



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Ministry of Youth Development and National Service

MYDNS: 36/3/3 Vol. III

January 18, 2022

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

Dear Mr. Caesar

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

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

Submitted as requested.

Sincerely


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

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Ministry of Youth Development and National Service

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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