



**Contribution**  
**of**  
**The Honourable Keith Bell, M.P.**  
**Minister of Housing and Urban Renewal**  
**On**  
**The Urban Renewal Authority Bill, 2024**  
**Before The House of Assembly**  
**Wednesday, 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2024**

## **CONTRIBUTION**

Madam Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the wonderful people of Carmichael, filled with a deep sense of purpose and conviction. As we stand in this Honourable House to debate the Urban Renewal Authority Bill, 2024, I am guided by the words of Proverbs 11:14, which states:

**"Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors  
there is safety."**

This scripture speaks directly to the heart of our mission today. Without vision, leadership, and structure, communities risk falling into chaos. But with wise counsel and collaborative effort, we can create a foundation of safety, stability, and progress.

Madam Speaker, I would like to begin by expressing my heartfelt gratitude to my family, who have been my constant source of strength and inspiration. To my beloved mother, my father-in-law, my sons, my daughter-in-law, and my grandson, your unwavering love and support have guided me through the most challenging of times. In a world that often demands so much

of us, it is your steadfast presence that keeps me grounded and focused on the path ahead. Your sacrifices, understanding, and encouragement fuel my passion to serve the people of this great nation, and for that, I am eternally grateful.

Madam Speaker, I must also extend my deepest thanks to the Progressive Liberal Party for their continued trust and confidence in me. I stand here today as a proud member of a Party that has always championed the cause of the people and sought to bring meaningful change to their lives. I am particularly grateful to the Honourable Prime Minister, whose visionary leadership has paved the way for the transformative work we are doing today.

To my Cabinet and Parliamentary colleagues, I express my sincere appreciation for your wisdom, collaboration, and dedication to the Bahamian people. Together, we are making strides toward building a better future, and the Urban Renewal Authority Bill is a testament to our shared commitment.

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to those who have been instrumental in bringing us to this moment. I recognise the Hon. Lisa

Rahming, Minister of State in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Renewal, for her tireless dedication and support. I also acknowledge our Permanent Secretary, Mr. Reginald Saunders, whose leadership has been invaluable. My deep thanks go to Mr. Stephen Dean and the entire team at Urban Renewal, who work daily to make this vision a reality. Last, but by no means least, I offer special recognition to the Rt. Hon. Algernon Allen and Rev. Dr. Diana Francis, the Co-chairs of Urban Renewal, whose unwavering commitment and guidance continue to shape and elevate this Programme.

Madam Speaker, before moving to the Bill, I will take a moment to briefly advise this Honourable House of the progress we are making in Carmichael in carrying out the mandate of this administration. Our efforts continue to bear fruit, both literally and figuratively, with the farmers' market ensuring that fresh fruits and vegetables are available for the community.

In addition, our job placement assistance programmes are ongoing, providing much-needed support to residents seeking employment. We have also bolstered our community patrols, which are now being conducted by a

dedicated cohort of volunteers. With vehicles generously donated for this purpose, these patrols are enhancing the safety and security of our neighbourhoods. Cleanup efforts remain a priority, with the removal of derelict vehicles continuing in earnest.

Madam Speaker, though Carmichael may not be classified as an urban area, the progress we are making in the Carmichael community underscores the transformative power of a coordinated, comprehensive approach to community development. We are seeing firsthand how targeted support and sustained engagement can tangibly improve lives.

Madam Speaker, today represents a landmark moment for this Davis-led administration as we commence debate on legislation that embodies almost two decades of vision, determination, and resilience. As I embark on this debate, I wish to dedicate my Contribution to the memory of Former Commissioner of Police, the Late Paul Farquharson, a man of profound vision, a mentor, and a colleague.

During my time as an officer, I had the privilege of working under the leadership of Mr. Farquharson, witnessing firsthand his unwavering drive and dedication. His approach to community policing was transformative and has been the driving force behind the very principles of Urban Renewal we now champion. His legacy lives on through this initiative, as we honour his commitment to community and security in our nation's neighbourhoods.

Madam Speaker, the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) has always been the unwavering voice of the people - the Party that stands rooted in the belief that every Bahamian, regardless of background, deserves a fair shot at prosperity, dignity, and a chance to thrive. Since our founding, we have held fast to principles of social and economic equity, a commitment to lifting up all Bahamians, and a vision of national development that does more than just talk - it acts.

