GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

PRESS RELEASE

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Stakeholders Consulted on Amendments to Domestic Violence Act

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The Ministry of Health and Social Development through the Office of Gender Affairs convened a stakeholder consultation to review and identify proposed amendments to the Domestic Violence Act (2011) as part of ongoing efforts to strengthen protections for victims and survivors of domestic violence in the Virgin Islands.

The consultation was held at the Ministry's Training Room in Long Bush and brought together representatives from government departments, the judiciary, law enforcement, social services, and partner agencies involved in responding to domestic violence matters.

Minister for Health and Social Development, Honourable Vincent Wheatley, in his opening remarks, reaffirmed Government's commitment to strengthening the legislative framework surrounding domestic violence and ensuring that victims and survivors receive the protection and support they deserve.

The Minister noted that while the Domestic Violence Protocol remains an operational framework guiding interagency responses and support services, the current consultation focused specifically on reviewing the legislation itself. He added that a separate consultation would be convened to continue discussions relating to the Protocol.

Honourable Wheatley also highlighted the continued work of the Gender Affairs Unit through the Partnership for Peace Violence Intervention Programme, a 16-session psychoeducational programme for men aimed at reinforcing the message that violence is a choice and promoting long term behavioural change.

"Strengthening the Domestic Violence Act remains critical to ensuring accountability, improving protection for victims and survivors, and supporting long term behavioural change within our communities. As a Government, we recognise that domestic violence has far reaching effects on families, communities, and the overall wellbeing of our society. It is therefore important that our legislation remains relevant, responsive, and capable of addressing the realities faced by survivors today." the Minister said.

Honourable Wheatley added, "The reform process cannot happen in isolation and depends heavily on the expertise, professional experience, and practical insights of

the agencies and organisations that work directly with survivors and their families every day. Through collaboration and meaningful consultation, we can develop stronger legislation that enhances protection, strengthens interagency coordination, and promotes dignity, safety, and justice for all persons within the Virgin Islands."

Facilitator and Ministerial Special Adviser on Gender Affairs, Ms. Patricia Hackett, guided participants through discussions focused on identifying legislative gaps and areas requiring reform to better align the Act with present day realities and evolving best practices.

The facilitator shared key outcomes from previous Domestic Violence Protocol technical meetings and explored areas for amendment including evidentiary procedures, police powers, protection order mechanisms, definitions, jurisdiction, and interagency responsibilities under the law.

The consultation process examined the Virgin Islands Domestic Violence Act together with other OECS Model Domestic Violence Bills of 2011 and 2022, enabling stakeholders to identify key gaps and opportunities to strengthen the national legislative framework. Participants presented recommendations during a plenary session identifying priority areas for legislative reform.

Expected outcomes from the consultation include the development of a consolidated draft list of legislative gaps requiring amendment, agreement on priority reform areas, and clarity on next steps and responsibilities for advancing the amendment process.

The Ministry of Health and Social Development remains committed to working collaboratively with stakeholders to strengthen protections for victims and survivors and to promote safer communities throughout the Virgin Islands.

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Additional Documents or Media

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