

COOPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION
OF THE NINTH PARLIAMENT 2006 -2011**

FIFTH PERIODIC REPORT

OF THE

PARLIAMENTARY SECTORAL COMMITTEE

ON

SOCIAL SERVICES

RESOLUTION NO. 19 OF 2003

PERIOD:

MARCH 2010 – APRIL 2011

**PRESENTED TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMITTEE**

ON

28TH APRIL, 2011

DECLARATION

The Fifth Periodic Report to the National Assembly on the status of the work of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Social Services (PSCSS), pursuant to the requirements of paragraph 4(ix) of Resolution 19 passed by the National Assembly on May 15, 2003.

1.0 BACKGROUND

The Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Social Services (PSCSS)

- 1.1 The PSCSS is one of the four (4) Sectoral Committees which was established by Resolution No.19 of May 2003 of the National Assembly of the Eighth Parliament. Resolution No.19 gives the effect to the Constitutional provision of Article 119 B of the Constitution of Guyana.
- 1.2 The Committee has responsibility for the oversight of the Executive and the authority to determine areas of government activity for scrutiny.
- 1.3 During the period April 2010 to March 2011 of the First Session, the PSCSS continued with the execution of oversight of the Executive. Also, during this period, the Committee made significant strides in its work since both Members of the Committee and Executive acquired a better understanding of the role of the Committee within the context of Parliamentary Oversight.
- 1.4 This report highlights the issues and concerns raised, the suggestions discussed during the meetings with Ministers and Public Officials, and the visits made to Ministries and Agencies. The recommendations herein emanated largely from the Committee's examination of the information obtained during its interactions with the Members of the Executive and the staff of Ministries and Agencies, which fall under the purview of the Committee.

2.0 Membership of the Committee

- 2.1 During the period April 2010 to March 2011, the Membership of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Social Services constituted the following: seven permanent Members and two Alternate Members

2.2 Members nominated on 14th December, 2006

Members of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (P.P.P. /C.)

Mrs. Indranie Chandarpal, M.P., Chief Whip	Member
Mr. Norman Whittaker, M.P.	Member
Mrs. Shirley Edwards, J.P., M.P.	Member
Mrs. Philomena Sahoye-Shurry, C.C.H., J.P, M.P.	Member
Mr. Albert Atkinson, J.P., M.P.	Alternate Member

Members of the People's National Congress/Reform-1 Guyana (P.N.C./R.-1G)

Ms. Anna Ally, M.P.	Member
Mrs. Volda Lawrence, M.P.	Member
Ms. Cheryl Sampson, M.P.	Alternate Member

Member of the Alliance For Change-A.F.C.

Mrs. Latchmin Budhan-Punalall, M.P.	Member
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Change in Membership

On the 8th April, 2010, the Committee of Selection nominated Ms. Cheryl Sampson as a Member and Mrs Volda Lawrence as an Alternate Member.

3.0 Election of Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson

At the elections held on 26th March, 2010, Mrs. Indranie Chandarpal and Ms. Amna Ally were elected Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, respectively.

4.0 MEETINGS OF THE COMMITTEE

4.1 The Committee agreed to convene statutory meetings twice per month. During the period of reporting, the Committee convened twelve (12) statutory meetings. The numbers and dates of the meetings are as follows:

Statutory Meetings

Meetings	Dates of Meetings
31 st Meeting	26 th March, 2010
32 nd Meeting	9 th April, 2010
33 rd Meeting	23 rd April, 2010
34 th Meeting	7 th May, 2010
35 th Meeting	21 st May, 2010
36 th Meeting	11 th June, 2010
37 th Meeting	2 nd July, 2010
38 th Meeting	23 rd July, 2010
39 th Meeting	12 th November, 2010
40 th Meeting	14 th January, 2011
41 st Meeting	4 th March, 2011
42 nd Meeting	8 th April, 2011

5.0 FUNCTIONS OF THE COMMITTEE

5.1 The work of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Social Services, during the reporting period, was consistent with its overall mandate and the list of functions stipulated in Resolution No.19 of May 2003. (Please see Appendix 1). The Work Programme of the Committee for the period April 2010 to March 2011 can be found at Appendix 2.

Mandate

5.2 The mandate of the Committee was derived from Paragraph 3 of Resolution No.19 which emphasized that, in the conduct of its scrutinizing function, the sectoral committees were empowered to “examine all policies and administration for each sector to determine whether the execution of government policy is in consonance with the principles of good governance and in the best interest of the people of Guyana”.

5.3 In order to discharge that mandate, the Committee was empowered to scrutinize all areas of government activity as well as to summon Ministers of Government and other public officials to provide information, to answer questions and give evidence.

