

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Tuesday, October 12, 2021***APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2021) BILL, 2020**

[Third Day]



The Standing Finance Committee of the whole House resumed its deliberations on the Bill and Estimates.

[Chairman: Mrs. Annisette-George]

10.00 a.m.

Madam Chairman: The meeting of this Standing Finance Committee will resume. We are at Head 78: the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services.

Head 78: Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, \$5,270,815,000.

Madam Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of Social Development and Family Service to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes. Minister.

Hon. Cox: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services continues to effectively carrying out its mandate of maintaining the nation's safety net including the provision of support to mitigate the COVID-19 measures.

Madam Chair, in fiscal 2022, the Ministry is firm on social transformation and the empowerment to the vulnerable amount us to build their resilience and self-sufficiency via the Social Transformation and Empowerment Programme, Uplifting People. The Ministry will ensure that it continues to efficiently and effectively manage its digitalization of social services and its poverty reduction strategies to its business process, reengineering efforts.

The service delivery quality and standards required to improve the quality of

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life of our nation's families, inclusive of persons with disabilities, street dwellers, older persons, widows, single parents, those displaced due to substance use disorder and HIV, remain critical at all levels of the Ministry. As our implementation of the National Social Mitigation Plan continues, we will forge greater partnerships and collaboration with key stakeholders to ensure that no one is left behind.

Madam Chair, the delivery of a responsive and multifaceted social service system and the caring for and protection of our poor and vulnerable families from the multidimensional impacts of poverty are areas of focus as we invest in the development of the people needing it the most. Thank you very much.

Question proposed: That Head 78 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$5,270,815,000 for Head 78, Ministry of Social Development and Families Services is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure, Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*, and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. We are at page 371. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001. Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, 01/001/01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. Can the Minister indicate as of September 30th, how many persons have been employed under this line Item?

Hon. Cox: We have 198 positions filled, 202 vacant positions. A total of 382. We have vacant posts with bodies 142, without bodies 60.

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Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, given the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and this reduction in salary and COLA, how does the Ministry plan to deal with such decrease in allocation?

Hon. Cox: Okay. Well, at this time, remember, we are in our digitalization efforts. You are hearing clearly?

Ms. Mohit: Yes.

Hon. Cox: Okay. We are involved in our digitalization efforts so there is some restructuring taking place in the Ministry and, therefore, this may not be an issue.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, moving further down to 05: Government's Contribution to N.I.S. Madam Chair, can the Minister state what accounts for this increase in contributions?

Hon. Cox: Well, the filling of positions in the Ministry is ongoing. So at this point in time, we are seeking to address the shortfall in staff in some areas.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, given the decrease in salaries and COLA and with an increase in NIS, any—I am not sure. There seems to be an inconsistency there. Can the Minister indicate?

Hon. Cox: I will not be able to say. I will have to check on that.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. I am sorry, I will come back to you, Member for Chaguanas East, if you are not ready. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Yeah. Thank you, Madam Chair, good morning. Minister, staying with the line Item 05, the NIS increase of \$436,000 for this fiscal year, is it due to arrears that is owed to the NIS board? Because when you look at the amounts in 2020, it is more or less stable with 2020 and 2021 Revised. So I am just trying to

understand if it is arrears to the board that is owed.

Hon. Cox: Okay. We will have the finance person check that and get back to you.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, I just—under 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. When you gave the breakdown about the number of posts and the establishment—the vacant posts with incumbents and I think you said that there were 60-odd vacant posts. And in reply to my colleague, you said that vacant posts were being filled on an ongoing basis. Does it mean in your Ministry now that the decision has been taken to fill vacant posts in the public service? Because in last year's budget presentation, your Finance Minister had stated that there was a freeze on the hiring of workers in the public service. I would like you to clarify for this meeting whether your Ministry has taken a decision to continue to fill vacant posts and has that policy decision come to an end?

Hon. Cox: No, no. This is not—this does not have to do with the establishment.

Mr. Indarsingh: This does not have to do with the establishment?

Hon. Cox: These are positions that are available at contract level and there are some vacant positions.

Mr. Indarsingh: So it is contract positions?

Hon. Cox: Contract—well, when it comes to the establishment, the established positions are there already, so it is not a matter of us going to fill a vacant post that was not filled before.

Mr. Indarsingh: “Aha”.

Hon. Cox: So it is ongoing.

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Mr. Indarsingh: And how many contract positions are there to be filled if using your expression?

Hon. Cox: I will have to get those details.

Mr. Indarsingh: And are they short term or as they of a—

Madam Chairman: Member, can I ask what Item you are under?

Mr. Indarsingh: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance.

Madam Chairman: Is that not the positions on the establishments?

Mr. Indarsingh: Well, I am responding, Madam Chair, to the information coming from the Minister. And if the Minister is saying that there are filling of positions outside of the establishment, I think I need to clarify that.

Madam Chairman: All right. So I think you should identify the Item.

Mr. Indarsingh: “Huh?”

Madam Chairman: I think you should properly identify the Item.

Mr. Indarsingh: Well, I did in my opening comments.

Madam Chairman: And for your guidance I am saying 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance does not deal with contract employment.

Mr. Indarsingh: Ma'am—

Madam Chairman: So maybe—

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Chair—

Madam Chairman:—maybe I will give you an opportunity to recalibrate yourself and I will come back to you.

Mr. Indarsingh: But, Madam Chair—

Madam Chairman: Member for St. Augustine.

Mr. Indarsingh: The Minister was dealing with vacant positions and how it will

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be filled—

Madam Chairman: Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Madam Chair, under 01: Personnel Expenditure; Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, we have been experiencing where in a time of disaster, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services is required to visit persons affected and do assessments, for example, after flooding and so on, and they have been experiencing some sort of manpower shortfall it seems. Can you indicate any if any of these—if there are such vacancies and if it is under this Head? And what is being done to address this shortcoming of the Ministry?

Madam Chairman: Okay. So just that we make good use of our time. From the responses elucidated from the questions asked by the Member for Chaguanas East, under this Vote, the Minister said there are 190 positions filled, 202 vacant positions, 142 positions with posts with bodies and 60 positions without bodies. Okay? So based on that information that is available to all of us, I give you an opportunity to ask the question that you would like under this Vote: 01.

Ms. Ameen: I think the Minister understands the challenge is faced.

Hon. Cox: Yes. I think your question with regard to assessment for floods and so on, that is not under the purview of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. We only pay but the assessment takes place by the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, the Disaster Management Unit.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South, are you ready?

Mr. Indarsingh: I already asked my question and I understood what the Minister said.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Member for Chaguanas East.

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Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, Item 14: Remuneration to members of Cabinet-Appointed Committees, a decrease of \$315,000. Madam Chairman, can the Minister account for this decrease as listed?

Hon. Cox: No, I cannot account for it.

Ms. Mohit: Okay. Madam Chair, given the response by the Minister in the Standing Finance Committee in November of 2020, can the Minister indicate if the committees listed at that time would have completed their works?

Hon. Cox: What is the question?

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, I will repeat for the benefit of the Minister. In the Standing Finance Committee November 2020, you would have identified the committees listed under this—responsible under this line Item. I am asking if the committees listed under this line Item in the Standing Finance Committee, November 2020, rather, whether these committees listed would have completed their works?

Hon. Cox: Number four? This one has entered the interagency committee to promote and monitor the implementation.

Ms. Mohit: Right.

Hon. Cox: Their term of office has ended.

Ms. Mohit: Their term in office has ended?

Mr. Hosein: Madam Chairman, I cannot hear what the Minister is saying. There is a lot of noise in the Chamber and it is very difficult to hear the answer that the Minister is giving.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So can I just ask all Members to make this exercise a fruitful one, if we can please lower our volumes? Members, maybe your mikes

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should be switched off so that we can continue with the business of the people.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, given the response of the Minister, can the committee be provided with deliberations made by these committees?

Hon. Cox: Okay. This could be done.

Madam Chairman: Item 003.

Ms. Mohit: Yes, Madam Chair,

Madam Chairman: You are not finished with 001?

Ms. Mohit: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Yes?

Ms. Mohit: Finished.

Madam Chairman: Yes, Member for Chaguanas East and then we will take Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, a decrease by—totalling the amount of \$720,668, Minister, given the—in the context of your budget contribution statement, when it comes of the establishment of a compliance unit, how would this decrease affect the setup of that particular unit?

Hon. Cox: This unit will be—they will be mainly contract officers in that unit, so this will come from another Vote.

Ms. Mohit: The particular unit?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Ms. Mohit: All right. Madam Chair, can the Minister indicate as of September 30th, how many persons have been employed under this particular line Item?

Hon. Cox: Which line Item are you talking about? Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance?

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Ms. Mohit: Yes.

Hon. Cox: Repeat your question.

Ms. Mohit: Can the Minister indicate how many persons have been employed under this line Item as of September 30th?

Hon. Cox: That is not a question I answered before?

Ms. Mohit: No. This is social welfare.

Hon. Cox: Yeah. Okay. I will have to get that information to you. Okay?

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, whilst the Minister is stating she will get that information for us, can I just ask whether this reduction accounts for how many members—whether there was a reduction in employees under this particular line Item?

Hon. Cox: No. I do not see a reduction in employees here but I have the information for social welfare. We have 216 positions.

Ms. Mohit: Filled?

Hon. Cox: 113 filled, 103 vacant, 82 vacant with bodies and 21 without bodies.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, given the recent announcement in senior citizens, as well as other members of the grants offered by the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, when it comes to persons being deceased and still receiving the grant assistance as mentioned, can the Minister indicate whether this allocation, the reduction in this allocation would affect such proceedings seeing that case workers, et cetera, employed under social welfare are required to manage the affairs of this division?

Hon. Cox: No. This will not be a problem because a restructuring effort is taking place.

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Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, I am not sure if I can move on.

Madam Chairman: You can.

Ms. Mohit: Item 05.

Madam Chairman: You are under 003, eh.

Ms. Mohit: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Sure.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, can the Minister account for the increase in estimates under this line Item seeing that there is a reduction in the cost of living—salary and COLA, whether, Madam Chairman, this is arrears or so?

10.15 a.m.

Hon. Cox: No, I cannot account for it. I am not sure why there is an increase there, but there is an increase.

Ms. Mohit: Would you be able to do so in the future by reporting to the Committee, probably in writing?

Hon. Cox: No problem.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, Item 6 under 003, Remuneration to Board Members. Madam Chairman, can the Minister indicate what is the reason for this increase?

Hon. Cox: Okay, what is happening is that we would have—you mentioned, you spoke about my contribution. I spoke about the fact that we will be splitting the boards to better be able to serve persons. So, for example, the Arima office we have to open back Arima, and also Tunapuna, there are just too many persons there so we will have to split in two. The other board office with Tabaquite that will also be split, so therefore there would be an increase in staff.

Ms. Mohit: Sure. Madam Chairman, I just want to indicate I am having a little

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challenge hearing the Minister in terms of the responses.

Madam Chairman: Maybe Minister, maybe you could also direct that other mike and put it on, and maybe that will assist.

Hon. Cox: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Yes. So, would you therefore allow me to take the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, and if it is that you have other matters under this I will come back to the Member for Chaguanas East. Thank you very much. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is just to follow up on Line Item 05/09, Contribution Increase. It is just to why, I am asking again, because in the Personnel Expenditure, General Admin the NIS also was increased, so I am asking are there arrears owed to the NIS board? Because if you look throughout your Ministry there are increases in NIS.

Hon. Cox: I would provide that information.

Mr. Lee: You would provide that in writing?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Okay, so that is all, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, the other page is another—

Madam Chairman: Could I ask maybe if the technical people check the audio, because I am also having difficulty in hearing. Maybe Members are having difficulty in hearing me too. All right, so maybe the audio could be checked. All right, so we move on, Item 005, Child Development. Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, 005/01, Salaries and COLA. Can the Minister give any

particular reasoning for the increase under this line Item?

Hon. Cox: Well, there is a restructuring process taking place here and additional staff would be hired.

Ms. Mohit: Additional staffing is required?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Yes. Item 006, National Family Services. Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, 006/01, can the Minister indicate as at September 30th how many persons have been employed?

Hon. Cox: You have 22 permanent positions; three positions filled, 19 vacant, four with bodies, 15 without bodies.

Ms. Mohit: Can the Minister indicate, Madam Chairman, due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, whether this decrease would affect the operations of this particular unit?

Hon. Cox: Yes, definitely it will affect the operations of the unit, but what is happening is that, again, there are some issues with regard to job description that Service Commissions is working out. So we are actually awaiting that information so that we can move forward.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, can the Minister indicate to us how long would this process take place?

Hon. Cox: Well, we are not responsible for that outcome, but we are hoping that this is done soon, because there is a lot to be done. Family service has to take part of the leading role in the Ministry at this time.

Ms. Mohit: Okay. Madam Chairman, in terms of 006/05, Government's

Contribution to NIS. It is a very small increase but can the Minister indicate the reasoning for this increase as well?

Hon. Cox: There seems to have been increases in the NIS throughout, and I will provide that information.

Ms. Mohit: In writing?

Hon. Cox: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Anybody else? Okay, Sub-Head 02, Goods and Services, Item 001, General Administration. Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, Line Item 04, Electricity. There is an increase of 496,000, when we go into the Estimates provided by the hon. Minister of Finance there is a programme across all Ministries with respect to constellation programmes that the Ministry of Finance is overseeing, can the hon. Minister indicate with respect to this almost half a million dollar increase to electricity, whether or not it reflects outstanding arrears to T&TEC or whether or not this is an increase for this coming year? And how does it harmonize the programme being envisaged by the Minister of Finance?

Hon. Cox: This was a reflection of outstanding arrears.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chairman, 001/01, Travelling and Subsistence. Madam Chairman, an increase of \$474,292. Can the Minister account for this increase?

Ms. Cox: This would have to do with the staff, more staff at the boards, the various local boards.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chairman, can the Minister provide at a later date, in writing possibly, a list of previous travelling positions and new travelling positions?

Hon. Cox: Okay, that could be done.

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Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister under 16, Contract Employment there, your Ministry would have spent \$30 million in 2021, there is an allocation of 42.3 million for 2022. This shows an increase of \$12.3 million in expenditure under contract employment, could you inform this meeting how many contract officers are being recruited by your Ministry?

Ms. Cox: We can provide that listing. Some of them have to do with our digitalization efforts at the Ministry, so there are some ICT positions, but we will provide that information to you.

Mr. Indarsingh: So could you commit to give a breakdown of the classification in terms of how many IT personnel, how many whatever will be—

Hon. Cox: In various divisions?

Mr. Indarsingh: And how your Ministry will go about in terms of the advertisement in relation to the respective job classification?

Hon. Cox: Well, we advertise all our positions.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much.

Hon. Cox: Okay.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, with respect to the same Line Item, 16, Contract Employment, with the increase of 12.3 million, I hear you with respect to the explanation you provided to the Member for Couva South. The question that I have with respect to this is that whether or not this allocation will reflect a supplementation of staff at the regional offices of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, in light of the increased mandate of the Ministry I know that there have been some challenges at the regional offices, so I am hoping that this Line Item will be able to bring in some additional staff. Would

that be the case?

Hon. Cox: Yes, definitely. This also has to do with the establishment of our SSEU and Citizens Engagement Outreach Unit, which is the unit that we would be able to help Members of Parliament, so that you can get quicker access to information and so on. So that would be part of it too.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I am on Line Item 23, Fees. I saw that on the Revised Estimate there were \$323,000 spent for fiscal 2021, and then there is a massive increase of 2.29 million being allocated for fiscal year 2022. Minister can you just advise this meeting why this massive increase in terms of fees under this line Item?

Hon. Cox: Okay. Some of the fees have to deal with our ICT solutions, and one concerns the network management suite, client messaging service, creative cloud, warranty extension, service level agreements, our social service management information system fees. But this mainly has to do with our IT software licences and renewals.

10.30 a.m.

Mr. Hosein: Okay. Madam Chair, one more question please. On line Item 27: Official Overseas Travel. Minister, I saw that basically no money was spent in the last fiscal for that Item, but then there is an allocation of \$1.3 million in overseas travel. What are the plans in terms of spending this allocation for this fiscal year?

Hon. Cox: Well, we are hoping that, you know, very soon, you know, because of COVID-19 persons would not have been travelling, but it does not mean that we do not have hope. So therefore, this is there in the event that we have to go to important overseas travel for the staff, then it is here.

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Mr. Hosein: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair. To the hon. Minister, line Item 08: Rental Office Accommodations, quite a lot of money, over 25 million. I see there is a 589,000. Could we get in writing what is the number of properties and where located for such properties? Line Item 08.

Hon. Cox: Okay, that will be done. You will get it in writing.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item No. 66: Hosting of Conferences, Seminars and other Functions. I see that the 2020 Actual was around \$270,000 and there is an intent to spend 500,000 in 2022. Are you expecting to host a lot of conferences, seminars and functions in the upcoming fiscal year with the COVID-19 pandemic still on?

Hon. Cox: Well, particularly seminars, because of our digitalization efforts and where we will be creating new offices and divisions therefore this would be important for the staff.

Dr. Seecheran: So this increased cost is for digital seminars?

Hon. Cox: Well, that is one of the areas, one of the areas. Family services now also will be restructured and therefore they will be having more webinars and so on, here, with regard to the staff.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I note that line Item 61 that there was a

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\$200,000 allocation for insurance, very important line Item. But none was expended or none is expected to be expended based on the Revised Estimate of 2021. I now note that there is a \$700,000 budget for 2022. Is that because we did not pay the insurance in 2021?—and even if we did, what would still account for this substantial increase above even the Estimate for 2021.

Hon. Cox: Oh, this is to cater for our transitional homes which we are—are you hearing me?

Mr. Tancoo: Yes, I am. Thank you.

Hon. Cox: All right, good. This is for our transitional homes and this is for the buildings, furniture, fixture, machinery.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister. Can I then confirm that no insurance coverage—well no payment for insurance coverage was made in 2021 and in 2020, that these homes were not covered by insurance. Is that true?

Hon. Cox: No, no, no. These homes—we are now reconfiguring these homes. So therefore it was not that they were not covered.

Mr. Tancoo: Okay, thank you. Hold on, one follow-up, Ma'am. So if we are now starting to—we are now engaging these homes which would have been what was projected in 2021, why then is that the cost now, 700,000, as opposed to the 200,000 when you initially conceptualized the idea in 2021, why is this figure still so high? In the interest of time, can I recommend that the hon. Minister provide the response in writing?

Hon. Cox: Yeah, that response will be provided in writing.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

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Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, I am going back on to line Item 23: Fees, and you said it is for really ICT upgrades at the Ministry. Now, I was perusing the Auditor General Report for 2020 and there were some issues with respect to lack of internal controls because of the manual system and it can allow for a lot of fraud to take place with respect to some of these grants that are being issued by your Ministry. Based on the new infrastructure that you all are intending to put in through ICT, are there any infrastructures in order to combat instances of persons double-dipping or fraud with respects to grants?

Hon. Cox: Yes, that will form part of our new ICT solutions in the Ministry.

Mr. Hosein: Okay, thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Hon. Minister, line Item 17 and it has a bit to do with the issues raised by the Member for Baratavia/San Juan. With respect to these platforms that you speak of with respect to digital transformation in the Ministry, there is absolutely no allocation in the area of training. How do you harmonize the coming on board of digital transformation in the Ministry, but there is no money allocated for training of the staff in an area that is very technical?

Hon. Cox: In 2021—a lot of training took place in 2021 and a lot of virtual training would also be taking place.

Mr. Padarath: This is in preparation for the digital transformation?

Hon. Cox: Yes, yes.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, Item 22: Short-term Employment. Can the Minister indicate whether the decrease that is reflected in

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2022, whether persons under short-term employment would have or would be transitioning into contractual employment?

Hon. Cox: Definitely some would.

Ms. Mohit: So therefore, this is what this decrease is reflecting?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, in addition to what was requested under line Item 08, can the Minister just indicate whether there is an increase in offices, regional offices island-wide?—under Rental/lease-Office Accommodation.

Hon. Cox: Well, we are actively pursuing a new office, Sangre Grande, and also to relocate the Aranguez office. And we mentioned before that we have to reopen the Arima office, and, of course, we may be splitting two boards to better serve the people.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you. Madam Chair, in terms of Item 27: Official Overseas Travel. Madam Chair, can the Minister provide details in terms of the proposed expenditure of this amount of 1,365,000 for this fiscal year in terms of overseas travel.

Hon. Cox: Okay, that will be submitted.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, Item 12: Materials and Supplies, an increase of \$706,560. Can the Minister provide to us, maybe at a later date in writing, the proposed expenditure under Materials and Supplies, under line Item 12?

Hon. Cox: Well, I can tell that that part of this increase involve the increased sanitization that is required because of COVID-19 throughout all the offices.

Ms. Mohit: So this is apart from janitorial services provided?

Hon. Cox: Yes, yes.

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Ms. Mohit: Okay. Madam Chair, Janitorial Services, Item 37, also has an increase of 1,015,935. Can the Minister indicate the reasons for this increase under this line Item?

Hon. Cox: Well, because of the additional offices that I spoke about before, then we will need to increase janitorial services. And new contracts were established for some of these services.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, line Item 62: Promotions, Publicity and Printing. Can the Minister provide to us a breakdown of the proposed expenditure under this line Item?

Hon. Cox: Yes, this will be done.

Ms. Mohit: Can the Minister indicate however, whether the Family Radio Programme is included under this line Item?

Hon. Cox: Yes, it is.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas East, can I in the meantime move on to another Member. I will come back to you.

Ms. Mohit: Sure.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes, Madam Chair. Minister, quickly to return on the issue of contract employment, in terms of whatever complement of staff is going to be recruited. Is any earmarked to be deployed to the Couva office of the Ministry which is located at Camden, Couva?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Mr. Indarsingh: And as we speak about the Camden office, has that office in terms of its role, has it been redefined in terms of a storage office or is it still

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offering services to the people of Couva and environs?

Hon. Cox: Well actually our call centre is there and our facilities unit is located in Couva.

Mr. Indarsingh: The facility—

Hon. Cox: Facilities and call centre.

Mr. Indarsingh: Only for that purpose now or—

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Mr. Indarsingh:—persons, because the Couva area is a very huge area. Is it now that that office will no longer provide the opportunity for citizens to walk in and conduct their transactions as it relates to the respective grants that fall under your Ministry?

Hon. Cox: Yes, well remember I stated that we are restructuring and we would like to split some of the boards so that we would be better able to serve the areas. So very soon you will hear what the plans are with regard to that. But at this time the call centre is located there and our facilities unit.

Mr. Indarsingh: Okay, but in terms of going forward I may ask a few based on the traffic that comes to my office making requests for—to have grants and so on, processed. Could I ask that you reconsider for some kind of service to still exist for the benefit of the catchment area of Couva?

Hon. Cox: Okay, that will be taken into consideration, your request.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you, Madam Chair. Going back to line Item No. 37: Janitorial Services, Minister. Given the significant increase in the allocation, the Estimate for 2022, could you provide a list of the contractors that are providing

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janitorial services and the value of each contract in writing please?

Hon. Cox: Okay, that will be done.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Item 06: Water and Sewerage Rates. In 2020 the country paid \$201,000 in Water and Sewerage Rates. So I saw that in 2021 the Revised Estimate is 48,000 and in 2022 you are making provision for 64,000. If the actual spend, and it is the only actual figure that we have in 2020 it was 200,000, two questions, why is it that this has been such a drastic drop to 64,000 projected for 2022? And the other part of the question is whether there are outstanding water rates, water dues, water bills, that currently the Ministry has that it has not serviced and whether or not you have catered for the potential increase in rates as already been signalled by the Minister?

So three questions, if I may, three questions: the reason for the increase, whether you have in fact catered for the increased rates that the Minister has already signaled and thirdly, whether there are any arrears that would be catered for or not catered for during the current fiscal year?

Hon. Cox: Well, at first I want to say that most of the WASA payment falls under the rental agreement. So this would have—you would see that there is a decrease, but I think there are also some arrears to be paid also.

Mr. Tancoo: So this line Item makes provision for arrears?

Hon. Cox: I will have to check that and get back to you, okay.

Mr. Tancoo: Can I ask for you to check one more thing, Madam Minister, whether or not this \$64,000 projected for 2022 factors in the proposed increase in water rates that the Ministry of Public Utilities has already signalled would be affecting

citizens in this country.

Hon. Cox: Well as I said before, most of the WASA payment falls under the rental agreement. So we may not need to factor in a considerable cost where WASA is concerned for 2022.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am.

10.45 a.m.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas East. All right. So we move on. Item 002: Division of Ageing. Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, 002, line Item 16: Contractual Employment, an increase of 495,165. Can the Minister provide a breakdown to us on these positions which exist—filled and those positions that are not filled under this particular Division?

Hon. Cox: We have one Inspector II, six Inspectors I. The Inspector I position was advertised, and also six BOA positions were also advertised.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, can the Minister indicate if this increase in allocation and filling of positions would assist the Ministry or the particular Division which is Division of Ageing, in terms of the shortcomings of the particular Division as explained by yourself during the course of the fiscal year?

Hon. Cox: Yes, this will help us considerably. So actually these positions, contractual positions, were already advertised and we are hoping to fill them soon.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Hon. Minister, on the same line Item of Contract Employment, 16, the question that I have with respect to this increase is that I am almost certain that the volume of work at the Division of Ageing has

increased over the past year in light of the COVID. The question really is: Does this reflect bringing on board additional field officers that will assist these regional offices?

Hon. Cox: I think this would be necessary because I am not sure if—these are established positions that we have.

Mr. Padarath: Oh, these are established positions.

Hon. Cox: Yes. But I understand with the fact that we are moving forward with the Division of Ageing and what is happening with the elderly, I agree with you that this is important that we ensure that we have persons who can reach throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Padarath: Sure. Minister, the concern really is bridging the gap in terms of what is happening in the current environment with COVID and persons being able to access the services of the Ministry especially this Department Division of Ageing, and the concern has been that—and I know other colleagues have raised it with respect to the regional offices. There seems to be a bit of a challenge of having these field officers in the amounts that are needed and it is something I would ask you to probably consider.

Hon. Cox: Okay. One of the reasons we have a hotline for the Division of Ageing now called OPIC. So that too will assist us. We have established the call centre because we understand that there has been some challenges with reaching persons; and the call centre, we have had good reports with regard to the call centre and Division of Ageing particularly the hotline called OPIC.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 16: Contract

Employment. The Minister indicated that these are established positions, however for 2021 Estimate it was 1.7 million and the Revised Estimate was 2.5 million. If these are established positions, is it that the increase indicates filling of vacancies for those positions during the fiscal term?

Hon. Cox: No, well, actually from—I am now looking at the records here, they are contract positions. Yes, they are contract positions.

Mr. Ratiram: So the question is they are contract positions that have been established. Correct, Minister?

Hon. Cox: Yes, they are. Go ahead.

Mr. Ratiram: All right. So if it is that these were established contract positions that were budgeted for at 1.7 million, how is it we increased during the financial term from 1.7 to 2.5 million?

Hon. Cox: Well, because of the need for more persons at this time. Because of the COVID-19 we have had an increase in reports of elder abuse, and therefore, the staff, there is a lot more work to be done during this time.

Mr. Ratiram: Could the Minister indicate what was the process utilized to recruit these persons? This increase in employment, this increase in contract positions, were these positions advertised publically?

Hon. Cox: Yes, the positions were advertised to fill the vacant positions.

Mr. Ratiram: Okay. Can the Minister kindly provide us with a list of all those positions?

