



PR#121-22

## PRESS RELEASE

### Cabinet Brief

Belmopan. 5th May 2022. 9:15 a.m.

The Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister Hon. John Briceño, met in regular session on 3rd April 2022.

- The Minister of Health & Wellness Hon. Kevin Bernard informed Cabinet that COVID-19 vaccines for children ages 5 to 11 years will soon be available. The Ministry of Health & Wellness is working closely with the Ministry of Education to safely deliver vaccines to students in time for the start of the new school year. Also, the Ministry of Health & Wellness encourages all Belizeans 60 years or older and those with preexisting conditions to get their second booster.
- Cabinet took note that signatures had been submitted to the Governor General to commence the process of issuing a writ of referendum in relation to the passage of the Cannabis and Industrial Hemp Control and Licensing Bill. In accordance with the Referendum Act, the petition will now undergo the process of vetting and verification by the Elections and Boundaries Department. Cabinet is committed to continuing to shepherd the process with respect for all concerned and considers this an inspiring and encouraging part of Belize's democratic system. Cabinet remains confident that in the end the right and best decisions will be made as a country.
- Cabinet gave its recommendation for the Attorney General to have introduced a bill at the next sitting of the House of Representatives to restructure the administration of the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal with the introduction of the Senior Courts of Belize. The Senior Courts Bill is an amalgamation of the Supreme Court of Judicature Act and the Court of Appeals Act with amendments:

- (1) to restructure the courts administration system by making the office of the Chief Justice the administrative leader for both the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal;
- (2) to introduce new officeholders such as Senior Judges in the Civil and Criminal Divisions of the Supreme Court, the Chief Registrar, Masters, and Judicial Assistants;
- (3) to introduce specialized divisions in the Supreme Court, such as a Constitutional and Public Law Division, Family and Trust Law Division, Commercial Law Division, and such other divisions as the Chief Justice from time to time may find necessary;
- (4) to remove marital fault grounds for divorce proceedings and to provide for gender-neutral provisions in relation to divorce and matrimonial proceedings.

These changes are being introduced to improve the efficiency, accuracy and consistency in the upper courts of the judicial system of Belize.

- Cabinet has also given its approval for the introduction of a bill to address consequential amendments to the Belize Constitution to provide for the additional judicial office holders as well as to provide for the office of the Chief Justice to be the administrative leader of the Supreme Court and Court of Appeal as well as for the renaming of the Supreme Court to that of the High Court. The office of the President of the Court of Appeal is being retained but shall be subject administrative to the office of the Chief Justice.
- Cabinet gave its recommendation for the Attorney General to have introduced, at the next sitting of the House of Representatives, a bill to amend the Marriage Persons (Protection) Act, Chapter 175 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2020. This is to allow for the removal of the fault grounds for an application for judicial separation before the Family Court, which is to be replaced with the ground of incompatibility. Too many times the Family Court is bogged down with acrimonious family proceedings that are not conducive to the family healing and moving on, with children being affected by such proceedings. It is important to note that these proposed amendments will not affect the protection against domestic violence under the

Domestic Violence Act and will not affect the rights of maintenance for spouses and children.

- Cabinet took note of the protocol to amend the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas to allow Enhanced Cooperation Among CARICOM Member States and gave its approval for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade & Immigration to ratify the amendments to the protocol on the Revised Treaty to Allow for Enhanced Cooperation Among Member States.
- Finally, the Prime Minister informed Cabinet that on Saturday, 7th May 2022, the President of the Republic of Mexico, His Excellency Andrés Manuel López Obrador will be making an official visit to Belize.

**Ends**