6.0 COMMITTEE’S AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY

6.1 The Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Social Services has been given responsibility for the oversight of the following sectors and activities:

MINISTRY	RESPONSIBILITY
Culture, Youth and Sport	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Culture 2. Archives, Libraries & Museums 3. Cinemas & Video Censorship 4. National commemoration Committee 5. Youth Affairs 6. Sport
Education	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Primary, Secondary, Technical, Higher Education. 2. Examination Local & Overseas 3. School Feeding 4. Book Distribution
Home Affairs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Maintenance/Public Safety & Order 2. Public Holidays, Road Traffic 3. Immigration 4. Gambling prevention 5. Fire Protection, Prison 6. Marriage licenses 7. Registration of Births/Deaths/Marriages
Labour, Human Services & Social Security	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Children Services 2. Adoption Services 3. Probation/ Welfare 4. Operating an Advice Bureau for Women with Financial, Personal and Legal Problems. 5. Supervision of Government's Social Impact Amelioration Programme 6. Welfare for Senior Citizens 7. Social Security 8. National Relief 9. National Insurance Scheme 10. Co-op Society /Friendly Society 11. Industrial Relations 12. Occupational Health & Safety 13. Statistical Services

	14. Recruitment and Placement
Public Service	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Administrative Organization 2. Public Service Personnel 3. Public Sector Training 4. Public Service Reform 5. Non PSC Administration Matters
Amerindian Affairs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Amerindians' Affairs
Attorney General & Legal Affairs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. General Legal Assistance to the President 2. All Legal matters except where law assigns to another authority. 3. Deeds Registry 4. State Solicitor 5. Public trustee and Official Receiver's Department.
Office of the President	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. National Art Collection
Tourism , Industry and Commerce	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consumer Affairs
Health	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Health Services 2. Primary Health Care 3. Public Hospital 4. Clinics, etc 5. Blood Bank 6. Pharmacy 7. Poison Boards, etc

7.1 The Committee invited the following Officials and Ministers to make oral presentations for the purpose of enlightening its Members on specific aspects of the operation of their Agencies and Ministries.

(i) **Presentation by Representatives from the Ministry Of Human Services and Social Security.**

Mr. Trevor Thomas, Permanent Secretary, Mr. Whenworth Tanner, Director of Social Services and Mrs. Zola Cameron-Lubin, Probation and Social Services Officer, appeared before the Committee on the 33rd Meeting held on the 23rd of April, 2010. They made a presentation on the topic: **"Concerns of Old Age Pensions and the Public Assistance Programme"**

Mr. Trevor Thomas, Permanent Secretary, in an effort to address several issues, provided the following information:

- The appointed Local Boards of Guardians' life span is three (3) years. Members were appointed by the Cabinet, based on the recommendations made by the Ministry.
- Probation and Social Services Officers operated in the ten Administrative Regions in Guyana with the exception of Region No. 9.
- Challenges in Region No. 7 included the difficulty with transportation and inadequate communication in the Hinterland Region.
- Appointment of Board Members was done by an inauguration session in the committee.

- The Ministry would verify that persons were overseas by requesting them to submit their passports or contacting the Immigration Department.
- Birth Certificates were used to verify the list of persons benefiting from public assistance.

At the conclusion of the presentation, questions were asked for the purpose of clarification.

(ii) Presentation by Representatives of the Ministry of Education.

Mr. Roopnarine Tewari, Chief Education Officer (a.g), Mrs. Evelyn Hamilton, Chief Planning Officer and Ms. Jacqueline Simon, Human Resources Manager appeared before the Committee, at the 39th Meeting held on the 12th November, and made a presentation on the topic” **Education Policy with regard to Literacy, Numeracy, punctuality etc and the Health and Family Life Education (H.F.L.E.)”**

The presenters discussed the Ministry’s five (5) year Strategic Plan which covers the period 2008-2013. Some of the major strategic issues addressed in the plan include:

- Strengthening the management system of the Ministry;
- Improving access to a quality and equitable education at the nursery, primary and secondary levels;
- Improving teachers’ education and training;
- Ways of improving literacy , school and classroom environment; and
- Monitoring of the school system

The presenters also provided the following answers in response to concerns raised by Members:

- The Ministry's Policy outlined that teachers could use the native languages in the early years. However, students are also encouraged to learn English since their grade assessments were being done in English.
- Work was being done on the Education Bill which was at the Attorney General's Chamber.
- Two copies of the H.F.L.E. guide were sent to all schools. In addition, teachers who were trained were strictly monitored by the H.F.L.E. Coordinator to ensure that the programme is being implemented properly.
- The Ministry offered waivers and scholarships to teachers who were desirous of pursuing studies in the field of Science.
- The Ministry has a Welfare Department comprising a Welfare Officer, Guidance and Counselling Personnel. These officers examined the attendance and punctuation reports submitted by Head Teachers. Upon examination of the reports, truancy campaigns were often carried out.

