



## STATEMENT

### TO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

By Honourable Fayval Williams

Minister of Education, Youth and Information

November 24, 2020

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Madam Speaker,

Today I will speak to three topics, namely, the tragic incidents involving some of our students, an update on the Missing Children's report and an update on a partnership with Microsoft. Madam Speaker, I must note that unfortunately, we continue to mourn the atrocities meted out to our children. This week our hearts ache for two (2) more of our children:

**They are Christina and Mishane McFarlane.**

Unfortunately, on Sunday, November 22, we were met with the sad news of the murder of **Christina and Mishane McFarlane**, along with their grandmother. They were shot by gunmen at their house in Tryall Heights, St. Catherine. Six year-old Mishane and 10 year-old Christina, were students at Spanish Town Primary.

We recall that last week **Mikele Allen**, 6 years-old from St D'Acre, St Ann was mauled by dogs while on his way from a nearby shop. Fortunately, he is reportedly doing much better after extensive surgery at the Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx in New York. We must extend our heartfelt gratitude to the team of doctors headed by Dr. Evan Garfein, chief of plastic surgery, who responded so generously with their time and skills to this urgent case.

There was also the very sad case, Madame Speaker of another six year old, **Oshane Banton** of Lionel Town, Clarendon, whose body was found in a sewage tank in the community after being reported missing.

While not specific to these cases, there are too many incidents in which our children die or are seriously injured, and where parental or adult supervision was absent.

Our National Parent Support Commission has an important role to play in assisting parents to develop the skills they need to raise and protect their children. They are playing a tremendous role in this regard. Yet too many parents are not availing themselves of the counselling and other services that are available to help them.

Madame Speaker, parental supervision or adult supervision of our children is the most basic parenting technique that involves looking after, or monitoring a child's activities.

Young children (in the 0 – 8 years range) are generally incapable of looking after themselves or making informed decisions for their own well-being. For this reason, they require supervision. They require looking after. Young children require adults to know their whereabouts. Young children require the physical presence of an adult.

Madame Speaker, children require adult supervision to keep them from hurting themselves or others. Children require adult supervision to keep them away from dangerous objects and situations. In fact, very small children require continual supervision and care, meaning they must be in the presence of an adult all the time, not some of the time, but all the time.

Madame Speaker, lack of adult supervision of our children constitutes neglect. And I dare say some parents are not aware of the need to supervise children.

I implore parents or guardians not to neglect this very basic parenting responsibility: supervision of your children.

At the NPSC, we have thirty-six (36) helplines which were launched in April 2020 in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Victoria Mutual Foundation and Fight for Peace.

The helplines are being manned by competent persons who are trained in psychosocial first aid. They assist in guiding persons to where and how they may get additional help and what they can do as individuals.

Parents and guardians, I implore you, avail yourselves of this assistance.

The parish lines are listed below.

<b>PARISH</b>	<b>DIGICEL</b>	<b>FLOW</b>
Westmoreland	876-560-9314	876-788-5568
Hanover	876-560-9630	876-788-5371
St. James	876-560-9395 876-560-9336	876-788-5214 876-788-5276
Trelawny	876-560-9736	876-788-5382
St. Ann	876-560-9399 876-560-9634	876-788-5468 876-788-5606
St. Mary	876-560-9604	876-788-5196
Portland	876-560-9215	876-788-5323
St. Thomas	876-560-9269	876-788-5409
St. Andrew	876-560-9425	876-788-5417
Kingston	876-560-9656 876-560-9758	876-788-5460 876-788-5329
St. Catherine	876-560-9289 876-560-9564	876-788-5378
Clarendon	876-560-9209 876-560-9503	876-788-5201
Manchester	876-560-9176	876-788-5427
St. Elizabeth	876-560-9302	876-788-5172

(If persons are having difficulties getting through to any of the helplines, they may call the NPSC at 876-560-9272.

### **Missing Children's Report**

Madame Speaker, I turn now to the Missing Children's report for the period January to June 2020.

Preliminary figures received from the Jamaica Constabulary Force Missing Persons Monitoring Unit indicate that, Five Hundred and Forty-five **(545)** reports of missing children were received between January and June 2020; a reduction of Three Hundred and Twenty-Three **(323)** or 37.2% in the number of children reported missing when compared to the Eight Hundred and Sixty-Eight **(868)** reported over the corresponding period — January and June 2019.

Madam Speaker, I must add that below eighty per cent (80%) of the children missing are girls, while boys comprised 20% of the children missing.

