

Public Hearing Summary – Twelfth Meeting

Wednesday February 15, 2023

Inquiry Subject:

Examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the Children’s Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (CATT) for the financial years 2014 to 2018.

Committee Members:

The following Committee Members were present for the meeting:

- Mr. Davendranath Tancoo, MP - Chairman
- Ms. Jearlean John - Vice-Chairman
- Ms. Charisse Seepersad - Member
- Mr. Adrian Leonce, MP - Member
- Mr. Roger Monroe - Member

Witnesses who appeared:

Auditor General’s Department (AGD)

- Mr. Gary Peters - Assistant Auditor General
- Mr. Desmond Noel - Audit Director

Office of the Prime Minister-Gender and Child Affairs (OPM-GCA)

- Mr. Vijay Gangapersad - Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
- Ms. Abeni James - Senior Project Manager

Children’s Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (CATT)

- Mrs. Sharon Morris-Cummings - Director (Ag.)
- Mrs. Rhonda Gregoire-Roopchan - Deputy Director, CARE Services
- Mrs. Elizabeth Lewis - Deputy Director, Legal and Regulatory Services (Ag.)
- Mr. Steve Mulrain - Finance Manager

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Key Topics Discussed:

1. The mandate and vision of the CATT;
2. The proclamation of key legislation regarding the Authority's mandate in 2015;
3. The outsourcing of the audit of the CATT's financial statements to a private external auditor, with the approval of the AGD, from FY 2014 to FY 2016;
4. The status of progress in the AGD's audit of the CATT's financial statements for FY 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020;
5. The CATT's position within the wider child protection system and the need for a collaborative inter-agency approach among stakeholders in the system;
6. The increasing complexity of the Authority's work and the steps taken to address this through enhanced monitoring and evaluation in the Authority's 2022-2025 Strategic Plan;
7. The timeline for full implementation of the 2022-2025 Strategic Plan by November 2024;
8. The strengthening of the operations of the Authority as part of the action plan for an enhanced child protection system developed by an Inter-Agency Taskforce and approved by Cabinet in October 2022;
9. The CATT's budget for FY 2023 and the gradual increases in the Authority's Government Subvention since FY 2015;
10. Government responsiveness to the Authority's funding requests and the timing of the release of subventions by the OPM-GCA;
11. The funding received by the CATT from Multinational Agencies such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Authority's goal to increase funding from such sources;
12. The CATT's high staff turnover and need for increased staffing given the higher than anticipated level of work under the Authority's purview;
13. The staff rationalisation initiatives carried out by the Board of Directors to strengthen staffing;
14. The Authority's new organisational structure, approved by the Board in June 2022;
15. The anticipated filling of the position of Authority CEO under the new organisational structure by April 2023;
16. The obstacles to staff retention at the Authority due to comparatively low remuneration levels and the compensation assessment being conducted in this regard based on the new organisational structure;
17. The challenges associated with staff burn out at CATT and the measures implemented to address these issues via the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP);
18. The CATT's processes for identifying families in need of assistance with caring for children;
19. The process to procure software for submission and review of reports of child abuse;
20. The challenges faced in incorporating digital solutions into the reporting process and the possible solutions to those challenges;
21. The problem of insufficient information and data available to the CATT for reviewing cases and the efforts made to overcome this challenge;

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22. The implementation of the Child Protection Information Management System (CIPMS) with support from UNICEF; and
23. The Authority's public information campaigns on issues such as improving public attitudes towards fostering children and associated advertising and promotion expenses for FY 2022 and FY 2023.

View the Hearing:

The hearing can be viewed on our YouTube page via the following link:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9CpHgMN3DI>

PAC Secretariat
February 15, 2023