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PRESS RELEASE

Cabinet Brief

Belmopan. 28th July 2022. 9:00 a.m.

The Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister Hon. John Briceño, met in regular session on 26th June 2022.

Cabinet was briefed by the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Health and Wellness on the very serious public concerns raised in respect of the proposed Social Security Board (SSB) loan to Pharmacy Express Limited. Cabinet fully respects the autonomy of the SSB but supports the importance and necessity of ensuring that all relevant information regarding Pharmacy Express Limited is shared with SSB before a final decision is made in respect of the loan. Cabinet understands that SSB funds are the people's money and should always be subject to the highest levels of care, scrutiny, transparency, and management.

The Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister responsible for Religious Affairs reported to Cabinet about their successful meeting with church leaders during which they discussed the matter of holding a referendum on the legalization of cannabis. After learning of the outcome of the meeting, Cabinet accepted the recommendation to defer the referendum until further notice and to make the necessary amendments to the Cannabis legislation to ensure that the bill will only be enacted into law after the holding of the referendum.

The Minister of Health & Wellness updated Cabinet on several health issues, including the ministry's level of preparedness for the possibility of detection of the Monkeypox virus in Belize. Already, the virus has been detected in Mexico, the United States, Jamaica, and the Commonwealth of the Bahamas. Additionally, the minister reported on a case of polio detected in

the United States and assured Cabinet of efforts to vaccinate children against polio to ensure that Belize returns to 95 percent of children in Belize vaccinated against polio.

Cabinet welcomed the news from the Minister of Agriculture, Food Security and Enterprise that the shrimp industry is on the rebound. The minister reported to Cabinet that the current status of the industry, which was decimated by the Early Mortality Syndrome (EMS) disease detected in Belize in 2015, is reviving and has significantly improved prospects for the future. The Ministry of Agriculture projects that this year's shrimp production could reach as high as 2.5 million pounds at a value of over BZ\$12.5 million.

Cabinet was provided with a written update on the status of COVID-19 vaccinations. Currently, there are more than 209,950 vaccines on hand. As of 26th July 2022, 227,767 persons or 52.9 percent had received at least one dose of the vaccine and 218,203 or 50.7 percent have been fully vaccinated. Of the population ages 12 to 17 years, 26,722 have received two doses of the vaccines and of the population five to 11 years, 5,626 or 7.6 percent of have received two doses. To date, 49,921 booster shots have been issued.

Finally, Cabinet wishes all Belizeans a safe and Happy Emancipation Day, which will be celebrated on Monday, 1st August.

Ends