from an audit perspective we did not do a risk analysis nor did we do an EFM [*Inaudible*] management audit on the decentralization of the pension contract function. However, what we did is, because in 2019 and 2020 there was the transitional movement, what we did was incorporate into our programme of work to verify on a sample basis because from an audit perspective we are no longer doing a 100 per cent verification. So from a sample basis, we sought to verify in every single Ministry and from the sample of the contracts, whether contracts were being administered or whether contracts were being paid. Based on that we did not find any anomalies, any significant or material anomalies to report in those years. But it would be—it would be imprudent of me at this point to say we did an assessment because it certainly was not within our portfolio or our programme of work at that time to do such a thing, to do such an

evaluation.

However, this year what we are trying to do is, we are still continuing, we are not looking at it from all Ministries' perspectives as we did the last time but we did send out a circular asking Ministries to provide certain information as it relates to contract payments. And one of the issues that we are seeking to find out is whether or not there have been any outstanding contract payments, outstanding, due to officers, post-September 30, 2022. I cannot begin to tell you what the information is as yet. We have not tabulated it. Ministries have a deadline of December to respond to us and so I would not be able—but that will be formulated in our report going forward on the annual report going forward on the Public Accounts of Trinidad and Tobago. But a specialized audit assessment or evaluation of the decentralization process certainly was not programmed by us nor was it discussed at any stakeholders meeting, so I certainly would not be able to address that.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. So I guess the ball really is in the court of the Ministry of Finance to really, you know, do the assessment. I do not think the response given really deals with the issue that was directed to you by Parliament. So that we would still expect you to do some evaluation and assessment of that and advise us regarding that. Okay? So I now invite any member of the Committee, because I do not have a full screen, any member of the Committee who wishes to ask a question at this stage to join the conversation.

Mrs. Morris-Julian: Madam Chair, I do have a couple of questions.

Madam Chairman: Thank you so much, Mrs. Morris-Julian. I was just looking for you but you are on another screen. So I invite you now to join the conversation.

Mrs. Morris-Julian: All right. Through you, Madam Chair, regarding the PD is supposed to submit a statement following to the Parliament by January 31, 2022, the training programmes conducted in fiscal 2021, the number of persons trained, the subject matter of the training and findings on the evaluation of the training. Right? Based on the evaluation there appears to be an appetite for more frequent training by the NDAs. Do you plan to implement some of the recommendations to improve the workshop? Also, do you have a proposed training schedule? And the Committee would really truly appreciate if you tell us the proposed dates and the entities that would be involved?

Madam Chairman: So I think that the CPO had spoken to the fact that a proposed date—that something is proposed for January 2023, and that he would submit to us the training schedule

for 2023 at some time subsequently, because he is not sure that it is prepared. But certainly in terms of the question about whether the feedback is going to be incorporated in your training schedule to improve your workshop, I will certainly allow that question as asked by the member.

Dr. Dindial: Thank you, Madam Chair. Member Julian, yes, the PD will be incorporating some of the recommendations made in the evaluation that we received from the training that we conducted. We do intend to have a longer workshop on this occasion—on the next occasion, rather, and we will try to see, at best, for those Ministries that did not participate in the initial training, for those Ministries to be targeted with a face-to-face training workshop as opposed to a virtual.

Madam Chairman: Member Morris-Julian, do you have further questions?

Mrs. Morris-Julian: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I think this is a more general question regarding the improvements. Now, I can speak from the Ministry of Education's perspective where I am still seeing some outstanding pensions and gratuities. Right? But since the training, again through you, Madam Chair, what can we say we can look forward to regarding—the public would really love to know—the improvement regarding gratuities, timely interventions thereof. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Is this directed to the CPO? To whom are we directing this?

Mrs. Morris-Julian: Ms. Laban. Sorry.

Madam Chairman: Ms. Laban. All right.

Ms. Laban: Can you—I did not quite understand your question. Can you repeat?

Mrs. Morris-Julian: Through the Chair, basically I want to know what will be done to improve the more timely—with the pensions and gratuities with regard to persons? Very often as an MP we would have people come to your office and ask for some sort of intervention regarding their gratuity or their pension. Right? And we just want to know what we are looking forward to. We are hearing all the good work but what can we tell our constituents and people when it comes to the—in a timelier manner, I would say.