Hon. Cox: Will do.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 003. Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Item 003, 01: Travelling and Subsistence. Given the increase of \$2.3 million can the Minister provide a listing of all the positions in receipt of travelling and subsistence?

Hon. Cox: Okay, this will be done.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, Item 05: Telephones. Madam Chair, given the proposed increase of \$445,800 can the Minister indicate in terms of the recent advertisement of uncollected cheques when it comes to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services as it relates to the COVID support grants, whether this increase in allocation has to do with reaching out to those who would not have acquired their COVID relief support as yet?

Hon. Cox: This is part of it. But also the fact that the restructuring effort and splitting up of the boards, there will be a need for more persons for the use of telephones, also the plan for the investigative unit, and also the Citizen Engagement Unit so that persons can reach out to others. So this is the reason for this increase.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, line Item 12: Materials and Supplies. Can the Minister provide a breakdown of the proposed expenditure under this line Item?

Hon. Cox: This is particularly for like photocopying paper, toners, photocopiers, et cetera, for all the local boards. And, of course, as we stated we will be splitting the boards, so therefore we will be having more offices soon and there will be a need for increase in materials and supplies.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, line Item 17: Training. Given the increase—well, the Revised Estimate was zero dollars, but the 2022, an allocation of 200,000. Can the Minister indicate, Madam Chair, what mechanisms were used to determine the

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training needs under this line Item?

Hon. Cox: Well, because of the new system that we have in place, our digitalization efforts, the Social Welfare will form a key role, and therefore, there is a need for training. We will be having new offices, and therefore new officers and we feel that training would be important.

Ms. Mohit: Okay. Would this allocation be sufficient based on your proposed training recommendations?

Hon. Cox: Well, we hope so.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, line Item 22: Short-term Employment, an increase of 532,112. Madam Chair, can the Minister indicate whether under this line Item, Short-term Employment, how would this short-term employment add value to the poor and vulnerable?

Hon. Cox: Well, the fact we have the separation of boards, we have the Citizen Engagement Unit to come on board and this would be a quick way of starting these processes.

Ms. Mohit: Okay. And, Madam Chair, how many positions are proposed to be filled under this short-term employment?

Hon. Cox: Well, we will get back to you with that because we are now doing the restructuring exercise, and then, of course, the splitting of the boards will also require short-term staff.

Ms. Mohit: So you will provide that to us in writing?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, under line Item 28: Other Contracted Services, there is a decrease of \$2,083,904, can the Minister indicate to us what services would be

reduced or what services have been eliminated and the reasons for such under this line Item?

Hon. Cox: Well, this Item deals with courier services provided by TTPost; PTSC for payment of travel fares; NIB, the printing of the social welfare cheques, and we might require more money at mid-term.

Ms. Mohit: Would this affect the PTSC services provided to citizens as you stated?

Hon. Cox: No, it would not affect. And then we are in the process of trying to put as much persons on direct deposit. So our fee will decrease with regard to payment to TTPost to provide the courier services.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, line Item 62: Promotions, Publicity and Printing. Can the Minister indicate, there is an increase—well, 2021 no Revised Estimate, but an allocation of 300,000. Can the Minister indicate what activities would be undertaken with this allocation?

Hon. Cox: Well, this would be for printing of forms because this printing, promotions, publicity, also our Communications Unit is also communication and education. So therefore they are also responsible for getting forms printed, production of posters, brochures.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 22: Short-term Employment. There is an increase from 900,000 to \$1.4 million. Can the Minister indicate the process in which these short-term employment positions are filled?

Hon. Cox: Okay. We conduct a recruitment exercise and there are staff in other

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positions and they are recruited basically.

Mr. Ratiram: And this recruitment exercise is advertised for the positions?

Hon. Cox: Same way. Yes.

Mr. Ratiram: So for these positions that were utilized for 2020 where we spent 680,000, and for 2011 where we spent 900,000, those positions were advertised in the recruitment process? Can the hon. Minister provide us with a copy of the advertisement that went out for these positions for the last fiscal term?

Hon. Cox: We also use the Ministry of Labour. We use the Ministry of Labour heavy.

Mr. Ratiram: Okay. Thank you. Can you provide a copy of the advertisement that went out for the last fiscal term in writing?

Hon. Cox: No problem.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 57. I see there is an increase of 500,000 for postage. Can you give me the rationale why a large increase?

Hon. Cox: I think this has to do with bulk mail, re: the senior citizens programme, food support, and there is a new grant, the new grant which is the disability grant for minors. This would have caused this—

Dr. Ragbir: So these will be mailed out?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Dr. Ragbir: So that is how you took into account the other half million.

Hon. Cox: Yes.

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Dr. Ragbir: All right. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 005: Child Development Centre. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I refer to line Item 21: Repair and Maintenance of Buildings. Can the Minister indicate which buildings this line Item refers to?

Hon. Cox: This is the building in Couva that they occupy.

Mr. Ratiram: And the building in Couva, the Enrichment Centre in Carlsen Field that was being utilized for the Cerebral Palsy Society to provide physiotherapy for those children, is that included in this division here?

11.00 a.m.

Hon. Cox: No, that is separate.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the Minister indicate what section that will fall under?

Hon. Cox: I think we are coming up to it. Yeah, I think we are coming up to that.

Mr. Ratiram: Okay, thanks.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla. No? Item 006: National Family Services. Item 007: Disability Affairs Unit. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, does the Item fall under this Unit?

Madam Chairman: Which Item? We are at Disability Affairs Unit, 007.

Hon. Cox: No, it is not under here. I do not think so. No. Not under here.

Mr. Ratiram: Hon. Minister, can you identify which future Item you are referring to because I am not seeing a line Item in the future that we are coming to? You said we are coming to that Item.

Madam Chairman: Member, for now, we are under 007: Disability Affairs Unit. Okay. If there are no questions, I now go on to Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration. Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Forgive me, Madam Chair. I will go to the next page when you are ready.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So can we go on then to Item 002: Division of Ageing. Item 003: Social Welfare. Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, under line Item 003, 03: Furniture and Furnishings, an increase of \$441,363. Can the Minister indicate what activities would be undertaken under this particular line Item?

Hon. Cox: This is for the replacement of dilapidated furniture and cabinets for additional use.

Ms. Mohit: Can the Minister identify any specific regional offices that these works would be undertaken at?

Hon. Cox: All.

Ms. Mohit: All?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Item 005: Child Development Centre. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Can the hon. Minister indicate line Item 03: Furniture and Furnishings, if this is the line Item that is going to be utilized for completion of the works at the enrichment centre?

Hon. Cox: No, this is not the line Item.

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Mr. Ratiram: Can the Minister advise which Item it will fall under? Because I do not want to have keep wasting the Committee's time by only asking.

Madam Chairman: You mean under 005?

Mr. Ratiram: Yes, Child Development Centre.

Madam Chairman: We are only under 005 here, eh. We are not going to be all about the place. All right?

Mr. Ratiram: No, we are not.

Madam Chairman: Okay, good.

Mr. Ratiram: So I am asking the Minister if she can kindly advise on that Item that we spoke about.

Hon. Cox: This would be under General Administration.

Mr. Ratiram: As a future item or—

Madam Chairman: Member, Member, Member. What you are doing is not allowed. All right. Item 006: National Family Services. Item 007: Disability Affairs Unit.

Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 005: Non-Profit Institutions. Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Item 02: Other Social Programmes, a decrease by \$30,000. Minister, can you advise in the context of the prevailing socioeconomic circumstances, why this item was decreased and not increased significantly?

Hon. Cox: This Item is particularly used for commemoration of UN international days, downs syndrome, youth day in collaboration with NGOs.

Ms. Mohit: Would this decrease affect any of those programmes?

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Hon. Cox: No, it would not.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, Item 28: Senior Citizens Homes. Can the Minister indicate in light of the circumstances facing senior citizens, would this allocation be adequate to fulfil the requirements under this line Item?

Hon. Cox: Yes, it will be adequate.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, Item 29: Senior Citizens Centres, an increase of 916,400. Can the Minister provide to us a listing of these Senior Citizens Centres and the proposed expenditure?

Hon. Cox: Yes, will do.

Ms. Mohit: Good. When it comes to all of the centres. Right. Madam Chair, Item 31, a decrease by 700,000 and this relates to Contribution to Non-Profit Institutions. Madam Chair, can the Minister indicate whether this decrease would negatively impact on the operations of the non-profit institutions as listed here?

Hon. Cox: No, because actually this includes non-profit organizations that get subventions on a regular basis and then there are those that receive one-off grants and, therefore, you must meet the requirements. Some have not met the requirements for the grants.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, in terms of the Minister's reporting in November 2020 Standing Finance Committee, the National Enrichment Centre, as mentioned by my colleague, answers were given under this particular line Item of non-profit organizations. Can the Minister indicate whether the National Enrichment Centre would have been functioning as at 30th September with their necessary funding as it relates to this line Item?

Hon. Cox: The National Enrichment Centre does not fall under this line Item.

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Ms. Mohit: So persons with disabilities, et cetera, as listed here.

Hon. Cox: It would be under the Development Programme.

Ms. Mohit: Okay. That is it for that area, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South. Yes, Member for Chaguanas East, you have more questions? Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. To the hon. Minister, line Item 44: Contributions to Non-Profit Institutions, it was estimated at \$1.2 million but the Revised Estimate is at 500,000 indicating that approximately 748,000 was not utilized in this line Item which was a contribution to the non-profit institutions. Can the hon. Minister advise if it is that the Cerebral Palsy Society of Trinidad and Tobago would fall under this line Item and the funding to that organization?

Hon. Cox: Under Item 44?

Mr. Ratiram: Yes.

Hon. Cox: No, no, cerebral palsy will not fall under. They would fall under non-profit organizations, the one we just passed.

Mr. Ratiram: That is the one I am referring to, the non-profit institutions.

Hon. Cox: But you said 44.

Mr. Ratiram: Which is 44.

Hon. Cox: No, 44 is Non-Profit Institutions – (Other Social - Family). This pertains to family.

Mr. Ratiram: And which one out of the Items will that society fall under?

Hon. Cox: What you are speaking about will fall under 31.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the hon. Minister indicate if sufficient funding has been provided for the society during the financial term?

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Hon. Cox: The cerebral palsy association?

Mr. Ratiram: Society of Trinidad and Tobago. Now, hon. Minister, I know that you would have engaged in conversations with the society and I know it is a work in progress.

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Mr. Ratiram: So I am making a humble appeal to you, on behalf of the society, to take into consideration the work that the society has been doing as we go forward into the financial term.

Hon. Cox: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, line Items 43 and 44, can the Minister provide a breakdown of the proposed expenditure in terms of these non-profit organizations in writing?

Hon. Cox: Okay, will do.

Madam Chairman: Item 006: Educational Institutions. Item 007: Households.
Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, 007, 02: Senior Citizens Grant, an increase under this line Item. Madam Chair, can the Minister advise this Committee as to the number of beneficiaries under this particular line Item?

Hon. Cox: All right. We will get it in a little while. We will pull it for you.

Ms. Mohit: I am sorry, I did not hear.

Hon. Cox: We will get that information to you just now.

Ms. Mohit: Okay. In addition, can the Minister indicate whether this increased

sum will be sufficient for qualified persons under this programme?

Hon. Cox: Yes, this would be sufficient.

Ms. Mohit: And in addition, Madam Chair, can the Minister indicate how many persons who would have qualified for assistance under this line Item during the fiscal year 2020 did not receive their assistance as at September 30, 2021.

Hon. Cox: We will provide you with that information.

Ms. Mohit: All right. Madam Chair, Social Assistance, 03, an increase under this particular line Item. Can the Minister provide a breakdown of the grants under this line Item for us?

Hon. Cox: Under Social Assistance, 03?

Ms. Mohit: Yes, 03. Can the Minister provide a breakdown for us?

Hon. Cox: This is to cover an estimated cost of an additional 200 new clients to receive this grant. This is estimated.

Ms. Mohit: Okay. Madam Chair, can the Minister provide to us in writing a breakdown of the different grants received under this line Item?

Hon. Cox: Will do.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, can the Minister indicate whether income support falls under this line Item?

Hon. Cox: Yes, it does.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, during the mid-year review, an additional \$40 million would have given to this Ministry under social assistance for the provision of income support grants. Can the Minister indicate as at September 30, 2021, when it comes to applicants starting May 01, 2021, how many are still outstanding payments in terms of the income support grants?

Hon. Cox: For all those who applied, they have all been paid. Those who were approved were all paid as at September 30th.

Ms. Mohit: Okay. Madam Chair, can the Minister just provide a number for us?

Hon. Cox: We will give you that number.

Ms. Mohit: Okay. Madam Chair, Item 04: Urgent Temporary Assistance, a decrease by \$1 million. Can the Minister indicate whether the assistance, as it relates to those with disabilities in terms of the equipment required for them, whether that falls under this line Item, the provision of those services?

Hon. Cox: Yes, it does.

Ms. Mohit: Yes it does. okay. So, Madam Chair, can the Minister indicate whether the reduction under this line Item has to do with the removal of VAT on the items that were provided under this line Item?

Hon. Cox: Well, this would be one of the areas but under this Urgent Temporary Assistance, there are other variables to be taken into consideration. We also pay flood relief grants under this Item also and I think some aspect of the NSDP grant is paid under this Vote.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, I know there is the National Social Development Programme under other Item, so grants are paid both under NSDP as well as Urgent Temporary Assistance?

Hon. Cox: Yes, because this would be like rental assistance. Rental assistance is paid under this line Item.

11.15 a.m.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, given the challenges faced by tenants at this time, the reduction in allocation, Minister, do you not see it fit to lobby for this allocation to

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assist those persons under this financial year, given the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Hon. Cox: Well, at this point in time we have been adequately supplied with funds to pay persons under this Vote.

Ms. Mohit: Minister, are you considering the rental assistance during this fiscal year in terms of requesting more allocation proposing to the Minister of Finance?

Hon. Cox: At mid-term this will be done, once it is needed. And I want to go back to—you asked about the number of persons on Senior Citizens Pension. It is 109,132 persons, and for this year we had an increase of 664 new persons on the system.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, Item 08: Disability Grants. Madam Chair, can the Minister indicate whether this increased sum makes provision for the disability grant to children which should have been finalized in the second quarter of fiscal 2021, as indicated by you, Madam Minister?

Hon. Cox: Yes, this was finalized and this reflects the increase because disability for minors under this grant.

Ms. Mohit: Disability for minors under this grant. Can the Minister indicate what is the proposed number of persons thus far, in terms of children, to be in receipt of the Disability Grant Assistance?

Hon. Cox: Hold on. We will give it to you just now. We have it here.

Ms. Mohit: Sure. Thank you, Madam Chair, for now.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair. To the hon. Minister, line Item 09: Assistance to National Heroes. Hon. Minister, how many persons fall within this

bracket, and how are they identified?

Hon. Cox: Okay, could I just answer the Member for Chaguanas East first and then come back to you? Under the disability grant we have 2,611 children. And we will get the other figure for adults in a little while.

Madam Chairman: I believe—Minister, are you ready to answer the question posed by Cumuto/Manzanilla?

Hon. Cox: What was the question?

Dr. Ragbir: You want me to repeat the question?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Dr. Ragbir: Sure, sure, certainly. Hon. Minister, under line Item 09: Assistance to National Heroes, quite plausible. My question is: How many persons so far have qualified under this line Item and how are our heroes identified for assistance?

Hon. Cox: Okay, they are identified as they are nominated by interest groups; sporting organizations, we call them special achievers; persons who have reached a certain level in society where they have contributed, like sportsmen, but fall into hard times. All right? And therefore, we have met a lot of persons who would have contributed to Trinidad and Tobago in some way, but yet had fallen into hard times and therefore need some assistance. But they are nominated by, maybe the sporting organizations, culture organizations, community organizations, and that is how there is a committee in place and that committee looks at it and then they would make a decision, based on their vulnerability, because they would then do a means test to check to see even how much money you may have in the bank and what is your earnings, you may have a medical condition that you may need help for.

And this point in time the Ministry is reviewing that grant and why we are

reviewing it is because of the fact it must be in line with what the Ministry is about, vulnerability because there are some persons who may be on the grant and they may not be vulnerable. So, therefore, it will come like another grant from culture or tourism or even sport or community development. So we have to differentiate what this grant is about and it is particularly for persons who are vulnerable.

So that, we are almost complete because we have also contacted key stakeholders and gotten their comments and we have taken the comments into consideration and the committee is now redrafting the final policy on that. But it must be in line with what the Ministry is about and that is about vulnerability.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, hon. Minister.

Hon. Cox: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Item 009. Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, 009, 02: National Social Development Programme (NSDP). The Revised Estimate shows 3million for 2021 and the 2022 estimates, 5 million. Madam Chair, can the Minister advise the Committee whether the Ministry was able to address the outstanding applicants totalling 1,622, which rolled over into 2021 at the end of fiscal 2020?

Hon. Cox: The Ministry was not able to address all. They were able to address some of the applicants. At this point in time, I believe that there are some still outstanding, but they have been working on it. So hopefully persons will get their grants as soon as possible.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, can the Minister indicate whether the employees under the NSDP programme would have been reinstated under that programme? Because

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I know they were being used to assist with the applications for the Income Support and other COVID relief grants. Are they now reinstated under the NSDP?

Hon. Cox: Yes, they are.

Ms. Mohit: They are. So, Madam Chair, given the fact that they now have their full complement, can the Minister advise this Committee how many outstanding payments are there under this NSDP programme at the end of fiscal 2021?

Hon. Cox: Okay, we will send that information in writing.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, if the Minister can also provide a breakdown in terms of house wiring, plumbing, et cetera? Because NSDP would entail a few different grants, so if you can also provide that breakdown.

Hon. Cox: Okay. Will do.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies. Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*. We are at page 493 of that book, 15: Trinidad and Tobago Association for Retarded Children (Lady Hochoy Homes), Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, Item 001. Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, 001, 01 Salary and COLA, an increase of 543,680. Can the Minister advise, give some details as per this increase, Lady Hochoy Home north?

Hon. Cox: Okay, I could send you that information.

Madam Chairman: Item 002. Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, 002, 01 Salaries and Cost of Living, a decrease in allocation. Can the Minister shed some light on this decrease?

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Hon. Cox: We will provide that information also.

Madam Chairman: Item 002: Penal Day Care and Training Centre. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001. Item 002. Item 003. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001. Item 002. Item 003. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007. Item 009.

41, Trinidad and Tobago Association for the Hearing Impaired. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001. Sub-Head—page 501.

Ms. Mohit: 501?

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Mohit: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, 001, 05, a decrease by \$287,664. Minister, can you give any reasoning for this steep decline?

Hon. Cox: We will provide you with that information.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, 06: Remuneration to Board Members, a new Sub-Item. Can the Minister shed some light or details on this new Sub-Item, please?

Hon. Cox: Hold on, I think I need to get that information but I am not seeing that information here.

Ms. Mohit: You will provide it to us at a later date?

Hon. Cox: Yes, I will because I am not seeing the information here.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you.

Hon. Cox: So I want to be clear what you are speaking about. Okay?

Madam Chairman: Can we move on? Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item

Appropriation (Financial Year 2021)
Bill, 2020

2021.10.12

Head 78 Ministry of Social Development
and Family Services (cont'd)

001. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007. Item 009.

42: Trinidad and Tobago Blind Welfare Association. We are now at page 508. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*, Sub-Head 09: Development Programme Consolidated Fund. We are at page 161. Item 004: Social Infrastructure. Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, 004 C, 044, Establishment of Social Displacement Centres. Madam Chair, can the Minister indicate what is the estimated cost to complete the establishment of these centres?

Hon. Cox: We were allocated 2million. We already expended 1.4 and some of the areas that we are doing refurbishment work are the Carapo building and there is another area, Mary Jenny Pool on Tragarete Road. We are establishing an additional transitional facility and we are also looking at having an assessment centre for persons.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, can the Minister provide the cost expended to date on these centres listed?

Hon. Cox: We will provide that.

11.30 a.m.

Ms. Mohit: All right. Okay. Madam Chair, given the recent attendance by the Parliament in terms of the Sustainable Development Goals, et cetera, can the Minister indicate whether—you mentioned an assessment centre, whether you have any plans or the Ministry has any plans in terms of targeting women? As well

as any plans for gender-based budgeting based on the statistics provided to us?

Hon. Cox: This will fall under the Office of the Prime Minister, Ministry of Gender and Child Affairs.

Ms. Mohit: Yes, but in terms of the social part of it?

Hon. Cox: Our Family Services Division, once is family, the Family Services Division would also be a part of that. So yes, we are working on that.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, 096: Development Centre for Persons with Challenges. Madam Chair, can the Minister indicate whether this funding would be adequate for this particular project?

Hon. Cox: It may not be totally adequate, but at mid-term because we will have to outfit the centre, so we will come back at mid-term.

Ms. Mohit: Minister, do you have an estimated time frame for this particular project?

Hon. Cox: It should be finished by the end of this year.

Ms. Mohit: Okay. Madam Chair, Item 112: The Street Dwellers Rehabilitation and Re-Integration Project. No allocation under 2022. Madam Chair, can the Minister indicate whether any project was proposed under this line Item for fiscal 2022?

Hon. Cox: Well, this particularly has to deal with the Centre for Socially Displaced Persons, and therefore, we decided that we would not—there were some refurbishment works to be done, but the plan is to remove them from the areas that there are in, that is at the car park. So we are actively looking for a spot so that we can move them.

Ms. Mohit: Okay. Madam Chair, Item 129: Implementation of a Social Mitigation

Appropriation (Financial Year 2021)
Bill, 2020

Head 78 Ministry of Social Development
and Family Services (cont'd)

Plan. Madam Chair, can the Minister indicate whether this sum would be adequate to complete this project, and can the Minister at the same time provide some background details on this particular project?

Hon. Cox: Well, part of this project involves the establishment of the social services and empowerment unit which would be a one stop for persons who need to access the service of the Ministry. It consists of the rollout of our internal values, VABs which we call VABs, Values, Attitudes, and Behaviour campaign. It involves the role out of our nationwide campaign on strategies to ensure personal food security. This would also involve the implementation of a nationwide public education campaign on financial security. Also, the remodeling of Tunapuna and Rio Claro social services to facilitate our pilot project as part of our digitalization effort.

Ms. Mohit: All right. Madam Chair, Item 134, can the Minister—there is no funding identified here under 2022 Estimates. Can the Minister indicate whether funding was requested under this project, under this particular line Item?

Hon. Cox: Okay. This project, the original mandate—it is actually completed, but the original mandate of the centre is currently being reviewed by the Ministry.

Ms. Mohit: So, therefore, the mandate which is being reviewed—

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Ms. Mohit:—is it a cost attached to it under this line Item, or was it just for the completion of the—?

Hon. Cox: Well, we have paid—the outstanding payments have been paid, and at this point we are reviewing the mandate of the centre.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. I am on Item 112. I want to return back to The Street Dwellers Rehabilitation and Re-Integration Project. The Minister indicated that you are currently looking for a new space. My question though, Ma'am, is that in 2021 there was no allocation. In 2022 there is no allocation. So, what then has happened to those persons who were displaced before? Is it that we have no more socially displaced individuals? Line Item 112. You indicated in your contribution to my colleague just now that the reasons that there is no allocation in 2021, no spend in 2021, is that you all were in the process of finding an alternative location. My question then is whether or not because no expenditure took place in 2021 and none is projected for 2022, whether or not there is now no street dweller, no socially displaced persons in existence, which is why no spend was made for accommodating them in 2021, or projected to in 2022?

Hon. Cox: Well, money is paid because they are accommodated by the Saint Vincent de Paul. So the Ministry has paid them under Non-Profit Organization. That is what happened.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Cox: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Item 005: Multi-Sectorial and Other Services. Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, 005/032: Establishment of an Integrated Social Enterprise Management System / E Pass. Can the Minister indicate whether this sum of \$4.3 million would complete this project?

Hon. Cox: Yes, this should complete this project.

Ms. Mohit: All right. Madam Chair, can the Minister also indicate to us how this

project improves the circumstances of the poor and vulnerable?

Hon. Cox: Well, this is one of our key digitalization efforts. And this is one of our key digitalization efforts, all right. So this is an area where we would be reconfiguring the boards and reconfiguring the service to be provided to the vulnerable.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, Item 038—sorry 036, 038. Madam Chair, these are two new projects, if the Minister can indicate to us, share some details on this programmes, these two programmes, and what is the intended benefits to the poor and vulnerable?

Hon. Cox: Okay. 036, this is to move the manual system to electronic system. So this will support real-time decision making, and of course we are still—in some of the areas you would know that we are working with files and so on, it is not digital. So this data migration is to move our system from a manual one to digital, so that our service will be more effective. Also, with 038, this is a back-up service.

Ms. Mohit: A back-up service?

Hon. Cox: A back-up service to our digital positions.

Ms. Mohit: So this is in relation to 036?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, can I move to F? Or not yet?

Madam Chairman: Yes, you can move to F. It is all within Item 005.

Ms. Mohit: Yes. 003: Outfitting of Buildings. Madam Chair, I noticed that from 2020—2021 no allocation, but \$3 million. Minister, can you advise which are the proposed buildings earmarked for outfitting under this line Item?

Hon. Cox: Well, Sangre Grande and Point Fortin are earmarked for relocation.

Also, the Aranguez office might also have to be relocated. We need to now have an Arima office and that too will be catered under here.

Ms. Mohit: All right. Thanks.

Madam Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, coming back to the new projects, line Item 36, of 1.5 million is a new project. We understand what you said it is for. What is the overall cost for that project, and has that project been started, or has that contract been awarded?

Hon. Cox: No. This has not started. Contract has not been awarded.

Mr. Lee: And what is the overall project in digits for that project? And how long will it take?

Hon. Cox: I will provide that information to you.

Mr. Lee: And that holds also for line Item 38, Madam Minister, if you could?

Hon. Cox: 36?

Mr. Lee: 36 and 38.

Hon. Cox: Okay.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Can the Minister—I am returning to Item under F: Public Buildings; 003: Outfitting of Buildings for the Ministry. Can the Minister provide—Minister indicated in her response to my colleague just now that there were several movements of the Ministry's offices from point A to point B, from one building to another, which would therefore require outfitting. But would it be possible for the Minister to provide an indication maybe in writing of which

buildings—which are the new buildings being proposed to be rented and who are the owners of those buildings? The buildings that you would be moving to.

Hon. Cox: Okay. Thank you. Will do.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members the question is—Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Sorry Ma'am. I am on line Item 36 and 38. Minister, can you indicate whether or not this digitization, whether it will also extend to the social welfare—the regional social welfare offices? Or is just this within the Ministry itself?

Hon. Cox: Yes. This is mainly for the regional social welfare offices.

Mr. Hosein: And Ma'am, as a Member of Parliament, a lot of the requests we get are really for persons who want to apply for food cards and other grants offered by your Ministry. Will there be some level of integration within the MPs' offices so that there can be easier processing on applications for these grants once the digitization process takes place?

Hon. Cox: Yes, as part of the digitalization effort is to have one stop shop. So persons would not have to be going from office to office. And of course, yes, the regional offices will be able to assist them more effectively. It is also the reason why we are having the education programme with constituencies, so that the constituency staff will be aware of the services that we provide and how to access them more readily.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you. Because one of the issues we have is that persons come to us and then they have to go back to the welfare office to drop a letter or any other document, so it becomes very tedious especially persons who need emergency

reliefs and grants that are offered by your Ministry. So I am very happy to hear that this will happen.