Our mission Madam Speaker has never been about lofty promises but about real action, especially for those communities too often left behind. These founding ideals have never wavered, and today they are more alive than ever. We see these values clearly embodied in the work we do, in our drive to strengthen communities, and in this legislation - ensuring that the transformative power of Urban Renewal endures, providing a foundation for future generations and a testament to our enduring commitment. This is the PLP difference - where action meets purpose, and progress lifts us all.

Madam Speaker, the Progressive Liberal Party has always understood that true progress demands bold economic development and unyielding efforts to alleviate poverty. These are not negotiable; they are fundamental. Our Party's foundation is built on policies that uplift every Bahamian, particularly those living on the margins. Urban Renewal is the embodiment of this promise - a direct, powerful force against poverty. It revitalizes neighbourhoods, builds job opportunities, and fortifies community infrastructure. This is not just a commitment to prosperity; it is a commitment to prosperity **for all**.

## ***History Of Urban Renewal***

Madam Speaker, my journey with the Urban Renewal Programme began at its inception when I served as a senior officer in the Royal Bahamas Police Force. The seeds for what would become Urban Renewal were sown by former Prime Minister Perry Christie, who witnessed firsthand the widespread suffering and community decay during his campaign leading up to the 2002 General Election. He opined:

**“There is far too much suffering in this land of plenty.”**

PM Christie pledged that if the PLP were elected, they would tackle the pressing challenges faced by marginalised communities.

Madam Speaker, acting on a commitment to address the crisis facing our urban communities, former Prime Minister Christie tasked then Commissioner of Police, the Late Paul Farquharson to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the conditions of the ‘Farm Road’ community.

The findings Madam Speaker painted an unmistakable picture of escalating crime, social decay, and deeply-rooted struggles - issues that could no longer be ignored. Commissioner Farquharson's Report was presented to the then Minister of National Security, now Her Excellency, The Most Honourable Dame Cynthia "Mother" Pratt, who immediately organized a presentation for the Prime Minister and the Cabinet (table Farm Road Report).

It was in that briefing that we confronted the troubling reality: **urban areas were grappling with not only rising crime, but also crumbling family structures, intensified gang activity, and fractured communities.**

Our officers witnessed first-hand the impact of grinding poverty, the lure of gang life, and the despair that gripped so many of our young people who saw limited educational or economic opportunities before them. Our intelligence made it clear - crime was a symptom of far deeper issues: persistent unemployment, entrenched poverty, and the absence of meaningful community engagement. Traditional policing alone could not combat these

challenges; we needed a transformative, holistic approach that addressed the social and economic roots feeding crime.

Madam Speaker, while we hoped that such findings would provoke immediate action, history has often shown that critical reports are too easily shelved, gathering dust with little consequence. But this report was different.

At this crucial moment, former Prime Minister Christie and his Cabinet showed extraordinary vision and resolve, vowing that his Government would not accept the status quo. It is a profound honour to have the Rt. Hon Perry Christie here with us today as we take this historic step to solidify Urban Renewal through legislative action - a home-grown Programme that has become a cornerstone of hope and change in our nation. His role in launching and championing this transformative initiative has been invaluable.

Madam Speaker, while Urban Renewal is, at its heart, a socially minded programme, it was born out of a powerful commitment to community safety

through policing. From its inception, the PLP understood that community safety and crime reduction are the foundation upon which all social progress rests. Without safety, societies cannot function or grow, and the presence of law enforcement in Urban Renewal was not only intentional, but essential.

Madam Speaker, we understood from the beginning that placing the Royal Bahamas Police Force at the core of Urban Renewal was a transformative and strategic decision. By involving law enforcement directly, we established a coordinated approach that enabled officers to engage meaningfully with communities, understand their needs, and gather vital intelligence to proactively address crime while offering essential support to residents.

Madam Speaker, this decision - placing the Royal Bahamas Police Force at the very heart of Urban Renewal - was not taken lightly. Yes, it has stirred controversy among Members Opposite; yet, we stand unwavering in our conviction that policing must remain a foundational element of Urban

Renewal. Community safety is the very backbone of any society. Without it, development stalls, opportunities fade, and progress halts. By including the RBPF, we are not just addressing crime; we are fortifying a safer, stronger, and more resilient Bahamas for all.