As at June 2020 a total of four hundred and seventeen **(417)** children have been accounted for with One Hundred and Twenty Four (124) still missing. There have been no reports of children being found dead subsequent to being reported and consequently there is no increase in the number of deceased children reported missing in the last period.

A reason proffered for this reduction is that our children are at home as a result of the pandemic.

Madame Speaker, many of our children are reported missing when they are away from their homes and are on our roads.

Between January and June 2020, three hundred and fifty-four (354) families have been contacted. The Ananda Alert Secretariat continues to make contact with families as soon as notified of the child's disappearance, to gather additional details surrounding the circumstances of same, and the family's coping capacity. Continuous contact is maintained, to provide support to the family during this time, however, should they require further in-depth social intervention, the case is referred to the respective Regional Director within the Agency for their action. At the time of this Report, no family had expressed a need for, or was assessed as being in need of further psychosocial support than which is offered within the Unit.

So Madame Speaker, as we continue our phased re-opening of schools for face-to-face teaching and learning in our classrooms, we have to consider ways in which we can protect our children as they journey from home to school and back. It would be a travesty if we simply allow these numbers to begin climbing again as more of our children return to school. These figures suggest to us at least one major missing element:

- Greater supervision is needed of our children as they make their way to school and back.

This is the reason some countries that have the resources have a formal school bus system. While that is out of our reach just now, I know that in our rural communities, the MoEYI has made provisions for two hundred and fifty (250) selected schools in thirteen (13) parishes to engage the services of eligible transport operators to provide a shuttle transportation service for over seven thousand five hundred (7,500) students who are either unable to attend school because of the cost of transportation or because they are travelling along routes that are not adequately serviced by the public transportation system.

The Ministry is currently reworking the programme to cater to schools that are resuming face-to-face. In the previous week, a meeting was held with the Ministry of Transport and Mining and we continue to work with them to develop a mapping of the logistics arrangements for JUTC support as well as other providers.

A second meeting is to be held with the Transport Ministry and the transport associations island wide, towards streamlining support for the movement of students to and from school as well as to ensure that providers are reminded of the safety protocols and that these are enforced.

## **Microsoft Partnership**

Finally, Madame Speaker, in continuing the journey to make our children digitally ready for 21st Century, we are pleased to announce that Microsoft has partnered with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information (MoEYI) to provide, free of cost, 500,000 Microsoft Office 365 Education Software licenses to students in our educational institutions, in an effort to make technology readily available to them and expose them to a suite of skills and applications that enhance their learning experience whilst preparing them for the 21st century workforce.

The free 500,000 licenses of Office 365 EDU A3 license plan for students in Jamaica, include full office suite with Excel, PowerPoint, OneNote, Publisher (PC only), Access (PC only) and services that include Teams, SharePoint, Forms etc. This license also allows 500,000 students to download the Office Pro Plus (Word , Excel, etc.) to any of their home PC's, so they enjoy the same experience at school and at home.

For its part, Microsoft has affirmed the partnership and its commitment to education in Jamaica; underscoring mutual benefit. Country Manager for Microsoft Jamaica, Yamile Bustamante has remarked: "Microsoft will contribute to generate more efficient and safe educational environments for Jamaica's students through Office 365, a complete set of tools that will allow teachers and students to connect and continue their learning paths."



The Ministry will be distributing these licenses to our classroom teachers, our principals, students at the secondary level, as well as students at our teachers colleges, community colleges and other multi-disciplinary institutions, Edna Manley College for the Visual and Performing Arts (EMCVPA), the College of Agriculture, Science & Education (CASE), GC Foster College, the Caribbean Maritime University (CMU), Knockalva Polytechnic, students in the equivalent of grades 10 – 13 at our independent schools and children in our primary schools.

The approximate annual value, assuming all 500,000 licenses are downloaded, is US\$15 million or J\$2.1 billion.

### **Updated and Secure**

Since Microsoft Office 365 is a cloud-based platform, students will always have the most current and secure version.

### **Preparing for the Future**

Madame Speaker, the Ministry is pleased to note that students who use Office 365 Education Software in the classroom, are exposed to and ultimately become conversant with a suite of skills and applications that are highly valued by employers; giving them a head start not only in their career paths as seekers of employment but also creators of employment (entrepreneurs).

It should be noted that students will have access to the Microsoft Office 365 Education Software as long as they are students in our participating educational institutions.

Madam Speaker, we are only just beginning the technological journey with our children as we empower them to make the grade in the global economy, think their way through abstract problems, work in teams and distinguish good information from bad. We are on the journey to equip our students for the complexities of the 21st century. Our Jamaican children will not be left behind.

Thank you Madame Speaker.

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