Hon. Cox: Thanks.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 78 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, PS. Thank you, other officers of the Ministry.

Okay. So we are going on to Head 39, the Ministry of Public Utilities. And for the guidance of Members we will be starting at page 227 in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, and also when we go to the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*, we will be starting at page 195, and for the Development Programme, we will be starting at page 85.

11.45 a.m.

Head 39: Ministry of Public Utilities \$2,555,023,600.

Madam Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of Public Utilities to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes. Minister.

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales): Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair. I am very honoured to participate in the national budgeting process for fiscal 2022 and to address the Standing Finance Committee of Parliament this morning. I must congratulate the Minister of Finance for his stewardship and his sober management of the national economy.

During this difficult and unprecedented time for the global community, utilities have found themselves on the front line of the COVID-19 pandemic, with

your services being deemed essential. Since the pandemic arrived on our shores last year March for the most part, citizens have continued to receive an adequate supply of electricity, water and waste water services, internet connectivity, postal and sanitation services. Madam Chair, despite notable efforts by WASA to improve the reliability of water to communities, the future though daunting, portends for a secured water sector for all our citizens. This has been due in large measure to the sterling contribution of our workers in the utility sector who continue to provide yeoman service on the frontline to our country during these challenging times. I take this opportunity to salute their efforts on behalf of our citizens.

The utility sector is feeling the negative impacts of climate change, including more frequent and intense extreme weather patterns and climate related events, which raise additional vulnerabilities. In this environment of fast paced disruption, it can no longer be business as usual, therefore, Government has refined its efforts to ensure that all public utility agencies are future-focused, client-centric and perform at their optimal level. Our utilities must now navigate a transition to new business model based on the principles of sustainability and reliance—resilience, sorry. Transformation is therefore an imperative that we cannot afford to shy away from. As such, Madam Chair, the Ministry of Public Utilities is at a critical point of repositioning all the utilities to be more customer-centric and self-sufficient. Madam Chair, as we turn our attention to reengineer our utilities to improve the reliability and the quality of their service, special focus will continue to be placed on extending those services to the unserved and underserved communities, and through our social intervention programmes to facilitate greater access to utility services to most vulnerable, thus ensuring that we are leaving no

one behind. The path is challenging, but it is often said that the right path is often the most challenging. I thank you.

Question proposed: That Head 39 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$2,555,023,600 for Head 39: Ministry of Public Utilities is comprised of monies proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002— Item—Member for Caroni Central, this is Item 002.

Mr. Ram: 002 please.

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ram: Madam Chair, through you, Item 08: Vacant Posts - Salaries and COLA (without incumbents). Can the Minister indicate how many vacant posts exist under this service provided here?

Hon. Gonzales: That is 01?

Mr. Ram: 002: Meteorological Services, 08: Vacant Posts.

Hon. Gonzales: 08?

Mr. Ram: How many vacancies exist at this time?

Hon. Gonzales: Okay, my understanding is that there are 12 vacant positions outstanding at this point.

Mr. Ram: And previously, these posts—these jobs were being done by existing personnel?

Hon. Gonzales: Yes.

Mr. Ram: Have these 12 vacant posts, we expect to see some form of recruitment exercise in the daily newspaper coming up soon?

Hon. Gonzales: So they are public offices in the public service and therefore, the Ministry of Public Utilities continues to liaise with the DPA office to have these positions filled.

Mr. Ram: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 005, Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 22: Short-term Employment, was estimated at 2.2 million and it was revised at 2.8 million. Can the hon. Minister indicate why the additional increase in the Short-term Employment, what does the Short-term Employment include?

Hon. Gonzales: What is the question, Member?

Mr. Ratiram: For the Estimates and Revised Estimates, the difference there, can the Minister indicate what would account for that additional spending and this line Item: Short-term Employment, what would that entail?

Hon. Gonzales: What additional spending?

Member: Reduction.

Mr. Ratiram: From the Estimate to the Revised Estimate, the Estimate for 2021 was 2.2 million, the Revised Estimate was \$2,880,000. There is an increase there between the Revised Estimate and the Estimate.

Hon. Gonzales: Yes, so if you notice that there is a decrease in the allocation for 2022 and that decrease is in the sum of \$306,000. That is for the allocation for 2022 when compared to the allocation for the Revised Estimate for 2021.

Mr. Ratiram: I can see that, hon. Minister. That is not what I am asking. What I am asking is that there was an Estimate of 2.2 million, and there was a Revised Estimate of 2.8 million. Can the hon. Minister kindly advise or account for why this increase from the Estimate to the Revised Estimate?

Hon. Gonzales: That is probably because of—I do not have the information, but I suspect that the Ministry may have hired some short-term contract employment during the financial year, which resulted in the increase.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, hon. Minister, however, I do not want you to suspect I would like you to be specific and certain. [*Desk thumping*] So, in accounting to this Committee, can you get the information and provide me in writing in the future please.

Hon. Gonzales: As soon as I have that information I will provide the clarity in writing.

Mr. Ratiram: In addition to that, the recruitment process for these short-term employment, can the hon. Minister advise on how these persons are recruited?

Hon. Gonzales: Well, the advertisement is placed, the Permanent Secretary and the team at the Ministry of Public Utilities, they engage the normal recruitment practices for employment in the public service, which is through advertisement in the national newspapers, social media, et cetera. And that process is the normal process that has always been triggered for employment in the public service.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, hon. Minister. I would like the hon. Minister to provide us in writing all the advertisements that were placed in the newspaper for the spending of 2.8 million for the last financial term, please.

Hon. Gonzales: Sure.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 17: Training, in the previous years there has been very little allocation and this year is actually no allocation at all. Can the hon. Minister indicate—I know for the Ministry before, under this line Item, the issue of digital transformation came up. Can the hon. Minister indicate whether or not the Ministry is engaged in this digital transformation and if so, how come under line Item 17 there is no allocation?

Hon. Gonzales: And that is because most of the training that staff members are exposed to is free virtual training—

Mr. Padarath: Okay.

Hon. Gonzales:—so we do not anticipate any—to incur any costs on that line Item—

Mr. Padarath: Sure.

Hon. Gonzales:—for 2022.

Mr. Padarath: Minister, if you turn your attention to line Item 04 please, Electricity, there is a decrease of 267,600 and I am looking at the pattern. Is this an elimination of arrears in the past that would have accounted for this decrease?

Hon. Gonzales: What is the question, Sir?

Mr. Padarath: The decrease under line Item 04—

Hon. Gonzales: Yes.

Mr. Padarath:—Electricity, is this because of arrears from the past that this decrease is being reflected on the books?

Hon. Gonzales: That was settled in 2021.

Mr. Padarath: So the answer is yes?

Hon. Gonzales: Yes.

Mr. Padarath: And with respect to the line Item 15: Repairs and Maintenance – Equipment, there is a decrease of 73,800 under this particular line Item. Can the hon. Minister indicate what would have accounted for this decrease especially at this time if we are engaging in digital transformation, et cetera?

Hon. Gonzales: That decrease is as a result of extensive repairs that were conducted in 2021, so we are expecting to incur less in the financial year 2022.

Mr. Padarath: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, with respect to 16: Contract Employment, I see there is more or less a consistency in terms of the expenditure. Could you provide this meeting with a breakdown of how many contract officers you have and your respective classifications and so on, and the tenure or duration of the respective contracts?

Hon. Gonzales: I do not have the exact information with respect to their tenure, but I can tell you that we have 111 contract positions of which 65 positions are filled and—yes, 65 positions are filled at this point in time.

12.00 noon

Mr. Indarsingh: The information that I requested, I will allow you and give you the appropriate time.

Hon. Gonzales: Of course, I can provide that information.

Mr. Indarsingh: Please do. And with respect to 22: Short-term Employment, you continue to spend in 2020, 2021 and 2022, approximately the same financial sum. What is the plan? Is there a plan to keep these people on short-term employment or what it is? Is it that their contracts are being extended and there is no security of tenure?

Hon. Gonzales: So, the Ministry of Public Utilities, we continue to engage the PMCD with respect to a new structure for the Ministry of Public Utilities. And once that process is completed, a lot of the positions that we have categorized as short-term employment, they will either be absorbed as full contract employment or within positions in the public service.

Mr. Indarsingh: Within the public service? And seeing that you have engaged the PMCD, have you also engaged the Public Services Association as it relates to this particular issue?

Hon. Gonzales: The Ministry of Public Utilities, the Permanent Secretary, they are on a team, that is, those matters are settled with the PMCD. At any point in time, if there is a need to engage the association, the guidance will be sought from the CPO's office.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you. I hope you do not violate the procedures as it relates to the labour laws of the country.

Hon. Gonzales: Of course, I would not take advice from you on that.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would like to refer the Minister's attention to Item 42: Street Lighting. The actual spend for 2020 was 41 million. However, the Revised Estimate for 2020 was 216 million, when it was estimated for at 50 million. Can the Minister kindly explain why this is significant overspending of \$176 million?

Hon. Gonzales: So, the decrease is as a result of payments that were made in 2021 to cover arrears over that period of time to 2021. So what you are seeing here is as a result of that outstanding sum or outstanding sums that were settled previously.

Mr. Ratiram: That was arrears from previous years?

Hon. Gonzales: Yes.

Mr. Ratiram: How much previous years?

Hon. Gonzales: Over the last two years.

Mr. Ratiram: Over the last two years it accumulated to an additional 176 million. So if it is that we actually spent 41 million in 2020—we do not have the figures for 2019—and arrears were compounded and we spent an additional 176 million to clear the arrears, then why are we budgeting at a figure less than what was spent in 2020? We are budgeting 40 million which means that we are going to incur arrears once again. So why are we not properly budgeting for what the actual spend is going to be?

Hon. Gonzales: Well, we always have the opportunity to have those figures revised at our mid-term. We believe that the \$40 million allocation, at this point in time, would allow the Ministry to satisfy the outstanding payments or the payments to be incurred, at least, in the first six months of 2022.

Mr. Ratiram: Hon. Minister, this line Item: Street Lighting, when the Ministry normally receives requests from the utility seeking the approval and guidance for street lighting—requests coming from the commission—what is the normal turnaround time?

Hon. Gonzales: It all depends on the availability of resources, the availability of funds. So, there is no set, you know, turnaround timing to facilitate those types of requests. But I can tell you with the level of responsiveness from the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission, I am of the view that the response time is quite impressive.

Mr. Ratiram: Well, hon. Minister, taking your response into consideration, what I have is a letter that I received from the commission on the 22nd of September,

subject: “Request for Street lighting at Orchid Avenue”. And this letter states:

Firstly, the Commission apologized for inadvertently not acknowledging my correspondence dated the February 16, 2021.

Notwithstanding this, the Commission addressed your request—which is my request—by forwarding same to the Ministry of Public Utilities via letter dated April 22, 2021 for their consideration and approval. The Commission awaits the Ministry’s guidance regarding same.

Minister, this is since the 22nd of April, the Commission wrote to the Ministry from April 22nd concerning street lighting in an area that is dark, is not lit, in an environment where safety is a major concern. And is this acceptable to you, from the 22nd of April to today’s date, this lighting problem has not been addressed and [*Desk thumping*] we spent \$216 million for the last year?

Hon. Gonzales: So, my response to your question a short while ago, it remains. And I am satisfied that in the circumstances, the Commission does its best, working together and collaborating with the Ministry of Public Utilities to have those matters addressed as quickly as possible.

Mr. Ratiram: But, Minister, we cannot be working together if from April 22nd the Commission wrote to the Ministry and it has had not been resolved as yet. We cannot be working together on this, because it seems as though we are working but you are not. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Padarath: Thank you Madam. Madam, on the same line Item, in reference to the answer that was provided to my colleague for Couva North that this reflects—the \$176 million decrease reflects the arrears for the past two years: Can the hon. Minister give the undertaking to provide us with the projects, in the last two years, that this decrease will amount for—account for, sorry, and also if the Minister can

give us by region or by constituency? And, similarly, with the allocation for this year, if the Minister can give us the work programme envisaged for this allocation per region or by constituency, please?

Hon. Gonzales: Madam Speaker, I can provide that in writing.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Thank you. Line Item 43: Security Services. What plans or what would have accounted for this decrease in allocation to security services between the financial years 2021 and 2022?

Hon. Gonzales: The decrease is as a result of arrears that were settled for the period March to September 2021.

Dr. Ragbir: Could you repeat please. I did not hear.

Hon. Gonzales: The decrease was as a result of arrears—outstanding arrears that were settled between March and September of 2021.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to return to line Item 42: Street Lighting. Just for my clarification, Minister, this \$216 million revised expenditure in 2021, can you confirm—you said it was for arrears—but can you confirm what company, or what entity, or what entities are these arrears owed to? From the questioning and the conversations we just had, it seems to be that these are arrears owed to T&TEC. Is it that these arrears are owed to T&TEC or to private supplies of goods and services?

Hon. Gonzales: The arrears are owed to the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission only.

Mr. Tancoo: So, Minister, the Ministry of Public Utilities owed T&TEC \$176 million, the Ministry itself?

Hon. Gonzales: Yes.

Mr. Tancoo: And for several years you said?

Hon. Gonzales: Yes.

Mr. Tancoo: Would this expenditure in 2021 wipe out the arrears or are you still going to be putting T&TEC in danger of financial insolvency?

Hon. Gonzales: So we have an allocation for 2022 of \$40 million to address the issue of street lighting.

Mr. Tancoo: Is that to address all arrears? The question I am asking, Sir, if you may, is can you kindly confirm whether the Ministry of Public Utilities as at today's date or as at the end of September 2021, whether there are outstanding arrears owed to the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission as at the end of September 2021? Do you still owe the company?

Hon. Gonzales: So, at the end of fiscal 2021, the outstanding balance owed to the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission is \$36 million.

Mr. Tancoo: So you are going into fiscal 2022 with an outstanding debt of \$36 million and you are budgeting \$40 million to spend in incurring new— that—

Hon. Gonzales: That would be to facilitate new requests for street lighting.

Mr. Tancoo: The maths is really not adding up, chief, because now you are saying that you are going to not be able to cover—you are just barely going to be able to only pay the arrears. From this allocation you have here, you are only going to meet the arrears or is it that this allocation is understated to facilitate a lower expenditure figure overall in 2021?

Hon. Gonzales: Member, I am telling you that at the end of 2021, the outstanding debt owed to T&TEC is \$36 million. We have an allocation of \$40 million, and that would be to address the outstanding debt and to facilitate new requests for 2022.

Mr. Tancoo: So, Minister, are you saying you are going to use \$4 million in electricity as a Ministry for 2022? That cannot be right. That cannot be right. Your figures here suggest that you are going to spend the vast majority of \$36 million out of this to repay arrears and leave \$4 million alone for payment of your current use for one year, 365 days. You are suggesting that the entire Ministry is going to use \$4 million, when in 2020, you have used \$41 million? Something is wrong with the maths there. I suspect that you are under budgeting, and I am very suspicious as to the reason why you are doing so.

Hon. Gonzales: Well, I think, I think my response was very clear.

Mr. Tancoo: It is and that is what is worrying me.

Hon. Gonzales: It is very, very clear and you would understand that we have alternative mechanisms. We have the opportunity at the mid-term review to address any outstanding payments.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, I thank you very much.

Madam Chairman: Okay, Member. So, I think you have interrogated that. Are you going on to something else or I will invite somebody else? I think the answer to that line of questioning is extremely clear. Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes, Madam Chair. Minister, could you, with respect to line Item 42: Street Lighting—I do not know if you have the information and to advise this meeting—how many request you may have at T&TEC for repairs to existing street lights and also request for the installation of new street lights?

Hon. Gonzales: Normally, those requests would go to T&TEC, and it would be transferred subsequently to the Ministry of Public Utilities. So I do not have the information that would be at T&TEC at this point in time.

Mr. Indarsingh: And can you confirm, under this particular head, whether you

have carried out any political instructions to T&TEC not to effect any street lighting repairs in Opposition-controlled constituencies? [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Gonzales: I think that is absurd. I am the Minister of Public Utilities of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago that serves every single constituency, both on this side and on the other side, [*Desk thumping*] and I would never engage in that kind of politics.

Mr. Indarsingh: Well, I am putting it to you that you have instructed the board of T&TEC to do such.

Hon. Gonzales: I think somebody is misleading you, Sir.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North. Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Madam, on that same line Item 42: Street Lighting, and I am taking the Minister at his word when the Minister said that these numbers reflect arrears, the 176 million for two years, and if we were to take that 176 and divide it, Madam, we are getting 88 million, And the question is—this will reflect 2019 and 2020. What would account for this spike in 2019 and in 2020? Is it because it was an election year? And again, could we get the undertaking from the Minister to provide us with these huge expenditures only for these two years with respect to which constituencies these were expended in? Because when you come back to after the election in 2021/2022, you are going back into \$40 million.

Hon. Gonzales: Madam Chair, I—

12.15 p.m.

Mr. Padarath: So is it that suddenly you had love for them in 2019 and 2020 but no love in 2021, 2022? Which constituencies did this affect?

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town, which question would you want the Minister to address—

Mr. Padarath: I want the Minister, Madam, to specifically give the undertaking to provide us with the projects, 2019 and 2020, per region and per constituency.

Hon. Gonzales: Madam Chair—

Mr. Padarath: And what would have accounted for these large expenditures in these two years, if he is prepared to do so?

Madam Chairman: You see, Member, if maybe you will try and allow a question to be answered, because sometimes with the statements and the questions all running five minutes we are not sure which question is to be answered.

Mr. Padarath: Okay, Madam, well, I think I was very clear.

Madam Chairman: Remember—

Mr. Padarath: It is just two simple questions.

Madam Chairman: Remember, Member for Princes Town, remember you are allowed a number of interventions. Okay? So I think for your matters to be properly addressed if you could ask a question rather than a long statement with 10 questions. I really do not know which question is before the Minister. Minister.

Hon. Gonzales: Madam Chair, I listened to the Member and the question that he asked, I am of the view that I answered the question. I give the undertaking that I am going to provide the information in writing.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. And there is an additional question that I am asking the hon. Minister now, what would have accounted for these large expenditures in these two years and then going back to only \$40million in the next financial year? What would have accounted for that spike in these two years just before general election?

Hon. Gonzales: Madam Chair—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South. Minister.

Hon. Gonzales: Madam Chair, I answered the question already.

Madam Chairman: All right. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, on line Item 53: Refunds to WASA Re: Water Improvement Rate, Minister, can you just give us a clear understanding of this large allocation of \$233 million in terms of Refunds to WASA?

Hon. Gonzales: So under the Waterworks and Water Conservation Act, WASA receives payment for the supply of water to industrial and commercial customers and that payment is referred to as water improvement rates. Normally when WASA receives that payment, it is deposited in the Consolidated Fund and the Ministry of Finance would reimburse through the Ministry of Public Utilities. They would reimburse WASA the same amount that they collected from these improvement rates from those customers and that would be provided to WASA subsequently.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, I saw that there was a decrease in the Revised Estimate of \$218 million in refunds, is this as a result of the reduction in the amount of companies operating at the industrial parks?

Hon. Gonzales: That is absolutely correct.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to return to Item 42; it is a slightly different question, Madam. As the Minister would know, we have had multiple requests for street lighting services, for installation of street lights, et cetera, in our constituencies. I am wondering whether the Minister could confirm that this is sufficient—this allocation, especially given what we just discussed, that there is

only about \$4 million outstanding, left after arrears are paid; whether the Minister is convinced that this \$4 million is sufficient to meet the requests for street lighting services that have been coming, at least from our constituencies on this side.

Hon. Gonzales: Madam Chair, whatever funds we have available at our disposal with respect to street lighting projects the refunds would be utilized equitably based on the requests that we receive at the Ministry of Public Utilities and at the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission. Those requests, Madam Chair, I am not guided by whether or not those constituencies or the requests are coming from Opposition constituencies and/or PNM constituencies.

I can tell you, Madam Chair, that based on the information that I have seen in previous documents at the MPU that a lot of the constituencies that are in receipt of street lighting assistance they are based in Opposition constituencies. Constituencies in which works were completed; I am seeing here, San Fernando West, Toco/Sangre Grande, Siparia, Caroni Central, Caroni East, Chaguanas East, Fyzabad, Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, San Fernando West, Cumuto/Manzanilla, Pointe-a-Pierre, Couva North, Chaguanas East, Oropouche East, Moruga/Tableland, Princes Town, Mayaro, Couva South, Couva North, and I can go on and on.

I have not seen Diego Martin North/East as yet. I have not seen Arouca/Maloney as yet. So stop playing the victims. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh: We want data.

Hon. Gonzales: Stop playing victims.

Mr. Indarsingh: "Doh" call constituencies, give the data.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South, I think you know much better than that.

Hon. Gonzales: I am not seeing Diego Martin West; I am not seeing Tobago East—

Mr. Tancoo: Not seeing Oropouche West. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Okay. So Member for Oropouche West, I guess if Member for Couva North would allow you the opportunity to ask your question, I would recognize you. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam. Based on the list that the hon. Minister just provided, I would appreciate if the hon. Minister would provide the similar list with the amount of street lights that have been provided per constituency in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

I have one more question, Madam. Is the Minister aware that T&TEC or the relevant agency is now removing streetlights from particular areas, like Petit Morne, to be placed in other areas? So it appears that there is a shortage of street lighting which is why street lights are being removed from poles in one area after they have been placed there for several years and being placed elsewhere. Is that a decision that was taken because of the absence or insufficiency of funds or is there another reason?

Hon. Gonzales: It sounds like conspiracy theories.

Mr. Tancoo: Excuse me?

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Tancoo: The Minister is not aware?

Madam Chairman: Excuse me, Member for Couva South—Member for Couva South, one, you know we have a rule against display, I am certain you are well aware of that. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, refer to the same line

Item with—however, I would like to tell the—

Madam Chairman: The line Item?

Mr. Ratiram:—hon. Minister—

Madam Chairman: Excuse me, which Item are you at, please?

Mr. Ratiram: Line Item 42, Street Lighting.

Madam Chairman: Yes, please.

Mr. Ratiram: And I would like to advise the hon. Minister that it is not a conspiracy theory but it is something for him to look into. All right? It is information that has been presented by my colleague and he should take the information into consideration and do the necessary investigation and deal with it. [*Desk thumping*] However, I would like to follow up from what the Minister responded earlier where he indicated \$36 million was going to be utilized for 2022 which leaves this programme only \$4 million for recurrent expenditure for the upcoming financial year. However, requests have been made from my constituency from way back in 2017, come right up to today's—to this financial term by myself and councillors, councillor Dubraj, councillor "Taxi", councillor Vishan, councillor Wendy and councillor Rajbal have all sent in requests.

These requests have been discussed at regional coordinating committee and the Commission is fully aware of the request for Roopsingh Road development; Joyce Road, North and South; Chandernagore Road; St. John's Road; Palm Avenue and Petersfield area, just to name a few. And I would not go through the content of those letters but I will always—I can provide the hon. Minister with copies of documents dated way back, from 2017 to today's date, indicating significant outstanding work to be completed by the Commission.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chair, could I get a ruling, are we dealing with 2020 to 2022

Estimates?

Mr. Ratiram: If I may continue, please?

Mr. Imbert: Not 2017, '16, '15, '10, whatever.

Mr. Ratiram: These are outstanding requests and these requests have been repeated in this financial year.

Madam Chairman: So, Member for Couva North, I believe what you are trying to ask the Minister, if you could ask the question now, please?

Mr. Ratiram: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. I am asking the hon. Minister if it is that he believes the remaining \$4 million that will be made available to the Commission will be sufficient to satisfy all these requests or at this point in time should he be asking the Minister of Finance for additional funding. We do not have to wait until mid-year review if it is that it was not properly budgeted for at this point in time.

Hon. Gonzales: Madam Chair, I have just read out a list of constituencies that have received or benefited under this programme. It appears to be, quite clearly, based on the list that I have just read out and in the interest of equity, perhaps I may have to start paying some more attention to some constituencies on this side of the floor.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Madam, under line Item 53, to follow up on [*Crosstalk*] a question that was asked and answered—

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town, if you could wait one minute so that the conversation that is taking place between the Member for Couva South and the Minister of Finance, maybe when they are finished I will hear. Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Madam, under line Item 53, and it is a follow up to something that the Member for Barataria/San Juan raised and the Minister answered. Minister, can you give the undertaking if you do not have the information right now, to provide us in writing with a list of the clients or customers that no longer fall under this line Item in terms of industrial park clients?

Hon. Gonzales: Which line Item is that, 53?

Mr. Padarath: Fifty-three.

Hon. Gonzales: And the question is?

Mr. Padarath: You had indicated that the reasons why we are seeing these figures is because there would have been the loss of some of these clients or customers from the industrial park in the industrial estates—

Hon. Gonzales: Yes.

Mr. Padarath:—can the hon. Minister provide us in writing if he does not have the information now, over the last year, how many and which of these clients are no longer customers?

Hon. Gonzales: Certainly, I can provide that information in writing.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am returning to this Item 42, can the Minister of Public Utilities kindly confirm receipt as at one minute and 30 seconds ago of photographs from me to his cell phone indicating the exact situation that I raised.

Madam Chairman: So, Member, I am not going to allow that question in this exercise. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 42, under Street

Lighting, the Minister's response, he did read out a list of constituencies that work was—

Hon. Gonzales: Madam Chair, I am not hearing the Member's question because of the constant talk that I am hearing from Couva South.

Madam Chairman: Maybe his own Members may have to ask him to allow them opportunity to do so.

Hon. Gonzales: Perhaps he does see the relevance in the questions being asked by his colleagues.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, in the hon. Minister's response to line Item 42 in the earlier question that I asked, he did in fact read out a list where Couva North was mentioned and other constituencies, and I take this moment to congratulate the Commission, T&TEC, for the work that they have been doing across the country. However, the Minister indicated in his response—in his response he indicated that maybe he should pay some more attention to Members on this side. I hope the Minister is not discriminating and the Minister is paying attention to the citizens across the entire country. However, the Minister did not answer my question when I asked for the street light requests for Roopsingh Road, Joyce Road, Chandernagore, St. John's Road, Palm Avenue and Petersfield; if it is that in his opinion the \$4 million would be sufficient to finance the Commission to execute this work in the upcoming financial year.

Madam Chairman: I believe that question was asked and answered.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, I repeated his answer but his answer does not indicate any—

Madam Chairman: Item 002. Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Madam Chair, line Item 05: Telephones, the amount budgeted for the Estimates for 2021 was \$250,000, the amount spent was \$180,000, and then in this year we are seeing an increase of \$360,900, can the Minister indicate, one, what is the increase—why is there an increase? And, secondly, what is the average monthly rental of telephones, whether it be landline, fixed lines, mobiles, whatever it is?—the average amount per month.

Hon. Gonzales: Madam Chair, the increase is to facilitate allocations—

Mr. Ram: Telephones? [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Gonzales:—to cover payments for all charges related to telecommunications services in 2022.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

12.30 p.m.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Under line Item 22: Short-term Employment, the Estimate for 2021 was 2.8 million, however, it is estimated for 2022, 3.7 million. Can the hon. Minister advise why such a significant increase for Short-term Employment, what it entails?

Hon. Gonzales: Madam Chair, there are currently 24 persons on short-term contract for a period of six months, and they are on a rotational basis. The Estimate, after analysis by the Ministry of Public Utilities, we believe that the sum allocated for 2022 will cover the 24 persons that are on short-term contract for the period of six months.

