



THIRTIETH REPORT OF THE

THE COMMITTEE ON

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
AND APPROPRIATIONS

FIFTH SESSION OF THE 11TH PARLIAMENT

INQUIRY

An examination into the preparedness and response of public authorities to the COVID-19 Pandemic in Trinidad and Tobago.



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.*

Current membership

Mrs. Bridgid Mary Annisette-George	Chairman
Dr. Lackram Bodoë	Vice-Chairman
Ms. Nicole Olivier	Member
Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy	Member
Mr. Clarence Rambharat	Member
Mr. Daniel Dookie	Member
Mr. Wade Mark	Member
Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine	Member
Ms. Amrita Deonarine	Member
Mr. Foster Cummings	Member

Committee Staff

The current staff members serving the Committee are:

Ms. Keiba Jacob	Secretary to the Committee
Ms. Sheranne Samuel	Assistant Secretary
Ms. Hema Bhagalloo	Assistant Secretary
Ms. Rachel Nunes	Graduate Research Assistant
Ms. Ashaki Alexis	Graduate Research Assistant
Mr. Justin Jarrette	Graduate Research Assistant
Ms. Anesha James	Administrative Assistant
Ms. Natoya O'Neil	Administrative Assistant

Publication

An electronic copy of this report can be found on the Parliament website using the following link:

http://www.ttparliament.org/committee_business.php?mid=19&id=232&pid=28

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MANDATE

1. The PAAC of the Eleventh Republican Parliament was established by the revised Standing Orders to:
 - examine 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.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

Mrs. Bridgid Annisette-George	Chairman
Dr. Lackram Bodoë	Vice-Chairman
Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy	Member
Ms. Nicole Olivierre	Member
Ms. Amrita Deonarine	Member
Mr. Wade Mark	Member
Mr. Daniel Dookie	Member
Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine	Member
Mr. Clarence Rambharat	Member
Mr. Foster Cummings	Member

CHAIRMANSHIP

2. 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. At its First Meeting held on January 27 2016, Dr. Lackram Bodoë was elected as the Vice-Chairman

MEETINGS

3. The Committee held three (3) meetings on the following dates:
 - **51st Meeting – Wednesday February 5, 2020;**
 - **53rd Meeting – Wednesday March 11, 2020; and**
 - **54th Meeting – Thursday May 21, 2020.**
4. The Minutes of the Meetings are attached at **Appendix I**.

WORK DONE

5. At its Fifty-First Meeting held on Wednesday February 5, 2020, the Committee met with representatives of the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Finance, the Customs and Excise Division, the Ministry of National Security, the Immigration Division, the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago and the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago.

As no cases of COVID-19 had been detected in Trinidad and Tobago up to the time of the Fifty-First Meeting, the focus was on the measures in place in the public health system in the event of an outbreak in Trinidad and Tobago, and systems in place at the country's ports of entry to reduce the risk of persons suffering from COVID-19 entering the country undetected.

6. At its Fifty-Third Meeting held on Wednesday March 11, 2020, the Committee met with representatives of the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Finance, the Customs and Excise Division, the Ministry of National Security, the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management, the Immigration Division, the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago and the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago.

As there were still no cases of COVID-19 detected in Trinidad and Tobago up to the time of the Fifty-Third Meeting, the focus was the continuation of the inquiry into the preparedness of public authorities for the potential spread of COVID-19 in Trinidad and Tobago.

7. At its Fifty-Fourth Meeting held on Thursday May 21, 2020, the Committee met with representatives of the Ministry of Finance. By the time this Meeting was held, authorities had begun to detect cases of COVID-19 in Trinidad and Tobago. That being the case, the focus of this Meeting was as follows:
 - i. the expenditure related to the Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic;
 - ii. the release of funds to Ministries and Departments; and
 - iii. the overall implementation of the budget.
8. The inquiry was scheduled to continue at the Committee's Fifty-Sixth Meeting on June 18, 2020 with representatives of the Ministry of Health. However, the Meeting was not held. The Committee received a written submission from the Ministry of Health on June 26, 2020.

REPORT

9. The Committee wishes to report that while progress has been made, it is unable to submit its final report. This is especially the case given the constantly evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and the necessary response to it.

RECOMMENDATION

10. The Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Finance, the Customs and Excise Division, the Ministry of National Security, the Immigration Division, the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago and the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, Ministry of Social Development and Family Services should report to Parliament on the lessons learnt since the beginning of the pandemic and the plans and strategies to be implemented in the ongoing fight against COVID-19 until a vaccine is developed, by December 31, 2020.

THE WAY FORWARD

11. It is the hope of the Committee that the work done to date would provide the foundation for further examination of and reporting on the preparedness and response of public authorities to the COVID-19 pandemic in Trinidad and Tobago in the Twelfth Parliament.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sgd.
Mrs. Bridgid Annisette-George
Chairman

Appendix I – Minutes of Meetings

**THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE –
FIFTH SESSION, ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT
MINUTES OF THE FIFTY-FIRST MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 5,
2020 AT 9:44 A.M.
IN THE GROUND FLOOR MEETING ROOM (WEST)
PARLIAMENTARY COMPLEX, CABILDO BUILDING,
ST. VINCENT STREET, PORT OF SPAIN**

Present were:

Mrs. Bridgid Mary Annisette-George	-	Chairman
Dr. Lackram Bodoie	-	Vice-Chairman
Mr. Daniel Dookie	-	Member
Ms. Amrita Deonarine	-	Member
Mr. Foster Cummings	-	Member
Ms. Nicole Olivierre	-	Member
Ms. Keiba Jacob	-	Secretary
Ms. Rachel Nunes	-	Graduate Research Assistant
Mr. Justin Jarrette	-	Graduate Research Assistant

Excused were:

Mr. Wade Mark	-	Member
Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy	-	Member
Mr. Clarence Rambharat	-	Member
Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine	-	Member

COMMENCEMENT

- 1.1 At 9:44 A.m. the Chairman called the meeting to order.
- 1.2 The Chairman indicated that Mr. Wade Mark, Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine, Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy and Mr. Clarence Rambharat asked to be excused from the meeting.

EXAMINATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE FIFTIETH MEETING

- 2.1 The Committee agreed to defer the examination of the Minutes of the Fiftieth (50th) Meeting held on September 18, 2019 and to complete same at its Fifty-Second (52nd) Meeting.

PRE-HEARING DISCUSSION: THE PREPAREDNESS OF PUBLIC AUTHORITIES FOR THE POTENTIAL SPREAD OF THE NOVEL CORONAVIRUS IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

- 3.1 The Chairman reminded Members that this meeting will be an examination into the preparedness of public authorities for the potential spread of the Novel Coronavirus in Trinidad and Tobago.
- 3.2 The Chairman invited Members to review the Issues Paper based on the written submissions received from the Ministry of Health.
- 3.3 The Chairman invited Members to raise any issues or questions on the examination into the preparedness of public authorities for the potential spread of the Novel Coronavirus in Trinidad and Tobago. The Chairman also invited Members to identify any specific areas they wished to focus on. A discussion ensued.

SUSPENSION

- 4.1 There being no further business for discussion in camera, the Chairman suspended the meeting at 10:01 a.m.

EXAMINATION INTO THE PREPAREDNESS OF PUBLIC AUTHORITIES FOR THE POTENTIAL SPREAD OF THE NOVEL CORONAVIRUS IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

- 5.1 The Chairman called the meeting to order at 10:08 a.m.
- 5.2 The following officials joined the meeting:

Ministry of Health

Mr. Asif Ali	-	Permanent Secretary
Dr. Roshan Parasram	-	Chief Medical Officer
Dr. Vishwanath Partapsingh	-	Principal Medical Officer Environmental Health
Dr. Osafo Fraser	-	County Medical Officer of Health (CMOH), St. George East

Ministry of Finance

Ms. Savitree Seepersad	-	Deputy Permanent Secretary
Ms. Yvonne Neemacharan	-	Deputy Permanent Secretary
Ms. Eleanor Alleyne	-	Deputy Director of Budgets (Ag.)
Ms. Vidyah Marcial	-	DC Operations, Customs and Excise Division

Mr. Bernard Nicholas - DC Enforcement, Customs and Excise Division

Ministry of National Security

Mr. Vel Lewis - Permanent Secretary

Mrs. Charmaine Gandhi-Andrews - Chief Immigration Officer

Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago

Mrs. Trudy Gill-Conlon - General Manager/ CEO (Ag.)

Ms. Joy Guy- Browne - Occupational Health Nurse

Dr Sonia Roache - Medical Superintendent

Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago

Col. Albert Griffith - General Manager (Ag.)

Ms. Oswald Bruce - Coordinator Operations and Aviation Training

Mr. Kurt Manal - Deputy General Manager Airport Operations-
Piarco International Airport

5.3 Key Issues Discussed:

Ministry of Health (MoH)

1. The designation of the Novel Coronavirus as a public health emergency of international concern by the World Health Organization (WHO);
2. The rapidly increasing number of confirmed Novel Coronavirus cases globally and the absence of the virus in Trinidad and Tobago;
3. The likely underreporting of suspected virus cases;
4. The number of virus-related deaths globally;
5. The low death rate of the Novel Coronavirus;
6. The limited capacity of small developing States to deal with the outbreak of the disease;
7. The number of thermal screenings carried out on passengers so far;
8. The justification for the fourteen (14) days travel restriction concerning travellers originating in China;
9. The public education campaign carried out by the Ministry;
10. The symptoms of the Novel Coronavirus;
11. The different means whereby the Novel Coronavirus spreads;
12. The details surrounding the other viruses belonging to the category of coronaviruses;
13. The general protective measures in place to treat the Novel Coronavirus;
14. The procedures in place, if a person suspects they may have contracted the Novel Coronavirus;
15. The MoH's collaboration with regional and international agencies;

16. The difference between quarantine and isolation;
17. The number of beds available at the quarantine facility within the Caura Hospital and the scope for quickly increasing capacity if the need arises;
18. The isolation capacity of the port health unit at the Piarco International Airport;
19. The quarantine protocols in place regarding Trinidad and Tobago nationals being repatriated from China;
20. The anticipated effect of the influx of carnival visitors;
21. The MoH's communication with carnival stakeholders;
22. The participation of the private sector medical institutions and personnel in virus surveillance efforts;
23. The status of stocks of medical material and contingency plans through PAHO for rapid restocking;
24. The composition of a typical Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) kit;
25. The simulation exercises conducted by MoH's rapid response teams;
26. The nature of the testing conducted to confirm virus infection;
27. The current reliance on the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for laboratory virus confirmation;
28. The laboratory testing services to be provided by Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) starting in mid-February;
29. The rapid testing kits developed by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO);
30. The collaboration between the MoH and the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries concerning agricultural produce possibly originating in China;
31. The need to convene a formal multi-sectoral committee; to coordinate virus-related initiatives between the MoH and relevant stakeholders;
32. The status of the National Plan regarding public health emergency preparedness and response;
33. The alignment of public health authorities with guidelines published by the WHO and CARPHA; and
34. The insurance provisions in place for health care workers given their exposure to the virus.