And, Madam Speaker, let us confront a misconception head-on: too often, single-parent households are unjustly vilified as drivers of social decay. The reality tells a different story. Take Barbados, for instance, where single-parent households are as prevalent as here, yet their crime rates remain significantly lower. This demonstrates that family structure alone does not dictate social outcomes; rather, it is the quality of life - the stability of housing, access to nutritious food, quality education, and safe environments that matters. Urban Renewal was designed to address these critical needs, not with judgment, but with understanding and compassion, creating a support system that empowers rather than divides. Dr. David Allen was retained to address psychological issues and Dr. Desiree Cox, Rhodes Scholar was contracted to document the findings and results of Urban Renewal.

Urban Renewal provided transformative alternatives to the draw of gang life by introducing essential support systems and services that had been absent in our urban areas. This was no temporary solution; it was a visionary effort to rebuild the social fabric of communities that had long been neglected. Through community policing, support for youth and families, and partnerships with local leaders, Urban Renewal redefined our approach to tackling these persistent issues.

One cornerstone of the program was the establishment of Community Centres, which quickly became the beating heart of our urban neighbourhoods. These Centres offered young people and adults a safe space to find belonging, purpose, and pride. Programs like the Urban Renewal Band transcended simple after-school activities, serving as powerful tools of empowerment that instilled discipline, teamwork, and dedication. They offered our youth a path away from poverty and crime, igniting hope and ambition in a place of despair.

Madam Speaker, the impact of Urban Renewal was immediate and profound. Just a year after its inception, Urban Renewal earned the Motorola Community Policing Award from the Association of Caribbean Commissioners of Police in 2003. And the accolades didn't stop there - Urban Renewal continued to receive recognition, winning awards from the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) in 2004, 2005, and 2006. How could such a program, proven to be effective and celebrated internationally, have been stopped, reviewed, and cancelled?

Let us remember, too, Madam Speaker, that Urban Renewal became a model across the region. Caribbean nations like Jamaica sent fact-finding missions to witness firsthand the profound impact Urban Renewal was having on our communities, with the intent to replicate it within their own borders. Imagine that, Madam Speaker - a Program born here in The Bahamas, inspiring change throughout the region. This is the legacy of Urban Renewal, and it is one we must protect and expand for the future of our nation.

The impact of Urban Renewal Madam Speaker, extended far beyond after-school activities. The programme also tackled physical decay in urban areas, understanding that a community's environment directly affects self-worth and behaviour. Community clean-ups, removal of derelict vehicles, demolition of abandoned homes, and repair of inhabited ones were integral parts of the initiative. Each cleared lot, every repaired home, and every removed derelict vehicle sent a message to our people that they matter, and their communities deserve hope and opportunity.

Madam Speaker, preventing gang recruitment among our youth is among the programme's most critical aspects. Gangs prey upon vulnerable young people, exploiting their lack of support and opportunity. The Urban Renewal Police Programme faced this challenge head-on by integrating school-based policing into a broader framework of community safety (**table School-Based Policing Report**).

This initiative was not just about law enforcement; it was about fostering an environment for learning and personal growth, free from the influence of gang culture.

With the full support of the Christie-Davis administration, the late Commissioner Paul Farquharson championed this initiative with a vision to disrupt gang recruitment pathways. His leadership made schools safe havens where children could learn without fear. Through direct interventions, including regular counselling sessions, routine bag searches, and the presence of trusted officers, we saw significant reductions in gang recruitment and violence. These proactive measures were critical in breaking the cycle of crime at its root, before it could claim another generation of Bahamians.

Regrettably, Madam Speaker, it was this very policing model that was mischaracterised as a basis for dismantling the Urban Renewal Programme after the 2007 General Elections. There are times, Madam Speaker, when political expediency disrupts progress, and in hindsight, some decisions are

simply wrong. Politicising and dismantling Urban Renewal in 2007 was one such misstep; and the same is true of the School-based Policing Programme.

But we are not here today, Madam Speaker, to dwell on the past. We are here to look boldly toward the future! The Right Honourable Perry Christie, as Prime Minister, was the visionary who championed the Urban Renewal Programme, recognizing it as a path toward profound social transformation.

