



PR#018-22

## PRESS RELEASE

### Cabinet Brief

*Belmopan. 20<sup>th</sup> January 2022. 9:00 a.m.*

The Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Hon. John Briceño, met in regular session on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2022.

- Cabinet was updated on the status of vaccinations and the number of vaccines available in Belize. Currently, there are more than 338,000 vaccines on hand. As of 17<sup>th</sup> January 2022, 212,080 persons or 49.3 percent of the total population had received at least one dose of the vaccine and 201,930 or 46.9 percent of the total population has been fully vaccinated. Additionally, over 24,905 booster shots have been issued to date. Also, 24,683 Belizeans, aged 12 to 17 years old, have received at least one dose of the vaccine.
- The Minister of Education, Culture, Science & Technology informed Cabinet that as of January 17, 2022, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology (MoECST) has approved the transition to hybrid learning for a total of 568 schools which represent 94 percent of all schools nationwide. Of the 568 approved schools, 402 schools are open for hybrid learning. This figure represents 71 percent of the approved schools or 66 percent of all schools. Two hundred three schools are open for remote learning and these schools account for 34 percent of all schools.
- The Minister of Education, Culture, Science & Technology also informed Cabinet that the safety of Belize's education community remains the ministry's top priority. Alongside personnel from the Ministry of Health & Wellness, MoECST are monitoring schools closely for any potential outbreaks of the coronavirus. Between 10<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> January, the ministry has, via its COVID-19 Reporting System, received confirmation of 313 cases of COVID-19 affecting teachers and 456 cases of COVID-19 affecting students, nationwide. Of the 313 cases affecting teachers, only 33 were recorded among teachers who were actively engaging in hybrid learning. When compared to cases among students, out of the 456 cases confirmed, 67 were confirmed among students who were actively engaging in hybrid learning. The cases recorded among teachers affected 1.4 percent of teachers actively engaging in hybrid learning. Among students, the rate was even lower, with cases affecting only 0.27 percent of all students actively engaging in hybrid learning.
- Cabinet gave its approval for a bill to be introduced at the next sitting of the House of Representatives to amend the Indictable Procedures Act, Chapter 96 of the Laws of Belize to add offences, which are to be tried by

a judge alone and for pleas to be taken virtually. This is being done in an effort to address various issues arising from jury trials offences and to seek to clear the backlog of pending criminal matters. The offences to be added are abduction of a child, sexual offences, offences under the trafficking in persons and offence under the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Prohibition) Act.

Cabinet also gave its approval for the introduction of legislation for the repeal and replacement of the Libel and Defamation Act and will seek the approval of the National Assembly to strike a balance between the prosecution of the reputation of an individual and the freedom of speech and expression and to modernize the law of the tort of libel and slander.

- Cabinet gave its approval for Belize to apply for Non-Contracting Party Status of the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization (SPRFMO) to allow for Belize flagged vessels to fish in the Southern Pacific Ocean region.
- In an effort to reduce the upsurge in traffic accidents on the nation's major roads and highways and to improve enforcement and vigilance, approval was granted by Cabinet for the Ministry of Youth, Sports & Transport to increase the Department of Transport Enforcement Unit by increasing the number of enforcement officers and the vehicle fleet that patrol all highways in Belize.
- Cabinet gave its approval for legislative changes to the Money Lenders Act and Money Lenders Regulations for improved transparency and accountability as well as to strengthen entry barriers for new and existing money lenders.
- Finally, in the wake of the rising number of COVID-19 infections, the presence of the highly contagious Omicron variant and the continued presence of the Delta variant, Cabinet continues to encourage the public to wear masks in public, maintain physical distance, wash hands regularly, and for those not fully vaccinated, to get vaccinated as soon as possible. Vaccines save lives.

**Ends**