8.0 PROGRAMME OF VISITS

8.1 Continuing its programme of visits, the Committee visited the following agencies;

- National Insurance Scheme's Offices in Port Mourant and New Amsterdam, Berbice (7th June, 2010)
- Mr. Norman Whittaker visited the Night Shelter in East La Penitence, Georgetown (25th November, 2010)
- Visit to the Palms (18th February, 2011)
- Follow up visit to the Palms (18th March, 2011)

The details of those visits: the purpose of the visit, concerns/issues raised and recommendations made can be found at Appendix 3.

APPENDIX 1

EIGHT PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA

SECOND SESSION (2002-2003)

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

RESOLUTION NO. 19

WHEREAS Article 119 B of the Constitution provides:

There shall be parliamentary sectoral committees established by the National Assembly with responsibility for the scrutiny of all areas of Government policy and administration including (I) natural resources (ii) economic services (iii) foreign relations and (iv) social services

RESOLVED,

1. The Sectoral Committees shall consist of seven (7) members, four (4) representing the Government and three (3) representing the Opposition. The Government and Opposition are entitled to elect one alternate member each for each Sectoral Committee.

2. The Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of each sectoral committee shall be elected from opposite sides of the National Assembly and would alternate annually with two (2) Sectoral Committees each to be chaired by the Government and Opposition respectively.

3. The committees shall, in the discharge of their scrutinising role, examine all policies and administration, for each sector, to determine whether the execution of government policy is in consonance with the principles of good governance and in the best interest of all the people of Guyana.

4. The committees shall have the authority to:

- i Determine areas of government activity for scrutiny or specific examination;
- ii Request the Minister assigned responsibility for the sector to submit written or oral information, including government documents and records about any specific area of government policy and administration;
- iii Review existing legislation on government policy and administration for any of the sectors;

- iv Summon persons to give evidence, scrutinise government documents, papers and records;
- v Visit any government activity or project in Guyana as agreed and arranged by the Committee;
- vi In the discharge of their mandate, utilise the services of experts, specialists and other sources of advice as they determine;
- vii Establish a timeable for the conduct of their work;
- xviii Make recommendations to the National Assembly on legislation or any other action to be taken on matters falling within their purview;
- ix Submit periodic reports to the National Assembly on their work; and
- x Invite comments, from the Minister assigned responsibility for the sector on their recommendations or reports.

5. The National Assembly, notwithstanding the current work programme of any sectoral committee, may request the committee to give prompt attention to a particular aspect of the policy or administration of the government for a sector

6. The provisions of Standing Order No. 70A shall apply to the Sectoral Committees

AND FURTHER RESOLVED,

7. The Gazetted ministerial responsibilities shall be allocated to each Sectoral Committee in the manner set out in Schedule I.

(Passed by the National Assembly on 15th May, 2003)


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S. E. ISAACS

Clerk of the National Assembly

**S E. ISAACS
CLERK OF THE
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

APPENDIX 2

Work Programme for the Sectoral Committee on Social Services (2010 – 2011)

Responsibility	Ministries/Areas which fall under Committee's purview	Activities	Presentations and Visits	Proposed Time Frame May 2010 to April 2011												
				May	June	July	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr			
<i>Scrutiny of all areas of Government Policy and administration in relation to Social Services</i>	1. Labour Human Services and Social Security	To re-examine old age pension procedures. To examine old age pension procedures with respect to pensioners on vacation overseas	Presentation by representatives of the Ministry	7 th												
		To observe the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • procedures at the Local Offices with regard to claimants; • accommodation and time allocated to each pensioner; 	Visit to NIS Branches in New Amsterdam and Port Moutant	7 th												

Responsibility	Ministries/Areas which fall under Committee's purview	Activities	Presentations and Visits	Proposed Time Frame May 2010 to April 2011											
				May	June	July	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr		
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the availability of fund at Post Offices with regard to payment to pensioners 													
		To examine the programmes / institutions prepared for the mentally-challenged and homeless persons	Visit to Night Shelter Visit to Palms					25 th							
		To examine the functions of the Legal Aid Board and the types of cases presented;	Write the Minister of Human Services												
		To inquire about the modality of legal assistance to persons who are in need.													
		To inquire about the composition and programmes of the Commission for the Elderly											6 th		

Responsibility	Ministries/Areas which fall under Committee's purview	Activities	Presentations and Visits	Proposed Time Frame May 2010 to April 2011											
				May	June	July	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	April		
	2. Ministry of Education	<p>To invite representatives from the Ministry to appear before the Committee to apprise the Committee on the Education Policy regarding literacy, memory health, family life, punctuality among other issues;</p> <p>To inquire about the role of the P.T.A and the performance of the school boards ;</p> <p>To inquire about the programmes prepared for school drop-outs and violence in schools.</p>	<i>Presentation by representatives of the Ministry on the Education Policy</i>						12 th						

