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**PRESS RELEASE
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DCS Mitigates COVID-19 Admirably - Minister Matthew Samuda

The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected all corners of Jamaica but despite the challenges the Department of Correctional Services (DCS), has mitigated the effects admirably says the Sen. the Hon. Matthew Samuda, Minister without Portfolio in the Ministry of National Security.

He noted that, the institutions relative success is partly due to foresight. *“The sensitization to the potential threat began in late January 2020 through sharing of the basic facts that were known about the virus then with key members of the DCS medical team and representatives from the Correctional Centres. Subsequently, a comprehensive contingency plan was prepared with MOHW, CDC, PAHO, and WHO guidelines forming the foundation. DCS HQ then carried out an education effort targeting staff and inmates throughout the organization. Pamphlets were handed out, posters were erected and the radio stations in the facilities were used to share information,”* Minister Samuda said.

He was addressing Wednesday’s Sir Arthur Lewis Institute for Social and Economic Studies (SALISES) UWI virtual public forum under the theme: “Successfully Managing the COVID-19 Pandemic in Prisons; the experiences of Caribbean SIDS”.

Minister Samuda told the panelists that the virus has threatened to undermine each of the DCS’ core functions, stating *“it is more difficult to maintain order in correctional facilities with the added anxiety—both for inmates and staff—brought on by the virus and its second-order effects...That anxiety is compounded by possible staff shortages due to quarantines and infections, the necessary cessation of inmate family visitations and the increased need to establish spaces for quarantine areas in facilities that already have little space to spare”*.

He added that, decreased traffic in and out of the facilities has also disrupted interactions with the court system and the Jamaica Constabulary Force, due to lack of physical court attendance by inmates and remandees. Furthermore, the said, the DCS had to divert resources from activities, such as rehabilitation programmes into securing the basic well-being of those in its care.

Minister Samuda said that like all penal institutions, the DCS is designated ‘high risk’ for outbreaks of infectious diseases due to the number of persons housed in the facilities. He pointed out that considering that reality, the Department managed to pull off a Herculean effort in stemming the spread, once the virus entered the facilities.



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To date, there have been a total of five (5) deaths attributed to COVID-19, two (2) inmates and three (3) staff members.

He said further that aside from the initial preventative measures, the department's success can be attributed to the many dedicated staff, who risk their lives daily to provide care for positive inmates/children, sometimes working double shifts and who, at times cook and clean in place of inmates who were in quarantine.

Minister Samuda noted some challenges. He said the whole-of-institution effort did encounter issues that limited the department's success and as competent and cohesive as the DCS staff were in responding to COVID-19, the sustained and demanding effort led to "burnout", which would have caused on occasion lapses in protocol adherence.

"If COVID-19 has offered any benefit to Jamaica's Department of Correctional Services it is by highlighting the major areas of vulnerability within this critical institution, which is now the task of the Government to address," the Minister stated.

One notable development, according to the minister is the ongoing procurement of a digital Jail Management System, which he said will not only improve the internal efficiencies of the DCS operations but will also make those operations more transparent to adjacent state agencies to streamline relevant interactions.

"This system will automatically generate data, which we can be used to monitor important developments in the facilities and to coordinate the appropriate response. Once this system comes online, DCS will have taken a significant step toward greater internal security, the efficient administering of adequate care to those in its charge and seamless interoperability with other security and justice institutions," said Minister Samuda.

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