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PRESS RELEASE

Cabinet Will Not Table Equal Opportunities Bill

Belmopan. September 15, 2020. 5:20 p.m.

Cabinet at its meeting today considered the Equal Opportunities Bill, 2020. The bill seeks to promote equal opportunities and to address discrimination, stigma and violence by prohibiting certain forms of conduct and encouraging proactive steps to be taken to address unjust disparities and barriers in order to promote the core Belizean values of fairness, respect, and justice.

The decision was taken to **not** proceed with the bill at this time and to withdraw it. While this is Cabinet's position, it views with deep regret the circumstances surrounding the bill being brought before the Cabinet for its approval which is a mere part of the legislative process.

While for some there might have been genuine consternation, it is regrettable that there was purposeful misinformation from some stakeholders. The legislative process allows opportunities for the venting and redressing of such legitimate concerns. The Cabinet wishes to make the following clear in this regard:

(a) that there was never an intent to pass such legislation without the due process being afforded that would include proper consideration by members of Cabinet, proper ventilation of the issues in both Houses of Parliament; proper opportunities for stakeholders to voice their concerns and for such concerns to be addressed (primarily through presentations to the relevant House Committee(s).

(b) that there are very good elements of the bill that would bring about tremendous benefits for the Belizean people especially as it relates to issues having to do with but not limited to our aging population, breastfeeding, persons with disabilities, family responsibilities, gender, HIV positive status, maternity, political opinion, industrial activity, irrelevant criminal record, lawful sexual activity, political opinion, pregnancy, race, religious activity, sex, sexual orientation, status as a person who is experiencing or has experienced domestic violence, status as an orphan and a few other statuses.

The Cabinet reiterates to the Belizean people its commitment to fight for the rights of all. It continues to view with urgency the need to protect those who are discriminated against, harassed and victimized in any way and pledges to continue seeking ways to achieve such objectives.

Ends