Responsibility	Ministries/Areas which fall under Committee's purview	Activities	Presentations and Visits	Proposed Time Frame May 2010 to April 2011											
				May	June	July	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	April		
	3. Ministry of Health	<p>To examine the impact of alcoholism and other substance abuse on society;</p> <p>To inquire about the programmes for persons who are aurally-impaired.</p>	<p><i>Presentation by representatives of the Ministry of Health and Human Services and Social Security</i></p>												
	4. Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport	<p>To make proposals with respect to having a National Dress;</p> <p>To inquire from the Ministry on the status of Youth Training Programmes.</p>	<p><i>Write the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport</i></p>											6 th	

Responsibility	Ministries/Areas which fall under Committee's purview	Activities	Presentations and Visits	Proposed Time Frame May 2010 to April 2011											
				May	June	July	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	April		
	5. Ministry of Home Affairs	To focus on the issue of Late Registration of Births;	<i>Write G.P.O with respect to Policy for the Late Registration of Births Make proposals to the Ministry for persons residing in the Hinterland</i>												26 th
		To focus on the enforcement of Traffic Laws with regard to motorist and noise nuisance offenders;	<i>Write the Minister of Home Affairs encouraging him to be more forceful in the campaign against noise nuisance offenders, taking into consideration the sick and the elderly</i>												26 th

Responsibility	Ministries/ Areas which fall under Committee's purview	Activities	Presentations and Visits	Proposed Time Frame May 2010 to April 2011											
				May	June	July	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	April		
	<p>6. Ministry of Tourism, Industry & Commerce</p>	<p>To examine the standard of products available to consumers with a view to minimize the amount of substandard products, <i>whether locally made or imported</i>, in the Markets;</p> <p>To examine the pricing of Commodities; and</p>	<p><i>Visit to several prisons: New Amsterdam, Ruinveldt and East La Penitence</i></p>												

APPENDIX 3

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1.0 Introduction

On Friday, 7th June, 2010, a delegation of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Social Services visited the National Insurance Scheme's Local Offices in New Amsterdam and Port Mourant.

The purposes of the visits were to observe the operational procedures at the National Insurance Scheme's Local Offices in New Amsterdam and Port Mourant: time allotted to deal with pensioners, accommodation for pensioners, record checks; observe the procedures applicable in dealing with issues of pensioners and claimants; the availability of money at certain Post Offices, the use of birth certificates to verify persons benefiting from public assistance etc. In addition, Members felt that there should be a one-on-one discussion with the staff of the National Insurance Scheme.

1.1 Members

The visiting delegation of the Committee comprised:

Mrs. Indranie Chandarpal, M.P., (P.P.P.C.)	- Chairperson
Mrs. Philomena Sahoye-Shury, C.C.H, J.P., M.P. (P.P.P.C)	- Member
Mrs. Shirley Edwards, M.P. (P.P.P.C)	- Member
Mr. Albert Atkinson, M.P. (P.P.P.C)	- Member
Mr. Norman Whittaker, M.P. (P.P.P.C)	- Member
Mrs. Anna Ally, M.P (P.N.C.R-IG)	- Vice Chairperson
Mrs. Latchmin Budhan-Punalall, M.P. (A.F.C)	-Member

2.0 Operation of the National Insurance Scheme's Offices in New Amsterdam and Port Mourant

2.1 New Amsterdam

The delegation was received by Ms. Marcia Williams, Office Manager, Mr. Michael Patterson, Area Manager and Ms. Dianne Lewis-Baxter, Public Relations Officer. The Committee was divided into two Teams. Team A was assigned to New Amsterdam and Team B was assigned to Port Mourant.

The Team visiting New Amsterdam comprised:

Members

Mrs. Anna Ally-Vice Chairperson

Mrs. Philomena Sahoye-Shury-Member

Mr. Norman Whittaker-Member

Mr. Albert Atkinson-Member

2.2 Highlights on the Operation of the National Insurance Scheme's Local Office in New Amsterdam

The operational procedures of the local office were outlined by the Office Manager, Ms Marcia Williams, as follows:

- The pension date is every first Monday of the month;
- The door is opened at 08:00 hrs for business but pensioners would normally queue from 05:00 hrs to avoid long waiting time;
- They operate with a number system. The Security Guard would give the pensioners a number based on the order in which they arrive: first come first served;
- There are two nurses attached to the local office;
- There is a Medical Advisor who is attached to the N.I.S Offices in Berbice, but visits the office once per month;
- The Branch serves two thousand eight hundred and forty three (2,843) pensioners;
- Pensioners can uplift their pension at the Post Offices and the Commercial Banks;
- Pensioners chose to uplift their pensions at the Local Office since funds were unavailable at some Post Offices;
- Life Certificates can be signed by Officers at the Local Office or by any prominent

person in the district (Berbice);