Ministry of National Security

1. The effective tracking of passengers' travel history;
2. The challenges in determining passengers' geographical origin;
3. The use of the Advanced Passenger Information (API) system to determine the original port of embarkation of passengers travelling to Trinidad and Tobago;
4. The lack of provision for PNR (Passenger Name Record) information in Trinidad and Tobago's API legislation;
5. The refusal of entry to a passenger originating in China who was suspected of carrying the virus;
6. The contact tracing efforts concerning passengers on board flights containing travellers originating in China; and
7. The monitoring of unofficial ports of entry.

Ministry of Finance

1. The protocols in place for emergency funding via the Contingencies Fund.

Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago

1. The systems in place for monitoring arrivals from China at sea ports;

Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago

1. The possibility of extended waiting times at the airports during the carnival season due to the screening initiatives being carried out.

[Please see the verbatim notes for the detailed oral submission of the witnesses]

- 5.4 The Chairman thanked the officials of the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of National Security, the Ministry of Finance, the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago and the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago for attending and they were excused.

SUSPENSION

- 6.1 At 12:00 p.m., the Chairman suspended the meeting to resume for a post-hearing discussion with Members only.

RESUMPTION

- 7.1 At 12:08 p.m. the Chairman resumed the meeting.

POST-MORTEM DISCUSSION

- 8.1 The Committee engaged in a discussion on the just concluded hearing.
- 8.2 The Committee agreed that additional questions would be sent to the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Finance, the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago and the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago **[Please see Appendix]**.

ADJOURNMENT

- 9.1 The Chairman indicated that the Committee's next meeting would be held on **Wednesday February 12, 2020 at 9:30 a.m.**
- 9.2 There being no other business, the Chairman thanked Members for their attendance and the meeting was adjourned.
- 9.3 The adjournment was taken at 12:16 p.m.

We certify that these Minutes are true and correct.

CHAIRMAN

SECRETARY

February 5, 2020

Questions for Additional Information – Ministry of Health (MOH)

1. Describe the step by step process to be followed by authorities in the event that a person with a confirmed case of 2019-nCoV arrives in Trinidad and Tobago.
2. Provide a copy of the 2014 plan for public health emergency preparedness and response that was initially prepared during the Ebola outbreak.
3. What is the status of the establishment of a multi-sectoral committee to coordinate virus-related initiatives?
4. At the 14th sitting – 5th Session of the House of Representatives on Monday January 27, 2020, it was also indicated that the Ministry of Health had gone beyond World Health Organisation's (WHO) recommendations by implementing passenger screening at airports.

In its written submission dated 4th February 2020, the MoH indicated that screenings began on January 13, 2020.

- i. When did thermal screening start at the ANR Robinson international airport?
5. What percentage of individuals arriving at ports of entry have been placed under surveillance or in isolation?
6. How many dedicated personnel has the Ministry assigned to conduct the various protocols necessary to manage preparedness activities?
 - i. Would these assignments impair the MoH's ordinarily expected productivity and service delivery?
7. A poor risk management culture is caused by insufficient synchronization between departments / stakeholders.
 - i. What efforts have been made to promote a strong risk culture in the management of disease outbreaks, incorporating all relevant stakeholders including RHAs and other public authorities?
 - ii. What is the status of disease-related information sharing at the regional and international level?
8. Several governments have taken steps to evacuate their citizens from Wuhan, China¹. According to the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs², there are two (2) Trinidad and Tobago nationals in Hubei Province where the outbreak originated. These individuals have reportedly been informed of evacuation procedures, but have not expressed any desire to be evacuated from China. There are 120 TT nationals in China.
 - i. What do the official evacuation procedures entail?
 - ii. How is this procedure affected by the 14-day travel restriction?

¹ Reuters, France to Evacuate Citizens from Wuhan by Air, accessed on January 28, 2020: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-health-france-evacuation/france-to-evacuate-citizens-from-wuhan-by-air-idUSKBN1ZPOQV>

² Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs, Outbreak of Coronavirus in the People's Republic of China, accessed on January 29, 2020: <https://foreign.gov.tt/resources/news/outbreak-coronavirus-peoples-republic-china/>

9. The Regional Health Authorities (RHA) do not have standardized information systems and the majority of RHAs have no specific ICT strategy³. Further, there is a lack of collaboration and coordination amongst the RHAs and the MoH⁴.
 - i. What is the status of ICT interoperability which is crucial to the consistency of RHA initiatives in case of the spread of the Novel Coronavirus?
10. Although there is currently no vaccine or anti-virus treatment for 2019-nCoV, the first tests on a possible vaccine could start in 3 months' time⁵.
 - i. What plans has the Ministry developed for the procurement of Novel Coronavirus vaccines once they become available?
 - ii. Can the Ministry anticipate the funding that would be necessary for this procurement?
11. The Auditor General's Department highlighted a lack of evidence of collaboration and coordination amongst the RHAs and the Ministry of Health. Non-integration of the inventory systems within and amongst the RHAs lead to inefficient disbursement of pharmaceuticals to clients due to a lack of real time information to prevent excess and shortfall in pharmaceuticals at the various health facilities⁶.
 - i. How will the MoH ensure that timely vaccine distribution is not negatively affected by the ICT weaknesses highlighted at the RHAs?
12. What is the status of readiness of laboratory facilities to conduct relevant tests to identify the Novel Coronavirus?
13. What quantities of IV fluids and bags, ventilators and oxygen are usually kept and what is the level at which new supplies are ordered?
14. How and when did the MoH communicate with fete promoters regarding the precautionary measures and safe practices related to the virus?
15. In its written submission to the Committee, the MoH indicated that 54,400 face masks have been procured and are expected to be delivered in the near future.
 - i. What is the exact expected date of delivery?
16. In its written submission the MoH also explained that the total cost of procuring the PPE materials including masks is \$400 per PPE set.
 - i. Is this in Trinidad and Tobago dollars?