Ms. Laban: From our end we can ask the Permanent Secretaries because we would know when it reaches the Treasury what documents are outstanding or were not sent so that we can follow up with the Permanent Secretaries to ensure that the documents are sent in a more timely manner and we sent circulars this year already and I—

Mrs. Morris-Julian: Thank you very much. But again through the Chairman, I guess I am

asking more about the communication process. It gets from the PS to your office, so is it that you reach out to them and you ask her to come in a timely manner? If you notice that, for example, in the month of February X amount compared to the month of March? That is what I meant. The communication process, how can it be improved?

Ms. Laban: We also have—we do have liaison officers who would communicate directly with the persons involved, in charge of the P&L process. And they do call in terms of the outstanding documents that are needed to be sent.

Mrs. Morris-Julian: All right. Thank you very much, Ms. Laban. I know that for a fact from personal experiences, I think you all are really stepping up, so I hope it continues along this vein.

Ms. Laban: Okay. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Okay. And I just want to throw out this question. It was a recommendation the Committee had directed to the Auditor General's Department. And based on the response from the Auditor General's Department I want to ask, maybe it is the Ministry of Finance, maybe it is the Personnel Department, how, if they have any sort of input or recommendation with respect to this aspect? And this was with respect to recordkeeping. The Committee had recommended that the Auditor General provide a detailed report outlining arrangements that could enhance the process of recordkeeping of pensions in each Ministry and department.

The Auditor General in its response indicated that, this is really outside of the remit of the Auditor General and suggested that maybe the Treasury's internal audit department may be the entity best placed to provide such a report. So I am trying to engage both Ministry of Finance and CPO to see how do we really resolve this. Because quite frankly I agree, this is not a matter for the Auditor General.

Dr. Dindial: Madam Chair, may I go?

Madam Chairman: Yes, please, CPO.

Dr. Dindial: And for clarity the question is around how do we improve recordkeeping for pension and leave records?

Madam Chairman: Yes. That is it.

Dr. Dindial: All right. So, Madam Chair, I can advise that the Cabinet recently made a decision to put the human resource information management system under the management of the Ministry of Public Administration. Minister West in her leadership capacity has reconvened something called a strategic human resource management council that has met on two or three

occasions in the last month and a half. One of its main priority objectives is to rollout the implementation of IHRIS to include how we treat with records of personal files across NBAs. So in my respectful and considered view, that approach taken by the Cabinet and being led on behalf of the Cabinet by the Ministry of Public Admin with the support of the CPO's office, the Service Commissions Department and the technical staff in MPA to roll out IHRIS finally, is the mechanism that we are going to use to be able to have pension and leave records in a digital format that could be easily accessed. Of course, we are also engaging the Ministry of Digital Transformation as well, they are part of that process. And we will co-opt as required the support of other stakeholders, namely the Ministry of Finance when required if there is cost implications to roll out the IHRIS system.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, CPO. So there exists a sort of implementation plan that maybe you do by sample or something like that, learned lessons and then roll it out completely. Have you all reached that far in terms of—

Dr. Dindial: No, Madam Chair. What has occurred in the last two weeks, the technical teams met, which is the directors of ICT in those Ministries and departments in the council and they are providing recommendations to the strategic human resource management council. That is a council led by Minister West. At that council, decisions will be made on how we are going to roll it out. So this is a recent initiative. Minister West only recently directed the council be reconvened. We had two or three meetings. One was with the technical officers who are au courant of the mechanisms and the capabilities of IHRIS and what may be expected for us to roll out in a plan, the modules across Ministries and departments. Which Ministry will have a lead role, which Ministry will have a support role, which Ministry will have access and so on because there are several modules that not all Ministries and department would use all. Some will use some of it but most Ministries and departments, the HR units will have a cross-section of access to the different modules. So we have not worked out as yet how we are going to roll it out, what is first, but the discussions have commenced. And we do have to—the Minister has to report back to Cabinet in a six-month period. So by March of 2023, Minister West has to report back to Cabinet about the implementation of IHRIS. So it is something that is high on the agenda.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So I guess not until March 2023 we will some idea of timelines, if I understand what you are saying.

Dr. Dindial: By March 2023 we may also have, Madam Chair, the beginning of the rolling out

of it because March 2023 is when we have to report back to the Cabinet what has been done with IHRIS.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Thank you very much. I call on member Hislop and after that member Morris-Julian to join the conversation. Member Hislop, thank you for waiting.

Mr. Hislop: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to jump back to the Ministry of Finance, Madam Chair. With regard to the call circuit, are we looking for any other method beside call circulars and reminders to have Ministries and departments submit their records in a timely manner for pension and leave? Is there any other method that could be used besides call circulars and reminders?