- The New Amsterdam Local Office serves as the main office in Berbice. All appeals are made at this office and Georgetown;
- Some pensions were paid to the wrong bank account. This problem has been ongoing, for some pensioners, since 2004;
- Unavailability of records of contribution;
- Some employees failed to report cases of disability;
- Some pensioners were unable to receive medical benefits, although they were qualified;
- Some employers failed to pay N.I.S contributions for their employees although their pay slips reflected that N.I.S deductions were made; and
- Years of contribution have been omitted for some claimants.



2.3 Port Mourant

The delegation was received by the Area Manager, Mr. Michael Patterson and the Office Manager, Mrs. Hulda Chung.

The Team visiting Port Mourant comprised:

Members

Mrs. Indranie Chandarpal-Chairperson

Mrs. Shirley Edwards-Member

Mrs. Latchmin Punalall-Member

2.4 Meeting with Members of Staff

After interacting with the pensioners/ claimants, the delegation met with some members of staff of the National Insurance Scheme.



Some of the issues discussed were

- The internal technological database called National Insurance Scheme Management System (NISMS) was ineffective. Disruptions in the technological base resulted in delays;
- Faulty and inadequate computers that delayed the work;
- Receipts were manually produced;
- Inadequate staff;
- The need for staff to be trained;
- The inadequacy of the bandwidth; and
- The user licence provided for only seven seats. Consequently, staff members encountered difficulties when logging on to the system.



Staff's Responses

After listening to the concerns of the pensioners, the staff of the N.I.S. in their response, stated the following:

- Some Post Offices inappropriately used monies, allocated to pay pensioners, to conduct their own transactions;
- The N.I.S. pension payment date and the old age pension payment date was the same at the Post Office. The old age pensioners would be given priority in the payment of the pensions and in some cases N.I.S pensioners were referred to the nearest Local Office;

- The change in the National Bank of Industry and Commerce to Republic Bank has resulted in problems of money being paid to the wrong bank accounts. The General Manager would write the bank to have the matter resolved;
- Persons needed to make contributions in order to receive Disability Benefits; and
- Inspectors from N.I.S. visited companies and businesses and observed that although some companies had several active workers, contributions were only paid for some employees.

3.0 Pensioner's Complaints at New Amsterdam and Port Mourant

The following complaints were made:

- Some pensions were paid to the wrong bank account. This problem has been ongoing, for some pensioners, since 2004;
- Unavailability of records of contribution;
- Some employees failed to report cases of disability;
- Some pensioners were unable to receive medical benefits, although they were qualified;
- Some employers failed to pay their employees' N.I.S contributions although deductions were made from their salaries;
- Years of contribution have been omitted for some claimants;
- Lengthy waiting period;
- Inadequate money to pay pensioners at some Post Offices; and
- Lengthy period to verify contributions.

4.0 Recommendations:

After the visit the Committee met and made the following recommendations:

Improvement to Facilities and Equipment

- Amenities/facilities for the pensioners should be improved;
- A visible sign should be positioned for members of the public to follow; and
- The cashier's quarters at Port Mourant should be extended and an additional cashier should be placed to work in the Pensions Section on the pension date.

Improvement to Equipment

- More computers should be provided for staff;
- Computer records should be updated;
- Bandwidth should be improved;
- The user licence should be increased to thirteen (13) seats; and
- Receipts should be produced electronically.

Improvement in Services

- Organisations/Agencies should work in collaboration with the National Insurance Scheme to verify names and N.I.S. numbers of employees;
- Members of the Board should have a discussion with the Post Master General informing him about the alleged inappropriate use of money allocated to pay N.I.S. pensioners;
- N.I.S. should direct pensioners to other payment outlets in an effort to avoid overcrowding and the lengthy waiting period;
- Contributions should be verified in a timely manner;
- A colour code system should be implemented for the different categories of claimants/pensioners;
- A number system should be implemented to give priority to pensioners who are very old, hypertensive, blind, disabled etc; and
- Defaulting employers, who have failed to pay their employees' contributions, should be fined.

Employees' Concerns

- Senior Officers have voiced several concerns to Members of the Committee: the need to grant duty free concessions.

Report on my visit to the Night Shelter on Thursday, 25th. November, 2010.

