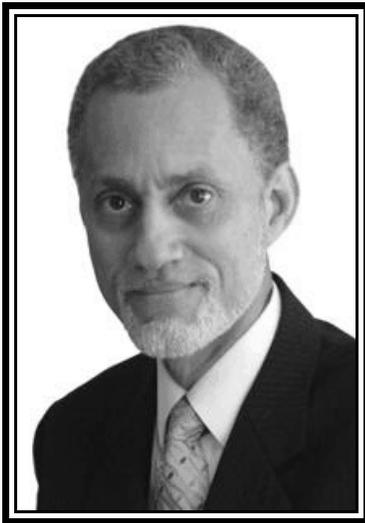


New Government Ministry Needed

Ministry of Family, Social Services and Community Development Needed

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From every segment of The Bahamian society, we can hear the cries of concerns about the continual increase of crime in our lovely country. Although we are still a peaceful country and there are still islands that are not impacted by crime and violence, yet per capita, our murder and violent crimes rates are much, much too high. We can dialogue, debate, argue, or discuss about solutions, but unless action takes place there will be no change. There are generally two approaches to social change and crime reduction and in a country. One is responsive and the other is preventative. I believe we are doing a good job in responding to criminal activities and the many social ills in our community. I commend the police for the great work and diligence in responding to criminal activities. Their job is to respond. I also commend the Department of Social Services in the

Ministry of Labour, Social Services and Community Development, for providing the curative responses to the social ills in our country. The social workers are overworked with case loads that are unbelievable.

I have been a member of the Child Protection Council for more than fifteen years. This is a council that provides education and information on children abuse in our country. We have been making a positive impact on the lives of countless families. Often committee members travel to many of the islands to share information on child abuse.

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health both have excellent programs for parents, singles, and families that are every effective. In fact, many people are not aware of the programs that are conducted each day and week. However, all of the programs mentioned in this article and the many more not mentioned are not sufficient for crime prevention. There is a need for a more centralized, unified, proactive, national approach to family wellness, social development and crime prevention in our country. How can we accomplish this?

THE NEW DEPARTMENT

Since 1996 I have been advocating in this newspaper that creating healthy families is the first answer to crime prevention and the reduction of many of our social ills. I have written over and over that weak, dysfunctional families produce a weak, violent nation. We need a much greater emphasis on family life and family wellness in our nation and it needs to come from the national level. One way of doing this is to establish a Ministry of Family, Social Services and Community Development. Currently there is a Ministry of Social Services and Community Development with one department: the Department of Social Services. I believe that adding “family” to the name of the ministry and having a department of family life will help to put family education and

crime prevention on the front burner. I suggest that the Department of Social Services be totally responsible for responding to social ills—the curative. On the other hand, the Department of Family life will be responsible for prevention through education and training—family wellness.

HOW WILL THIS WORK?

The proposed Department of Family Life in the new Ministry of Family, Social Services and Community Development should have a number of proactive programs and activities designed to teach individuals how to have healthy relationships, family life, and marriages. Hence, here are a few of my suggestive national programs: national single adults program, national women's programs, national men's program, national parenting program (including pregnancy education and pre-parenting program), national teenage and children's program, national marriage program. Each program will be well developed to provide education and training. These national programs can also be the centralized programs that all other governmental ministries and agencies will utilize. The new department can help push for the need of mandatory health certification for marriage and mandatory post-divorce counseling sessions for parents with dependent children.

As mentioned earlier, there is a need for one cohesive, national body to develop and coordinate programs for family wellness. The department of Family Life is an answer. The department will place a much greater emphasis on prevention. The old adage is true: "prevention is better than cure." While we have a strong contingent of well-trained individuals to respond to the social ills, we must have an equally strong force that will prevent the increase of social ills and crime.

HURTING FAMILIES

We need strong families in our country. Too many individuals are hurting, crushed, and socially crippled. If we can start from the cradle with proper education, we will reduce the risk of one ending up in prison or on a most-wanted list. If we can get started on prevention we may not see a result immediately, but we will see it by the next generation. We must start now.

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