Ms. Laban: One of the methods we have used and we have done three this year, preparation for retirement, where we will meet with the Ministries to prepare them for the retirement of their personnel in terms of what needs to be done and what needs to get updated and stuff, you know, in anticipation of getting these persons' P&L done on time.

Mr. Hislop: Okay. Thank you. No further follow up from me, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Member Morris-Julian.

Mrs. Morris-Julian: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, this is a question that goes out to everyone and I noticed the CPO spoke about IHRIS and IHRIS is something that could really revolutionize everything if everyone is participating and willing to participate. But what is the timeline for Ministries, departments, agencies to submit the claims to the Comptroller of Accounts, the Auditor General? And the average time frame for each to process the claims and persons to receive their moneys? So if I can get answers from the relevant Ministries and departments please? I am very much interested in knowing that particular time frame?

Ms. Laban: We have asked in the circulars for them to—for Ministries to submit at least one year before the date of retirement of the personnel so that the information will get to us to be processed and for us to see if there are corrections to be made.

Mrs. Morris-Julian: Okay. Thank you very much. And could we assume that most Ministries are abiding by that request of that one-year timeline?

Ms. Laban: Unfortunately, they are not all abiding.

Mrs. Morris-Julian: So, thank you, Madam Chair. I think we see where the problem lies with regard to that then. And I think a year is reasonable.

Madam Chairman: So again, Ms. Laban, all are not abiding. Do you have information with

respect to trends? Are there particular Ministries that are chronic defaulters? And if there are Ministries and departments that are chronic defaulters, is there a specific strategy being developed to target, you know, those chronic defaulters? I heard the CPO speak with respect to what their plan is. But in terms of the Ministry of Finance, you know, I do not want to say that there is a silence but maybe I have not heard how do you, one, determine, you look at trends and you specifically target these defaulters?

Ms. Laban: Yes. We have seen some specific trends. And apart from, yes, we do send out communications, and circulars, and reminders but the power really lies within—it is really a disciplinary procedure. If all else fails, then it will have to be a disciplinary process to get the—well, the head of the Ministry, the Permanent Secretary to get these, you know, documents done and sent on time and that will lie with Service Commissions Department if you have look at a disciplinary procedure. But again, you know, you could speak, remind or talk to the head of the public service to get it done.

Madam Chairman: Yeah. But with the status report which you all had implemented to direct to the head of the public service, would that not help? Because, you know, certainly, I mean, we hear the disciplinary slant but if that were a preferred route, I do not think we would still be sitting here talking. So, you know, we are really trying to see how do we come up with practical solutions. Because yourself, a public servant working very hard like all of you all here around the table, and, you know, what we are trying to avoid is that when your date of retirement occurs, that you do have your pension within the time stipulated, I think it is in Regulation 33(2) and 33(1). Okay?

So, you know, what I like when I am in enquiries like this, is to ask people, if it were you, both on the doing end and the receiving end, what would you have done differently given the fact that you are not living in utopia so you do not have all the resources that you want, monetary, human. Right? You are not living in a perfect world. What you would have done differently, apart, well, from the fact that you would have been Comptroller of Accounts so you might be treated differently. But that apart, both on the receiving end and the doing end to ensure that a public servant like you who may not have the privilege of being the Comptroller of Accounts would have the privilege of being treated like maybe you would be treated retiring in your position.

4.50 p.m.

Ms. Laban: Well, what I think can be done too, but we do not really have all the resources for that, is sort of going to the Ministries themselves and seeing where they are having issues with their pension and leave records, and what are the issues, actually going to them or asking them to come to Treasury to sort out, you know, how it is done or to assist them in getting it done accurately then.

Madam Chairman: So that is something that could be done, that the accounting officers could be invited to come. That is one thing. The process that you all had determined with respect to the status report going to the head of the public service, what mischief—when that was designed, what mischief was that designed to treat with? So that if it was designed to treat with a particular mischief and there is not compliance it means that the mischief is not being addressed. So therefore, how do you then address the—I do not want to use the word, “omission”, but the inability of the head of the public service to ensure that everybody is doing what is supposed to be done, which is to give the status report? How are those things being addressed?

Ms. Laban: Yes. That really was done to let it be known to the head of the public service which Ministries are the ones not in compliance so that he, being the head of the public service, would take some action to, you know, get the Ministries to do what they are supposed to do or institute disciplinary procedures. But seeing that he is not here, I cannot speak for him.