Madam Speaker, after the unfortunate dismantling of Urban Renewal following the 2007 General Election, the Progressive Liberal Party returned to office in 2012 with renewed resolve to rebuild this essential programme. We relaunched **Urban Renewal 2.0** with vigour! Prime Minister Christie entrusted its revitalisation to the Honourable Philip “Brave” Davis, then Deputy Prime Minister, who took on direct responsibility. This dynamic Christie-Davis combination knew that a true paradigm shift required more than just a relaunch - it demanded the strengthening of the Programme to restore its deep impact on our communities.

With Davis's relentless drive and leadership, Urban Renewal 2.0 took shape, supported by dedicated Co-chairs Cynthia “Mother” Pratt and Algernon Allen, and under the able guidance of the late Honourable Dr. Bernard Nottage as Minister of National Security. Together, this formidable team **infused** Urban Renewal with a renewed sense of hope and resilience, transforming it into a force that restored faith, and strengthened the very foundations of our communities.

One shining example of this change, Madam Speaker, is the Urban Renewal Band. Individuals who had never played a single instrument learned to master not just one, but multiple instruments. Take, for instance, Rodella Rolle, who can now play the Clarinet, Flute, Saxophone, and Trumpet – and she could sing too - a true testament to the transformative power of Urban Renewal.

Madam Speaker, by 2017, the Band's membership had reached a remarkable **1,160 young Bahamians**. Yet, when we assumed office in 2021, that number had tragically dwindled to a **mere 30 members**.

Today, this Bill ensures the permanence of Urban Renewal, securing its continuity and insulating it from the shifting political winds - so that every Bahamian community continues to flourish for generations to come – no child is being left behind.

Madam Speaker, on this point, I must acknowledge the Honourable Member for Killarney. Although he initially called Urban Renewal 2.0 “**a scheme for turning trained police officers into delivery boys**,” he ultimately came around to recognise its importance during his tenure as Prime Minister. To his credit, and under his leadership of the FNM, Urban Renewal was not dismantled; in fact, he allowed it to continue and even extended its reach to additional Family Islands. This shift reflects the broad and growing acknowledgment that Urban Renewal is a critical social initiative. Such

bipartisan acceptance highlights the importance of this legislation, ensuring the Programme's stability, continuity, and lasting impact. Today, we boast of thirteen (13) Urban Renewal Centres in New Providence, seven (7) in Grand Bahama, and nine (9) across the Family Islands.

The journey to today, Madam Speaker, has indeed been arduous. On January 2, 2013, DPM Davis formally requested the Office of the Attorney General to draft the Urban Renewal Commission Bill, marking a significant step toward establishing a permanent legal framework. By November, 2016, the Bill had been tabled in Parliament, following extensive efforts. However, despite our best efforts, the Bill was not passed before the House dissolved in April, 2017. From 2017 to 2021, during the FNM's administration, no movement was made to advance this Bill.

Today, as we debate this Urban Renewal Authority Bill, 2024, we stand ready to secure the future of this transformative Programme. We honour the unwavering commitment of Her Excellency, the Most Honourable Dame

Cynthia “Mother” Pratt, the Right Honourable Perry Christie, the Right Honourable Algernon Allen, Prime Minister Philip Davis, the late Paul Farquharson, and countless others who have championed this cause. Through this Bill, we solidify Urban Renewal’s foundation, ensuring that it will continue to uplift and transform lives in our communities for generations to come.

Madam Speaker, these conditions did not emerge overnight. Our efforts to reverse decades of decline must be equally sustained and unwavering as we move forward. It is within this same spirit of endurance and purpose that we advance Urban Renewal's next chapter.

### **The Bill**

Madam Speaker, the urban challenges we face today are the result of many years of social and economic decline. Problems of this magnitude require not only immediate intervention but a steadfast, long-term

commitment. Urban Renewal is not a task to be completed overnight; it is a journey - one that calls for sustained efforts across years, if not decades.

Repeated changes in policy or direction risk undermining hard-won progress. When we reverse course or allow support to waver, it is the communities who bear the setbacks. We must be resolved in our commitment, prepared to see this effort through, understanding that the full fruits of our labour may not be immediately visible. We are laying a foundation now to ensure Urban Renewal becomes the enduring force for change our communities so desperately need.