³ Written submission dated 18 November 2019 from the Ministry of Public Administration to the Public Accounts Committee.

⁴ Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the Financial Year 2017, p 84-85.

⁵ CNBC, US health officials fast-track coronavirus vaccine, hope to start clinical trial in three months, accessed on January 29, 2020: <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/01/28/us-fast-tracks-coronavirus-vaccine-hopes-to-start-trial-in-three-months.html>

⁶ Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the Financial Year 2018, p 45-46.

Questions for Additional Information – Ministry of Finance (MOF)

Under Head 28⁷ – Ministry of Health, the 2020 estimates of the budgetary allocation show the following:

02-004-39 Drugs and Other Related Materials and supplies, which apply to the purchase of drugs and other medical stores for the entire Health Service.

2019 Revised Estimate	2020 Estimate	Increase / (Decrease)
\$575,162,200.00	\$144,200,000.00	(\$430,962,200.00)

Questions:

1. How will this 75% decrease in allocation affect the procurement of materials necessary to protect against or treat possible cases of the Novel Coronavirus?
2. How and when will funding be supplemented to remedy the possible shortfall?

⁷ Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure for the Financial Year 2020, accessed on February 6, 2020:
<https://www.finance.gov.tt/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Numbered-Draft-Recurrent-Expenditure-Book-2020.pdf> .

Questions for Additional Information – Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago

1. HVAC⁸ systems have been known to harbour harmful microorganisms following their contamination from the spaces they serve. Given the fact that transmission of this virus can be via respiratory droplets, airborne, fomites⁹ and that its potency outside a live host is currently unknown:
 - a. Will steps be taken to conduct regular testing & sanitization of HVAC systems in port buildings and on public sea craft, namely the vessels used for the water taxi service and the inter-island ferry service?
 - b. Will isolation and quarantine areas at the ports be served by independent HVAC systems fitted with air purification devices?
 - c. Would it be necessary for employees at seaports such as stevedores to be given special instructions on how they should unload cargo from ships?
 - d. Are there any plans to issue port employees with appropriate PPE if they are determined to be at risk of contracting the 2019-nCoV?

⁸ Heating, ventilation and air conditioning.

⁹ Objects or materials which are likely to carry infection, such as clothes, utensils, and furniture.

Questions for Additional Information – Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago

2. Provide an estimate of the extended waiting times at the airports as a result of the screening initiatives being carried out.
3. HVAC¹⁰ systems have been known to harbour harmful microorganisms following their contamination from the spaces they serve. Given the fact that transmission of this virus can be via respiratory droplets, airborne, fomites¹¹ and that its potency outside a live host is currently unknown:
 - e. Would steps be taken to conduct regular testing & sanitization of HVAC systems in airport buildings and on public air craft?
 - f. Would isolation and quarantine areas at the two airports be served by independent HVAC systems fitted with air purification devices?
 - g. Would it be necessary for baggage handlers at both airports to be given special instructions on how they should handle baggage?
 - h. Will baggage handlers be issued with appropriate PPE if they are determined to be at risk of contracting the 2019-nCoV?

¹⁰ Heating, ventilation and air conditioning.

¹¹ Objects or materials which are likely to carry infection, such as clothes, utensils, and furniture.

**THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE – FIFTH SESSION,
ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT**

**MINUTES OF THE FIFTY-THIRD MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY MARCH 11, 2020 AT 9:57
A.M.**

**IN THE LINDA BABOOLAL COMMITTEE MEETING ROOM, GROUND FLOOR, CABILDO
BUILDING, PARLIAMENTARY COMPLEX, ST. VINCENT STREET, PORT OF SPAIN.**

Present were:

Mrs. Bridgid Annisette-George	-	Chairman
Dr. Lackram Bodoë	-	Vice-Chairman
Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine	-	Member
Ms. Amrita Deonarine	-	Member
Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy	-	Member (Afternoon session)
Ms. Keiba Jacob	-	Secretary
Ms. Sheranne Samuel	-	Assistant Secretary
Ms. Rachel Nunes	-	Graduate Research Assistant
Mr. Justin Jarrette	-	Graduate Research Assistant
Ms. Ashaki Alexis	-	Graduate Research Assistant

Absent were:

Mr. Foster Cummings	-	Member (Excused)
Mr. Clarence Rambharat	-	Member
Mr. Daniel Dookie	-	Member
Ms. Nicole Olivierre	-	Member
Mr. Wade Mark	-	Member

COMMENCEMENT

- 1.1 At 9:57 a.m. the Chairman called the meeting to order.
- 1.2 The Chairman indicated that Mr. Foster Cummings and Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy (morning session) asked to be excused from the meeting.

EXAMINATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE FIFTY-SECOND MEETING

- 2.1 The Committee examined the Minutes of the Fifty-Second (52nd) Meeting held on February 12, 2020.
- 2.2 There being no omissions or corrections, the Minutes of the 52nd meeting was confirmed on a motion moved by Ms. Deonarine and seconded by Dr Bodoë.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE FIFTY-SECOND MEETING

- 3.1 As per item 3.3, the Chairman informed Members that questions were sent to the Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC) re: the examination of the internal controls and expenditure of the EBC (002-Election Expenses) on February 17, 2020 with a deadline for submission of March 03, 2020. The Chairman indicated that the EBC requested and received an extension to March 13, 2020.
- 3.2 As per item 3.4, the Chairman informed Members that the additional responses from the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Planning and Development re the examination into the implementation of the budget for fiscal year 2019/2020, were circulated via email.
- 3.3 As per item 4.1, the Chairman indicated that the response from the Ministry of Education re the request for Statements of Expenditure for the first quarter of fiscal 2020, remained outstanding. The Committee agreed that if the response remained outstanding by March 25, 2020, the Ministry would be invited to explain the non-submission or deliver the response in public.
- 3.4 As per item 6.5, the Chairman informed Members that arising from the inquiry into the maintenance of community pools by the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, additional questions were dispatched to the Ministry with a deadline for response of March 13, 2020.