- 1) This visit was as a result of a decision taken during the 38th Meeting of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Social Services where member Norman Whittaker was tasked with visiting the Shelter.
- 2) **Purpose of visit.**
To enquire into the operations of the Night Shelter with a view to assessing/determining whether it was fulfilling the purpose of its establishment; what challenges were associated with its operation and the recommendations for addressing these concerns, challenges and improving further the quality of the service provided at the Shelter.
- 3) **Background Information on the Shelter's establishment.**
The Night Shelter opened its doors at 1A Arapaima Street, East Lapentence, on January 08, 2001 under the aegis of the Ministry of Human services and Social Security with the primary objective of providing a temporary home for the homeless. In fact, its mission was determined as "providing itinerant street dwellers with a temporary environment of physical safety, medical and material support and counseling services aimed at arresting social and emotional dysfunctioning".
- 4) **The name Night Shelter is probably a misnomer** as the shelter has been opening its doors day and night to adults of both gender, all races and even to deportees who are temporarily homeless .At the time of my visit there were 22 registered homeless deportees at the Shelter.

The only precondition to acceptance at the Shelter was that the prospective homeless dweller be able bodied and of sound mind. Where he/she was not, such a person would be examined by the Medex at the East Lapentence Health Centre next door and referred to the relevant Institution such as the Palms with the completed medical Report signed by the Medex.

Most of the itinerant dwellers at the Shelter are persons referred from the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation, the Help & Shelter, the Ministry of Human Services & Social Security and even the Prison.

- 5) **There is a basic Intake-Data (Registration) Form** that is completed for each new entrant. This Form provides information on the prospective dweller such as I.D., telephone references which were verified. The Shelter caters for a maximum of 200 persons. At the time of my visit the intake was 180 persons with a ratio of males to females of approximately 4:1 Females are accommodated in a separate building to the males.

6) Dwellers are provided on admission with a locker to secure personal effects such as clothing, and toiletries and each locker is secured with a lock/keys. I noted that while there were enough such lockers for females; those for the men were inadequate because of their larger number. Each dweller is also provided with a toothbrush, toothpaste, soap, toilet paper, mosquito net. From time to time civil minded persons/organizations would donate clothing to the shelter for distribution to the dwellers at the Shelter. Each dweller is responsible for washing his/her own clothes.

7) Other services provided at the Shelter

a) Besides accommodation, dwellers are provided with 3 meals daily. Provision is also made for vegetarians and persons with allergies. In this regard, this type of information is provided at the time of registration by the Dwellers and forwarded to the Kitchen staff for notification. At the time of my visit, the Shelter had contracted the services of 2 Caterers via the tendering process, One caterer provided lunch; while the other provided breakfast / dinner. Meals were delivered in Boxes with the Kitchen Attendant being responsible for its distribution to the dwellers. A daily record is kept of the recipients of these meals.

b) Support Services – welfare, counseling, employment

c) Light Recreational Opportunities – viewing television, playing indoor games such as draughts, chess, dominoes.

d) Church Services are held once per week on Thursdays and is voluntary. Dwellers are also allowed to worship at Churches of their choice on Sundays.

e) There have also been visits from Lifeline Counseling, Heads of Probation Services, the Permanent Secretary of the MHSSS and some NGOs. The Hon. Minister Priya Manickchand also visited recently and held a meeting with the residents present at the time of her visit.

f) Medical services. They are some persons who have been diagnosed with tuberculosis and they have been quarantined in a special section. DOT officers from the MOH visit and ensure they receive and use their treatment every morning.

In the case of medical referrals to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation, the Ministry of Health provides an ambulance service. In fact the Administrator of the Shelter did point out that the Ministry of Health (MOH) has been very supportive.

8) A day in the life of a Night Shelter dweller.

- a) They clean their surroundings which they occupy and also, the Compound in which the Shelter is situated.
- b) use the toilet and washroom services provided; use meals provided
- c) Some go out- seeking work, some go to Charity Homes seeking help; visit relatives/friends; some who have part time employment report for work. The Shelter has been provided with a Minibus from MHSSS with a seating capacity of 14 persons to transport dwellers back to the shelter daily. There are fixed / established pick up points, viz. the Lapenitence, Bourda, Kitty, Stabroek markets. The dwellers are aware of these pick-up points and times. Some use the facility; others walk or use the public minibuses

9) Staffing-

21

Administrator- Mr Harrydat Tilku	Kitchen
Attendant - 2	
Receptionist - 1	Cleaners
-	4
Social Worker 1	Handyman
1	
Stores Supervisor -1	Driver
1	
Orderlies - 9	They help to maintain order; handle disciplinary matters on the ground e.g. fighting

In spite of the presence of the Orderlies, there have been some incidents of violence, theft, narcos drugs being found. In this regard, the East Lapenitence police have been very helpful. Those culpable or suspected of being culpable are arrested, interrogated and where deemed necessary, passed through the Courts.

The Social Worker deals with issues of conflict resolution, family welfare matters, violence/ abuse, personal issues and also help qualified residents to secure jobs, mostly as laborers or security officers.