Madam Chairman: But I really was not asking you to speak for him, I was asking you to speak for you. I understand that you could only speak for you. And I am saying, therefore, you creating that measure, if you did not feel that you had some influence on the head of the public service, then you would not have created the measure. How could you ask the head of the public service to get that if you are saying, “I cannot influence the head of the public service”? And therefore, I would expect its premise on there being some influence, and I use influence in the loosest possible way. And therefore, if it is that the head of the public service is not getting it, right, what sort of other measures you can take to influence the head of the public service to understand the importance? Because I believe the head of the public service is also a public servant, no? Okay. And therefore, putting the head of the public service in the shoe of the recipient of a pension at some stage, how do you use your other persuasive measures to see how you get incremental improvements across the board?

So, you know, I am trying to see how you strategize going forward and getting an

improved system. I mean, I accept that you may not get a 100 per cent. But if today you are getting 80 per cent and you say, “Well, okay, we are doing strategies to see by the end of this year we get 85 per cent,” you are inching along, yes, but you are getting somewhere. So that kind of discussion I am trying to see us develop.

Ms. Laban: Earlier I had indicated that the returns from the Ministries were also not being submitted frequently, so those returns may not have been submitted to the head of the public service as well. So I think we would have to have some further discussions with him as well on, you know, properly strategizing how we can get the Ministries to do what they are supposed to do.

Madam Chairman: Okay. And maybe that is one of the ways the committees could help, by giving you some more work to ask you to make a return on your returns to the committee annually. That may help. But we will look at it in the fullness of the discussion that we are having.

Ms. Laban: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Okay?

Mr. Hislop: Madam Chair—

Madam Chairman: Yes, I really do not know who is speaking because I cannot see.

Mr. Hislop: Member Hislop.

Madam Chairman: Member Hislop, sorry. Thank you.

Mr. Hislop: My apologies. Is it that the issue—we have some, and for lack of a better phrase, repeat offenders in the Ministries who are lax in their filings, or however you want to put it, is it that it is a process issue? Because if you have repeat offenders, and the number of Ministries that are lax are less than those who are on point, then it cannot be a process issue, and that is just my opinion on it. So is it that it is a personnel issue, in terms of personal responsibility for maybe a member of staff who has to do a particular work, or a particular department that is not functioning properly? So is it the personal or a personnel issue, or a process issue? And to the Ministry of Finance, why we have Ministries that are not on point in terms of their returns and so on?

Ms. Laban: It is various issues really. A personnel issue, in terms of staffing, because all Ministries claim that they are very short on staff. It can also be a process issue as well as a delinquency issue, not doing what they are supposed to do. So it is really various issues.

Mr. Hislop: But through you, Madam Chair, if it is that you have particular Ministries that are at fault, then I could see from the Ministry's standpoint where you could send the personnel into those particular Ministries. Because, as I said, from my view, it should not be a process issue if you have the majority of Ministries who are doing what they are supposed to do. Then it should not really be a process issue, it more seems to be a personnel issue.

Ms. Laban: Well, as the CPO has indicated, the computations can be very complicated and it depends on a lot of other issues such as the, you know, classification of leave, late classification of leave, extended sick leave and so on. So various Ministries will have various issues, and the larger Ministries may have a lot of issues concerning staffing and classification and thing, and that is what also makes it a bit complex for the Ministries to sort out.

Madam Chairman: Member Bacchus. Member, Member, might I ask that you unmute?

Mr. Bacchus: Yes, yes, thank you. Thank you, again, Madam Chair. In doing some research, again in preparation for this, asking around various Ministries as to why things like this would have happened in terms of delays in getting things processed, one of the things that seems to be a thread, even though probably not the most popular thing, is the fact that this—that there are things that they simply cannot find. So you find yourself in the situation where the Ministry is attempting to put all the things together, particularly for people who would have moved around from Ministry to Ministry or division to division in their career and they are trying to identify and locate these things. How often is that? And I know the electronics could solve a lot of it, but is that a contributing factor which makes some of what you are trying to do even more difficult? And I am not sure where, because this goes through a number of places, maybe at the originating place might be the place to look at.

Ms. Laban: Yes, you are right, that is a contributing factor, in particular the realignment of Ministries. When that happens, you know, persons move from one Ministry or a piece of a Ministry to another, and their records, if it was not moved properly, or at the time, could get mixed up, and that is a major issue that happens when a realignment occurs.