OTHER BUSINESS

- 4.1 The Secretariat was directed to circulate draft reports to Members for feedback by March 16, 2020.
- 4.2 The Committee agreed to conduct a site visit to both the Caura and Couva Hospitals, details surrounding the date(s) and time(s) were to be finalised.

PRE-HEARING DISCUSSION: CONTINUATION OF INQUIRY INTO THE PREPAREDNESS OF PUBLIC AUTHORITIES FOR THE POTENTIAL SPREAD OF COVID-19 IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

- 5.1 The Chairman informed Members that the following stakeholders – who were present at the first hearing on T&T's COVID-19 preparedness on February 5, 2020 – would be appearing before the Committee once again:
 - Ministry of Health;
 - Ministry of Finance;
 - Ministry of National Security;
 - Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago; and
 - Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago.
- 5.2 The Chairman invited Members to review the Issues Paper based on written submissions received from the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Finance, the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago and the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago.

- 5.3 The Chairman invited Members to raise any issues or questions as well as any specific areas they wished to focus on as the Committee continued its the examination into the preparedness of public authorities for the potential spread of COVID-19 in Trinidad and Tobago. A discussion ensued.

SUSPENSION

- 6.1 There being no further business for discussion *in camera*, the Chairman suspended the meeting at 10:30 a.m. to be reconvened in public.

CONTINUATION OF INQUIRY INTO THE PREPAREDNESS OF PUBLIC AUTHORITIES FOR THE POTENTIAL SPREAD OF COVID-19 IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

- 7.1 The Chairman called the public meeting to order at 10:35 a.m.

- 7.2 The following officials joined the meeting:

Ministry of Health

Mr. Asif Ali	-	Permanent Secretary
Dr. Roshan Parasram	-	Chief Medical Officer

Ministry of Finance

Ms. Savitree Seepersad	-	Deputy Permanent Secretary
Ms. Yvonne Neemacharan	-	Deputy Permanent Secretary
Mr. Syed Khan	-	Assistant Comptroller of Customs & Excise (Central Services)
Mr. Leslie Hewit	-	Collector (Piarco)

Ministry of National Security

Mr. Vel Lewis	-	Permanent Secretary
Mr. Kern Penco	-	Deputy Chief Immigration Officer
Air Cdre Darryl Daniel	-	Chief of Defence Staff, Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force
Maj Gen. (Ret) Rodney Smart	-	CEO, Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management

Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago

Mrs. Trudy Gill-Conlon	-	General Manager/CEO (Ag.)
Dr Sonia Roache	-	Port Medical Superintendent
Ms. Joy Guy-Browne	-	Occupational Health Nurse

Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago

Mr. Hayden Newton	-	General Manager
Col. Albert Griffith	-	Deputy General Manager, Security
Mr. Kurt Manal	-	Deputy General Manager Airport Operations (Ag.) – Piarco International Airport

7.3 Key Issues Discussed:

Ministry of Health (MoH)

1. The COVID-19 situation reports published by the World Health Organisation (WHO);
2. The total number of cases, deaths and territories affected globally as at March 10, 2020;
3. The number of Trinidad and Tobago COVID-19 tests conducted by the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) thus far;
4. The continued absence of COVID-19 in Trinidad and Tobago;
5. The addition of Spain, France and Germany to Trinidad and Tobago's 14-day travel restriction list;
6. The communication between Trinidad and Tobago authorities and airlines via the International Air Transport Association (IATA) about the travel restriction;
7. The reports of a COVID-19 case in Canada concerning an individual who may have travelled to or via Trinidad and Tobago in the recent past and communication between the Ministry of Health and Public Health Canada on this matter;
8. The collaboration between the Ministry of Health and the British High Commission for the implementation of enhanced surveillance and safeguard measures in light of the growth in the number of COVID-19 cases in the United Kingdom, which has very active travel links with Trinidad and Tobago;
9. The integration of Tobago authorities in national COVID-19 measures conducted by the Multisector Executive Response Team for Infectious Disease Threats (MERTID) Committee;
10. The reporting relationships between the Chief Medical Officer of Trinidad and Tobago and the County Medical Officer of Health (CMOH) Tobago;
11. The protocols in place if a suspected case is detected in Tobago including transfer of confirmed cases to facilities in Trinidad;
12. The turnaround time for laboratory testing of samples by CARPHA;
13. The intended role of the Couva Hospital as an isolation and critical care facility as part of COVID-19 initiatives;
14. The potential to make use of the Augustus Long Hospital in Pointe-à-Pierre;
15. The feasibility of calling on unemployed doctors to increase capacity for COVID-19 initiatives;
16. The three-tier system used by the MERTID Committee to determine the nature of the response to the spread of COVID-19;
17. The role of the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management (ODPM), the Fire Service and the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government in COVID-19 initiatives;
18. The status of consideration of a ban on large public gatherings by the Sub-Committee of the MERTID established to make recommendations on this issue;

The status of analysis by the MoH of the report from the high-level CARICOM meeting on COVID-19 held on March 1, 2020;