Madam Speaker, the Urban Renewal Authority Bill, 2024 is “A Bill for an Act to provide for the establishment of an Urban Renewal Authority to improve the quality of life of residents in designated urban communities throughout The Bahamas and for connected purposes enacted by the Parliament of The Bahamas.”

Madam Speaker, this Bill introduces a scope of definitions aimed at bringing much-needed standardization to the conversation surrounding Urban Renewal. These definitions are crucial for clarity and consistency as we move forward. For example, the term **“urban renewal”** is defined as the revitalization of an urban community, encompassing redevelopment, rehabilitation, conservation, reversal of gentrification, and the re-establishment of traditional communities.

Madam Speaker, the concept of reversing gentrification and re-establishing traditional communities is fundamental to this Bill and reflects a deeply thoughtful approach to urban revitalisation. Too often, gentrification brings economic development but displaces long-standing residents, eroding the unique character and social fabric of these communities. The reversal of gentrification in this Bill is not about stopping progress but ensuring that growth includes those who have called these areas home for generations. It allows for inclusive development that uplifts existing residents, preserves affordability, and prevents forced displacement.

Madam Speaker, this Bill's emphasis on re-establishing traditional communities acknowledges the invaluable bonds, cultural heritage, and support systems that make these areas resilient.

Madam Speaker, Section 3 of the Bill establishes the Authority's objectives, which are focused on organizing, coordinating, managing, and executing a variety of urban renewal programmes and projects. These initiatives are designed to tackle the multi-dimensional challenges facing our urban areas.

Among the objectives, Madam Speaker, is the establishment of Urban Renewal Centres, which will serve as vital hubs of community activity, outreach, and support. These Centres will provide not only administrative oversight but also a place where citizens can access vital services and engage in programs aimed at improving their quality of life.

Financial assistance is a critical component of this Bill. The Authority is empowered to provide loans for minor home repairs (Section 3(b)) and grants for urgent home repairs (Section 3(c)). These provisions ensure that both those who can repay assistance and those who cannot, have access to the support they need.

Additionally, the Bill allows for grants to support urban community programmes and projects (Section 3(d)), which will encourage local development and innovation in tackling issues such as crime, education, and poverty alleviation. Moreover, the Bill focuses on alleviating poverty through initiatives like food-based programs and backyard farming (Section 3(g)), helping to ensure food security and self-sufficiency in urban areas.

Madam Speaker, the Bill also targets the root causes of crime and social decay. It seeks to implement programmes aimed at eliminating crime (Section 3(h)) and discouraging criminal activity through a combination of social services, community engagement, and educational initiatives (Section 3(m)).

In addition, the Bill empowers the Authority to facilitate the removal of dangerous structures (Section 3(j)) and the repair of dilapidated buildings, ensuring that urban spaces are both safe and conducive to living and economic activities. The importance of preparing the next generation is underscored by the Authority's mandate to promote educational programmes that teach children their rights and responsibilities (Section 3(k)) as citizens and community members. Moreover, the Authority will focus on preparing young people for opportunities across The Bahamas through tailored educational programmes (Section 3(l)).

Madam Speaker, the Bill addresses the broader goal of economic development, encouraging and promoting economic activities and small enterprises within urban communities (Section 3(n)). The aim is to create an environment where economic growth can flourish, thereby lifting people out of poverty and empowering them to contribute meaningfully to their communities.

Turning to Section 4 of the Bill, the Power of the Minister to Declare an Urban Community, the Minister is given the authority to declare any district, settlement, town, or zone within The Bahamas as an urban community. This is a significant power, as it allows for the flexibility to address the evolving needs of different areas across our islands.

Madam Speaker, Clause 7 of the Bill is particularly significant as it outlines the powers of the Urban Renewal Authority. The passing of the Urban Renewal Authority Bill, 2024, will solidify Urban Renewal as a national priority, giving the Authority the power to carry out its responsibilities with the efficiency and authority necessary to ensure its mandate is sustained.