Madam Chairman: Yeah. But, you know, granting—and I accept all of that and these are issues which would have been raised in the first enquiry, and this is why little interventions were being looked at as recommendations to help improve the system. But what we are looking at, in my respectful view, where the conversation was, with respect to those Ministries who have not been making returns, or those Ministries and departments who have not been making the status

reports, which is a different thing from computing people's pension and leave and the increments and the availability of the records, and what you call them, the realignment of Ministries. Those were the initial issues, including staffing and training, et cetera, and IHRIS and all of those things. Those were the initial issues coming out of our first intervention.

So, you know, in my respectful view, we are not going back there, those are givens. What we are looking at is given, what challenges you have. How do we use our creativity, our will, our love for people, okay, to improve the system? Because I am also of the view that when it comes to individuals, some do not get the problems in the imperfect world because of whatever the privilege may be. And all I am trying to see is how can we use all our limitations and our ingenuity to make everybody privileged? Okay?

So I accept that there are challenges, but I come back to the same question, how do we improve, having regard to our observations, our analysis, how do we get improvement by the defaulters in doing the status reports to the head of the public service and in making their returns to us? Because the legislation says three months, you have given them a year. You are saying, "Hear what, let us know from a year upfront who gonna retire within the year," so you are going to start finding all that you need to find, and some people not even doing that. So that is where I think I would like to hear some kind of discussion on how do we focus on that and how we improve that, until what I hear is the panacea, which is IHRIS, comes or is given birth.

So, Ms. Laban, I do not want to zero in too much on you, but I will ask you to give that some thought and when we write to you with the additional information if some attention could be given to that with respect to solutions, given all your constraints that you think may help improve the process.

Ms. Laban: Sure, Chair.

Madam Chairman: Okay? And I think you do have a communication plan amongst the other stakeholders, so maybe they can help to. Okay? Are there any other further questions from the members of the Committee? And if not, I then would like to ask, in terms of the various heads—one last thing, because I think we have TTPS here, and they may be one of the entities whose submissions go to, and the Auditor General will correct me if I am wrong, go directly to Auditor General, as if the Auditor General had to compute, verify, et cetera, et cetera. TTPS and fire and prisons, I think—

Ms. Pujadas: Yes, Chair, it goes directly, yes.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So I want to ask TTPS, fire and prisons, each in their turn, in spite of what the regulations say, if they do have the capacity, the capability to prepare their pension and leave records for their officers for submission, rather than just sending everything to Auditor General to do a function that is not really the Auditor General's own. And if they could identify to us what are their challenges, what they think they need. So we could start with TTPS, prisons and fire, in that order.

Member: Mr. Arthur.

Mr. Arthur: Good afternoon, again. Good afternoon, Chairman.

Madam Chairman: Yes, good afternoon.

Mr. Arthur: Supt. Arthur, Finance Branch, and I will attempt to answer that question, Ma'am. From the TTPS side, it is an interesting question that was raised in the sense that we have been historically submitting our records to the Auditor General's Department, and then from there it goes to the Comptroller of Accounts where the Comptroller of Accounts would then process the approvals, which would be sent to our department for us to pay our retirees.

As to the question being asked as to whether we have that capacity, it is something that we will want to look into because it is only today that could raise as to—with the Permanent Secretary, as a matter of fact, Ministry of National Security—*[Inaudible]*—because our regulation says that it must be sent to the Comptroller of Accounts. And so, we were toying around with how come it is being done that way, and then I was also told that it is something that is being done by the fire department and also the prisons.

So, it is something that we intend to look into, Chair, but you have, again, along with the Comptroller of Accounts and the Auditor General's Department in collaborating to see how best that can happen because it is all about processing our—*[Technical difficulties]*—in a timely fashion, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: Thank you so much. Is it Supt. Arthur?

Mr. Arthur: Yes, Chair.

Madam Chairman: Thank you so much for that approach to the issue. Fire.

Mr. Raphael: A pleasant good afternoon. As was stated by the police department, ever since we have been doing our pension and gratuity in fire service we have always sent our audited pension and leave to the Auditor General for onward transmission to the Comptroller of Accounts. Madam Chair, while going through the report I noted where the Auditor General's Department

stated that approximately 2,000 files were submitted to them without passing through the internal audit department, and they highlighted fire service as one of the departments as well. I have been in the pension and leave department since 2005, and every pension and leave that is done by fire service is audited by the Ministry of National Security, internal audit department, and then sent to Auditor General's Department. We do the computation in fire service.