19. The efforts of the MoH and CARPHA to curb the practice by some private laboratories of advertising COVID-19 testing, which is the exclusive responsibility of CARPHA;
20. The engagement with the private sector to increase the sanitisation of facilities such as supermarkets and gyms;
21. The public education campaign carried out to promote hand washing and prevent community spread;
22. The lessons to be learnt from the rapid spread of COVID-19 in Italy;
23. The COVID-19 triage systems in place at hospital Accident and Emergency Departments and at Health Centres;
24. The COVID-19 hotline being established by the MoH to answer frequently asked questions and conduct remote triage;
25. The status of the communication plan being developed by the Ministry of Communication at the request of the MERTID Committee;
26. The interruption of the global pharmaceutical supply chain due to difficulties in China and India;
27. The lengthy process involved in the development of a COVID-19 vaccine;
28. The sanitisation protocol being developed by the Port Health Department of the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago;
29. Three (3) challenges faced in carrying out initiatives to prevent the spread of COVID-19; and
30. The recommended protocols to avoid contamination on board an aircraft.

Ministry of National Security (MNS)

1. The number and nationalities of travellers refused entry to Trinidad and Tobago thus far due to possible COVID-19 symptoms;
2. The questioning protocols developed for Immigration Officers to effectively assess the travel history of passengers arriving at ports of entry;
3. The efforts by the ODPM to secure additional thermal scanners; and
4. The port health measures in place concerning arrivals by yacht.

Ministry of Finance (MoF)

1. The value and terms of the loan secured by the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago from RBC Merchant Bank (Trinidad & Tobago) Limited for the procurement, storage and distribution of pharmaceuticals and non-pharmaceuticals; and
2. The mechanism in place for additional COVID-19 funding for the MoH via the mid-year budget review.

Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (PATT)

1. The protocols in place for COVID-19 screening at the ports;
2. The efforts to ensure that all ports including those outside of the purview of the PATT are equipped to screen for COVID-19; and

3. The increased vigilance and measures concerning the clearance of cruise ships to dock in Trinidad and Tobago.

Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (AATT)

1. The status of the heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system maintenance and sanitisation protocols in place at the airports;
2. The enhanced provision of hand sanitizer and surface cleansing agents throughout the airports; and
3. The responsibility of the AATT to ensure all stakeholders operating on its premises stringently observe measures to protect against COVID-19.

[Please see the verbatim notes for the detailed oral submission of the witnesses]

- 7.4 The Chairman thanked the representatives of the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of National Security, the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago and the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago for attending and they were excused.

SUSPENSION

- 8.1 There being no further business for discussion, the Chairman suspended the meeting at 12:25 p.m. to be resumed *in camera* at 2:00 p.m.

**THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE –
FIFTH SESSION, ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT
MINUTES OF THE FIFTY-FOURTH VIRTUAL MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY
MAY 21, 2020 AT 1:51 P.M.**

Present were:

Mrs. Bridgid Mary Annisette-George	-	Chairman
Ms. Amrita Deonarine	-	Member
Mr. Daniel Dookie	-	Member
Mr. Wade Mark	-	Member
Ms. Keiba Jacob	-	Secretary
Ms. Sheranne Samuel	-	Assistant Secretary
Ms. Hema Bhagaloo	-	Assistant Secretary
Ms. Rachel Nunes	-	Graduate Research Assistant
Mr. Justin Jarrette	-	Graduate Research Assistant
Ms. Ashaki Alexis	-	Graduate Research Assistant

Excused were:

Dr. Lackram Bodoë	-	Vice-Chairman
Mr. Clarence Rambharat	-	Member
Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy	-	Member
Ms. Nicole Olivierre	-	Member

Absent were:

Mr. Foster Cummings	-	Member
Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine	-	Member

COMMENCEMENT

- 1.2 At 1:51 p.m. the Chairman called the meeting to order.
- 1.2 The Chairman indicated that Dr Lackram Bodoë, Mr. Clarence Rambharat, Ms. Nicole Olivierre and Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy asked to be excused from the meeting.

EXAMINATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE FIFTY- THIRD MEETING

- 2.1 The Committee examined the Minutes of the Fifty-Third (53rd) Meeting held on March 11, 2020.
- 2.2 There being no omissions or corrections, the Minutes of the 53rd meeting was confirmed on a motion moved by Ms. Deonarine and seconded by Mr. Dookie.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE FIFTY-THIRD MEETING

- 3.1 As per item 3.1, the Chairman informed Members that the responses from the Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC) re: the examination of the internal controls and expenditure of the EBC (002-Election Expenses) remains outstanding. The Chairman indicated that the EBC requested a further extension to May 20, 2020.
- 3.2 As per item 3.3, the Chairman informed Members that the responses from the Ministry of Education regarding its Statement of Expenditure for the first quarter of fiscal 2020 remains outstanding.
- 3.3 As per item 3.4, the Chairman informed Members that the additional information requested from the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs with regard to the examination into the maintenance of community pools was received on April 15, 2020.
- 3.4 As per item 4.1, the Chairman informed Members that the following Committee Reports were presented in the House of Representatives on March 20, 2020 and in the Senate on March 26, 2020:
- The Twenty-Second Report on an examination of the Expenditure and Internal Controls of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service for the fiscal year 2018/2019; and
 - The Twenty-Third Report on an examination into the Expenditure and Internal Controls of the Ministry of Communications for the fiscal year 2018/2019.
- While the following Committee Reports were presented in the Senate on May 1, 2020 and the House of Representatives on May 8, 2020:
- The Twenty-Fourth Report on an examination into the Processing of Payment of Pension and Gratuity to Retired Public Officers and Contracted Employees; and
 - The Twenty-Fifth Report on an examination into the Development Programme for fiscal year 2018/2019 and follow-up on the Ministerial Response to the Sixth Report on the Tobago House of Assembly (THA).
- 3.5 As per item 4.2, the Chairman informed Members that the site visit to the Caura and Couva Hospital did not materialised as a result of the Stay-at-Home order regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

- 3.6 As per item 15.2, the Chairman informed Members that responses to the additional questions arising from the inquiry into the preparedness of public authorities for the potential spread of COVID-19 in Trinidad and Tobago were received from the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Finance, the Airport Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago and the Point Lisas Industrial Port Development Corporation Limited. Responses from the Ministry of National Security, the Caribbean Airlines Limited and the Water and Sewerage Authority remains outstanding.