It will enhance the capacity for inclusive, sustainable urbanization and the management of human settlements throughout The Bahamas. As our elders might say, this Bill will give "teeth" to the government agency, enabling it to tackle a broad range of complex urban issues, from unsanitary or deficient

housing and inadequate sanitation to climate impacts, urban decay, crime, and poverty.

Madam Speaker, the Establishment of the Urban Renewal Authority as outlined in this Bill is pivotal in ensuring the effective leadership, accountability, and coordination required to sustain this vital programme. The Bill provides a clear structure through Clauses 9 and 11, which include the formation of a Board of Directors and the appointment of a qualified Managing Director to oversee operations. This level of strategic planning and oversight is essential for ensuring that Urban Renewal not only meets its objectives but does so with efficiency and transparency.

The Bill also reinforces the “Whole of Government, Whole of Society Approach,” a model that has proven effective in uniting various governmental and societal forces to tackle complex issues. The Urban Renewal Programme will continue to be underpinned by the Royal Bahamas Police Force (RBPF) through their community policing efforts. However, it will also involve a broader, multi-agency collaboration that includes social workers from the

Ministry of Social Services, officers from the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources, the Ministry of Works and Family Islands, housing officers from my Ministry, as well as input from churches, international organizations, and civil society.

This collaborative engagement will ensure hands-on fieldwork that addresses not only crime, but also public health, disaster risk reduction, and environmental challenges. By working together, these entities will create a holistic approach to improving the quality of life in our urban communities—whether through implementing social programs or building safe and secure homes.

Madam Speaker, one of the most crucial elements of the Urban Renewal Authority Bill, 2024 is the Assistance in Cases of Urgent Need for Minor Residential Home Repair. For too long, too many of our citizens have been living in conditions that are simply unacceptable. Homes are deteriorating, and without the means or support to repair them, many families face physical and

emotional hardship. It is in response to this ongoing crisis that the Urban Renewal Residential Homes / Building Minor Repair Program has been established as a top priority of this government. This program is designed to holistically address the physical and infrastructural decay present in our communities.

Madam Speaker, to date, the Urban Renewal Small Home Repairs Programme has received some 4,482 applications from homeowners seeking assistance in New Providence, with 700 additional applications coming from the Family Islands. In terms of contractor interest, 618 applications were submitted in New Providence alone, alongside 954 approved contractors, of which 133 contractors have been assigned repair contracts.

In New Providence, 1,006 homeowners met the criteria for assistance, and from this group, 133 homeowners have been awarded repair contracts. Meanwhile, in the Family Islands, 328 homeowners have been approved and assigned repair contracts (particularly in Abaco and Grand Bahama), addressing critical needs in these areas.

This overwhelming demand underscores the community's reliance on and belief in this programme, highlighting both the success to date and the need for additional resources to meet the extensive remaining requests for support.

Madam Speaker, this is not just about repairing homes - this is about restoring dignity. This programme directly tackles the compromised living conditions that too many Bahamians are enduring. Clause 14 of this Bill ensures that the Residential Homes / Building Minor Repair Program is not only a core element of Urban Renewal, but that it remains legally and ethically sound. This clause ensures that the program will continue to provide essential support, transparently and effectively, to those most in need.

This is not a political promise or a temporary fix - it is a core commitment, woven into the very fabric of the Urban Renewal Programme, ensuring that no Bahamian is left behind. By focusing on urgent home repairs,

we are addressing both immediate physical needs and long-term social stability.

Madam Speaker, the Urban Renewal Authority Bill 2024 addresses one of the most critical components of the program - grants and loans for residential repairs. Clause 14 outlines how grants may be provided for community programs, while Clause 15 specifies the circumstances under which grants may be extended for urgent home repairs. However, Clause 17 details how loans are to be granted for minor home repairs, creating a structured framework for determining eligibility.

This has been the most challenging aspect of the Bill to develop. Development requires proper funding, and as stewards of the people's money, we must strike a delicate balance. Grants are necessary in cases of extreme need, where residents simply do not have the means to afford repairs on their own. The loan provisions offer a way to ensure more residents can receive

assistance while repaying funds over time, thus supporting the sustainability of the program.

