

19 June 2026

## **Prison Debate Highlights Rehabilitation and Accountability**

His Majesty's Prison conducted its Third Annual Prison Debate, reinforcing its commitment to rehabilitation by giving prisoners opportunities to strengthen critical thinking, communication skills and personal responsibility while engaging in meaningful discussions on justice and community safety.

Organised by the Prison Rehabilitation Department under the leadership of Principal Officer Ms. Jazell Forde-Johnny, this year's debate examined the motion: "Restorative Justice is More Beneficial than Retributive Justice."

Participants presented thoughtful arguments on both sides of the motion, exploring themes such as accountability, punishment, rehabilitation, victim impact, and community safety. Following deliberations by the judging panel, the Opposition Team, which argued against the Motion, was declared the winner.

Minister for Health and Social Development, Honourable Vincent O. Wheatley, welcomed the initiative and commended the Prison Service for creating opportunities that encourage learning and personal growth among prisoners.

Honourable Wheatley said a modern correctional system must maintain an appropriate balance between accountability and rehabilitation.

"Retributive justice focuses on ensuring that individuals are held accountable for their actions through proportionate punishment, while restorative justice seeks to repair harm, encourage personal responsibility, and rebuild relationships where possible. Both approaches have an important role to play within the wider justice system," Minister Wheatley said.

He added that the debate provided participants with an opportunity to examine important issues, develop valuable life skills and engage in respectful discussion.

"I commend the Prison Service, the Rehabilitation Team, New Life Baptist Church, the Prison Visiting Committee and all those who contributed to the success of this event," Honourable Wheatley said.

Superintendent of Prisons, Mr. Jay Kendall, said the debate reflected the Prison Service's commitment to delivering meaningful rehabilitation within a safe and secure custodial environment.

"The deprivation of liberty imposed by the courts is the punishment. Our responsibility as a Prison Service is to ensure that sentence is carried out safely, securely and lawfully, while also creating opportunities for positive change," Mr. Kendall said.

He explained that while retributive justice is centred on accountability and the consequences of criminal behaviour, restorative justice focuses on helping individuals understand the impact of their actions, repair harm where possible, and develop the skills and attitudes needed to make better choices in the future.

"These concepts are not mutually exclusive. Effective correctional systems recognise the value of both. While safety, security and good order will always remain our foremost priorities, initiatives such as this debate help prisoners develop communication skills, critical thinking, self-reflection and personal responsibility, all of which contribute to rehabilitation and safer communities," Mr. Kendall said.

The judging panel comprised Apostle Curnal P. Fahie, Ms. Sherene De Castro and Ms. Shirlene Stoutt.

Special guests in attendance included Chairperson of the Prison Visiting Committee (PVC), Ms. Norma Chalwell, and Pastor Jevon Cline.

The Prison Service also expressed appreciation to New Life Baptist Church for its continued support of rehabilitation programmes and its positive engagement within the prison community.

All rehabilitation activities at His Majesty's Prison are carefully planned, risk assessed and implemented within established security and operational procedures. This ensures an appropriate balance between personal development opportunities and the safe and secure management of the institution.

The Ministry of Health and Social Development remains committed to improving the health and social well-being of the people of the Virgin Islands.

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