The Chairman directed the Secretariat to circulate all responses received to Members via email or ParlCloud.

- 3.7 The Chairman directed the Secretariat to circulate the draft report into the internal controls and expenditure of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs to Members via email for comments.

OTHER BUSINESS

- 4.1 The Chairman invited discussions on the Committee's Work Programme for the remainder of the Fifth Session.

The Committee agreed to the following:

- To commence its inquiry into the EBC and therefore the Secretariat was directed to send a reminder to the EBC to submit the responses;
- To conclude the inquiry into the preparedness and response of public authorities to the COVID-19 pandemic in Trinidad and Tobago, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services and the Ministry of Health will be invited to provide updates on expenditure related to the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- To review past Committee Reports and determine whether follow-up should be conducted.

PRE-HEARING DISCUSSION: CONTINUATION OF INQUIRY INTO THE PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE OF PUBLIC AUTHORITIES TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

- 5.1 The Chairman invited Members to review the Issues Paper based on written submissions received from the Ministry of Finance and information collected from the public domain.
- 5.2 The Chairman invited Members to raise any issues or questions as well as any specific areas they wished to focus as the Committee continued its the examination into the preparedness and response of public authorities to the COVID-19 pandemic in Trinidad and Tobago. A discussion ensued.

SUSPENSION

- 6.1 There being no further business for discussion *in camera*, the Chairman suspended the meeting at 2:58 p.m. to be reconvened in public.

CONTINUATION OF INQUIRY INTO THE PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE OF PUBLIC AUTHORITIES TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

- 7.1 The Chairman called the public meeting to order at 3:01 p.m.

- 7.2 The following officials joined the meeting:

Witnesses who appeared:

Ministry of Finance

Mrs. Suzette Lee-Chee	-	Permanent Secretary
Mrs. Michelle Durham-Kissoon	-	Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
Mr. Narine Charran	-	Manager, Debt Management Division
Mr. Anthony Joseph	-	Manager, Economic Management Division
Ms. Tashay Francis	-	Assistant Manager, Economic Management Division
Ms. Kimberly Roberts	-	Senior Macroeconomic Analyst
Ms. Vernessa Teesdale	-	Senior Macroeconomic Analyst

Key Issues Discussed:

2. The challenges experienced by the Ministry with regard to releases of funds and the possible solutions to these challenges;
3. The restriction of non-mandatory expenditure and the determination of what is considered mandatory and non-mandatory expenditure;
4. The prioritisation of salaries, pensions, debt servicing and social expenditure;
5. The borrowing and drawdowns on the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund (HSF) as a mean of addressing cash flow difficulties as a result of the sharp fall in energy prices and Government's energy revenue expectation;
6. The status of efforts to access Covid-19 relief funding through loans from the Andean Development Bank, the World Bank and the China Development Bank;
7. The likelihood of an economic contraction of Trinidad and Tobago's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and International Trade of around 2- 4 percent as a result of the measures taken to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus;
8. The effect of the economic contraction on interest rates for Trinidad and Tobago's international borrowing;

9. The status of Trinidad and Tobago's credit rating from international ratings agencies;
10. The estimates for the decrease in the collection of corporation tax in FY 2020 due to the nationwide slowdown of business activities caused by the pandemic;
11. The Ministry's rationale for its projections of a reduction in the national debt to GDP ratio;
12. The forecasted increase in crude oil and natural gas production in FY 2020 compared to FY 2019;
13. The status and monitoring of the US dollar Foreign Exchange Facility implemented through the Export Import Bank of Trinidad and Tobago Limited (EXIMBANK);
14. The status of the first tranche of the VAT bonds;
15. The lack of data to conduct an analysis of COVID-19 funding-related activities;
16. The reasons for the differences between projections for the Trinidad and Tobago economy made by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and those of the MoF;
17. The funds allocated to financial institutions to support local business;
18. The status of the grants to hoteliers and the relief initiatives specifically for hotel employees;
19. The status of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) being established to implement funding to credit unions;
20. The eligibility criteria for credit unions to access government funding;
21. The status of the Government guaranteed loan provided to NIPDEC for the procurement, storage and distribution of pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical items;
22. The measures in place to stimulate the economy in this time of uncertainty;
23. The usefulness of data disaggregation of COVID-specific funding releases to Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) from the general funding disbursed to those entities;
24. The general timeframe for the processing and releasing of salary relief funding to beneficiaries;
25. The status of Trinidad and Tobago's non-submission of funding request to the IMF;
26. The oversight mechanism in place to ensure the effectiveness in the disbursements of funds to MDAs;
27. The status of and the accountability mechanisms in place for the funds disbursed to religious organisations;
28. The importance of considering the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in establishing COVID-19 relief funding initiatives; and
29. The consideration of CARICOM recommendations and / or strategies in implementing COVID-19 relief funding.

SUSPENSION

- 8.1 There being no further business for discussion in public, the Chairman suspended the meeting at 5:30 p.m. to be resumed *in camera*.