The decision as to whether a person qualifies for a loan or grant is outlined through specific policies and procedures to be implemented by the Board. The Board will assess the financial standing of applicants, the nature of the repairs needed, and whether immediate intervention is necessary. This flexible system is a starting framework—one that will evolve as we gain more experience in its implementation. It's important to acknowledge that this approach, while not perfect, provides a much-needed foundation after more than a decade of discussion and planning. It ensures that we are not just reactive but proactive in addressing the housing challenges our communities face, while also safeguarding public funds.

Madam Speaker, Clauses 17 and 18 set out a strong legal and operational framework for Registration of Contractors to Undertake Minor Residential Home Repairs to ensure that every aspect of this programme is executed with

the highest level of accountability and professionalism. These provisions ensure that all contractors involved are properly registered, that the necessary documentation is in place, and that agreements are formalized with clear and binding conditions for quality assurance.

Madam Speaker, as we move towards the final provisions of the Urban Renewal Authority Bill, 2024, it is important to note that these sections ensure that the Authority operates with the highest levels of accountability, transparency, and efficiency. Sections 20 through 24 outline the seamless transition of personnel from the existing Urban Renewal Commission to the new Authority. This process guarantees that those who have dedicated themselves to serving urban communities will be offered continuity of employment, with the same or better terms, while maintaining their pension rights. The Authority is also empowered to establish its own pension plan and provide gratuities, ensuring long-term security for its employees.

Madam Speaker, financial stability is critical to the success of this Authority, and Sections 25 through 33 provide a robust framework for managing its finances. The Authority's funds will come from Parliamentary appropriations, donations, and loans, with the Board having the power to borrow and invest responsibly, subject to the approval of the Minister of Finance. It must also prepare annual borrowing and procurement plans, ensuring compliance with the Public Debt Management Act and the Public Procurement Act. The requirement for mid-year and annual reports, along with audited accounts, ensures that the Authority remains transparent and accountable in its financial dealings.

Lastly, Madam Speaker, Sections 34 through 40 ensure that the Authority is equipped with the necessary legal protections and operational flexibility. Members of the Board and employees are granted immunity from lawsuits for actions carried out in good faith, while confidentiality provisions safeguard sensitive information. The Authority is also exempt from certain taxes, further supporting its financial viability. These final sections ensure the

seamless transition of assets from the former Urban Renewal Commission and give the Authority the legal foundation it needs to carry out its critical work.

Madam Speaker, as we stand on the edge of making Urban Renewal a permanent fixture through this Bill, it is only fitting that we reflect on the lives transformed by this visionary programme. Urban Renewal has been more than policy or procedure; it has been a lifeline, a source of hope, and a platform for opportunity in some of our most vulnerable communities. Through its initiatives, we have witnessed extraordinary stories of resilience, empowerment, and success - stories that embody the very spirit of this nation and highlight the profound impact that targeted, compassionate support can have.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

Madam Speaker, the Urban Renewal Programme has not only made a profound impact here at home but has garnered respect and admiration on the regional and international stage. Its holistic approach to combating crime,

alleviating poverty, and strengthening community bonds has earned the programme prominence on the world stage.

Over the years, the unwavering support from Bahamian businesses and individuals has empowered this mission. Generous donors like the Fox Foundation, Dame Anita and Algernon Allen, Sir Franklyn and Lady Sharon Wilson, Bahamas Striping, BTC, Sandals Royal Bahamian, MSC Cruise Lines, the Chinese Embassy, the American Embassy, and countless others have fortified the programme's outreach. Their contributions - ranging from monetary donations to essential resources - have collectively fuelled Urban Renewal's capacity to bring positive, far-reaching change to our communities. While this list is not exhaustive, it reflects the broad-based support and commitment of so many to the vision of a brighter Bahamas.

Notably, Madam Speaker, Albany Resort, made the largest single contribution to date - a \$1 million investment in Urban Renewal secured under the skilful guidance of Perry Christie as a term of their 2014 Heads of Agreement.

Madam Speaker, in July, I had the privilege of informing this Honourable House about the transformative "Battle of the Bands," an event brought to life by none other than our Prime Minister. This initiative was more than a display of talent; it was a powerful testament to the potential and promise within our youth, a showcase of how the Urban Renewal Band changes lives. The results speak volumes.