Madam Chairman: Item 005; Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001; Item 002; Item 005; Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 001; Item 003; Item—Member for Couva North, are you on 003? Item 007, Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I refer to line Item 08: Refund to T&TEC, Rebate to Electricity Bill. The estimated figure for this was 40million, however the Revised Estimate was 97 million. Could the hon. Minister advise the significant increase in the Revised Estimate?

Hon. Gonzales: Madam Chair, for 2021 we had a Revised Estimate of 97 million, and in 2022, it is 50 million. So there is a decrease in the allocation for 2022 as a result of outstanding payments made by the Ministry of Public Utilities to T&TEC on arrears owed to T&TEC on this particular Item. So currently the payments outstanding to T&TEC, my understanding is that all outstanding arrears have been settled up to September of 2021, and we believe that with the allocation of 50million for 2022 it will be sufficient to cover the period September to April2022.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Could the hon. Minister advise what duration these arrears developed, for an increase of 57 million, that was the increase from the Estimate to the Revised Estimate, an additional 57 million? Can the Minister advise the arrears that he is speaking about, for what time period?

Hon. Gonzales: What \$57 million you are referring to?

Mr. Ratiram: Minister, 97 million take away 40 million is 57 million.

Madam Chairman: Member, it may help if you refer to the year. If you refer to the year, it may help guide the Minister to focus.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. So hon. Minister, 2021 Revised Estimate was 97 million. The 2021 Estimate was 40 million; 97 take away 40 is 57. That is the 57 million that I am referring to.

Hon. Gonzales: So the \$57 million is a result of the arrears for the period September 2019 to September 2020, which was paid in September 2021.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Ratiram: Taking those figures into consideration, does the Minister think that the 50 million estimated for 2022 will be sufficient, because I heard the Minister say it is sufficient up until April 2022? Are we not budgeting for the entire financial term, or are we under budgeting here at this point in time?

Hon. Gonzales: Okay, so the Estimate for 2022 is \$48 million, so the \$50 million will be more than sufficient.

Mr. Ratiram: No, Minister. The Estimate for 2022 is 50 million.

Hon. Gonzales: Yes, that is the allocation. It is the allocation, but based on our estimates for that period what we can potentially incur is somewhere between 48 million or \$49 million.

Mr. Ratiram: And that is for the entire financial year?

Hon. Gonzales: That would be for the entire financial year.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Madam, to the hon. Minister. In light of the impending rate increase, could the hon. Minister indicate how many persons would have benefited in the last financial year from this particular programme? In light of the rate increase, we suspect that persons may fall out of this programme because of that increase. Do you envisage that this will affect some of those customers?

Hon. Gonzales: So currently you have about 218,000 customers who are benefitting from this programme, and as the Government indicated through the Minister of Finance, the rate review process that is on the way by the RIC. We will await the recommendations by the RIC, and the Government through a cash card programme will seek to provide support to the low income, to the vulnerable groups in the society. So in addition to the rebate, which we are seeking to increase

from 25 per cent to 35 per cent, the Government through the cash card programme would be able to provide further assistance to the vulnerable groups in society.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Madam, in light of the answer provided by the Minister, could the hon. Minister indicate whether or not Government, through NGC, has removed in whole or the subsidy from NGC to T&TEC that would affect these customers that fall under this line Item?

Madam Chairman: I am not going to allow that under refunds to T&TEC's debate on electricity bills. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item 06: Utilities Assistance Programme. Based on your website that programme is designed for low-income earners in respect of assisting them with WASA and T&TEC bills. Correct? In 2021, you had estimated originally, the budgeted amount was 4million, the revised is 7.3million. The first question is, that 7.3 in 2021, that steep increase, what was it due to for 2021, that 7.3, as opposed to your 4million that you had budgeted?

Hon. Gonzales: That would have been based on additional requests that the Ministry received from members of the public.

Mr. Lee: Do you feel that was due to the pandemic that the country was going through?

Hon. Gonzales: Perhaps.

Mr. Lee: Perhaps, okay.

Hon. Gonzales: But from time to time, the Ministry continues to get a number of requests from citizens across Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Lee: That is fine, Minister, but I see in 2022 you came back with the same original amount of 4 million that was originally estimated in 2021. Do you

perceive to have that same sort of request, that uptick in helping low-income earners, assisting them in their WASA and T&TEC bills, and if so, why go back with the original budgeted amount of 2021 or 4 million?

Hon. Gonzales: It varies. We are of the view that 4 million allocation is quite sufficient based on the number of requests that we get over the years. I know last year, the last financial year, we did get an uptake on increase in the request for assistance under this programme. We believe that with the \$4 million it would be more than sufficient to address and to respond positively to some of the requests that we normally would get. If there is a need for increased allocation, we would have the opportunity at the appropriate time to request additional allocation from the Ministry of Finance.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I am on line Item 08: Refunds to T&TEC: Rebate on Electricity Bills. Minister, my question is based on this. It seems as though the current system now for rebates, the average that the Ministry would normally allocate per year would be the \$40 million, as we have seen in the 2021 Estimates. It could be compared to the 2020 Actual, so the current system is about \$40 million to deal with the rebates in the current system.

In this fiscal year, the Minister of Finance announced that the rebate would be increased from 25 to 30 per cent on bills that are \$300 or lower, and he also announced that this would cost the State an additional \$25 million. So if we use the formula that the average for each year is \$40 million, then if you add the \$25 million that he said it would now cost for this increase in the rebate, you will go up to about \$65 million. But your allocation here is only \$50 million for this current financial year.

So my question goes back to whether or not a higher allocation should have been given to take care of the increase in the rebate that was announced as a part of the fiscal measure in this year's budget.

Hon. Gonzales: So yes, that is a good point that you raise. The increase on moving from 25 per cent to 35 per cent, obviously there is going to be an increased expenditure under this Item. I can tell you that with the \$50 million it should be able to take us comfortably to make payment to T&TEC at the appropriate time, closer to the end of this financial year. If there is a need for an increase based on Government's intention to increase the percentage, we will work together with the Ministry of Finance to get the additional funding to make the payment to T&TEC.

Mr. Hosein: The reason I raised this question is because if the Ministry is not able to meet its obligation to T&TEC, it will affect their operations on that end and, therefore, it can affect service interruptions and the way how they respond. After sitting on a JSC, we have heard some of the concerns that they would have based on funding. So that is why I want to ensure that T&TEC is being paid the sufficient amount of money that they are actually owed so that their services are not interrupted.

Hon. Gonzales: Well, yes. So the \$50 million should allow the Ministry of Public Utilities to make timely payments to T&TEC under this programme.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I refer the Minister's attention to Item 40: Gratuity to Contract Officers. Hon. Minister, I see the 2020 estimate was 3million, however, the revised estimate was 1.5million. Can the Minister advise if it is that contract officers have been waiting for their gratuities and did not receive it in this financial year, because we did not utilize what was budgeted for?

Hon. Gonzales: So, the increase is to cover payments that are due in 2021, but not paid. Madam Chairman, 16 persons received who were due for payment in 2021, and 53 persons would become eligible for gratuity payments in 2022.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the Minister advise why these persons who were eligible for payment of gratuity did not receive their payments, even though the funds were budgeted?

Hon. Gonzales: I do not have that information at this point in time, but I can provide that for you in writing at the appropriate time.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, hon. Minister. Line Item 08: Refund to T&TEC. Minister, under this line Item you indicated that you would have cleared certain arrears in the 2021 Revised Estimate. Can the hon. Minister advise how much moneys are being owed to T&TEC at this point in time, because it is our understanding that Government owes T&TEC close to \$1 billion outstanding funds? Can the Minister advise how much funds are being owed in total to T&TEC?

Madam Chairman: I will not allow that under this particular Item.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman: It has to do with refunds to T&TEC specifically re: rebate on electricity.

Hon. Gonzales: Madam Chair, I also stated a short while ago that we have met all our outstanding payments owed to T&TEC for 2021.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: I refer to line Items 06 and 08. Can the Minister give us a geographic breakdown of the recipients under these two line Items?

Mr. Imbert: The geographical breakdown of recipients?

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Mr. Tancoo: Yes, Sir, or the constituency breakdown would be much preferable.

Hon. Gonzales: No, I do not have that information, but I can provide that in writing if you so desire.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you very much.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Dealt with, Madam, thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 009. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Through you, hon. Minister, Item 04: TTPost. Hon. Minister, I see there is a decrease of \$7.3 million. My question to you, with that decrease how would it affect the operating expenses and wages at TTPost?

12.45 p.m.

Hon. Gonzales: It will not. TTPost continues to explore additional areas for revenue and to undertake revenue-generating initiatives so that they can become more financially sustainable. TTPost continues to provide a certain service to the Ministry of Works and Transport under the demerit point system, red light camera enforcement system, the traffic ticketing system under its courier services department. And that particular area has been attracting a number of revenue or increased revenue to the organization and therefore what we are seeing is a great effort for TTPost to become financially sustainable thereby weaning it off from the Ministry of Finance.

Mr. Ragbir: Thank you.

[MR. FORDE *in the Chair*]

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you. I refer to line Item 22: Principal on T&TEC Loan where

we have upwards of a 200 per cent increase between the Revised Estimate of 2021 and the Estimate for 2022. Can the Minister advise whether any of this is because of the fact that there were arrears previously or is it that—I am helping you to help me—is it that the interest and principal on this loan are now bunching at this point in time? It is this the figure that is actually due? Or is it as a result of arrears that went forward before?

Hon. Gonzales: So in June 2019, the Government agreed inter alia for the implementation of a 10-year loan facility. My understanding is that in two tranches between T&TEC and NGC to address the residual balance of US \$524million which is about \$3.5 billion in the first instalment is payable at June 30, 2021.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, can you further advise whether any of the loans taken as listed here under 18, 19, 20, 22, whether any of these were to meet recurrent expenditure as a result of the failure of the Government to meet its obligations to T&TEC?

Hon. Gonzales: That is not correct, Sir.

Mr. Tancoo: So none of these loans were for recurrent?

Mr. Chairman: Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises, page 234. I recognize Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am referring to line Item 06: Interest on NMTS Fixed Rate Loan. I note that we have a 2021 Revised Estimate of \$15,628,000 million. We have an Estimate that is now \$28 less for 2022. Can the Minister advise what would have accounted for this \$28 decrease in the amount to be paid as part of a fixed loan agreement? Why is there a \$28 decrease?

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Gonzales: Mr. Chair, my understanding is that, based on the amortization

loan schedule, that is the reason why we have that decrease. So there is a loan schedule payment and it is very much consistent with that loan amortization schedule. I know that the Minister of Finance might be able to provide some further clarification.

Mr. Chairman: Minister of Finance, would you shed some light, further light?

Mr. Imbert: Yes. With respect to all—

Mr. Tancoo: Save him. Save him.

Mr. Imbert: With respect to all provisions for loan payments, all of them will be different, at different times in different forms, whether a loan is coming to an end, whether it is just beginning, whether it is in the middle of a loan repayment period, there is no consistency from year to year, and I do not expect the payments to be exactly the same from year to year.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, this is a \$28 difference on a loan that was \$300 million in value and a repayment which was \$15.6 difference in value. We have a \$28. If it is a typo, it is logical and rational and acceptable to say so.

Mr. Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, this is a consistent refrain from Members opposite. They do not want to understand reality. Loan financing does not result in an identical payment schedule every year. It is different every year. If the Members opposite do not want to understand that, do not want to believe that, I would not answer this type of question again. I have made the point over and over.

Mr. Chairman: We are going to a different question. A different line Item.

Mr. Tancoo: It is the same line Item but a different point. It is a specific request.

Mr. Chairman: Proceed. Hold on. Proceed.

Mr. Tancoo: Hon. Minister, can you provide this honourable Chamber with a

detailed breakdown of the proposed payment schedule for this loan?

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, I will provide details of all those matters—

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Mr. Imbert:—for everybody.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head—Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am looking at line Item 02: Solid Waste Management Company Limited. There is an \$11.5 million decrease. Could the Minister—

Mr. Chairman: Member for Tabaquite, one sec, one sec. Couva South. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Haynes: Minister of Finance is disturbing me.

Mr. Chairman: Right. I recognize the Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you. So I am on line Item 02: SWMCOL, the \$11.5 million decrease. Could the Minister give us what changes are expected in fiscal 2022 to rationalize this decrease?

Hon. Gonzales: So my understanding is that there is \$6million in unspent balances from a previous year's allocation, so that will rollover into the new financial year, and there are some outstanding projects that are coming to an end. So for the financial year 2022, SWMCOL will not be utilizing that amount of funds it utilized over the last year or two years. Going into 2022, a number of projects that have been going on over the last two years, they are winding down, they are coming to an end and therefore in 2022, we believe that the allocation received will be sufficient for the company.

Ms. Haynes: Okay. I just have a follow up and I am going to bring specific reference—

Mr. Chairman: Proceed.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you. Specific reference to the Forres Park landfill. I was in receipt of a letter from SWMCOL and they were discussing the deplorable roads, the drainage condition, the inability to prevent illegal salvaging and whatnot. So security services and whatnot are concerned. So I am not sure if they would have written to you as their line Minister but they wrote to me as MP for Tabaquite where the Forres Park landfill falls into my constituency.

Hon. Gonzales: Yes.

Ms. Haynes: So with this \$11 million decrease I am worried now that they would further not be able to meet their obligations here especially with respect to the Forres Park landfill.

Hon. Gonzales: So, yes. I received a report, a very comprehensive report from the chairman of the board concerning the issues at Forres Park. I can tell you that the latest report that I have received is that the improvement works to the road and drainage, that is underway currently. They are also working on improving the security arrangements, to be able to address some of the issues that came to the national fore recently. So I am confident that based on what is taking place at this current time and what is proposed to be done moving forward in the next year or so, that the \$97 million allocation will not impact the issues or negatively impact the issues at Forres Park. I think the board and the chairman, they are making tremendous strides to improve the situation there.

Ms. Haynes: Okay. So we can anticipate that in 2022 we will have a better year.

Hon. Gonzales: Yes.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Answered already, please.

Mr. Chairman: Right. I recognize the Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. On line Item 02: SWMCOL. Minister, the decrease that the Member for Tabaquite would have alluded to in the sum of \$11.5 million, can you just confirm that this would not affect any persons who are employed at SWMCOL in terms of whether or not it would cause a reduction in the staff at SWMCOL?

Hon. Gonzales: I think I have just explained, you know, why we have this decrease in the allocation. There is a \$6 million savings from last year's allocation and that has rolled over to 2022. And based on some measures being implemented by the board and by the management, SWMCOL is utilizing and experiencing some cost savings whilst not undermining its performance especially in relation to Forres Park, at Beetham and at Guanapo. So SWMCOL is also, as I have indicated in my opening statement, is one of the utility companies that we are looking to reposition, to reengineer so that it can become financially self-sustainable. And therefore, I want to give you the assurance that the \$97 million is quite sufficient for the efficient running of the organization.

Mr. Hosein: So nobody will be going home. I know in 2018 also the Government had implemented—

Hon. Gonzales: 2018?

Mr. Hosein: It will also be based on this—that an environmental tax was imposed that SWMCOL itself would have now become a bit more financially viable in terms of improvement in recycling of tyres and indiscriminate dumping. Can you say whether or not that imposition of the tax has impacted on SWMCOL in terms of a reduction in allocation from the central government to SWMCOL?

Hon. Gonzales: Yes—

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Gonzales:—so my understanding is that—sorry, Mr. Chair, my understanding is that the moneys received under this particular tax, it is deposited into the Consolidated Fund.

Mr. Hosein: So it does not come straight into SWMCOL?

Hon. Gonzales: No.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, line Item 02: SWMCOL. Hon. Minister, you would be able to advise us, from my understanding, one of the responsibilities of SWMCOL with respect to garbage collection across the entire country, with respect to the collection of garbage, it is done by local government but the contract is actually put in place by SWMCOL. And these scavenging contracts have been in existence for 2013 where local government is awaiting on SWMCOL to revise and to renew these contracts because they are operating at the 2013 rate. Can the hon. Minister advise if it is that consideration in this financial year is going to be taken for these existing contracts?

Hon. Gonzales: Under this line Item?

Mr. Ratiram: For SWMCOL, if it is that SWMCOL will be embarking upon revising these contracts in this financial term?

1.00 p.m.

Hon. Gonzales: I am not too sure, Mr. Chairman, and I know we are looking at Line Item No. 2, he is asking about contracts.

Mr. Chairman: Again, we are on Line Item 011, Transfers to State Enterprises, and I know are on 02—

Mr. Ratiram: Yes, I am referring—

Mr. Chairman:—with regard to the contracts.

Mr. Ratiram: No, I am referring to the work at SWMCOL for this upcoming year, if it is that they will have sufficient resources to complete the task at hand.

Mr. Chairman: Which is slightly different to what he just mentioned.

Mr. Ratiram: Of course.

Mr. Chairman: So, could you shed some light there, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Gonzales: What is the question?

Mr. Ratiram: If it is SWMCOL will have sufficient resources to complete the task at hand, in that I just explained?

Hon. Gonzales: And what task is that?

Mr. Ratiram: The revising or the renewing—establishing new contracts for the collection of garbage through local government? Because the scavenging contracts—maybe Minister, you might not be aware—but these scavenging contracts are operating—

Mr. Chairman: So let me just clarify.

Mr. Ratiram:—at the 2013—

Mr. Chairman: So, Mr. Minister, with regard to the scavenging contracts, could it be considered in this—at this Line Item?

Hon. Gonzales: No, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. So again, hon. Member—

Mr. Ratiram: No, I am talking about the resources at SWMCOL, because it is SWMCOL's responsibility to put out these contracts to evaluate and to—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, that is not correct. The Member is wasting time. It is not SWMCOL's responsibility.

Mr. Chairman: Minister of Finance, thank you. Right. So Member, based on what you are inquiring about, does not fall within this particular Item with regard to the contracts that you are inquiring about. Okay? [*Interruption*] Mr. Minister.

Mr. Ratiram: Chair, the contracts are paid for at local government but they are established by SWMCOL. Local government does not—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, that is not true, that matter has been dealt with twice. It is not true. He is wasting our time.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the hon. Minister of Finance provide the information then? If the information is not accurate, can the hon. Minister of Finance advise this Committee? Because that is the information we have.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, can we deal with line Items, please, instead of the random questions of the Member.

Mr. Ratiram: The operation of SWMCOL entails—

Mr. Chairman: Again, Member for Couva North, let us—we are dealing with line Item 011, and the Minister has made it clear that with regard to the contracts, does not fall within this line Item, based on that I would need to move on. Well, let me hear what you have to say on this last point.

Mr. Ratiram: What I am saying is that the contract is paid for by local government but the establishment of the contracts is done by SWMCOL.

Mr. Imbert: You know, I told him that is not true twice. He is saying it a third time.

Mr. Ratiram: It is SWMCOL who advertises, SWMCOL who puts out the advertisement—

Mr. Chairman: And Member—

Mr. Ratiram:—the bid process. The oversee, this—the local government

contracts.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, for the third time, that is not true. He is wasting our time.

Mr. Chairman: All right. So, Member for Couva North, that is the answer. I now recognize the Member for Couva South.

Mr. Ratiram: If it is that it is not true, Mr. Chair, can the hon. Minister advise—

Mr. Chairman: Couva South. I am now recognizing the Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, let me see if I could bring some stability to this meeting.

Mr. Chairman: Line Item? Line Item?

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes, 02: Solid Waste Management Company Limited. Minister, I heard you indicate to the meeting that the subvention or the transfers of approximately \$97 million will be enough for the financial year 2022. Could you advise me if there are any outstanding liabilities from the point of view of employment for any collective bargaining period for the employees of SWMCOL?

Hon. Gonzales: I do not have that information at this point in time.

Mr. Indarsingh: You do not have that information?

Hon. Gonzales: But I can provide it to you in writing if you so desire.

Mr. Indarsingh: And in terms of whatever allocation you sought from the Minister of Finance, did it take into consideration looking after employees' interest from a collective bargaining point of view?

Hon. Gonzales: So, as I have indicated, there is a saving of \$6million from last year's financial year, and that \$6 million was put aside to be able to address outstanding collective bargaining issues with the workers and their representing

unions. That particular matter has not been settled, and we believe as we preserve that \$6 million, moving into 2022, it will be utilized to address any outstanding issues with respect to the collective bargaining arrangements between the employees and the State.

Mr. Indarsingh: And I have listened to you very carefully, and you have said that \$6 million was set aside. So therefore, you are aware of the outstanding collective bargaining process, yes or no?

Hon. Gonzales: Aware of what?

Mr. Indarsingh: The outstanding collective bargaining process, yes or no?

Hon. Gonzales: So that is what I am saying, there are outstanding issues to be resolved, and the \$6 million was set aside to be able to address the outcome of the collective bargaining arrangements.

Mr. Indarsingh: Right. And if you are aware of the outstanding issue from a collective bargaining point of view, could you inform the meeting for what periods are outstanding?

Hon. Gonzales: I do not have that information right now.

Mr. Indarsingh: Well, you seem to be falling down on the job somewhere.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Imbert:—that matter was addressed yesterday.

Mr. Chairman: Oropouche West.

Mr. Imbert:—in response—Mr. Chairman, no, allow me, please. I respectfully ask you to make a point—allow me to make a point.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: Yesterday, the Member for Couva South—

Mr. Indarsingh: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Imbert:—asked me—

Mr. Indarsingh:—the Minister of Finance should not be running this meeting.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, who is running this meeting, them or you? Are they running the meeting or you? Who is running the meeting?

Mr. Chairman: He wants to shed some clarity on the same topic you were just on, so proceed.

Mr. Imbert: Yesterday, in response to a question from the Member for Couva South and others, I gave an undertaking to give the status of all collective agreements in all entities in the public sector and that was to pre-empt questions directly to other Ministers about the same thing, over and over. I gave that undertaking, all collective agreements, all entities within the public sector.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Mr. Chair, just for clarification, the Minister indicated that there was a \$6 million extra for lack of a—unused, unspent balance of \$6 million under this line Item 02: Solid Waste Management Company Limited. That unspent balance was from 2021 fiscal. Is that correct, Minister? And you are saying that that is not going to be returned to consolidated, that is actually going to be rolled over and kept in account somewhere. Is that normal practice?

Hon. Gonzales: So SWMCOL received the allocation from the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Ministry of Finance. It is kept in the accounts at SWMCOL and that would be utilized to defray any outstanding expenses for 2022.

Mr. Tancoo: So that, that money allocated and that is appropriated from this budget last year is actually not returned to consolidated if there is a surplus? Unspent balance is not returned?

Hon. Gonzales: And that is the reason why we have a reduced allocation for 2022.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, Sir, thank you very much. Any money sent to a state enterprise or statutory authority, disbursed, released and paid to a state enterprise or statutory authority is retained by that state enterprise or statutory authority. On the other hand, releases sent to Ministries that have not been converted into a grant of credit and then into a cheque payment are returned to the Consolidated Fund.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ministers. If I may, does this then confirm that there are no outstanding bills to SWMCOL which is why we had the surplus? There are no arrears to any provider of any good and any service at SWMCOL?

Hon. Gonzales: Mr. Chair, I answered the question. I explained the information surrounding that \$6 million and how the utility company, or rather how the authority intends to utilize it moving into 2022. If the Member is seeking to ask any question with respect to outstanding liabilities where SWMCOL is concerned, that—I can be able to provide that information in writing.

Mr. Chairman: Lovely. Sub-Head—

Mr. Tancoo: Just for clarification, Minister, because it is an accounting procedure, that you cannot have a surplus if you have outstanding bills. That does not add up. That money should have been allocated to outstanding bills and a new allocation be brought forward in anticipation.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, could I ask which line Item this is, please?

Mr. Chairman: This is on the same SMWCOL.

Mr. Tancoo: This, Sir, is line Item 02: Solid Waste Management Company Limited.

Mr. Imbert: This discussion?

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: This discussion.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, Mr. Minister. All right, Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, to the hon. Minister, continuing from what my colleague was speaking on, line Item 02, Solid Waste Management Company, the hon. Minister advised that 6 million was transferred to SWMCOL, was allocated to SWMCOL or was transferred to SWMCOL, can the hon. Minister indicate what this \$6 million—can he account for what this \$6 million was to be spent on?

Mr. Chairman: Member, that question has been asked and answered already. I am now moving on to Sub-Head 06—

Mr. Ratiram: No. Mr. Chair, if I may, the question—

Mr. Chairman: Member, Member. Member, that has been clarified by both the Minister, the line Minister and also the Minister of Finance, so we now go to Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies. Different book.

Mr. Ratiram: Chair, if I may?

Mr. Chairman: And we are going to page 234.

Mr. Ratiram: The Minister is not accounting for how the money is being—

Mr. Chairman: Member! Member, I am not recognizing you at this time. Different book.

Mr. Ratiram: But, Chair, the Minister—

Mr. Chairman: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies.

Mr. Ratiram: If 6 million is—

Mr. Chairman: Item 004: Statutory Boards, page 234. Hon. Members, we will now move to the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory*

Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly. No. 51 - Water and Sewerage Authority. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 195. Item 001: General Administration. I recognize the Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Line Item 06, Remuneration to Board Members. There is an increase of \$70 million—\$70,000 here, sorry, under Line Item 06, Remuneration to Board Members.

Mr. Chairman: Line Item?

Mr. Padarath: Line Item 06.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, proceed.

Mr. Padarath: Remuneration to Board Members, an increase of \$70,000. Could the hon. Minister indicate if there has been a commissioner's increase on their Water and Sewerage Authority board? How many? And what is the current complement of board members on the board right now?

Mr. Chairman: So, line Item 06, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, in 2021, the Water and Sewerage Authority Act was amended in the provision that increased the composition of the board from nine to 11. And subsequent to that amendment, further commissioners or additional commissioners were appointed to the Board of Commissioner of the Water and Sewerage Authority. And the increase that we are seeing being reflected there is to cater for the additional expenditure for the payment of board fees.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Mr. Chair, I am looking at line Item 01, Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. There is a decrease of \$45 million, but I am asking specifically if this decrease will impact the services that WASA provides given that on my way here to Parliament today, I have received several reports from the

Springvale community, the Forres Park community about service delays. They have had no water in excess of three weeks, no pipe borne water in several of these areas. So, if this \$45 million will see further water interruptions and disruptions across the country?

Hon. Gonzales: Mr. Chair, the Government has indicated its policy with respect to the transformation on the restructuring of the Water and Sewerage Authority. We have laid in this Parliament a report that was put together by a Cabinet sub-committee. That report was laid, and the recommendations in that report are quite clear. The Government is quite clear in terms of its move to re-engineer the Water and Sewerage Authority so that every citizen and every constituency will experience an improvement in their water supplies.

So I wish to assure the Member that despite the shortfall that you are seeing being reflected here, that the transformation of the Water and Sewerage Authority will result in an improvement in water supplies across the country, including those areas that you are seeing that you have just mentioned. Pumping money into an organization, it is over 10 years the Government has pumped over \$20 billion into the Water and Sewerage Authority, and if; if by simply pumping money into an organization will automatically result in an improvement in service, then the \$20 billion that the Government spent in the Water and Sewerage Authority, it means that every single community in Trinidad and Tobago should be receiving a 24/7 water supply.

So we have recognized that, and the transformation of WASA, the restructuring of WASA, the re-engineering of WASA is to ensure that we get value for money. So I wish to assure that that despite the shortfall that you are seeing here, it will not result in further decline in the water supplies. I give you that

commitment, that the restructuring of the organization, that is the only way in which your constituency and your constituents will see an improvement in their water supply.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am on line Item 01, Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. Now, Mr. Chairman, there is always a complaint that we have seen that the senior executive level of WASA, they receive exorbitant salaries and remuneration packages. Can the Minister provide this honourable meeting with the remuneration packages for the senior executive of WASA?

