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## PRESS RELEASE

### **Ministry of Human Development Strengthens Child Protection Services**

*Belmopan, February 19, 2026.*

The Ministry of Human Development, Family Support and Gender Affairs, through the Department of Human Services (DHS), officially commenced its annual *Court Access Training* with an Opening Ceremony held on February 18, 2026, at Zenses Resort in Caye Caulker.

The ceremony brought together senior government officials, members of the judiciary, and development partners to underscore the importance of strengthening collaboration between social workers and the courts in safeguarding Belize's children.

Delivering welcome remarks was Hon. Thea Garcia Ramirez, Minister of Human Development, Family Support and Gender Affairs, who emphasized the Ministry's commitment to ensuring that Children Services Officers are equipped with the knowledge and confidence necessary to navigate judicial processes effectively. Remarks were also delivered by Hon. MME. Justice Antoinette Moore, Justice of the High Court of Belize and Chair of the Policy and Legislative Committee; Ms. Enkhnasan Nasan-Ulzii, Social Policy Specialist and UNICEF Head of Office-Belize; Hon. Anthony Sylvester, SC, Attorney General of Belize; and Mrs. Ganesha Smith, Director, Community Rehabilitation Department.

The two-day training is conducted under the theme "*Capacity Building and Sensitization for Child Protection Social Workers: Court Access and Judicial Practice.*" A total of 57 children services officers, supervisors, and designated Community Rehabilitation Department (CRD) Officers are participating. The overall purpose of the training is to strengthen the competence, confidence,

and consistency of DHS and CRD officers in preparing court documentation, participating in judicial proceedings, and applying relevant legislation in child protection matters.

Sessions over the two days include:

- Review of relevant child protection legislation
- Types of court applications and variation of orders
- Arraignment and bail hearings
- Preparation of Social Inquiry Reports (SIRs) and affidavits
- Appeals and Stay of Execution applications.
- Peer review exercises and practical documentation workshops

Facilitators include the Director of the Belize Family Court, Mrs. Shanti Morrison, and Ms. Deborah Rogers, the Chief Magistrate, reflecting the strong interagency collaboration that underpins this initiative.

The Ministry extends sincere appreciation to UNICEF Belize for its financial support in making this training possible. Through its continued partnership with the Government of Belize, UNICEF has played a vital role in strengthening the professional capacity of frontline social workers and advancing the national child protection agenda.

The Court Access Training forms part of DHS's annual professional development programme and aligns with ongoing legislative reforms, including sensitization around the Families Bill. The training has expanded significantly over the years, demonstrating the growing demand for strengthened court-related competencies among social workers. By the end of the training tomorrow, participants are expected to demonstrate improved preparation and presentation of court documents, increased confidence in giving evidence, and enhanced collaboration with judicial partners, contributing to improved protection outcomes for children across Belize.

The Ministry of Human Development, Family Support and Gender Affairs reaffirms its commitment to investing in the professional development of its officers and to strengthening Belize's child protection system through strategic partnerships with the judiciary and development partners.

**Ends**