RESUMPTION

9.1 At 5:32 p.m. the Chairman reconvened the meeting.

POST MORTEM DISCUSSION

10.1 The Committee engaged in a discussion re COVID-19 to determine the way forward following the public hearing.

10.2 The Committee agreed that additional questions would be sent to the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Public Utilities. **[Please see the Appendix]**

ADJOURNMENT

11.1 There being no other business, the Chairman thanked Members for their attendance and the meeting was adjourned to Wednesday June 4 2020, when the Committee would examine the EBC.

11.2 The adjournment was taken at 5:45 p.m.

We certify that these Minutes are true and correct.

CHAIRMAN

SECRETARY

May 21, 2020

Questions for Additional Information – Ministry of Finance

1. Provide the following in writing:

- An update on the operationalisation of the US\$75 million foreign exchange facility granted to the Export Import Bank of Trinidad and Tobago (EXIMBANK);
- The specific criteria which should be satisfied in order to access the EXIMBANK facility;
- The ceiling amount that local importers and manufacturers will be able to access from the EXIMBANK facility;
- The average interest rate for both domestic and international borrowing;
- The role of the Ministry of Finance with regard to discussions held with money lending agencies on the reduction of interest rates and deferral of payments;
- The average interest rates used to calculate the decrease in the country's debt position;
- The Ministry's GDP projections per category of debt for the period 2020-2023;
- Whether the hotel grant facility is exclusive to Tobago and not Trinidad;
- The guidelines if any provided to the THA for the Hotel Grant Facility;
- The rationale for the amount allocated to the categories of small, medium and large properties;
- The measures in place to ensure accountability and transparency in the disbursement of the Hotel Grant Facility;
- A copy of the Memorandum of Understanding for the TT\$100 million Credit Union facility;
- The schedule of disbursements for the US\$65.6Mn. loan facility for Caribbean Airlines Limited (CAL);
- The repayment terms of the loan to Caribbean Airlines;
- A breakdown of the monthly sum of funds allocated to NIPDEC for the procurement and purchasing of pharmaceuticals for the period of October 2019 to April 2020;
- A breakdown of the finances received from international lending agencies for specific COVID-19 related activities for the Ministry of Health;
- The timeframe for the processing and disbursements of the salary relief grants to beneficiaries; and
- A detailed breakdown of how the TT\$400 million drawn from the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund will be spent;

Trinidad and Tobago's projected total COVID-19 relief spending of TT\$6bn represents 3.8% of National GDP (valued at US \$23.8bn in 2018). Comparatively (**see Appendix 1**), this is on par with other countries of similar population size and GDP to Trinidad and Tobago, particularly

Cyprus (4.3% of GDP) and Bahrain (4.2%). It is also greater than the average of 1.85% of GDP spent in CARICOM countries for which data is available. This is partly because in some CARICOM countries announced spending only relates to healthcare whereas Trinidad and Tobago's total covers social, economic and health-related spending.

- i. With regard to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has any consideration been given to determine the various categories and amounts of funding?
 - ii. In what ways is Trinidad and Tobago's spending aligned with or informed by CARICOM recommendations and strategies **(See Appendix I)**?
 - iii. How will the COVID-19 pandemic impact Trinidad and Tobago's Sustainable Development Goals and Vision 2030?
2. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has identified three (3) recommended priorities for COVID-19 relief funding:
 - i. Protect lives – medical resources;
 - ii. Protect livelihoods – wage relief, fiscal and monetary policy, business support, cash transfers; and
 - iii. Prepare for recovery – stimulate demand, tackle inequality, address debt.
 - a. Is the COVID-19 relief funding aligned to the International Monetary Fund?
 - b. If yes, what is the sum of funds allocated to each priority stated above?
 3. With regard to the provision of rental assistance and food support to retrenched, terminated persons and income reduced workers, what is the total sum provided thus far, the number of beneficiaries to date, and the expected totals for these?
 4. In an article² published in the media on 12th May 2020, the following breakdown of Government COVID-19 relief spending was provided by the Minister of Finance:

COVID-19 RELIEF SPENDING IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO AS AT MAY 12, 2020		
ENTITY / SECTOR / INITIATIVE	ALLOCATION AS AT 12 MAY 2020 (Million)	PROJECTED TOTAL BY SEPTEMBER 2020 (Million)
Ministry of Social Development and Family Affairs	\$98.1	\$400
Ministry of Health	\$55	\$350
Office of the Prime Minister	\$10	\$30

Ministry of Agriculture Land and Fisheries	\$1.3	\$10.7
Ministry of National Security	\$3.7	\$8.3
Ministry of Finance	\$13	\$490
Credit Unions	--	\$100
VAT Refunds	\$700	NOT SPECIFIED
Bond Payments	--	\$3,000
Caribbean Airlines	--	\$442 (loan)
OVERALL	Approx. \$900	\$6,000

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1. Was the IMF criteria to protect lives, protect livelihoods and prepare for recovery used to determine the amounts allocated to each of these groups?
2. Concerning the projected total of TT\$30 million to be allocated to religious organisations and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) by the Office of the Prime Minister:
 - a. What were the criteria used to determine the amounts allocated to each of these groups?
 - b. What monitoring mechanisms are in place by the Ministry to ensure the proper use of these funds by recipient organisations?
3. It was reported in the article that the Ministry of Finance had made projections for budget deficits up to 2023.
 - a. What effects will this budget deficit have on Trinidad and Tobago's ability to successfully implement the Vision 2030 Plan?

Question for Additional Information – Ministry of Public Utilities

1. Details on the moratorium offered by the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission.
 - i. The arrangement in place for payment once the moratorium ends; and

2. Whether a similar provision has been implemented by the Water and Sewerage Authority.
 - i. If yes, the arrangement in place for payment once the moratorium ends.