Hon. Gonzales: I can provide that information in writing at a subsequent date, Mr. Chair. I do not have that information at my disposal.

Mr. Hosein: In terms of the positions of the CEO; Director; customer care; Director, Operations—

Mr. Chairman: Okay, Member, I think they should be able to pull the senior management listing. I now go to Oropouche West.

Mr. Hosein: I just wanted to be absolutely clear.

Mr. Chairman: Oropouche West. No problem, Member. Oropouche West, I recognize you.

Mr. Tancoo: Sorry. Thank you very much, Sir. Minister, again on Item 01, it is interesting that you can cut \$45 million from the allocation without affecting the quality of service. That may be a good thing if you are an extremely good accountant. Minister, my question to you is, how will this cut improve the quality of services that we currently have? Just like my colleague from Tabaquite, I also have areas in my constituency which have been without water for weeks and months on end during this COVID pandemic when water is essential. When you understaff WASA or cut down the staff allocation for WASA that clearly must

impact the quality of service. Minister, can you provide a listing of exactly where these cuts are going to take place?

Hon. Gonzales: Mr. Chair, I do not understand where what cut is going to take place.

Mr. Tancoo: There is a reduction of \$45 million under Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. That suggests that persons are not going to be in a position to receive \$45 million. This implies a cut in employment. Can the Minister confirm whether there is a cut in employment, and if so, what positions, and how many persons?

1.15 p.m.

Hon. Gonzales: Mr. Chair, WASA currently receives somewhere around \$700 million in the collection of revenue from rates paid by various customers across Trinidad and Tobago; domestic customers, industrial customers and commercial customers.

Mr. Tancoo: This is not about commercial customers, this is about expen—

Hon. Gonzales: Mr. Chair, currently WASA is owed approximately \$1 billion, that is, by various categories of customers. The Government has indicated its intention to reorganize, to re-engineer WASA and then that reorganization and that re-engineering process, what we are seeking to do is to increase the revenue position of WASA and to reduce concomitantly the operational cost of the organization. And therefore, moving into 2022, WASA will be seeking to improve its revenue position by increasing its ability to collect outstanding rates owed to the Authority and thereby reducing its dependence on the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for its survival. And that is what re-engineering and reorganization is about.

So if you see a reduction in the allocations from the Ministry of Finance, it is

because we are pointing and we are indicating to the Water and Sewerage Authority that you need to stand on your own legs and to become financially sustainable.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister, for your very impassioned sentiment discovered after six years. Minister I am at 01 and now at 02, which works out about \$105 million reduction in the moneys that is to be allocated to monthly paid staff. This means that there are going to be labour cuts, Minister. That is all this number means, \$105 million worth of salaries and wages which will no longer be paid to individuals. This is not overtime, this is a monthly paid allocation, which means that staff are going to be cut. All I am asking Minister is for you to provide in writing, if possible, where those cuts are going to take place, because you projected a reduction here, you must know by now where it is going to happen that is why you have projected a reduction. Where in WASA are these cuts going to be effected?—\$105 million worth at least only in 2022 at this point.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Oropouche West, the Minister has already answered that question, but do you have anything to add, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Gonzales: Mr. Chair, I have absolutely nothing more to add.

Mr. Chairman: All right. I recognize the Member for Couva South.

Mr. Tancoo: He has answered?

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I have recognized some very nice human resource words that are being used here by the Minister, re-engineering and transformation and so on. But we have to deal with the real industrial relation issues. And in addition, 05, Mr. Chair, Government's contribution to the national insurance being reduced by \$28.8 million in addition to

salaries and cost of living and wages and COLA to the tune of approximately \$133 million. Minister you must come clean with this meeting [*Desk thumping*] and really inform, you must not hide behind buzzwords and human resource words. The real industrial relation issues are, how many workers have been earmarked by the Government to go home in WASA? [*Desk thumping*] Tell this meeting now, because the purpose of this meeting is to provide information—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Indarsingh:—to the Opposition and to provide information to the public at large.

Mr. Imbert:—line Item, please, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Right, and again—

Mr. Imbert: Line Item.

Mr. Chairman:—Member for Couva South, right, as identified the Minister has already answered. Do you have anything to add, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Gonzales: Absolutely nothing, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Right. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Now, Mr. Chair, the Minister had some very wishful thinking by saying, and I am on line Items 01, 02, 03, because they all relate to wages and overtime. And he is saying that the reason that there is a reduction in expenditure for wages and salaries is because WASA is now going to embark on some new programmes where they will recover rates that are owing to the Authority. Can the Minister then clarify or tell this meeting, what are some of those steps that WASA will take in order to recover this rate to cover the wage bill that we are seeing a reduction in, in this fiscal year?

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Gonzales: Mr. Chair, I have already in the best way I can, provided all the clarification on this particular issue. I have said over and over again that WASA has to become financially sustainable. The utility company is owed nearly \$1 billion by its various customers and in addition to that, Mr. Chair, you have thousands of persons who would have applied for new connections and they have been waiting one year, two years, in some instances they are waiting three years. Those are ways in which the utility company can see an improvement once they are properly managed, they can see an improvement in the collection of their rates and an improvement in their financial circumstances and that is the direction in which the Board and the executive management of the Authority, they are both mandated to be able to pursue strategies so that they can become financially self-sustainable, so that they can reduce their reliance on the Ministry of Finance for their survival. I cannot see nothing more.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: How is the Minister going to collect this \$1 billion that is being owed to WASA? What programmes, what process, what strategies are you going to use Minister?

Mr. Chairman: Member, I think now we are going into operations, we are going into policy, we are dealing with the financial aspect. Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hon. Minister, on that same line Items 01, 02, 03, in light of what you have shared with the Committee, are you aware that WASA has been cut for this financial year of over \$340 million? You are expecting over this year, this financial year, to get \$1 billion that has not been paid for over 25 years in one year to meet the shortfall of \$340 million that WASA has been cut in this financial year? So 340 million has been cut in this financial year,

you are telling us WASA is owed one billion and in order to meet that shortfall of 340 million that WASA has been cut by in significant areas, you are saying that this will come in this financial year?

Mr. Chairman: Again, Member, same question, different person. Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you. Having consideration to what you said about the cuts and the re-engineering overall, but I am noticing at line Item 04 the allowances to monthly paid officers have gone up by \$10 million. Could you give us some idea of what these allowances are and why we need an extra \$10 million allocated to pay allowances for monthly paid officers?

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister.

Hon. Gonzales: Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. My understanding is that there are some outstanding arrears owed to monthly officers that we expect to be settled in this financial year. So the increased allocation that you are seeing here is to address the outstanding arrears owed to these officers.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, page 195; Item 001: General Administration, pages 195 to 196.

Mr. Ratiram: Chair, you continue to—

Mr. Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram:—not recognize me and my mike was being muted the last time I was speaking.

Mr. Chairman: No, listen, Member—

Mr. Ratiram: I raised my hand on this block and I was not given any consideration. This is the second time at a Standing Finance Committee that this is happening. [*Desk thumping*]

Appropriation (Financial Year 2021)
Bill, 2020
Head 39 Ministry of Public Utilities (cont'd)

2021.10.12

Mr. Chairman: And again, Member, there is a clear procedure on how we operate. If I miss you, rest assured that the Procedural Clerks would identify you, right. So Sub-Head—so where are you? Item 001: General Administration, page 195 to 196?

Mr. Ratiram: Yes. Chair, line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance on page 195.

Mr. Chairman: No, just now.

Mr. Ratiram: The actual spend—

Mr. Chairman: Member, one second, hold on. We just moved on from there. We just moved on from there.

Mr. Ratiram: Chair, you just called it out. I was of the opinion that you were giving consideration because my hand was up.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister, Mr. Minister—

Mr. Imbert:—may I respectfully request that you—

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister, Mr. Minister, hold on please. Yes, Member for Couva North, right, we have moved on. I looked up, the Procedural Clerk would have identified and we moved on to the other line Item.

Mr. Ratiram: Mr. Chairman, my hand was up for this entire block and I keep raising my hand while you all were on this block.

Mr. Chairman: Member, we are only going to accept where we are at this time. Sub-Head—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, we have eight Heads to do today.

Mr. Chairman:—who do we have, Pointe-a-Pierre. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Imbert: “Yuh” wasting time.

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister, thank you.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Line Item 04 Minister, Electricity. Now help me understand this. In 2021 you had budgeted or WASA did \$110 million. The Revised Estimate in 2021 was \$10 million. So if I have to read this properly, WASA did not pay electricity bills to the tune of over \$100 million. And I asking first, did WASA suffer any disconnection by T&TEC in respect of this unpaid electricity bills during 2021, because I am sure some of the offices would have had to be disconnected by not paying their bills like residential individuals in Trinidad and Tobago. So could you help clarify that?

Hon. Gonzales: For any disconnection in 2021?

Mr. Lee: I cannot hear you.

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Gonzales: WASA has not suffered any disconnection from T&TEC.

Mr. Lee: So why WASA did not pay their electricity bills during the course of 2021?

Hon. Gonzales: And that is the reason why restructuring of the organization is absolutely necessary so that it would be able to meet its monthly—

Mr. Lee: I am not hearing.

Hon. Gonzales:—operational expenses.

Mr. Lee: You have to lift the mike, Minister.

Hon. Gonzales: Sorry. And that is the reason why I am saying the reorganization of the Authority is needed so that it would be able to meet its monthly operational expenses.

Mr. Lee: So, so, Minister, if I have to understand you that T&TEC gave WASA a bligh for 2021 by not allowing them to pay their electricity bills.

Mr. Imbert: Chairman, it is not right for them to ask the same question over and over in a different form. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre quickly—

Mr. Lee: I am trying to understand, why was WASA allowed by T&TEC not to pay their bills when normal residents of Trinidad and Tobago have to pay their electricity bills? So I am trying to understand what happened in 2021, why the Minister of Finance did not give them money—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, can I ask for a ruling?

Mr. Lee:—to pay their electricity bills.

Mr. Imbert: He has asked that question three times. The same question.

Mr. Chairman: Minister of Finance, right. So again, Member, operational policy, but I am going to give the Minister the opportunity to respond.

Hon. Gonzales: Mr. Chair, [*Crosstalk*] the allocation that WASA received under electricity it would take care of outstanding arrears owed by the Authority to the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission. Yes, there is an issue with respect to outstanding debts owed to T&TEC by the Authority, but as we move forward we are seeing to address this particular issue.

Mr. Lee: So let me ask—

Hon. Gonzales: But you have asked the question, whether or not WASA suffered any disconnection. And my response to that it is simply, no.

Mr. Lee: Okay, let me ask a follow-up question, Mr. Chair. Minister, you budgeted in 2022, \$95 million, which is an increase of \$85 million which would have taken, I am sure of arrears of 2021. Correct? Because the budgeted or the estimated expenditure of electricity during the course of a year is somewhere between 85 to \$100 million—

Hon. Gonzales: Yes.

Mr. Lee: So if you only paid \$10 million during 2021, you owe a heavy arrears in 2021, which is the \$95 million in 2022. So what is going to happen in 2022? Are you then going to not pay your bills in 2022, Minister, and you are going to have another set arrears come next financial year?

Hon. Gonzales: Mr. Chair, as I have explained earlier on we are looking to improve the operations of WASA where the Authority—[*Crosstalk*] Mr. Chair, can you, as the Member for Couva South, he just continues to be making statements and it is very disruptive. So I—it is becoming very difficult to be able to answer the question being posed to me. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: One second.

Mr. Indarsingh: You have to answer the question. You have to answer.

Mr. Imbert: Chairman, the Member for Couva South did not ask the question. He is doing this all the time. Somebody else asks a question and he is muttering in the back. I ask you to put an end to this.

Mr. Chairman: All right. So both Member for Couva South and Minister of Finance, again, please. [*Crosstalk*] Answer.

Mr. Indarsingh: Mr. Chair, the Minister of Finance—

Mr. Chairman: Member for Couva South, Member for Couva South—proceed, Minister.

Hon. Gonzales: Mr. Chair, let me get my bearings together. So I have indicated to this Committee that WASA is doing everything that is possible to improve its operational—the way in which it operates and to increase the revenue position also reducing the cost of its operation. And as the Authority seeks to do that with the assistance of allocations made by the Ministry of Finance as well as improving its

own financial circumstances the Authority would be able to meet its monthly obligations to the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission.

1.30 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you. Same line Item 04: Electricity. Is the Minister not in agreement, since the Minister is in charge of both WASA and T&TEC, that by failing to pay T&TEC what it is due that they are compromising the operations of T&TEC and forcing it to engage in borrowing to supplement this failure?

Mr. Chairman: Member. Minister.

Hon. Gonzales: Mr. Chair, can I ask for your ruling whether or not that is an appropriately placed question under this Item?

Mr. Chairman: Line Item 04 you are on, Member?

Mr. Tancoo: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, proceed.

Hon. Gonzales: Mr. Chair, I cannot explain myself better than this. I have indicated that we have done everything and we are doing what we need to do to ensure that WASA meets its monthly obligation to all the utility companies, T&TEC, and all the contractors that it engages to be able to move forward with its operations.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Hon. Minister if we turn our attention to line Item 12: Materials and Supplies and line Item 16: Contract Employment. Now WASA has been cut by \$340 million total, but when you look at line Items 12 and 16, line Item 12: Materials and Supplies, 99 million, and line Item 16: Contract Employment, 232 million, two critical areas of WASA. Out of

340 million that WASA has been cut by, 331 million are accounted for in terms of the cut in Materials and Supplies and Contract Employment. In light of all the massive protests that is happening throughout the country right now as it relates to WASA and their poor supply, the ageing infrastructure, and the problems that are occurring—

Mr. Chairman: Question please.

Mr. Padarath:—at the treatment plant, is the Minister concerned that these two major cuts in Materials and Supplies and Contract Employment—because a cut of 232 million in Contract Employment tells us a lot of people are going home, and Materials and Supplies a cut of 99 million tells us they have no material at WASA. Is the Minister concerned that we will continue to see a poor service supply of water being affected throughout the country over the next year with these cuts totalling 231 million out of a total cut of WASA of 340 million?

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Gonzales: Mr. Chair, just to respond to the statement of massive protest action taking place across the country, it is very unfortunate that these massive protest actions are being triggered by Members of Parliament, and it is very, very—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Deputy Chair, 48(6). 48(6), Mr. Deputy Chair.

Hon. Gonzales:—organized criminal behaviour.

Mr. Hosein: 48(6), imputing improper motives. Mr. Chair, you cannot impute improper motives on a Member of Parliament except on a substantive Motion. 48(6).

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Chairman: All of us cannot speak at the same time.

Mr. Imbert:—does that apply in a Standing Finance Committee what they are talking about?

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister, all of us cannot speak at the same time. You will complete it, Member?

Hon. Gonzales: Yes, Mr. Chair. So it is just unfortunate that in Trinidad and Tobago you have Members of Parliament being engaged in illegal—

Mr. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Chair, are you going to allow the Minister of Public Utilities—

Hon. Gonzales: It is criminal behaviour.

Mr. Indarsingh:—to get away with this—

Mr. Imbert: It is true. “All yuh burning tyres”.

Mr. Indarsingh:—this commentary— Produce the evidence. Put up or shut up.
[*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Member.

Mr. Imbert: Stop burning tyres in the road.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Couva South. Member for Couva South, could you kindly just retract the last statement you made please?

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes, Deputy Chair, I will retract but you cannot allow the Minister of Public Utilities to continue to attack Members of Parliament [*Desk thumping*] without relevant evidence.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, he is not retracting it.

Mr. Chairman: Member, just retract the last statement. We have been going fine, retract the last statement you made.

Mr. Indarsingh: I have retracted, Deputy—

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Indarsingh:—Chair, but I want a sense of equity and balance in this meeting.

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Imbert: Then stop burning tyres in the road.

Mr. Hosein: No, no, no, no. The Minister has to retract that statement.

Mr. Chairman: Member, listen. Members. Members.

Mr. Imbert: I saw a UNC MP burning tyres—

Mr. Hosein: Let the Minister of Finance retract.

Mr. Chairman: Listen. Members, Members, the Standing Finance Committee is still in session. All right? The Minister has been asked a question and he is giving his answer. If that is the answer that the Minister is giving, he is giving an answer to the question that has been asked. Right? Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Chairman, the Minister does not seem to be answering the questions but running commentary. I would really like to get an answer—

Mr. Imbert: Line Item, please.

Mr. Ratiram:—for line Item No—

Dr. Moonilal: I am not hearing him and I am next to him. Why “can’t” they stay quiet?

Mr. Chairman: Member for Couva North, line Item. Proceed.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I am referring to line Item 16: Contract Employment. For this line Item the actual spend of 2020 was \$414 million, the Revised Estimate was \$435 million, but it is only being estimated for 2022 at \$203 million. A decrease of \$232 million in this line Item. Can the Minister advise if it is a significant amount of contracted workers are going to be sent home at WASA?

Hon. Gonzales: Mr. Chair, I have already answered that question. I have nothing more to add to it.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. So—

Mr. Ratiram: On this line Item, Chair? This is the first question asked on this line Item. I did not hear my colleagues asked on this. On this line Item I would also like to ask the hon. Minister the number of contracted employees that was employed at WASA for 2020, 2021 and what is expected for 2022? Can I get the actual headcount from the organization?

Mr. Chairman: Now Member, the Member for Princes Town asked that question in a different format. This is why the Minister is able to say that he answered the question already. So could you—right? So I now go to—

Mr. Ratiram: Moving on to another line Item.

Mr. Chairman: One second. Let us hear Tabaquite. Tabaquite, and then we will have—Couva South, you have a question?

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Right. So Tabaquite and then Couva South.

Ms. Haynes: So, Mr. Deputy Chair, we are talking about the cuts in different spaces, but if we take a look at line Item 28: Other Contracts Services, there is an increase of \$17 million. What are we looking at under Other Contracted Services for fiscal 2022?

Mr. Chairman: Minister, line Item 28.

Hon. Gonzales: So I am advised that the increase that we are seeing here for 2022 is to improve customer engagement and responsiveness using digital platforms, the use of water management technologies, SCADA, to remotely manage water schedules across the country, improvement in repairs at the Frederick Settlement

waste facility, the Couva North and South waste water facilities including Harmony Hall, and to ensure that those facilities are not in breach of the Water Pollution Rules, 2019.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes Chair. Under 12: Materials and Supplies, Minister, there is a reduction of \$99 million and there have been numerous leaks for example. I am using the constituency of Couva South as an example. Could you tell this meeting how this reduction of \$99 million will affect WASA's ability to deal with the repairs of leaks? Because we have seen all different figures and information with the number of leaks and so on that WASA has to address. Could you tell us because my constituents continue to have this problem of leaks all over the constituency, and in addition I speak to you there is no water in Windsor Park, there is no water in Calcutta Nos. 1, 2 and 3, and I can go on and on in terms of what is happening at WASA under your watch and successive Ministers for the last six years?

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Gonzales: Mr. Chair—[*Interruption*] So, Mr. Chair, under this line Item, Materials and Supplies, that is the Item that we utilize to purchase desalinated water for the Water and Sewerage Authority. As a result of an RBL loan facility that we expect to renew for January, that would be the source of funding that we are going to get to address the purchase of desal water. So the reduction that we are seeing here is as a result of that additional facility that we are going to get to be able to address our obligations for desal water and it has absolutely nothing to do with repairs of leaks which I think is under another line Item.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair. I am also on line Item 12 which deals with materials and supplies, and in light of the cut of \$99 million under this line Item the Minister would be aware, being an MP himself, that the majority of the potholes in our constituencies are as a result of leakage based on WASA lines. When the WASA lines leak it causes the roads to form potholes. Can the Minister say that because of this cut of \$99 million we are expected to see worse roads in terms of more potholes and aging infrastructure of the WASA lines contributing to this leakage to damage the roads?

Mr. Chairman: Again Member, as a matter of fact all Members, we all had an opportunity during the budget debate to have all these questions answered. Today we are dealing with the financial aspect of the debate. Okay? So again, going forward we have a specific time in order to ensure that this Finance Committee completes its assignment. So as the Chair, going forward we are going to operate with regard to strict guidelines. So again, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, any information on this particular line Item to Barataria/San Juan comments?

Hon. Gonzales: Mr. Chair, you know I enjoy repeating this. It seem as though Members of the Opposition cannot get around to understanding that the Water and Sewerage Authority has the capacity to become financially self-sustainable. All right? That is what we are seeking to do. And therefore, any shortfall that we are seeing in the allocations for 2022 and moving forward it is only because we are seeking to make WASA a self-sustainable authority so that it can stand on its own by the collection of its revenue, the improvement of its revenue position, reducing operational cost so that it does not have to continue to rely on the Ministry of Finance for its survival. So all the issues being raised about materials and road restoration, leaks, et cetera, if you have an organization that is financially self-

sustainable it will be able to address all these issues without having to rely on allocations by the Ministry of Finance. I do not know how best I can explain this situation again.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. To the hon. Minister: Forgive me, my eyes have gone in line Item 68: Water Trucking. In Cumuto/Manzanilla we have a serious water issue and the 2021 Estimates, hon. Minister, was 35 million and I see the Revised Estimate for 2021 was 14 million.

1.45 p.m.

So my question to you with that 20 million for 2022, the water truckers, are they going to receive the money because many of the truck drivers refuse to do delivery of water to the needy people and that does not apply to Cumuto/Manzanilla, throughout the rural districts or urban areas of Trinidad?

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister.

Hon. Gonzales: So, Mr. Chair, the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, you know, I looked forward to his budget debate and his contribution in the debate and I was hoping that he would have been very straightforward with the Parliament by admitting that his constituency in Tamana and Manzanilla north continue to receive tremendous benefits in their water supply. So we are drilling for new wells, we are improving booster stations, et cetera, so that they do not have to rely on water trucks [*Desk thumping*] to be able to provide water.

And I do not believe that the Member would believe or subscribe to the view that the people of his constituency should have to rely on water trucks in 2021 and 2022. As a matter of fact, Mr. Chair, I, as a Minister of Public Utilities, I am cringed at the fact that so many of our communities have to rely on water trucks

and that is the reason why we have to improve and we have to reengineer, we have to reorganize the Water and Sewerage Authority so that people ought not to have to rely on water trucking [*Desk thumping*] for their water supplies, that their water supply should come from the water distribution system in Trinidad and Tobago. And my vision for the people of Cumuto/Manzanilla is not for water trucks but for your constituency to get an efficient water supply on WASA's distribution grid. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. I am on line Item 69: Road Reinstatement - WASA. Now, I am taking into consideration what the Minister is saying about the operations at WASA but we can all be very clear here that to fix the roads, you need money and therefore, if we are seeing a \$22 million decrease and having due regard to what my colleague from Barataria/San Juan said, which is in all of our constituencies, that the road works that we are seeing, WASA is creating a major problem with potholes, not just big trucks as the Minister of Finance told us but WASA is creating a problem with potholes and we are seeing a \$22 million decrease. So my question is on service delivery at this point because it is a major problem countrywide.

Hon. Gonzales: It is financial circumstances, Member. WASA would be in a far better position to be able to repair leaks and rehabilitate the road according to standards as established by the Ministry of Works and Transport and that is the intention. So even though you are seeing a decrease, as I have explained, even though you are seeing a decrease in the allocations, you have to take into consideration that moving forward, we are looking to make WASA financially sustainable and it will be in a position to rely on its own financing, its own funding

to be able to address the issues of leaks and road repairs.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Now, Minister, while I appreciate that, we are facing a major problem right now currently and therefore we have to question whether or not the decrease will see that the services that we need—because I am not talking about new leaks, I am talking about existing problems with the roadways. There are certain parts of my community that are impassable because of the work WASA did and the state they left the road. I have half “ah” road because of WASA at this point in time. And so we are very concerned that the cut, while we are talking about new problems, I am talking about things that have existed and are not being treated with at the moment.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Chair. I want to endorse the sentiments expressed by my colleague for Tabaquite because in my constituency as well, I have significant work being done by WASA in digging up the roads and not repairing them. But I want to raise that issue in the context of several line Items listed here: Materials and Supplies, Contract Employment and the Road Repairs.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, it has to be a particular line Item, it cannot be several. That is a scattershot approach.

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister.

Mr. Tancoo: On several line Items because I have listed them.

Mr. Imbert: Chairman, I object. I object.

Mr. Chairman: They are all related.

Mr. Imbert: It has to be a specific Item.

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister, the Member has to complete and then I will be able

to ascertain. Proceed.

Mr. Tancoo: The Minister is wasting—

Mr. Chairman: Proceed.

Mr. Tancoo: Sorry, Chairman. The reason I am asking specifically with regard to Item 12, Item 16 and Item 69 is because all of these are related. Because of the failure to employ, to hire persons—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, what is the question?

Mr. Tancoo: And that is what is listed here.

Mr. Imbert: He has to ask the question.

Mr. Tancoo: Inadequate materials, et cetera. We can expect to see a deterioration of service. That is what we can expect to see, so all of this talk about improvements—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, this is just going nowhere. He has to ask a question on a specific Item.

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister.

Mr. Tancoo: The Minister has given an assurance—

Mr. Chairman: As the procedure is clear—

Mr. Tancoo:—that we will not see a deterioration of service but the numbers clearly state that we will. Minister, we have listed as well under Item 23: Fees, I would appreciate if the Minister can provide a listing for 2021 and projected for 2022 of what these fees are going to consist of, who are they going to be paid to and for what purposes.

With regard to Item 28: Other Contracted Services, I would like the Minister to also provide a similar listing. With regard to Water Trucking, Item 68—

Hon. Gonzales: Mr. Chair, can you—the Member is all over. So can he just

narrow down to the particular line Item that he is asking the question?

Mr. Tancoo: But I have just done that. Minister, pay attention.

Mr. Chairman: Line Item 23: Fees, you would like a listing?

Mr. Tancoo: Of all fees to be incurred between 2021 and 2022, expenditure 2021 and projected 2022, who they are to and for what purpose. Similarly for Item 28—

Mr. Chairman: Right. Hold on, Member. Mr. Minister, for Fees provided. Okay, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Gonzales: Sure.

Mr. Chairman: Right. Proceed, Member.

Mr. Tancoo: Similarly for Item 28: Other Contracted Services, I would like to know—

Mr. Chairman: 28.

Mr. Tancoo: Item 28: Other Contracted Services, what services are to be provided for and what the expenditure Item is and who these services are to be provided by. Similarly for Water Trucking—

Mr. Chairman: Minister. Hold on, hold on, let us be clear.

Hon. Gonzales: Mr. Chair, I answered that question already. The Member for Tabaquite asked the question what the allocation is for, I explained what the allocation is for.

Mr. Tancoo: And this is a request, Sir.

Hon. Gonzales: Is it that he is asking additional request? Additional information?

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, may I have a ruling from you please?

Mr. Tancoo: This is a specific request that has not been made.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, can I have a ruling—

Mr. Chairman: Just one second.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, if you are in agreement that you will provide it to the Member for Tabaquite, I would appreciate it very much.

Mr. Chairman: Sure.

Mr. Imbert: Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister.

Mr. Imbert: I would like a ruling from you please.

Mr. Chairman: On what particularly?

Mr. Imbert: Are Members opposite allowed to ask multiple questions?

Mr. Tancoo: Of course we are.

Mr. Chairman: One second.

Mr. Imbert: Are Members opposite allowed to ask multiple questions at the same time on multiple Sub-Items?

