



**Ministerial Statement
The Bermuda Educators Council**

**The Honourable Dame Jennifer Smith, DBE, JP, DHumL, MP
Minister of Education**

Friday 02 December 2011

Mr. Speaker,

I rise to provide insight into a story circulating in the electronic media concerning the Bermuda Educators Council.

Let me begin by saying that I have, as yet, received no official correspondence indicating that the elected members of the Bermuda Educators Council have resigned.

For Members' and the public's information, the Council consists of eleven elected members and four members appointed by the Minister. I have received one letter of resignation from an appointed member and I have since met with the remaining appointed members, who remain committed to their role on the Council.

Mr. Speaker, upon assuming responsibility for Education a year ago, I made myself aware of all Acts governing educational responsibilities and I read all the files pertaining to same.

The Bermuda Educators Council Act 2002 provides that **"The Council shall establish and maintain a register of educators ("the register")."** It provides that **"The Council shall develop, establish and maintain qualifications for the continued registration of educators, and shall issue certificates of qualification therefor."** In addition, the Act provides that **"The Council shall issue and from time to time revise a Code of Practice laying down standards of professional conduct and practice expected of registered educators."**

Further, **"It is the duty of the Council –**

- a) To keep proper accounts and proper records in relation to accounts;**
- b) To prepare in respect of each financial year of the Council a statement of accounts; and**
- c) To send copies of the statements to the Minister and to the Auditor General before the end of the month of June next following the financial year to which the statement relates."**

The Council also has to **"make an annual report to the Minister...."**

There are other provisions concerning Standing Committees.

Members will also be aware that I have made public statements as well as statements on this floor pertaining to our plan to amend the Bermuda Educators Council Act.

Mr. Speaker, on 19 October, I met with the Council, at their request, and shared with them my intent to amend the Bermuda Educators Council Act and welcomed their input on same. Members subsequently shared their input.

In fact, the amendments were promised in the recent Throne Speech and, on Friday 18 November, I made a statement in this House informing Members that we intended to amend the Bermuda Educators Council Act. In fact, in a press conference the preceding day, I had reported that we had consulted widely with all stakeholders including the Bermuda Educators Council.

Mr. Speaker, in reviewing the correspondence and legislation regarding the Bermuda Educators Council, it became clear that the original intent had been to pay the fees for the first year as a means of funding the operations of the Council. There was also evidence to show that *(because the Council did not get off the ground as quickly as anticipated)*; the funding was extended to a second year.

However, Government was still paying these licensing fees in 2010. **Mr. Speaker**, there was never any intent for this to be an on-going financial responsibility of the Ministry.

In January 2011, I verbally communicated this position to the Council; and in May of this year, I communicated in writing that the Ministry would no longer be paying the licensing fee for educators.

As a result, the Council expressed their concern regarding their financial viability.

The Council was advised that there were matters which needed to be addressed before we could consider the type of financial commitment the Ministry could make to support the Council. These included:

1. Moving out of rental accommodation into Government accommodation;
and
2. Adopting the recommendations made in the Internal Audit Reports concerning staffing and budgeting

The Council has produced a Budget which was received on Wednesday 30 November, and this is very helpful as I have a responsibility to this House and the people of Bermuda to account for all expenditure made by the Ministry of Education.

Finally **Mr. Speaker**, the Bermuda Educators Council Act 2002 provides that a series of steps must be taken in the event of a resignation from the Council. Once official notification of such steps has been received, we will determine the best way forward in keeping with the Act.

Thank you.