Other Services provided at the Shelter

- 10) The Shelter assists with public assistance. An officer from the MISSS goes there every Monday to interview and to assist dwellers who qualify to complete the required application form.
 - 11) **Pest Control Personnel** spray in and around the buildings on a monthly basis in an effort to control and to eradicate pests, termites, rodents etc.
 - 12) **Security. There is a Contracted Security Service- United Associates Security Service.** In addition, there are Supervisors for clusters of lodgers. These Supervisors are persons who have been at the Shelter for some time and who have been found to be honest, alert and capable of supervising the activities and behavior of the other dwellers under his/her supervision.
- At my request, I was taken on a tour of the several buildings where male and female dwellers are accommodated. I also visited the Kitchen/Dining area, the recreation and the washing areas. I spoke with the Receptionist, the Social Worker, some of the Orderlies and Cleaners, and the Stores Supervisor.

It is apparent that the Shelter has been delivering on the services it is expected to provide. It should be noted however that there are some dwellers whose close relations are financially/materially able to take care of them but for reasons unexplained do not provide the assistance needed. There needs to be more contact between the Social Worker, such dwellers and their close relation with a view of having the latter assist their relative to be independent and to be reintegrated back into the wider Society.

There are also cases of alcohol and dangerous weapons being found during routine checks by the Administrator and the Orderlies. For this reason much more care, effort and time must be taken when enquiring into the background and character traits of potential dwellers at the Night Shelter.

- I am of the opinion that the duties and responsibilities of the Administrator of the Shelter, and the staff under his supervision are immense and require them to be alert, responsive, enquiring and committed to empathize with and to assist fellow human being, with social problems.

A 3 hour visit, tour and interviews may not be adequate enough to conduct an in-depth assessment and evaluation but it does provide opportunity for one to identify possible areas of weaknesses that need strengthening; strengths and opportunities on which to build and possible threats to successfully attaining the primary goal of the Shelter.

Recommendations

- The shelter should revert to its original purpose of being a facility to accommodate persons in the night rather than a resident facility;
- The bus service should be reintroduced;
- More Social Workers are needed to assist persons at the facility; and
- Security checks should be increased to prevent persons from talking drugs and harmful weapons to the facility.

Mr. Norman A. Whittaker, M.P.

REPORT OF THE DELEGATION OF THE PARLIAMENTARY SECTORAL COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SERVICES (PSCSS) WHICH VISITED THE PALMS GERIATRIC INSTITUTION FOR THE ELDERLEY ON FRIDAY, 18TH OF February, 2011

Introduction

On Friday, 18th of February, 2011 a delegation of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Social Services visited the Palms Geriatric Institution.

The visiting delegation of the Committee comprised:

Mrs. Indranie Chandarpal, Chief Whip, M.P. (P.P.P. /C.)-Chairperson

Mrs. Philomena Sahoye-Shury, M.P. (P.P.P. /C.) -Member

Mrs. Shirley Edwards, M.P. (P.P.P. /C.) -Member

Mr. Norman Whittaker, M.P. (P.P.P. /C.) -Member

Mrs. Latchmin Budhan-Punalall, M.P. (A.F.C.) -Member

Ms. Jocette Bacehus -Clerk of Committees

Mrs. Savitah D'Andrade -Assistant Clerk of Committees

Ms. Candayce Girard -Assistant Clerk of Committees

Ms. Abiola Bazil -Research and Analytical Assistant

The purpose of the visit was to observe the daily operations of the Palms.

Arrival at the Palms

The Delegation arrived at the Palms at 11:15hrs and was received by Mr. Wentworth Tanner, Director of Social Services, Mr. Gobin Singh, Administrator of the Palms and Ms. Allison Adams, Nurse in Charge.

After reciprocal introductions of the Members of the Committee and the staff of the Palms, Mrs. Chandarpal explained the purpose of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Social Services and the specific purpose of the visit.

The Administrator of the Palms informed the delegation about the following aspects of the institution:

- The institution has approximately 240 elderly inmates who were of a balanced gender, and had different ethnicities;
- Specific meals were prepared to meet the dietary requirements of certain inmates who were diabetic, hypertensive and suffered other ailments;
- The institution received contributions from Food for the Poor, Private Donors and the Guyana Prison Service would donate from time to time;
- Inmates were treated to recreational activities once a month: visit to the Botanical Gardens, National Stadium, and the Museum to name a few;
- There were eight wards and each ward had a television and a radio. Newspapers were also delivered for inmates;
- The staff comprised one doctor, two nurses, kitchen attendants, laundry staff and patient care assistants;
- Thirty-two volunteers were attached to the Palms; and
- Most Members of Staff had over ten years of service with the institution.

