



PR#237-25

## PRESS RELEASE

### **Government Introduces Key Legislative Amendments to Strengthen Domestic Violence Protections**

*Belmopan, November 20, 2025.*

The Ministry of Human Development, Family Support and Gender Affairs announced the introduction of two significant Bills aimed at expanding immediate protection for survivors of domestic violence on November 20, 2025. The Justices of the Peace (Amendment) Bill, 2025, and the Domestic Violence (Amendment) Bill, 2025, were presented in the House of Representatives by Honourable Thea Garcia-Ramirez, who continues to champion survivor-centred reforms within Belize’s national protection framework.

These amendments form part of the Government’s broader commitment outlined in the National Gender-Based Violence Action Plan (2024–2030). They ensure that vulnerable individuals across Belize can access safety, justice, and support when they need it most.

In her remarks, Minister Garcia-Ramirez underscored the reality faced by many survivors, who struggle to access protective orders during high-risk times such as nights, weekends, holidays, or emergencies. This lack of immediate access often leaves victims unprotected at their most vulnerable moments.

To address this gap, the Bills will empower designated Select Senior Justices of the Peace to issue *ex parte* interim protection orders in exceptional situations. These temporary orders, valid for up to 72 hours, provide instant protection until the matter can be heard by a magistrate.

Minister Garcia-Ramirez noted, “The reform is not a replacement for the court, but a life-saving bridge that can make the difference between danger and safety.”

The Bills introduce strict eligibility criteria for Senior Justices of the Peace, ensuring that only trained, vetted, and experienced individuals may issue interim protection orders. Selection will involve screening by the Attorney General's Ministry and consultation with the Family Court.

This effort reflects Minister Garcia-Ramirez's emphasis on accountability and integrity, with the amendments requiring detailed record-keeping and judicial oversight to maintain transparency and continuity of care for survivors.

The legislation also mandates that police stations create private spaces for victims seeking protection, another step aligned with Minister Garcia-Ramirez's ongoing advocacy for dignity and confidentiality in survivor services.

The development of these Bills results from robust collaboration among:

- The Ministry of Human Development, Family Support and Gender Affairs
- The Ministry of Home Affairs
- The Attorney General's Ministry
- The Family Court
- The Justices of the Peace Association

These amendments are complemented by additional initiatives currently championed by the Ministry under her leadership, including:

- Multi-sectoral protocols for coordinated GBV response
- Establishment of a one-stop centre for victims of gender-based violence in Belize City
- Strengthened social behaviour change campaigns led by the Office of the Special Envoy for the Development of Families and Children and partner agencies
- Expanded training for police and frontline officers
- Activation of the national domestic violence hotline

Beginning these 16 Days of Activism, consultations will also commence under the guidance of the National Women's Commission on a modernized Domestic Violence Bill to be introduced in 2026. The Ministry encourages the public and all members of the National Assembly to support these critical reforms as Belize strengthens its protective framework for survivors of domestic violence.

**Ends**