Mr. Tancoo: That is the job.

Mr. Imbert: This cannot work, Mr. Chairman, in my opinion. It has to be one Item at a time.

Mr. Tancoo: You are wasting time.

Mr. Imbert: It cannot be seven Items from one Member at one time.

Mr. Chairman: And again, Minister of Finance, as I am doing, the Member asked the question and I give the Minister the opportunity to respond and then we go back to the particular Member. Right. Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Sir. Under Water Trucking, Minister, I would like you to provide a breakdown.

Mr. Chairman: Line Item, state.

Mr. Tancoo: That is Item 68 for the Minister of Finance's knowledge. Item 68: Water Trucking, I would like you to provide a breakdown by constituency or

region as to where this money is going to be spent because I have demand for water trucking in my constituency which has not been met for weeks and weeks on end. If you could provide a listing for that, I will be very grateful. Last one, Minister under—

Hon. Gonzales: Mr. Chair, can I respond to that before he moves on?

Mr. Chairman: Proceed.

Hon. Gonzales: Right. So this is the allocation for water trucking services for 2022. I cannot produce a list of where I intend to use water trucks. I mean, that is ridiculous. So this is the allocation for a request to be made in 2022, I cannot anticipate where those requests are going to come from.

Mr. Chairman: Next question, Member.

Mr. Tancoo: If I may, Minister, can you provide a statement for 2021 of where that money was spent and a projection, because you have a figure, this is not my figure, Sir, this is your figure of 20 million. You have a figure based on some guesstimate that you would have provided to be used throughout the country. What I am asking for is what—

Mr. Chairman: So Member, he will provide for 2021. The Minister is going to provide for 2021.

Hon. Gonzales: For 2021. Good.

Mr. Tancoo: The Minister is asking for a \$6 million increase to that figure on the basis of something. It is not just a random figure picked out of a hat and thrown out. He must have some guidance as to where he is getting this figure from.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, the Minister has already answered that question.

Mr. Tancoo: The Minister has answered for 2021.

Mr. Imbert: The Member is asking the same question over, and over, and over.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, Minister. Next question.

Mr. Tancoo: Item 69, I would like the Minister to advise for 2021 and projected for 2022 where this money is going to be spent by constituency, if possible, but definitely by region if not possible.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, Mr. Minister. I now go to Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Deputy Chair. Minister, with respect to 16: Contract Employment, it is being reduced. It is earmarked to be reduced that expenditure by \$232 million for 2022. How will that impact upon because you have been using another tagline, your national water stabilization programme. *[Interruption]* Well, the reality is “nobody eh geing water” in Trinidad and Tobago. That is the reality. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Chairman: Question, Member.

Mr. Indarsingh: So I am asking you to tell us based on the reduction of the \$232 million, how it will impact upon your ability or your Ministry’s ability through WASA to deliver that, what we call national stabilization programme before citizens of Trinidad and Tobago mentally collapse under you?

Mr. Chairman: Member, that question was asked and answered on more than one occasion. Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I am on line Item 69, Road Reinstatement. Mr. Deputy Chair, I just want to ask the Minister whether out of this \$18 million allocated, whether the 38 roads in Barataria/San Juan will be taken care of starting from Ocean Avenue, Bhagoutie Trace, Lower Sixth Avenue, Shakeer Trace, Jhikoo Lane, Mohammed Trace, corner Eighth Avenue and Twelfth Street, corner Tenth Avenue and Eleventh Street, Fourth Avenue and Fifth Avenue, Twelfth Street and Sixth Avenue, Bissessar Street, Don Miguel Road,

Oudai Trace, the corner of First Avenue and Tenth Street, El Socorro Main Road, the corner of Satar Street and Boundary Road, Fazal Avenue, Boundary Road Extension, Chanka Trace—

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, could you provide it to him in writing, please?

Mr. Hosein: I can.

Mr. Chairman: Right. So the projection?

Hon. Gonzales: Yes, but we also have reinstatement for San Fernando West, in Tobago East, Tobago West, Arima, Laventille West, Diego Martin Central, Diego Martin North/East, Toco/Sangre Grande. So we will provide all that information. [*Desk thumping*] St. Joseph listed information to him as well.

Mr. Hosein: Can the Minister give a commitment that the roads in Barataria/San Juan will be repaired after WASA would have caused a lot of destruction of the roads based on leakages and the digging up and not covering back up the holes?

Mr. Chairman: I think since you have been sitting in the chair there, he has been giving some assurances of what is going to take place.

I now go Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration, page 196. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 196. Item 007: Households, page 196; Item 009: Other Transfers, pages 196, 197. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Chair. I am looking at Item 02: Settlement of Claims. I would like the Minister to provide a listing of all claims settled under this Head for which expenditure was made in 2021 and projected for 2022.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister.

Hon. Gonzales: Yes, I can provide that in writing.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. No. 55. Where are you, Oropouche West?

Mr. Tancoo: Sorry, so I am moving on from 02, I am now at Sub-Item 71: Interest on TT \$200 million.

Mr. Chairman: Page 197.

2.00 p.m.

Mr. Tancoo: Correct. This loan was taken for the working capital purposes, which means that the Government did not supply sufficient funding for T&TEC at that point in time. But that comes back to—sorry, for WASA at that point in time—to other issues we had raised before: whether it is that the failure by other parts of the Ministry to repay WASA their dues has now forced WASA to engage in borrowing to meet its obligations? Is the Minister projecting additional borrowing to meet obligations in 2022 that are not factored in as new Items here in this Estimate of expenditure?

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Gonzales: Mr. Chairman, would be able to allow me to provide that information in writing?

Mr. Chairman: 55 - Regulated Industries Commission. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 215. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration, page 216. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Households. Item 009: Other Transfers.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We have a different book and we are at page 85, Consolidated Fund. Item 003: Economic Infrastructure, pages 85 to 87. Hon. Members, Item 003 spans three pages. Therefore, I will also announce the project groups: A. Electricity. Members, you all are with me? I am on page 85. C. Postal Services. A. Major

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Water Sources, package 87. C—Cumuto/Manzanilla, you are at A. Major Water Sources?

Dr. Ragbir: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the hon. Minister, just a little question here. That is line Item 014. I see expenditure of 978,920 in 2020. I just want to ask: hon. Minister, has project been completed? I see no other expenditure for 2022 or 2021.

Hon. Gonzales: What is the question, sorry?

Dr. Ragbir: Has this project been completed, the design and construct of Quare Service Reservoir.

Hon. Gonzales: Is that 004 you are on?

Dr. Ragbir: 014.

Mr. Chairman: It is page 87, Minister.

Hon. Gonzales: Mr. Chairman, just give me one second.

Mr. Chairman: Page 87, we are at 16: Major Water Sources. Line Item 014: Design and Construction of Quare Service—

Dr. Ragbir: Service Reservoir.

Hon. Gonzales: Just one second. Sorry about that, Member. My understanding is that that project has been completed.

Dr. Ragbir: This is to supply water in the east of Trinidad?

Hon. Gonzales: That is correct.

Dr. Ragbir: And I want to make it public. I thank you hon. Minister for the booster station at Manzanilla and Tamana.

Hon. Gonzales: I thank you very much for acknowledging it.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: C, Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: I had my hand up for A.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Oropouche West, go ahead.

Mr. Tancoo: 04: Construction of Avocat Wells. I amusing, Minister, that this is Avocat in Fyzabad. Can the Minister give us a status report of this construction? Is it nearing completion? Would this be sufficient funding to complete?

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Gonzales: Mr. Chairman, I can provide the status in writing but I can inform the hon. Member, at this point in time, that we are seeking to complete the first phase of this project in this current financial year. And just to let you know that I am not happy with the pace at which this project is being managed and, therefore, I have already asked my team at the Ministry of Public Utilities to come forward with a new project management strategy to ensure that phases two and three of this programme is completed within the shortest time possible.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Subsequent question, Item 022, we have the Well Development Programme, which was underfunded for 2021, and you are now proposing a 3,567,000 allocation for 2022. Minister, is there any part of that Well Development Programme that would take place, that would benefit the constituents of Oropouche West, who are currently substantially without water?

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Gonzales: A significant portion of that programme, Member, will be in south Trinidad, parts of central, as well as north-west Trinidad. So I anticipate that with a successful execution of this project, we will see an improvement in the water supply in those parts of the country.

Mr. Chairman: Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Last follow-up, thank you. Minister, I am grateful to hear that and I am hopeful that you would be able to follow through. My question then, because this is not a new issue, in 2021, you had budgeted \$4 million. That water crisis that we are experiencing now, we experienced in 2021 and we expect, unfortunately, to experience in 2022. But why then did you not spend? Why was there a substantial reduction in expenditure? Why did we go from a 4million Estimate to an Actual spend of \$378,400?

Hon. Gonzales: Mr. Chairman, let me just explain to the hon. Member that these project are being funded by allocations from the Ministry of Finance as well as WASA's internal capex. So where there might be a shortfall in the allocations by Ministry of Finance, we intend for that to be funded by its internal capex of the Water and Sewerage Authority.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you. I am moving on to C.

Mr. Chairman: Hold on, let me just identify C. Transmission and Distribution Mains. Proceed, Member.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you. Line Item 003: Pipeline Relocation for Ministry of Works and Transport Bridge Reconstruction Programme. There was no money spent in 2021 and none estimated for 2022. Is it that this is taking place somewhere else? Because I have personally had an incident where a bridge collapsed in my constituency because of the WASA main that runs along there and they have had to move the WASA line and then fix the bridge. So is this taking place somewhere else now?

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Gonzales: Under that item, Mr. Chairman, through you, sometimes WASA would utilize its internal funding or allocations from the Ministry of Finance to be able to be engaged in pipeline relocation, especially when the Ministry of Works and Transport might be doing some rehabilitation work on bridges, et cetera. What is happening now is that to ensure the efficiency of these projects and the manner in which they are executed, the Ministry of Works and Transport, through its PURE programme, would have its own internal funding as part of the cost, the overall cost of the project to be able to take care of pipelines relocation, et cetera. So there is absolutely no need for specific allocation to be made to the Water and Sewerage Authority to be able to take care of this particular Item.

Mr. Chairman: F. Other Water Projects. I: Water and Sewerage. Item 004: Social Infrastructure, page 88. Item 005: Multi-sectoral and Other Services. Couva North, I recognize you.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for recognizing me. I refer the Minister's attention to line Item 061: Community Water Improvement Programme. Mr. Chairman, I recall under this programme in mid-year review, the Minister had requested an additional \$16 million in funding. Under this Community Water Improvement Programme that 16 million was given to him in the mid-year review and a commitment was made from the hon. Minister of Public Utilities that the Brickfield area, which I had written to him on and he had responded indicating his support to have that area serviced with an improved service of water. I would like to place on the record that up to today's date, no work has taken place in the Brickfield community, despite the commitment made by the hon. Minister in the mid-year review that that Brickfield water supply improvement was a project that was going to be considered.

I see for the Revised Estimate for 2021, no money was utilized here under this line Item. Can the hon. Minister explain why it is he did not fulfil his commitment to improve the water supply in the Brickfield, Butler Village, Ojar Maharaj area and why it is no funds were utilized here under this line Item?

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, the Community Water Improvement Programme is a short-term programme or intervention in communities that are unserved and underserved. And yes, I did give an undertaking that a number of projects will be executed within a short period of time of two to three months in certain communities where the water supply might be very much inadequate; often times, once every nine days, et cetera.

During that three months from May to September, I am proud to say that the Ministry of Public Utilities and WASA, working collaboratively, we were able to do work at Ramjattan Trace in Penal; in Tamana well—Tamana booster, as the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla would have said—Upper Wharf Trace; Petrotrin Heritage bungalow; La Fortune in Point Fortin; San Rafael; Valsayn; La Romain; Picton Road in Diamond Village; Windy Hill; Upper Champs Fleurs; Pitch Road in Morvant.

And moving on to the next month or two, we have a number of outstanding projects and we expect that the Brickfield community will be one of the communities that would benefit under this programme. However, notwithstanding the comments made by the Member, I can tell you nearly 60,000, people moving to almost 100,000 citizens, will benefit under this programme and the community of Brickfield will be one of those communities that will benefit under our Community Water Improvement Programme.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, hon. Minister. I hope that you fulfil that commitment, unlike how you made that commitment in the mid-year review and you did not fulfil over the last few months. Just looking forward to you executing your commitment in the next upcoming financial year.

Hon. Gonzales: Sure.

Mr. Chairman: Caroni Central, Member.

Mr. Ram: Thank you. In light of this same Item 061, on a budget of 11 million, can the Minister provide to this Committee the number—the areas in which these projects will be undertaken?

Mr. Chairman: Question asked and answered already, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Gonzales: I think I answered the question. As a matter of fact, the Member's constituency happens to be one of the constituencies to benefit tremendously under this programme. We have drilled or rehabilitated about four wells with an additional one million gallons of water, you know, with 23,000 constituents of the Member's constituency benefitting from an improved water supply. So the whole talk that there is discrimination, et cetera, is just unfounded. It is just ridiculous, because all of them across there, their communities and their constituencies are major beneficiaries of this programme. And the Member who just posed the question, his constituency, 23,000 of them, benefitted from an improved water supply under the Community Water Improvement Programme.

2.15 p.m.

Mr. Ram: There was an initial improvement but it has gone back to where it was.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Hon. Members, Item 005 spans two pages, therefore, I will also announce the project groups. A: Administrative Services; G: Sanitary Services. Infrastructure Development Fund, and we go to page 2-1-1, 211. And we

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will now go to item 003: Economic Infrastructure, pages 211 and 212. So I will now start with B: Local Water Sources, page 211. F: Other Water Projects, page 211. G: Sanitary Services, 211. I: Water and Sewerage, page 212. Other Item 005: Multi-Sectorial and Other Services, page 212.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 39 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Thank you, Madam Permanent Secretary and the other senior executives of the various statutory boards.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to Head 61 Ministry of Housing and Urban Development.

Head 61: Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, \$647,060,100.

Mr. Chairman: I would like to welcome the Minister of Housing and Urban Development. Welcome, Madam Minister. And I would also like to welcome your Permanent Secretary, and also all your senior technocrats from the Ministry, welcome to the Chamber. Welcome also to the Minister in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development. So, Madam Minister, as is customary I will now invite you to make a brief statement not exceeding five minutes. Over to you, Madam Minister.

Hon. Beckles: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Development is responsible for the formulation and execution of Governments policy as it relates to the housing and urban development sectors. The Ministry is the lead facilitator for the implementation of these policies through its various units and affiliated agencies.

The Ministry's areas of responsibility include, though are not limited to: Provision of Government subsidized housing; disbursement of home improvement

Head 61 Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (cont'd)

grants and subsidies; regularization of tenure; housing for squatters; land settlements; and urban upgrading and regeneration. Two of the Ministry's people-centred units which provide direct services to the citizenry are, the Housing Programme Facilitation and Implementation Unit, which is called also known as HPFIU, which administers a non-refundable grant to 15,000 to eligible low income households to carry out approved repair works to their homes. And the PMCU which is the Programme Monitoring Coordinating and Evaluation Unit, which has responsibility for the implementation of the Urban Upgrading and Revitalization Programme, which improves living and housing conditions of low and low-middle income persons, through infrastructural upgrades and land tenure security for persons occupying state lands. The provision of home improvement subsidies and facilitation of new construction or purchase of affordable quality housing. The programme's focus at this stage is the East-West Corridor.

Mr. Chairman, with specific regard to the housing sector, the Ministry and its agencies are increasing the number of homeowners in Trinidad and Tobago. We do this by awarding eligible applicants, financial and other support through the Affordable Mortgage Programme, the Aided Self-Help Housing Programme, the Housing and Village Improvement Programme and the Home Construction Subsidy.

Through the Ministry, citizens also come to know and enjoy the security of sustainable homeownership and tenancy through the HDC's Estate Maintenance and Rehabilitation Programme and the disbursement of Home Improvement Grants and subsidies.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, the Ministry is also responsible for urban regeneration which is conducted through the East Port of Spain Development

Company Limited. The urban renewal portfolio is intended to ensure that our towns and cities, particularly our nation's capital, become modern and sustainable communities that are safe and attractive to all who occupy and visit them. Thank you, Chairman, for the opportunity to provide this introduction and I would be happy to answer any questions.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Madam Minister.

Question proposed: That Head 61 stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$647,060,100 for Head 61: Ministry of Housing and Urban Development is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*, and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*.

We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. So we are in the Recurrent Expenditure booklet, we are at page 284, and Sub-Head: Personal Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I would like to draw the hon. Minister's attention to line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. This actual spend for 2020 was \$7,903,026. However, the revised estimate spent for 2021 was \$9,100,000. Can the hon. Minister indicate the increase that this line Item experienced? Whether the employees received an increase in salaries or whether additional employees were recruited?

Mr. Chairman: Madam Minister.

Hon. Beckles: I cannot give that exact information at this time so—I am definitely

sure it was not an increase in salary. But I will have to give you the information as to exactly what was the reason for the increase.

Mr. Ratiram: Sure. Thank you very much, hon. Minister. Can you also provide when you are providing the information, the actual headcount for 2020, for 2021 and what is being proposed for 2022? Most likely what is being proposed for 2022 will be the same as what was revised in 2021, because the numbers are the same for the Revised Estimate of 2021 and the Estimate of 2022. Can you also provide if there are any vacant positions in the organization to be filled?

Hon. Beckles: Okay. So at this point in time we are talking about 92 established positions, 80 with incumbents, five vacant, and we have three suppressed positions, and three posts to be classified which would be procurement officers.

Mr. Ratiram: And, hon. Minister, do we intend to fill those vacant positions during this financial year?

Hon. Beckles: Yes. Well, the three suppressed positions we will have to get approval.

Mr. Ratiram: Understood. Can I move on to another line Item, Chair?

Mr. Chairman: Once—yeah.

Mr. Ratiram: Line Item 04: Allowances; Monthly Paid Officers. The Estimate for 2021 was \$633,000, however, there was an increase of \$271,800 in the Revised Estimate for 2021. Can the hon. Minister indicate what caused this increase from the Estimate to the Revised Estimate?

Hon. Beckles: Okay. Could you just go over that again? You are talking about 04?

Mr. Ratiram: Yes, hon. Minister.

Mr. Chairman: Monthly Paid Officers.

Mr. Ratiram: The Revised Estimate was \$904,800; the Estimate was 666,000.

Hon. Beckles: Okay, fine. All right. So that has to do with—for the Minister PS and DPS for Housing and duty service, as well as there are some outstanding arrears for the Permanent Secretary and the Deputy Permanent Secretary.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 02.

Mr. Ratiram: One more line Item, Chair.

Mr. Chairman: In that same—

Mr. Ratiram: One more line Item in that same block.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, proceed.

Mr. Ratiram: Line Item 08: Vacant Post-Salaries and C.O.L.A. There was not any allocation under this line Item for 2020/2021. However, for 2022 there is an allocation of \$367,200. Can the Minister provide a listing of the vacant positions that this line Item will be filling during this financial year?

Hon. Beckles: Yes. So, one Senior State Council, one Senior Economist, a Vault Assistant, and two Temporary Clerk/Typists.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration, pages 284, 285. Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I would like to refer the hon. Minister's attention to line Item 04: Electricity. The estimated figure for 2021 was \$200,000 but the Revised Estimate was 2.3 million. That is a significant increase in a Revised Estimate. Can the hon. Minister indicate why such a substantial increase in the Revised Estimate?

2.30 p.m.

Hon. Beckles: That—existing arrears between the period June 2018 to September 2021. So we actually paid that in that financial year.

Mr. Ratiram: And can the Minister advise if there is any further outstanding arrears?

Hon. Beckles: Okay, not at this time, we have paid it off.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Another line Item.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Mr. Ratiram: Another line Item 08: Rent, Lease, Office Accommodation and Storage. Hon. Minister, this Item was budgeted for in 2021 at 3.5 million but the Revised Estimate shows 7.5 million, a significant increase in—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, just a correction, is 3.353 not 3.5.

Mr. Ratiram: I stand corrected. Thank you, Minister, 3.35 million, revised that 7.5 million. Can the Minister indicate what this increase signifies?

Hon. Beckles: So again, in 2021 the allocation was utilized for payment of arrears, the allocation for 2022 will be for current invoices.

Mr. Ratiram: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head—

Mr. Ratiram: Line Item, another line Item.

Mr. Chairman:—okay, go ahead.

Mr. Ratiram: Line Item 16: Contract Employment. There is an increase in contract employment for \$840,000 from the Revised Estimate of 2021. Can the Minister provide us with the information in terms of how much additional contract employment positions are going to be filled in this year?

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Beckles: Our total number of contract positions are 50. So number of positions filled are 36 actually. So we have an outstanding of 14.

Mr. Ratiram: And also for line Item 22: Short-term Employment. I see that the Revised Estimate was 2.6 million in Short-term Employment. Can the Minister advise how these persons are recruited under this line Item?

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Beckles: For that item they will go through the normal public service. There is a procedure by which persons are selected through the public service for short-term employment.

Mr. Ratiram: These are advertised publicly?

Hon. Beckles: All right, so my correction, it is persons who would have applied to the Ministry, who are already shortlisted, we will utilize those positions for the purposes of those contract employment.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. I would like to join my colleague from Couva North with questions on the housing area. Just want to continue along the very vein of the Member for Couva North, Item 21. Minister, as you can see on 2020, there was a \$36—\$37,000 expenditure, but what we are doing in 2022 more important now is 700,000. Could you provide if not now, certainly at a later time, a list of the buildings and the maintenance assets of Ministry that are earmarked for upgrading or refurbishment as the case may be?

Hon. Beckles: Okay, well I can just give you a little idea in terms of what we will be doing, which is to upgraded plumbing fixtures located through the entire building, replacements of doors, ceiling, tiles as scheduled, but I will provide the additional information that you have requested.

Dr. Moonilal: Is that at the main building?

Hon. Beckles: Yes.

Dr. Moonilal: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Yes, thank you, thank you, Mr. Chair. Just following up hon. Minister on Item 22: Short-term Employment. Minister indicated that the procedure is, persons who would have applied to the Ministry when the opportunity arise they are calling interviewed and so forth. So is it that persons who are seeking employment must send in a general application to the Ministry to be on file so that consideration can be given to them when the opportunity arise?

Hon. Beckles: It is not necessarily a requirement but as you know, a lot of people send in requests to Ministries I mean, you keep it on file so that if someone applies the Ministry will keep that on file because as you see it is short-term employment. So that you will use the cadre of existing persons that would have applied.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Minister.

Mr. Chairman: Caroni Central Member, please.

Mr. Ram: Item number 23: Fees. Can the Minister indicate what is the purpose of these fees?

Mr. Chairman: Where are you?

Mr. Ram: Page 285.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Proceed, proceed.

Mr. Ram: Yes, line Item 23. Can the Minister indicate what are these fees for?

Hon. Beckles: I would be—take for example consultancy, legal fees that we may not have used, we would normally use it for that so you see that this year, based on what we did last year there is a decrease.

Head 61 Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (cont'd)

Mr. Ram: No Minister, the actual spent last year was 500,000.

Hon. Beckles: Yeah this year, sorry, there is a decrease of \$100,000.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, Item 001: General Administration, Sub-Head 04: Current Transfer and Subsidies, page 286. I will start with Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. I am on page 286, Chair. There is a decrease of the entire Current Transfers and Subsidies here and it is a very significant decrease. I just wanted the Minister to make a comment or two on the nature of that decrease and what area, although we will get to it in a bit, will be affected.

Mr. Chairman: Again, being seasoned you still need to identify your particular line Item.

Dr. Moonilal: Okay. I am on—

Mr. Chairman: Rather than a general question on the—

Dr. Moonilal: Okay Chairman, 009: Other Transfers, 01: Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation.

Mr. Chairman: Right.

Dr. Moonilal: Good.

Mr. Chairman: Question.

Dr. Moonilal: You have had actual of 602 million then, you revise to 627 million but now Minister, of course, there is this complete slashing and gutting of the HDC budget by \$243 million. I just would like you to make a few comments on the impact of this and what necessitates this and I will get to another question after.

Hon. Beckles: Okay so that—

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Beckles:—figure would have been for original loan payments—

Dr. Moonilal: Excuse me.

Hon. Beckles:—so this here is a reduction of a loan payment.

Dr. Moonilal: Could you repeat please?

Hon. Beckles: Reduction of a loan payment, loan, 243 million less.

Dr. Moonilal: It has to do with loan fees?

Hon. Beckles: Yes.

Dr. Moonilal: Loan payments?

Hon. Beckles: Yes.

Dr. Moonilal: Which loans have been paid off?

Hon. Beckles: I cannot give you that right away but I can provide—

Dr. Moonilal: Could you then identify the loans, the terms of those loans and when they have been paid off and what was the loan for in the first place?

Hon. Beckles: Okay.

Dr. Moonilal: And when they were taken out?

Hon. Beckles: Will do.

Dr. Moonilal: But you are saying on the record that the two—

Hon. Beckles: Yeah, that 243 is a loan payment.

Dr. Moonilal: Is it the main payment for loans that have now—

Hon. Beckles: Yes.

Dr. Moonilal:—no longer—

Hon. Beckles: Yes.

Dr. Moonilal: Right.

Mr. Chairman: Oropouche East, you are still with us, or move on?

Dr. Moonilal: Yes. Could I ask as well the area of the—no, I will come to it later.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you. I had a question on line Item 11: The Port of Spain Shopping Complex, I see we are allocating \$7 million in fiscal 2022. Could you give us an idea of what scope of works we anticipate will take place at this Port of Spain Shopping Complex?

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Beckles: Okay, so that repairs, maintenance, air conditioning units for both buildings in Promotions and Rebanding, purchase of a vehicle for the couriers as well as, monthly subvention and operational services.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: I am on 011: Transfers to State Enterprises.

Mr. Chairman: Take for the records up to date. Item 007: Households. Item 009: Other Transfers; Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises. I recognize you now, Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Minister, is really to repeat a comment I made I think last year or so. When we have the data as it is here under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development. Could you please undertake to give us the specifics of 06, 07, 08, the nature of those loans, what they were for, when they were taken out—because you are budgeting now for payments on those accounts. If you can give us the nature of them, when they were taken out for what purposes—

Hon. Beckles: I can give it to you now.

Dr. Moonilal:—how much have been paid, and how much is outstanding?

Hon. Beckles: All right, so in relation to the 06, which is 213 million—

Dr. Moonilal: Yes,

Hon. Beckles:—okay, so that was issued on the 31st of October, 2012, for eight years at an interest payment due to be made semi-annually at a coupon rate of 3.35 per cent.

Dr. Moonilal: 3.35.

Hon. Beckles: And the last interest payment is due on October 31, 2020, in the sum of 3,597,073.97.

Dr. Moonilal: Sure. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Beckles: To the last payment October 31, 2020.

Dr. Moonilal: She wants to know which Government took it out. That is what she is interested in.

Hon. Beckles: It was taken out the 31st of October—

Dr. Moonilal: Yes, for the construction programme.

Hon. Beckles: And that was for the purposes of the Realspring Housing Development in Valsayn.

Dr. Moonilal: Sure.

Hon. Beckles: And the loan was actually executed on the 3rd of October, 2013.

Dr. Moonilal: It was not Global Finance by any chance? No. We can move on.

Mr. Chairman: Could I move now?

Dr. Moonilal: Sure. Yes, Chairman, the Minister is just disturbing me. My concentration—

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies. We go to a new book, and we are going to page 287. Couva North, no. Why are you doing this to me, Couva North? I looked up. You—

Mr. Ratiram: Chair, I will ask, why are you doing this to me?