So the computation, along with the pension and leave documents, and all other relevant documents are sent to Auditor General's Department, where I believe they will verify the data and then send to Comptroller of Accounts. So I was a little puzzled or concerned when I saw that listed there. But some of the constraints that we may have, I believe, is in the processes, internal, that we may need to look. The chief officer may need to look at, you know, in terms of acting approvals which is a main issue for us in fire service because that directly—[*Technical difficulties*]—Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much, Fire Officer Raphael. And in terms of prisons.

Mr. De Verteuil: Good day, Madam Chair, Mr. De Verteuil from the prisons department. Before the 1st of September, 2000, we were considered public servants and our P&L records used to go to Comptroller. But when we were trained, when we got our regulations, we were informed that it has to go to the Auditor General first and then to Comptroller. We have a few constraints that is more—as fire service said, the acting authorities take a long time to come from Service Commissions, so that is one of the major hiccups we have, to really process it and give the person his correct salary upon retirement. And that is one of our major constraints that we have, is the acting authority from Service Commissions does take a long time to come. And because of that now we have a few amended P&L to be done because of the acting authority. So that is our major constraint.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So, thank you. So, you know, I guess we all understand the historical context springing out of really those regulations that exist but, you know, as was said by both police—TTPS and fire, I am sure with a collaboration with the Ministry of National Security and the Auditor General a way could be found within the law, as it exists, to comply with the law, but certainly ease the burden on the Auditor General, all in the objective of treating our retirees, as Fire Officer Raphael said, with the kind of respect and attention and care that they deserve. So, at this stage, if there are not further questions, I really want to—

Member: There is one other person.

Madam Chairman: Oh, is it Cmdr. Gosine, is it that your hand is up?

Mr. Gosine: Yes, Ma'am, please.

Madam Chairman: I am so sorry.

Mr. Gosine: That is fine, Ma'am. That is fine.

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Gosine: Again, Ma'am, thanks again for the opportunity, and good afternoon to the panel. And please allow me to make a contribution here from the defence force. Now, understanding that CPO would have spoken earlier about the whole issue of training and so on, now whilst I understand that a holistic approach has to be taken or an all-of-stakeholder approach, for want of a better word, top-down is important but equally important is bottom-up, understanding the dynamism and complexity of pensions and gratuities, you know, today is one figure, tomorrow is another figure, persons are changing quite often, so many variables and so on.

At defence, one of the things that we have been mandated by or mandated to do by the Chief of Defence Staff is to find exactly what you alluded to earlier, which is creative ways of getting things done. And what we would have done at the defence is, of course, created a retirement guide based on our pensions and pension regulations. So, you know it is quite often said that in the age of information, ignorance is a choice. So what we have actually done in defence is arm our membership with information. So it is a really simple retirement guide handbook that the layman, who is not a subject matter expert or who is exposed to frequently asked questions, what he has to do, when he has to do it and so on. So, the intent really is to challenge the pensions department at defence force, so no longer a person, a serving member could walk up to the department and say, "I need to get some information on my years of service, what am I entitled to after 10 years?"

And, of course, for want of a better word, Madam Chair, how we would see it in local terms, you know, the service provider would not "BS", for want of a better word. Now that person who is receiving the information knows because he has read and he challenges the service provider to do, and not just do what he has to do, but do his best. And we would have seen, with the introduction of that retirement guide, the efficiency in the processing of TTDF's pensions and gratuities. My humble input, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Thank you so much, Cmdr. Gosine. And I really have to apologize for not recognizing you before and I think it would have been all our lost if you did not make that effort

to get my attention. So I want to thank you for your intervention and your contribution. Okay? So if it is that there are no further questions or interventions—I mean, the limited view I have on my screen, I am not seeing any raised hands, I want to bring this public hearing to a close. I want to thank all the Ministries, all the departments, all persons here present for their contributions, all in the objective of helping people get their retirement benefits and their gratuity on time or as close to on time as possible.

For some of the Ministries and departments, further questions will be sent to you with a timeline from the Parliament, so one does not have to sit down here and scratch your head to say, “Oh God what it is I promised them I will give?” We will send you a reminder. And to the Auditor General, I will also send the reminder for the next meeting, so it will not happen a year from now when we find time to have a further update. Okay? So I want to thank you all, wish you all a pleasant evening and a safe journey home. I want to thank the members of the public and the members of the media who have stayed with us in this enquiry, members of the public would have submitted questions for us to ask. Again, thank you, pleasant evening. This meeting is now suspended.

5.17 p.m.: *Meeting suspended.*