Wards One to Eight

The delegation visited each ward in the Palms Geriatric Institution and was informed of the following.

Ward One

- Eight patient care assistants were attached to the ward.
- Two patient care assistants work each shift.
- The shift ran daily from 07:00 hrs to 15:00 hrs, 13:00 hrs to 21:00hrs and 20:30hrs to 07:30 hrs.
- There were twenty-eight male inmates in the ward.

Ward Two

- There were twenty-four male inmates in the ward.
- Eight patient care assistants were attached to this ward.
- The shifts ran daily from 07:00 hrs to 15:00 hrs, 13:00 hrs to 21:00hrs and 20:30hrs to 07:30 hrs.
- There was a blind, bedridden inmate in the ward who needed special care and should be transferred to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation.

Wards Three and Four

- The wards comprised female inmates.
- The inmates suffered many ailments which included diabetes, hypertension, epilepsy, filaria and tuberculosis.
- The shifts ran daily from 07:00 hrs to 15:00 hrs, 13:00 hrs to 21:00hrs and 20:30hrs to 07:30 hrs.

Ward Five

- There were thirty-six inmates in the ward.
- Nine patient care assistants were attached to the ward.
- The shifts ran daily from 07:00 hrs to 15:00 hrs, 13:00 hrs to 21:00hrs and 20:30hrs to 07:30 hrs.
- The inmates suffered many ailments which included diabetes, hypertension, filaria and one patient suffered from the Human Immune Virus.

Wards Seven Ward Eight

- The ward comprised female inmates
- The inmates suffered many ailments which included diabetes, hypertension, epilepsy, filaria and tuberculosis.

Laundry Department

- Three Members of Staff were attached to this department and were responsible for washing the inmates' clothes.
- Two small washing machines were used.
- The staff worked an eight hour shift daily.
- The department had two industrial machines which needed certain parts in order to work properly.

Kitchen Department

- Ten Members of Staff were attached to this Department.
- The department catered for over two hundred and forty (240) inmates whose dietary requirements ranged from diabetics, salt free, vegetarians and non vegetarians and
- The staff prepared meals three times daily i.e. breakfast, lunch and dinner.
- The kitchen needed additional utensils. For example, soup pots, storage containers, freezer and fans.

Doctor's Quarters

- One doctor and nurse worked in this department.
- The doctor's shift started at 08:30 hrs and ended at 16:00 hrs.
- The doctor visited the wards twice per month.
- In the event of an emergency, inmates would have to wait until the doctor arrived.
- The doctor also provided services for patients who were non-resident patients.
- The Doctor's Office leaves much to be desired.

The issues/concerns of Members of Staff and inmates were discussed with the Administrator of the Institution.

The Committee outlined the following observations/concerns to the Administrator of the Palms:

- The inmates' meals arrived late;
- Inmates complained about being unable to leave the compound;
- Inmates requested that their pensions should be paid to directly to them;
- The food was insufficient for the inmates;
- Special meals should be prepared for diabetic inmates;
- The elimination of rodents and cats should be given priority;
- There is need for more utensils in the kitchen;
- Patients needed to utilize the physio-therapy department;
- The Doctor's Office needed to be refurbished and supplied with the necessary equipment;
- Medication was needed for the inmates;
- Mosquito nets should be provided for patients- especially those who were diabetic's; and
- There is need for proper drainage facilities

Responses by the Administrator

- The drains were cleaned regularly;
- Mosquito nets were available for the patients;
- He would address the concern of the bed-ridden patient;
- Patients were supplied with vitamins;
- The extermination of rodents and bed bugs was being done every six(6) weeks;
- Mattresses have plastic covers to prevent bed bugs from living in the mattresses;
- The doctor's quarter is the responsibility of the Ministry of Health. The Palms is under the control of the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security;
- The issue of pensions being paid to the family members of the inmates cannot be addressed by the Administration; and
- The equipment in the laundry department was working properly. There is need for a hot water system to be installed.

Recommendations

Members agreed to the following recommendations:

- More trained nurses should be present at the facility;
- The Doctor's Quarters should be refurbished and he should be supplied with the basic equipment to do his work efficiently;
- Fumigation should be done regularly;
- More recreational activities should be planned for the inmates;
- More porters should be hired to assist the inmates;
- The issue of the large amount of cats in the wards should be addressed;
- The building should be reconstructed, if possible, at another location. The present structure is inconvenient and hazardous for the elderly persons who would have to climb the long flight of stairs. In addition, in the event of a fire, it would be difficult to evacuate the inmates;

- Flat buildings should be used to accommodate inmates. Some patients have never left the building because they are unable to climb the high flight of stairs;
- More utensils and equipment should be provided for the kitchen;
- More reading materials should be provided for the patients; and
- The wards should be configured to group patients suffering from similar ailments.