Mr. Chairman: No, no, no, no.

Mr. Ratiram: Because my hand was up.

Mr. Chairman: We have a different procedural clerk in the House and all and there is no notification.

Mr. Ratiram: Chair—

Mr. Young: Chair, I saw Oropouche East's head blocking his hand. [*Crosstalk*]
[*Laughter*]

Mr. Ratiram: Chair, have you placed on the record you calling out 06: Current Transfers and Statutory Bodies and Similar Bodies and raise your head to acknowledge?

Mr. Chairman: No, we are now going to the book, yeah, we now going to it. So, you have the opportunity.

Mr. Ratiram: We were on 04—

Mr. Chairman: One sec, one sec.

Mr. Ratiram:—after 04 is 06.

Mr. Chairman: Member, we are now going to the new booklet.

Mr. Ratiram: Yeah, but we did not complete the 06.

Mr. Chairman: No we going to the new book now, we going to it now.

Mr. Ratiram: In this page, no—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, just to be certain, are you on the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies*?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, one second.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: That is what you on?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, that is where we are going to now.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: So hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*. Right. We are going to page 437, 18: Sugar Industry, Labour Welfare Fund, Administration. Sub-Head 01: Personal Expenditure, Item 001: General Administration. Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. There is a decrease of \$1.57 million. Can you know Minister explained this decrease if it is that workers have been sent home?

Hon. Beckles: Chair, which Item is that?

Mr. Chairman: We on Sub-Head 01: Personal Expenditure, Item 001: General Administration, page 467 we are on. Just for the records.

2.45 p.m.

Hon. Beckles: Yes. Sorry, I did not hear you. What is the question?

Mr. Chairman: Could you ask your question again, please?

Mr. Ratiram: Line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. The Actual spent for 2020 was 5.7 million, the Revised Estimate for 2021 was 4.1 million and the projected estimate for 2022 is 2.6 million. From the Revised Estimates to the Estimates for 2022, there was decrease of 1.5 million. Can the hon. Minister advise if it is that there is a reduction in staff?

Hon. Beckles: No, there is no reduction in staff. What would happen is that the 45 employees would be transferred to different Ministries. As you know, this is an organization that was agreed to be dissolved for quite some time, but because of what is required to be done, we kept the staff on, but nobody is going to be—there will be no loss of jobs.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you for that undertaking.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Oropouche East, and then I will come to Couva South. Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Minister, it is on that very line I was going to ask you, because I am looking at Remuneration to Board Members and Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. If you can give us an update again, if not now, certainly in the near future, as to the progress and process involved in the dissolution of this company—I know other colleagues would have other issues—but, particularly as it relates to the transfers of those sugar communities to local government bodies and the process that you are embarking now to ensure that persons and communities will have the utilities and the infrastructural assistance that they need.

Hon. Beckles: Okay. Well, I cannot give you all that detail, but what I can say to you is that in accordance with what the responsibility was given by the Cabinet Note, which is the divestment of land, the closure of files, the preparation of deeds and the audit. That is what is being processed at this time.

Dr. Moonilal: And is there a time frame that this would come to an end?

Hon. Beckles: Yes. That should come to an end—we are looking at March next year.

Dr. Moonilal: Sure.

Mr. Chairman: Couva North?

Mr. Ratiram: Asked and answered.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Couva South?

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Deputy Chair. Minister, my colleague, Oropouche East, touched on a number of issues, but sugar welfare has also—and I do not know if you are aware—some responsibilities, as it relates to infrastructure and so

on in communities that it has had under its jurisdiction for quite a number of period since its inception. And I think in the winding up—because you do want these communities to be left leaderless, if I should say from the point of view of the provision of amenities and so on—and if that responsibility, when the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee no longer exists, can be transferred or given to the representative regional corporations and so on, because that could create quite an issue and problem. I will come to—

Mr. Chairman: Could you come to the question, please? You need to comment?

Hon. Beckles: Save and except to say that we know that there are some 38 housing developments—

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes.

Hon. Beckles:—and at present arrangements have been made with the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government to service these areas, but we have also sought some advice from the Attorney General as it relates to some of those issues that you have raised, as it relates to the whole issue of continuity.

Mr. Indarsingh: Okay. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration, 437. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration. We now move to No. 54: Land Settlement Agency, page 448, same book. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. Couva North? Item 001: General Administration, 448.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, the Revised Estimate for 2020—I refer the hon. Minister's attention to line Item 06: Remuneration to Board Members. The Revised Estimate for 2021 was 306,000. The Estimate for 2022 is 621,000, an increase of 314,000. Can the hon. Minister indicate if it is that the

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board was short of members and if it is that the entire board is now filled?

Hon. Beckles: I think on the last occasion we had either five or six members, but now the board is, yes, constituted and we have a full complement.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. I recognize the Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Minister, Sub-Item 16, there is an increase of almost \$3 million on the Contract Employment. Could you give an explanation?

Mr. Chairman: Minister?

Hon. Beckles: Okay. Sorry. Hon. Member, could you just repeat please?

Dr. Moonilal: Item 16, the \$3 million increase for what I believe is Contract Employment. Is there an explanation of some unit or some department that is expanding?

Hon. Beckles: Okay. I will have to get back to you on that.

Dr. Moonilal: Sure.

Hon. Beckles: Okay.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. For line Item 28, I would like to refer the hon. Minister's attention to line Item 28: Other Contracted Services. The Revised Estimate—well, for 2021, the Estimate was 150,000, the Revised Estimate was 160,000. However, it is estimated for 2022 at \$10 million, an increase of 9.8 million. Can the hon. Minister explain this significant increase?

Mr. Chairman: Madam Minister?

Hon. Beckles: Okay. So this is going to be used for the maintenance of LSA squatting sites and land settlement sites. So, we are looking at repairs in terms of roads as well as drains, drainage.

Mr. Indarsingh: Minister, based on what you have just told my colleague from Couva North, in terms of the work that you are doing on sites and in terms of that expenditure, any of that work will be done on the Milton site in the constituency of Couva South?

Hon. Beckles: The Milton site?

Mr. Indarsingh: Yeah.

Hon. Beckles: I cannot tell you off the top of my head. I could enquire. Yes.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Thank you, Chair. Under this same line Item: Other Contracted Service, hon. Minister, I know that there are some outstanding works to be conducted by the LSA with respect to the regularization of our spontaneous settlers, and amongst one of that piece of work entails surveying and identification of boundaries and so forth.

Mr. Chairman: Line Item, Member?

Mr. Ratiram: Other Contracted Services, line Item 28. One of the issues and the challenge that the LSA would have had over the last financial year was the availability of funds to recruit surveying firms, et cetera, consultants, et cetera, to complete the regularization of our spontaneous settlers. Can the hon. Minister indicate if that will be taken into consideration in this financial year also?

Hon. Beckles: Yes it will.

Mr. Ratiram: And sufficient funding will be provided for that activity to be completed?

Hon. Beckles: Well, we believe that what we have received is sufficient.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General

Head 61 Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (cont'd)

Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 449. Item 007: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. So we are going to a different book, and we are going to page 120, 1-2-0. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund, page 120. Item 004: Social Infrastructure, pages 120 to 121. I recognize Oropouche East. Member.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Could I just invite the Minister to comment on the Item Regularization of Squatter Communities, 237, and to give some detail as to the communities identified and the process undertaken, since this is a significant increase in fiscal 2022 to the allocation? I think it is an increase of what could be 100 per cent.

Hon. Beckles: The question you are asking is for what is existing and the reason for the increase?

Dr. Moonilal: Yes. And the areas identified.

Hon. Beckles: Okay. So that we are looking at 34 projects. And do you want me to give you the list?

Dr. Moonilal: If you can undertake to provide the list of the projects, the areas identified.

Hon. Beckles: I mean, I can give it to you now.

Dr. Moonilal: Well, instead of calling the 34 names, if you want to circulate, that would be find as well.

Hon. Beckles: Well, I mean, just very quickly if you wish, I can. Okay. I would submit. I would submit it. Okay, fine.

Mr. Chairman: If you want you can call a few but, when I say, in terms of, you know, the time frame, if you want to identify it.

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Hon. Beckles: I could just quickly call just a few: Bois Bande, Sangre Grande; La Paille, Caroni; La Plata, Valencia; Retrench, San Fernando; Southern Gates, Point Fortin; Harmony Hall, Gasparillo and Glenroy, Princes Town. That is just a few. But there are 34, so. So there are others I did not call rather than listing all of them.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize you again, Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you. Item 239: Government Aided Self-Help Programme. Minister, there was an Actual of 2.5 million in 2020 fiscal and that is now going to 20 million in 2022, from 2.5 million to 20 million. Could you undertake to also provide in writing the list of beneficiaries of this programme, the areas and their application date?

Hon. Beckles: You want the list of beneficiaries?

Dr. Moonilal: Yes.

Hon. Beckles: Right, yes.

Dr. Moonilal: Yes, because in the fiscal 2021, you have a Revised Estimate of 10 million, more or less, 9.1.

Hon. Beckles: 9.1.

Dr. Moonilal: Yes, so we can get the beneficiaries, their date of application and the areas. Thank you.

Hon. Beckles: Okay. I could list some of the—

Dr. Moonilal: I cannot ask for 2022 in the thing, because that is the projection.

Hon. Beckles: Yeah. Well, I could list some of the areas for 2021/2022, a few.

Dr. Moonilal: Sure.

Hon. Beckles: I would just call: Orange Field, Carapichaima; Korea Village; Roopsingh Road; Waterloo, Freeport; Chin Chin Phase, Cunupia; Chin Chin, South; Milton Village that the Member of Parliament asked about; Cashew

Head 61 Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (cont'd)

Gardens; Picton Extension; Diamond Village; Factory Road, Chaguanas and so on and so on—Balmain, Couva and so on.

Dr. Moonilal: You see, I prefer, in addition, if those areas, all, would be circulated.

Hon. Beckles: Yeah. Well, as I said, I just called just a few.

Dr. Moonilal: As you list the one or two, there are questions that arise even from listing it, because there are certain infrastructure problems in Picton, for example, that we may want to consider and to ask further questions and bring clarity to.

Mr. Chairman: Madam Minister, we have that undertaking?

Hon. Beckles: So, I have provided a few, and I will provide the rest. Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Right. Lovely. Couva North. Do I have—

Dr. Moonilal: Sorry, if you—I can give way to my colleague to continue.

3.00 p.m.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, colleague. Thank you, Chairman. Chairman, I would like to refer the Minister's attention to line Item 233: Surveys of Squatter Sites. In the 2022 Estimate, it was 1.5 million. However, only 500,000 was utilized in the Revised Estimate. Can the Minister advise why the work was not completed? Why the 1.5 was not utilized? Is it a shortage of releases from the Ministry of Finance for the last fiscal term?

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Beckles: The main thing that we are doing really at this time would be the perimeter surveys, topographical surveys, general plans and we have 29 areas, so that we now would be in a better position to move forward.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Member for Oropouche East, you still—

Dr. Moonilal: Yes. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Proceed.

Dr. Moonilal: Minister, again, I would just grave your indulgence to provide the information rather than detailing now on 241. That budgeted figure is \$40 million, 241. There was no expenditure in 2020. Now, this programme obviously stalled for some reason because you had budgeted in '21 fiscal, 20 million but used or revised your Estimate to a mere \$37,000. So what were the problems being faced by the Ministry in terms of dealing with this matter? And if you will undertake to present in writing the policy of the Ministry as it relates to the development of the residential lots, the beneficiaries who have been identified for these lots, the areas that are identified for development, and if you can confirm if this is a project of the Land Settlement Agency as well? Thank you.

Hon. Beckles: It is. And you would—well, we do have substantial outstanding bills to the tune of 19.6 million.

Dr. Moonilal: Okay. So what I am getting is that you started work but did not pay.

Hon. Beckles: Yeah.

Dr. Moonilal: And so your budget of 40million now is to pay outstanding bills of 20 million-plus—

Hon. Beckles: Plus, yes.

Dr. Moonilal:—continuing your work in that area?

Hon. Beckles: Correct.

Dr. Moonilal: That is fine. Could you also undertake to provide a list of the contractors and payments of the 19 or 20 million that is outstanding?

Hon. Beckles: Yes, you can have that.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize Caroni Central and then we will have Barataria/San

Juan.

Mr. Ram: Thank you. Hon. Minister, D., 075, does this Rehabilitation and Maintenance of—

Hon. Beckles: Hon. Member, which line Item?

Mr. Ram: It is 075—D., 075.

Mr. Chairman: We are on page—same 120.

Mr. Ram: Just above—

Hon. Beckles: Okay. Okay.

Mr. Ram: You are with me, Minister?

Hon. Beckles: Yes, I am.

Mr. Ram: Right. Does this line Item cater for the Edinburgh 500 apartment complex or units; Edinburgh 500?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister.

Hon. Beckles: “Oh”, you mean out of this—no, this is not out of this Item.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I am on line Item 241: Development of Residential Lots - Petrotrin. Minister, can you indicate what is the mandate of the Ministry in terms of the total number of lots that you all have earmarked for development for distribution to—I believe this is for the former workers of Petrotrin?

Mr. Chairman: Madam Minister.

Hon. Beckles: I can give you, at this point in time, what we actually completed and where we had the draw, which is 167, which is Glenroy. But for the other areas which will be La Savanne and Nurse Trace, La Romain, et cetera, I cannot give you all of those lots immediately.

Mr. Hosein: Okay. But you can give me the total number that you all earmarked.

Hon. Beckles: You mean in total?

Mr. Hosein: Yeah.

Hon. Beckles: No, not at this time but I can undertake to do so.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Minister. We are moving smoothly. It is so peaceful when the Minister of Finance is not in the Chamber. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Chairman, could I ask—

Mr. Chairman: Question, Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Excuse me?

Mr. Chairman: Question.

Dr. Moonilal: Yes, yes, of course. What would be the policy consideration with the allocation to Emergency Shelter Relief Fund in a time when, you know, it is so critical to provide emergency support?

Hon. Beckles: Which—

Dr. Moonilal: I am on Other Services, 292.

Mr. Chairman: 292?

Dr. Moonilal: There is no allocation for 2022. And while you are looking at that, I can ask another question.

Mr. Chairman: Just now, Member.

Dr. Moonilal: Okay. Sure.

Mr. Chairman: 292 is Emergency Shelter Relief Fund. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Moonilal: Yes, I am finished. The Minister is looking for some information, I believe.

Hon. Beckles: Sorry. Okay. So no funds were allocated, so I am just asking—what

was the question, sorry?

Dr. Moonilal: No, but is there a policy consideration? Is that programme scrapped or closed down or inactive?

Hon. Beckles: No. I would not say it was inactive but we would probably look in the mid-term review and see whether it is possible for us to get some funds.

Dr. Moonilal: Okay. So the programme exists?

Hon. Beckles: Yes.

Dr. Moonilal: It is just there is no allocation for it?

Hon. Beckles: Yes.

Dr. Moonilal: Okay. The other question—could I proceed, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Chairman: Yeah, go ahead.

Dr. Moonilal: Yeah. The Home Improvement and New Housing Subsidies Program, that also has no Estimate for 2022. There is no Estimate for 2022 there. Is that again just a question of the—the programme is in place but just no money to provide home improvement subsidy, no money allocated, so to speak?

Hon. Beckles: Okay. The same—

Mr. Chairman: One second, Minister.

Hon. Beckles: Sure.

Mr. Chairman: Member, let us bring—for the records, let us bring it up-to-date because you have now gone on to—

Dr. Moonilal: I am on Other Services.

Mr. Chairman: Right. H., which is Housing Opportunity Programme.

Dr. Moonilal: Yeah. Sure.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. All right. Proceed. Go ahead, Madam Minister.

Hon. Beckles: Yes. I would—the same explanation for that as well, that we would

be still asking for some money mid-term, but it still exists, yes.

Dr. Moonilal: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, line Item 241: Residential Lots - Petrotrin that was developed in 2021 at a cost—

Mr. Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre—

Mr. Lee: Yeah?

Hon. Beckles: I am not hearing you.

Mr. Chairman: The mike—just adjust the mike to suit.

Mr. Lee: Yeah. The residential lots in Petrotrin that were developed in hand and given out earlier this year in 2021, the cost for that development was—is it \$37,900 or 37,000,900?

Hon. Beckles: Are you speaking about Glenroy?

Mr. Lee: No, I am talking about the line Item 241 and the Revised Estimate in 2021, I am seeing 37,900. So I do not know if it is a typo or is it—

Hon. Beckles: Yes, you are correct, that is \$37,000, yes. Pre-construction works, yes.

Mr. Lee: But those lands were developed in 2021, correct?

Hon. Beckles: If they were developed when, sorry?

Mr. Lee: The lands that were given out in 2021, they were developed in 2021, correct?—to be given out—the lots, the lots. No?

Hon. Beckles: 2019, 2020.

Mr. Lee: All right. Okay. Okay. In 2022, you budgeted 40million?

Hon. Beckles: Yes, because it would not only—it would be a—

Mr. Lee: You are continuing.

Hon. Beckles: Yeah. Because we did not have—

Mr. Lee: You are continuing the development.

Hon. Beckles: Yeah. We have Glenroy—

Mr. Lee: Yeah. No problem.

Hon. Beckles:—Guayaguayare, La Romain, San Fernando, Woodford Lodge.

Mr. Lee: And who are the contractors that are in the process of developing those lots?

Hon. Beckles: What? Sorry, I did not catch you.

Mr. Lee: The contractors or contractor that is developing those lots?

Hon. Beckles: “Oh”, contractors?

Mr. Lee: Yeah. You can supply it in writing.

Hon. Beckles: Yeah. Sure.

Mr. Chairman: Oropouche East, okay? All right. A. Community Development, page 121. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, page 122. Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Chairman, are we on 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, Sir. Yes, hon. Member.

Dr. Moonilal: Yeah. I want to go to 011: Digital Transformation Programme. It is a new project I believe. Would the Minister care to speak to that new programme? What is the \$2 million to be used for specifically?

Hon. Beckles: Okay. So that is—as you know, the Government announced the policy as it relates to digital transformation of all Ministries and certainly for our Ministry that is very important, you know, in terms of—[*Inaudible*]
—it is easier for access for your customers. I mean, it is an important programme for us.

Dr. Moonilal: Infrastructure Development Fund, page 227, Item 004: Social

Infrastructure, page 228. Couva North, I recognize you.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, line Item 230: Accelerated Housing Programme. Mr. Chairman, this actual spend for this Accelerated Housing Programme in 2020 was 334,300,000. However in 2021 and in 2022, there is no budgeted allocation for this programme. Has the Accelerated Housing Programme come to a stop? Has this programme been shut down? Can the Minister provide an update on what is taking place with respect to this programme?

Mr. Chairman: Madam Minister.

Hon. Beckles: Okay. So the expectation with that programme is that we will still be able to access funding. Okay? The HDC can fund itself. We can fund either off budget and we can, as you know, request from the Ministry of Finance the possibility of loans to be able to deal with this Item. So even though there is no allocation at this point in time, it does not mean to say that we are not going to be able to access funding.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. On this matter, Madam Minister, you would agree that the Accelerated Housing Programme is indeed the heartbeat of the Ministry of Housing and the HDC. Are you suggesting that with a Vote of zero for the Accelerated Housing Programme, your housing targets would be met from HDC revenue and from borrowing?

Hon. Beckles: I would say the answer to that is, yes. I mean, we did not—

Mr. Chairman: Okay, go ahead, Madam Minister.

Hon. Beckles: I answered. I said, yes.

Mr. Chairman: Couva North? Member?

Mr. Ratiram: Can the hon. Minister identify what those housing targets for 2022 are?

Hon. Beckles: Okay—

Mr. Chairman: And that is on the same line Item?

Mr. Ratiram: On the same line Item.

Hon. Beckles: Okay. So for the—

Mr. Ratiram: How much houses they plan to build without any funding?

Hon. Beckles: Okay. So our expectation in—so let me just say for—on the last occasion, during the budget debate, it was said that the Government did not construct any houses over the last couple of years, so that let me just give that figure. Since the PNM Government assumed office, it is 5,452 units with a revenue of 2.1 billion. And in 2022, we are expected to construct and complete some 7,692 mixed family units.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Oropouche East, I have Barataria/San Juan first and then I will come back to you.

Mr. Hosein: You want to go now?

Mr. Chairman: All right. Oropouche East, once you give way.

3.15 p.m.

Dr. Moonilal: I am on the exact matter, Madam Minister. Do you consider to be scandalous that there is a zero allocation for the Accelerated Housing Programme?

Mr. Chairman: Same question?

Dr. Moonilal: And the second question related to that is, could you just give some details on the Carlton Lane, San Fernando project, the status of the project and the source of funding for that project?

Mr. Chairman: That would come under what line Item?

Dr. Moonilal: Well, it is part of the Accelerated Housing Programme.

Mr. Chairman: Madam Minister.

Dr. Moonilal: All the projects are part of that programme.

Hon. Beckles: The project is about 60 per cent complete, and that would have been funded by virtue of what we call our mortgage conversion.

Dr. Moonilal: So it was domestic service with internal funding by the HDC?

Hon. Beckles: Yes, domestic.

Dr. Moonilal: Could I ask as well, related to the Accelerated Housing Programme, the status of the attempt to revive the Endeavour, is it Enterprise—Edinburgh Towers of Chaguanas? That was an ongoing matter for many, many years. Yes, it started where it ended. *[Interruption]* “Allow de lady to—do not disturb your ministerial colleague.”

Hon. Beckles: So that, hon. Member of Parliament, let me say where we are at this point in time. So the HDC awarded a contract to perform works in the sum of 212,000, and that was for design works. We also awarded a contract in the sum of \$400,000, for the structural calculation and review works. We also awarded a contract in the sum of \$666,606.70, for quantity surveying works, and then the last one at this time was the architectural designs at the sum of 250,000. So what I would like to say is that the most important thing for us is to ensure the whole issue of the structural integrity of the building, so that that is why these awards were given, and that would allow us then to make a solid decision in terms of moving forward.

Mr. Chairman: Barataria/San Juan, Member.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair. What I am trying to get clear here is that the Minister said that the Ministry would have constructed about

Head 61 Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (cont'd)

5,000 homes within the last six years, and then in 2022 the target is 7,000 homes.

Hon. Beckles: Construct and complete.

Mr. Hosein: Construct and complete 7,000 homes in 2022?

Hon. Beckles: Yes, that is what I am saying. So in other words, we have existing houses to be completed and houses to be constructed.

Mr. Hosein: But in six years 5,000 were completed, but in 2022, without any funding, you are targeting 7,000 homes? Can the Minister now indicate which—

Hon. Beckles: Well, you are saying without any funding.

Mr. Hosein: If you allow me to just ask the question. The question is, where exactly are you going to construct and complete these homes?

Hon. Beckles: I am just saying to you that you are saying without any funding. I am saying that you cannot simply say that because the allocation is not there we are not going to be able to access funding. That is all I am saying.

Mr. Hosein: But if you are target is 7,000, Minister, it would be prudent or obvious that there should have been an allocation for this fiscal year. Based on the estimates before us, there is zero dollars allocated towards the housing programme.

Hon. Beckles: The HDC, by its very nature, would be able to borrow, and as I said we are in discussions with the Ministry of Finance to be able to access funding, in addition to the private/partnership policy that exists, which would be also part of the 7,000 plus houses that would be constructed.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, could you then give us an indication of where these houses will be constructed?

Hon. Beckles: Can I provide that information to you after? I can give you some of the areas: Bon Air, Buen Intento, Carlsen Field, Cypress, Harmony Hall, Lake View, Malabar. That is a few, and then I will provide the entire listing.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, those areas already have HDC developments, so it is going to be—

Hon. Beckles: They have HDC developments, and we will also be constructing some more.

Mr. Hosein: So some of those would be for completion?

Hon. Beckles: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Oropouche East, you are okay? Item 005: Multisectoral and Other Services, page 229.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 61 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Madam Minister. Thank you, Minister in the Ministry of Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, and thank you Madam PS and all the senior public officers. Thank you for coming.

Head 82: Ministry of Digital Transformation, \$281,722,620.

Mr. Chairman: Welcome to the Minister of Digital Transformation, welcome to your Permanent Secretary and all the senior technocrats from your Ministry, welcome.

I will now invite the Minister of Digital Transformation to make a brief opening statement, not exceeding five minutes. Over to you Mr. Minister.

Hon. Bacchus: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chairman and thank you Members of the Committee. I would first like to, of course, compliment the Minister of Finance, the hon. Colm Imbert, and his aptly themed budget presentation on resilience, and just to also include in my compliments the Minister of Planning and Development, Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis for assistance as far as it pertains to the PSIP and the formulation of cases where that is concerned. So, again, my compliments.

Head 82 Ministry of Digital Transformation (cont'd)

The mandate of the Ministry of Digital Transformation is to facilitate the development of a digital Trinidad and Tobago, one where the population has access to and the skills to use ICT in their everyday lives, where the ICT infrastructure is of high quality, it is robust, it is secure and where businesses are using ICT to be more globally competitive; where the ICT sector is an increasing contributor to national GDP and where, of course, the Government is using ICT for improved service delivery, transparency and efficiency.

The Ministry carries out its mandate in close partnership with other Ministries, Departments and agencies, the private sector, international agencies, among other places.

The work of the Ministry of Digital Transformation is supported by two key agencies, the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, TATT, and the National ICT Company of Trinidad and Tobago, iGovTT. TATT is the regulator for broadcasting and telecoms as we know, and oversees USF, a significant contributor towards ICT access. iGovTT is the Government's ICT business centre, and it handles things specific to other Ministries, divisions, agencies and, of course, all the things really that GoRTT has.

Members will note, of course, that TATT generates a surplus from the revenues, mainly from concessions and so their operational expenses are off set in that manner.

The Ministry was newly established as a separate Ministry with effect from July 11, 2021, and, as such, Members will note our line items are just new and reflect all positive variances. I will try to explain as those questions come along, but the work programme is really underlined by three themes: digital society, digital economy and digital government.

Head 82 Ministry of Digital Transformation (cont'd)

Digital society addresses the need to ensure that citizens are able to effectively access and use information communication technology. Digital economy is focused on the digitization and the digitalization of the private sector agencies in Trinidad and Tobago, other economic opportunities as they would arise, new and emerging technology, such that our local entrepreneurs and investors can benefit. Digital government, of course, that would address the key areas of infrastructure and operations with very specific focus on service.

Mr. Deputy Chair, my team and I stand ready to answer Members' questions and to provide further information if required in writing. Thank you.

Question proposed: That Head 83 stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Hon. Members, the sum of \$281,722,620, for Head 82, Ministry of Digital Transformation, is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*, and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*.

We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. So we are in the recurrent expenditure booklet, page 416, Sub-Head 01: Personal Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration.

Member for Princes Town, page 416.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chairman. Hon. Minister, line Item 001. This being a relatively new Ministry, having been separate from the Ministry of Public Administration, can the hon. Minister indicate to us how many staff members are there on the establishment currently at this Ministry, so we have an idea of the manpower at the Ministry?

3.30 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister.

Hon. Bacchus: Certainly. The—under 01 the number of positions as we have now, 31, 3—1.

Mr. Padarath: And, Minister, do you envisage as this Ministry takes on a very important role, will the Ministry's staff complement need to be increased as it assumes the various areas of responsibility under its purview? And what has been done to see an increase when the establishment with respect to allocation at the Ministry of Digital Transformation at a very critical time?

Hon. Bacchus: I agree with you that the Ministry of Digital Transformation is and, like all the other Ministries, is a critical component in the development of the country. But the idea of having new digital-type processes and associated with the way these Ministries are run means that we try to run as lean as possible, meaning that a lot of the positions that we have that are established would have within them different roles as compared to a normal Ministry. So the idea is not that you are going get a lot of volume by having significantly—a very large membership. It is really in terms of having the correct people in the correct positions to be able to achieve the strategic mandate.

Mr. Padarath: Minister.

Hon. Bacchus: So I do not foresee significant expansion of the establishment at this time.

Mr. Padarath: Minister, what you have described there is fitting for the digital transformation in that this Ministry is more like an administrator.

Mr. Chairman: Question or a comment?

Mr. Padarath: No. We can move onto the other line Item, please.

Mr. Chairman: Item 002, National Information and Communication Technology. Item 003, Access Centre page 418; Item 004, Information and Communication Technology Division, Sub-Head 03, Minor Equipment Purchases page 419; Item 001, General Administration; Item 003, Access Centre, Item 0—Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Yes. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Item 003, Access Centres?

Mr. Padarath: 003, Access Centres.

Mr. Chairman: Sure. Proceed.

Mr. Padarath: Can the hon. Minister give us an indication of the location of the access centres that will be subject to repairs in fiscal 2022.

Hon. Bacchus: Did you say subject to repairs?

Mr. Padarath: Yes. Under—sorry. Under line Item 02/003/21, Repairs and Maintenance.

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister?

Hon. Bacchus: Specifically with respect to the zero count?

Mr. Padarath: Sorry?

Hon. Bacchus: Are you referring specifically to the zero count? I am not seeing—this is Item 21?

Mr. Padarath: Line Item 21. Yeah. Repair and Maintenance to Buildings under Access Centres.

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister, we are on page 418.

Hon. Bacchus: Right.

Mr. Chairman: Right. We are at 003, Access Centres and line Item 21, Repairs and Maintenance - Buildings. Not so, Member?

Mr. Padarath: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Right. There we are.

Hon. Bacchus: Yeah.

Mr. Padarath: Mr. Chair, in the interest of time, if the hon. Minister will give the undertaking to provide it in writing?

Hon. Bacchus: Sure.

Mr. Padarath: Sure. Can I follow with two similar questions, Mr. Chair?

Mr. Chairman: Proceed.

Mr. Padarath: Could the Minister indicate to what extent, in the same line Item, the sum covers the need to implement COVID-19 protocols within these access centres seeing that it is community based. And the third one would be, what unique services will these access centers provide in comparison to those already existing at the TTConnect service centres? Or whether or not they are being subsumed? Or is it a duplication?

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Bacchus: So on the second question as it relates to COVID-19 guidelines, these access centres are manned centres, they are not unmanned places. And included in the staffing is janitorial services and those janitorial services include the facilities to address all of the protocols as it relates to COVID as they stand now and those that will come in the future as they will change. The third piece and just to be clear again, Sir, the third piece of the question?

Mr. Padarath: The third part of the question—

Hon. Bacchus: Services.

Mr. Padarath:—had to do with the TTConnect service centres, whether or not it is being subsumed. These access centres with the service centres or it is a

duplication in programme?

Hon. Bacchus: It is not necessarily a duplication. The access centres—remember when we are trying to address the use of the digital technology across all of the population, we will try to raise the level of digital literacy for everyone. But for those people who are, for some reason having issues with it, or for some people who just choose to want to be able to access digital services having other people assist them, these centres are the places to go and do that.

So it is not just like the original centre, the TTConnect centres where you go and you, you know, you go to process your stuff, you will do it. In this there are people there to help you with training. There is equipment available there for you if do not have your own equipment. There is training staff are able to do that for you while you are there. As we expand more digital services, all will be available similar to what you heard from other Ministers here in terms of their digitalization programmes where basically all you need to access it is access to broadband. So it is training, you can get training there. You can go to access services there. You can go to use devices there, so it is a very model to the original model of TTConnect.

Mr. Padarath: Okay, Minister. A follow-up to your answer, I know the Minister of Finance dealt a bit with digital goods and services in his budget presentation. Digital goods and services, and the Minister of Finance indicated, it is an area that we will be looking at. Can the hon. Minister indicate whether or not these access centres will be used as a platform for the creation of these digital goods and services? And that ties into which communities, in the first question that I asked, it will affect.

Hon. Bacchus: So the creation of digital goods and services is a very broad-based area, and it is not just in the digital society piece. It entails really the digital

economy piece. So that creation of digital services is associated with partnerships that we have to do with the private sector and everyone else. It is associated—no, not everyone else. It is partnerships with the private sector, international organizations, partnerships with existing people here, the TTCSI, the Chambers of Commerce, et cetera. And the idea is, we are going to create the necessary ecosystem and that is contained in the budget numbers—

Mr. Padarath: Sure. Minister, I understand that.

Hon. Bacchus:—to do that.

Mr. Padarath: The point that I am trying to get at is, would these access centres be utilized for that purpose? And how would it be utilized for that purpose?

Hon. Bacchus: What I am saying to you is that, they can be but it is not limited to the access centres.

Mr. Padarath: Okay. It is not limited.

Hon. Bacchus: Anywhere where broadband is available and you have access to the ecosystems that we will create, will be the platform on which you can create and build services for yourself or for export.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much. Minister, I just want to get it clear. With respect to the access centres and the TTConnect existing centres, both will be operating together?

Hon. Bacchus: They exist—they coexist today. They coexist today.

Mr. Hosein: They will coexist together.

Hon. Bacchus: Yeah. They continue to coexist.

Mr. Hosein: Okay.

Hon. Bacchus: For sometime until we do a rationalization to define if we want to

merge them into one or not. But for now they coexist.

Mr. Hosein: Because I can, as the Member for Princes Town alluded to, there can in fact be some duplication of services from both centres, and in the guava season, I mean, we want to save as much as we can and have high efficiency.

Hon. Bacchus: The access centres primarily will focus them in the under-served areas. So, while you would find that the TTConnect centres exist in the urban areas, you will find them in cities and towns and so on, the access centres we put them in the under-served areas because that is actually where the greatest need is for people to be able to start to access digital services from a training standpoint, from a utilization standpoint. So that is the plan. So the question about the locations and so on, well I guess you will see that in that when you see where the access centres are. And we will continue along that trend.

Mr. Chairman: Item 004, Information and Communication Technology Division.
Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you. Mr. Chair, with respect to Information Communication Technology I will stand on line Item 15: Repairs and Maintenance. Could the hon. Minister indicate whether or not the Ministry of Digital Transformation has an existing website at this time?

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Bacchus: As an independent website specifically labelled the Ministry of Digital Transformation, the answer for that is no. It is still under development.

Mr. Padarath: The answer is, no.

Hon. Bacchus: The answer is no. It is still under development.

Mr. Padarath: And how long has this Ministry been operating, Minister?

Hon. Bacchus: How long has the Ministry been in existence?

Head 82 Ministry of Digital Transformation (cont'd)

Mr. Padarath: Yes.

Hon. Bacchus: The Ministry has been in existence since in July the 12th.

Mr. Padarath: And the Ministry's name is Digital Transformation?

Hon. Bacchus: The Ministry's name is the Ministry of Digital Transformation.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Item 001: Regional Bodies, Item 002: Commonwealth Bodies, Item 003: United Nations Organizations page 420. Item 09: Other Transfers, Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises.

Hon. Members, we will move on to the *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*. So we are going to the new book. 03: Trinidad and Tobago Telecommunications Authority and we are on page 537. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure page 7. Item 01: General Administration page 537. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, Item 001: General Administration page 538, Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Item 007: Households, Item 09: Other Transfers.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme* and we are now going to another book, Development Programme. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme Consolidated Fund page 177. Page 177 and I recognize the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Minister, line Item under Administrative Services 003: computerization of the Minister Digital Transformation \$5 million. Could you just enlighten us as to what that project is about? It is computerization of the

Ministry itself?

Hon. Bacchus: It is. So the Ministry as it stands is being built and as such will all of the digital infrastructure associated with the creation of a digital Ministry is being created. I recognize the question that went previously, not that I want to go back to the Head but in the building out of the infrastructure things like the websites and so on will be created. It is just that. So the establishment of the digital infrastructure is what this is for.

Mr. Lee: And how long do you envisage that project will take for that, for your Ministry?

Hon. Bacchus: Well, it obviously has to be finished as quickly as possible but the idea with this is that we—remember the infrastructure and the structure itself, meaning HR resources are specific to the facilitation of the mandate for the actual achievement of the strategic objectives. So as we have also prioritized the projects that we want to execute, we will also prioritize the way in which we build the Ministry to ensure that happens. I guess the answer I was trying to give you is that, this does not have to be completed for the Ministry to be up and running and functional, is what I am saying. But it will be finished within the fiscal. Obviously, it will months to do this. The bigger problem is not under this line. It is under the infrastructure of the building itself.

Mr. Lee: Yeah. I know you are a new Ministry. And just for my own appreciation, where is your Ministry located? I know it used to be part of public admin but are you all still within that public admin? I do not know. What is your new location if someone was to look for you or try to find you?

3.45 p.m.

Hon. Bacchus: So we are still within the confines of where we were within the

Ministry of Public Administration in the NALIS building. We, of course, have been assigned new facilities within the Waterfront.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: The Member for Pointe-a-Pierre dealt with the question. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Minister, dovetailing out of my original question, the computerization of your Ministry, I see a new project for \$15 million for the Digital Society. How long that project is supposed to last, and if that \$15 million is sufficient for this project?

Hon. Bacchus: The Digital Society is a programme, so it is a number of projects. It is a journey as well. The idea is, and this really pertains to, and I alluded to some of it earlier, it pertains to increasing the—it is societal things. Increasing the level of digital literacy for everyone in the society if we want to be able to partake. This is the no-one-left-behind thesis. So there are training components to that. There is the increase of the type of access that you have in Wi-Fi the TT Wi-Fi Programme.

You would have heard people saying, well, when would this end, when has it started. That programme is also included in there. But just think about it, what was sufficient Wi-Fi for a piece just previously, or for any service that was done previously to COVID is now inadequate simply because of the demands of the services that you want and so on. Therefore, that is included inside of that. The increased broadband to underserved areas is increasing. So, the idea is, is there an end? Probably. Is it a defined end that we will finish it at the end of this fiscal? This will go on for some time, as the needs of the customers change. So, we will do what we can, and we have an outlined piece of what we are doing, the number

of locations, the number of transport hubs, the amount of people who will want to try to train and upscale both in terms of just basic upscaling for the society and also for higher levels of that, the increasing access centres, all of that is covered under the Digital Society Programme.

Mr. Lee: One final question as we continue, do you have a business strategy for your Ministry?

Hon. Bacchus: If there is a—?

Mr. Lee: Do you have a strat plan for your Ministry?

Hon. Bacchus: Oh, certainly.

Mr. Chairman: Members, one second. Again Member, we are going into operation and policy, but I will give the Minister the opportunity to answer.

Mr. Lee: No, I differ—

Mr. Chairman: No, I will give him the opportunity.

Mr. Lee: No, it is okay.

Mr. Chairman: Proceed.

Mr. Lee: The Minister answered the question.

Hon. Bacchus: It is interesting. It would be very difficult to build out a structure, prioritize a list of projects, and not have it aligned to a plan or a strategy—to have it aligned to a strategy. So, yes we do have, just to answer the question as per your permission, Sir.

Mr. Padarath: Yes, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, line Item 003, and I am asking this because the last IDB report on technology use in Trinidad and Tobago across the public service lamented that in every Ministry there seems to be different software and programmes that were being used. The question that I have is, seeing that the IDB has identified this as a deficiency, would this Ministry with this line

Head 82 Ministry of Digital Transformation (cont'd)

Item be harmonizing across all state institutions, all Ministries, the same software and programmes that are used in every Ministry? And that is why I made the point earlier about being like an administrator across the public service. Is this the intention, and is work being done geared towards this?

Hon. Bacchus: So, the Ministry of Digital Transformation cannot achieve all of its goals on its own. All of the Ministries, and you would have noticed it in the contributions from other people's, other Members to the Committee, that all of the Ministries still have their own aspirations and still have requirements to do in this build for digital government. What the Ministry of Digital Transformation will do is to ensure that those things are aligned, prioritized, and harmonized, so that the exact situation that you are speaking about does not—one, stops; and two, we reverse it where applicable. Not all things are to be shared across all Ministries. Some things are to remain independent, even if it is the same programme it still has to remain independent. The Judiciary would be a good example of that, it is not part of the Government.

Mr. Padarath: Sure. Minister, I do not mean in terms of access. What I meant, in terms of the actual software and programmes that would be utilized across Ministries, in terms of whether there will be a uniformity, not necessarily access from one Ministry to the other.

Hon. Bacchus: No, again, maybe you did not get it. The idea is, so three Ministries could be using Microsoft suite. They are using the same software, but they have them as separate engagements with Microsoft. What the Ministry will do is harmonize that so you get the economies of scale, and that we are able to put it into the necessary infrastructure to provide for the security and the right amount of access, as well as the reduction in the operating measures. So the answer to that is,

yes. What I was saying though, is that is not going to be for every individual item of sort.

Mr. Padarath: I understand.

Mr. Chairman: Infrastructure Development Fund, page 255. Page 255, same book. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, page 255.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 82 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, hon. Minister. Thank you, Permanent Secretary, and all the senior technocrats from Digital Transformation Ministry. Thanks for coming. Thank you.

Head 31: Ministry of Public Administration, \$945,774,265.

Mr. Chairman: Welcome to the hon. Minister of Public Administration, to your Permanent Secretary and again to the members of the senior executive of the Public Administration Ministry. I will now invite the hon. Minister of Public Administration to make a brief opening remark not exceeding five minutes. Madam Minister.

Hon. West: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good day to Members and the members of the listening and viewing public. The Ministry of Public Administration is charged with the task of public service modernization, which involves partnering with other government Ministries and agencies to modernize the human resource management structures and systems, public officers' skills, office accommodation and service delivery processes. The core divisions of the Ministry are: The Public Management Consulting Division, the Public Service Academy, Property and Real Estate Services Division and the Modernization and Service Improvement Division.

MPA is guided by *Vision 2030* theme II, Delivering Good Governance and

Service Excellence, and plays a key role in meeting two of the goals. The public Service will have modern, effective and efficient management systems, and the public service delivery will be customer-focused. Our work touches on all of government. We provide services to other Ministries and Departments, and support them in their transformation of people, processes and facilities, to allow them to better serve the public in a more efficient, effective and comfortable manner.

Our focus for 2022 will be continuation and hopefully completion of the Ministry's digitalization programme, digitalization and other training to support the digitalization thrust of the Government; introduction of resources to manage the change it is required to achieve the digitalization; continuation of the rollout of a Public Sector Performance Management System Project; and the optimization of IHRIS towards improving human resource management across the public service. MPA is focused on our transition to a modern, agile and effective public service. Mr. Chair, my team and I stand ready to answer Members' questions. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Madam Minister.

Question proposed: That Head 31 stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$945,774,265 for Head 31, Ministry of Public Administration is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. So Members, we are on page 204 of the Recurrent Expenditure booklet, Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration, and I recognize the Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, Line Item 001, and it is

just really out of curiosity that I am asking this, seeing that the Ministry of Digital Transformation came just before you, whether or not the both Ministries share the same Permanent Secretary, because I noticed the officer next to you is the same person who sat there earlier? Is it right now both digital transformation and public admin share the same PS?

Hon. West: At the moment. A PS has been identified but has not yet commenced the operation in the Ministry of Digital Transformation, so during the transition we are sharing the same PS.

Mr. Chairman: Item 005: Property and Real Estate Management Services; Item 006, Public Management Consulting Division, page 205; Item 007, Public Service Academy. Sub-Head 02, Goods and Services, page 206. Item 001, General Administration; Item 003, National Information and Communication Technology Centre (ICT) Secretariat, page 207; Item 005, Property and Real Estate Management Services, pages 207 to 208, and I recognize the Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, line Item: Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage. Would the hon. Minister be kind enough to provide to us the number of rentals, the total cost? Whether it is commercial use? All with commercial use, sorry. Who are the owners and which Ministry it is rented to?

Hon. West: Mr. Chair, I can provide that response in writing subsequent to today.

Mr. Padarath: Okay. Similarly, on the last occasion the hon. Minister was here in the House, or the last time the Standing Finance Committee met, the Minister indicated under this line Item that there were several outstanding lease agreements that were to be signed with the Ministry and rent—on landlords, sorry. Can the

hon. Minister indicate if there are any outstanding leases to be signed, or whether or not these leases have been signed?

Hon. West: Yes, Chair. There are in fact leases outstanding to be signed. I have tasked the legal department with expediting and completing any leases that are outstanding, so they are working diligently in getting that done. You would also see in one of the Votes that we do have an intention to increase the complement of staff in the legal unit which will assist in that—in the completion of that exercise.

4.00 p.m.

Mr. Padarath: Can we ask you to give the undertaking, hon. Minister, that you would provide to us the ones that are outstanding?

Hon. West: In providing the list of the rentals, we can indicate where there are leases that are not executed at this point, yes.

Mr. Padarath: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Through you, Madam Minister, line Item 21. I see there is a \$21 million increase. Can you explain the rationale? Under the 2022 Estimate.

Hon. West: Yes. We currently have amounts outstanding to UDeCOTT which maintains both the International Waterfront and the Government Plaza. So we need to settle those outstanding amounts and we want to ensure that maintenance going forward is properly effected. So we sought and received an increase from the Minister to address both of those issues.

Dr. Ragbir: So basically, it is the settlement of arrears.

Hon. West: Some of it is settlement of arrears and some of it has to do with improving the way we maintain our buildings going forward.

Dr. Ragbir: All right. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Member.

Mr. Hosein: Just—I am on 08: Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage. Minister, just to be clear, with respect to one of the questions that the Member for Princes Town asked, when you provide the list, can you just provide whether or not all the buildings have the necessary Town and Country approval, especially for commercial use by the Ministries and if any of those buildings do not have the necessary approval for commercial use?

Hon. West: Mr. Chair, there is a statutory requirement and Government policy that we secure approvals on all buildings before we rent them, so I can indicate that to the Members. In terms of providing the full list of what he is requiring, while the Ministry has no difficulty in doing that, I will alert the Chamber to the fact that we are currently in the process of digitalizing our PRES D records. And so, for those that are not yet digitalized, this will take some time to pull all the information that is being requested.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: I would just like to remind the hon. Minister also that this information has already been provided in the past when I sat in another place. So I do not think it might be very difficult to just update and pull up the appropriate records for the rentals in respect to the public service.

Mr. Chairman: Well—

Hon. West: I gave the undertaking already, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: The Minister give the necessary undertaking. Item 006: Public

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Head 31 Ministry of Public Administration (cont'd)

Management Consulting Division; Item 007: Public Service Academy, pages 208 and 209; Item 015: Strategic Services Division; Item 020: Modernization and Service Improvement Division; Item 021: Information and Communication Technology Services Division, page 210.

Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration; Item 003: National Information and Communication Technology; Item 005: Property and Real Estate Management Services, page 211; Item 007: Public Service Academy. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 001: Regional Bodies; Item 002: Commonwealth Bodies, 212; Item 003: United Nations Organizations; Item 007: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers; Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises on page 213.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. So we are in the Development Programme book and we are going to page 7-7; page 77. Consolidated Fund. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Infrastructure Development Fund. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 31 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Madam Minister. Thank you, Permanent Secretary and all the senior executives of the Ministry of Public Administration. Do have a safe afternoon.

Members, we will be going to Head 04: Industrial Court in a couple of minutes.

[MRS. ANNISSETTE-GEORGE *in the Chair*]

Madam Chairman: Okay, Members, we are about to continue. Head 04:

Industrial Court.

Head 04: Industrial Court, \$22,855,000.

Madam Chairman: I will now invite the Attorney General to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes. Attorney General.

Hon. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the Industrial Court is well known to each and every person in Trinidad and Tobago and now stands at the cusp of significant reform in terms of its digitization programme, in terms of its move towards services of the type that we now see rolled out at the other courts in our countries, including the High Court and the District Courts as we refer the magistracies as.

The developments have been, of course, challenged during the course of the last year as a result of the pandemic, but most commendably, the efforts of the President and the Judges of the Industrial Court have been to rise to the challenge in the face of these very difficult times. As Attorney General, with responsibility for coordinating some of the services that are resident at that particular court, I look forward in the coming year to encouraging the growth and further build out. I ask you to note, Madam Chair, as we did with the Judiciary, that at the mid-year we proposed to meet the matters which we could not calculate in precise form at the mid-year expenditure in respect to some of the Heads that would show a variance between the last year and this year.

So we already had discussions with the Minister of Finance in relation to that and it is immediately the expectation that we will treat with those at the mid-year. I make myself available to answer any questions that my colleagues may have in Standing Finance Committee.

Question proposed: That Head 04 stand part of the Schedule.

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Bill, 2020
Head 04 Industrial Court (cont'd)

2021.10.12

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$22,855,000 for Head 04: Industrial Court, is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*.

We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. We are at page 17. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: South Office; Item 003: Tobago. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households.

Hon. Members, we will not move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme* and we are going to the Development Programme book for those estimates. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme. Consolidated Fund, we are at page 5. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 04 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you AG. Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Registrar and the other representatives from the Industrial Court.

We now go on to Tax Appeal Board. Okay. So we are at Head 09: Tax Appeal Board and we will be using the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. We are starting on page 44 and we also will be using the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*, we will be on page 12.

Head 09: Tax Appeal Board, \$4,598,980.

Madam Chairman: I will now invite the Attorney General to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes. AG.

Hon. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, it is with pleasure that I make this brief opening statement. Madam Chair, the Tax Appeal Board, in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General, we have in fact engaged in a significant amount of proposal for reform. We have a draft Bill ahead of us to better improve the processes at the Tax Appeal Court.

4.15 p.m.

That includes very much similar systems to that installed in the High Court. We are looking at the full digitalization platform. We are looking at the plant to machinery and processes in that particular court. This is one of the significant courts for this country as it is a significant generator of revenue and in dispute resolution. Obviously, Madam Chair, this is an entity which has a correlation to the development and implementation of the Revenue Authority insofar as appeals coming from that arena, coming out of the reformation of those particular entities that Customs and in this case the Board of Inland Revenue will have intersection at the Tax Appeal Court. I wish to express my gratitude to the head of that court and to the judges who sit in constant fashion right throughout this pandemic for the work that they been engaged in. I open myself to questions that my colleagues may have.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, AG.

Question proposed: That Head 09 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$4,598,980 for Head 09: Tax Appeal Board is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the follow Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 01: Personnel

Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I refer the Committee to line Item 08: Vacant Posts - Salaries & C.O.L.A. (without incumbents). Mr. AG, can you kindly advise why you think given the explanation you provided earlier in your introduction that this was such an important court, and especially given the initiatives that you are taking going forward increasing the mandate of the court itself, why you think \$125,000 increase—I note that there was none in 2020, none in 2021, but I remember that in 2019 the Chairman of the court at that point in time had indicated that there were already shortages and now we have vacant posts and salaries in a situation you are increasing by \$125,500 and you have just indicated that you are increasing your mandate of the court. Why do you think that this is a sufficient allocation?

Hon. Al-Rawi: I thank the Member for the question. This is directed to the fact that there are two additional members added to the court for the first time recently, and in those circumstances there is a direct correlation between the figure and the number of persons. Until the legislation is passed because we have a draft Bill up and running which creates further expansion of the court, until that is in gear we will not have the expansion that we are looking for in the figures as reflected. I omitted to say that at the mid-year we will be treating with this. Under the rubric that the Ministry of Finance operates by, the Cabinet Note will be taken for the expansion of the court, its processes, its digitalization, the number of members. It will also involve the creation of further line Items, et cetera. So this is in fact a work in progress which we expect to come within a matter of months before the Cabinet, and certainly the reforms that we intend to the legislation will come to the Parliament. So in answer in summary, this is relative to the two positions there. We

could not put in positions beyond the two positions.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, hon. AG. Just for clarification again, you would have a plan in place which you propose to implement within months as you just described. Are you saying then that you will then come to the Parliament to ask for additional resources so that therefore this increase here does not reflect your true proposed expenditure for 2022?

Hon. Al-Rawi: That is correct.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you. I refer to line Item 08 again. Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage. I note a significant drop in the allocation. Minister, is this because you are planning to move to the Waterfront?

Hon. Al-Rawi: This is—you have spotted the Item well. This is in respect of rental and we are at the cusp of having the Ministry of Public Administration look at what appropriate accommodation looks like. So we put a figure which is short of \$1.6 million at this point. That represents rental. If we do not meet the timing, we will come to the Minister of Finance in the mid-year. We can have virements arranged to cover this cost in the meanwhile, but the intention is to look at accommodation as we grow the court into a larger footprint.

Mr. Tancoo: But at this point in time, as at today, at the start of fiscal 2022 you in current occupation of rental premises. Is this correct?

Hon. Al-Rawi: That is correct.

Mr. Tancoo: And that fee would have been closer to 2.295 million which is what it has been last year and the year before that.

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Head 09 Tax Appeal Board (cont'd)

2021.10.12

Hon. Al-Rawi: Yep.

Mr. Tancoo: Do you envisage then an almost immediate movement from where you are today?

Hon. Al-Rawi: So let us deal with the mischief which is apparent. There is a shortfall of \$1.692520 attributable to rent. That figure can be vired by permission and approval under standard operating procedures by the hand of the Minister of Finance, and while we look at the accommodation aspects we can attend to that. So this is a specific amount that we can calculate. It can be remedied not only at the mid-year but by way of approval from the Ministry of Finance under virement.

Mr. Tancoo: So just to clarify again, so you still propose at the mid-year to seek additional funding as such is required?

Hon. Al-Rawi: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Services. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Household. Hon. Members we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme - Consolidated Fund. We are at page 12. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 09 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, AG. Thank you Minister. Thank you Registrar and the other representatives from the Tax Appeal Board.

Head 12: Public Service Appeal Board.

Head 12: Public Service Appeal Board, \$2,648,000.

Madam Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of Finance to make a brief

opening statement for a maximum of five minutes. Minister.

Hon. Imbert: Certainly, Madam Chairman. The Public Service Appeal Board is a form of dispute resolution designed to mitigate or minimize actions in courts that derive from disagreement or grievances of respective decisions of the Public Service Commission. So the purpose of the Public Service Appeal Board like the Tax Appeal board and other alternative dispute resolutions mechanism, although this is quite similar to a Court of Superior jurisdiction, it is designed to be the first step in the process of appeal against a decision from of the Public Service Commission. The Commission is comprised of five members currently headed by a retired Court of Appeal Judge.

Question proposed: That Head 12 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon Members, the sum of \$2,648,000 for Head 12: Public Service Appeal Board is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. We are at page 52.

Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Households.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 12 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Madam Registrar.

So Members, we have come to the end of the work programme for the day. I want to thank you all for your participation and cooperation. I want to thank the Director of Budgets who has been with us for the entire day—

Appropriation (Financial Year 2021)
Bill, 2020
Head 12 Public Service (cont'd)

2021.10.12

Mr. Imbert: And the Deputy Director.

Madam Chairman:—and the Deputy Director of Budgets. The Standing Finance Committee is suspended to Wednesday, October 13, 2021, at 10.00 a.m. Do reach home safely and enjoy the remainder of your afternoon and evening.

4.29 p.m.: *Standing Finance Committee suspended.*