Madam Speaker, over \$600,000 in music scholarships were awarded - \$100,000 from Talladega College and an extraordinary \$504,000 from Langston University. These scholarships have opened doors to higher education and opportunities that would otherwise be out of reach for many of our young people, underscoring the profound, far-reaching value of the Band Programme.

Additionally, that evening, the Rt. Hon. Algernon Allen and Dame Anita Allen stepped forward to pledge \$20,000 to Urban Renewal in memory of his late mother - a generous donation that exemplifies the unwavering community support behind this programme. And the money has been received in full!

Today, Madam Speaker, I am proud to announce that this investment in our youth has already borne fruit. As a direct result of these scholarships, 21 Urban Renewal participants are now enrolled at Langston University, embarking on their academic journeys this fall. And it doesn't end there; a further 15 young Bahamians are set to join them in the spring of 2025. This is the transformative power of Urban Renewal - changing lives, expanding horizons, and paving the way for a stronger, more resilient Bahamas.

Madam Speaker, today, I am pleased to report that our appeal has struck a chord within our community. Quietly but with profound impact, several generous individuals and families have stepped forward to champion this mission. Madam Speaker, a Foundation has pledged Twenty Thousand Dollars (\$20,000) to support programme participants in the Kemp Road area. Notably, this donor grew up in this very community and is driven by a heartfelt desire to give back to the place that shaped his journey.

Madam Speaker, further pledges/donations include:

- A **\$5,000 contribution** from a community-minded Bahamian family
- A **\$10,000 donation** from the national office of an international company dedicated to supporting the Urban Renewal Programme
- A **\$20,000 gift** from a young Bahamian entrepreneur to support Urban Renewal's broader mission across The Bahamas

Madam Speaker, all of these individuals and entities recognize the life-changing impact of the Urban Renewal Programme – this is indeed a New Day!

Madam Speaker but it does not stop there! I am pleased to also report that a Family Foundation has given Thirty Thousand Dollars (\$30,000) which will be used to amplify the Band programme. This family has roots in Ross Corner. These are real Bahamians giving back to the communities from whence they came. God bless all of you.

Madam Speaker, Urban Renewal thrives not only because of substantial contributions but also due to the quiet, steadfast support of every day

Bahamians who have embraced this cause. From volunteer youth mentors, who dedicate countless hours to guiding our next generation, to families offering small but meaningful donations—these acts of kindness are the lifeblood of our programme. Together with major benefactors, these unsung heroes represent the diverse, unwavering commitment to lifting our communities. Urban Renewal, thus, is truly powered by Bahamians from all walks of life, embodying a spirit of unity that strengthens us as a nation.

Madam Speaker, we owe our deepest gratitude to these donors who have come forward to champion this cause. Their contributions demonstrate a profound belief in the transformative power of Urban Renewal and the critical importance of giving back. But we must not stop here. To truly bring lasting change to our communities, we need even more partners—private sector allies, philanthropists, and those who recognize the value of investing in our people.

Madam Speaker, no government can undertake this work alone. These contributions serve as powerful reminders that this is a shared mission and

that, together, we can build a legacy of hope and opportunity for our communities. I encourage others to step forward and join us in this vital effort to strengthen and uplift The Bahamas.

Madam Speaker, today, we stand on the precipice of history. With this Urban Renewal Authority Bill, 2024, we are not merely passing legislation; we are forging a new legacy, one that solidifies our collective commitment to revitalising and empowering Bahamian communities for generations to come. This Bill is the culmination of decades of unwavering dedication, a vision that began with transformative leaders and will continue to inspire hope, resilience, and unity across every corner of our archipelago.

What we are accomplishing today, Madam Speaker, is monumental. Through the establishment of this Authority, we are securing the infrastructure necessary for lasting change. We are ensuring that the needs of our most vulnerable communities will no longer be at the mercy of political tides or

fleeting administrations. This is a permanent commitment to a stronger, more equitable Bahamas.

As we move forward, let us remember that this journey of renewal and restoration is far from over. It is an ongoing mission - one that calls for the continued support and engagement of all Bahamians. The volunteerism, the donations, the scholarships, the powerful partnerships formed through Urban Renewal are a testament to what can be achieved when we work together, united by a shared purpose. With each contribution and every act of service, we reinforce the foundation of a nation that values opportunity, resilience, and the dignity of all its people. And let us recognise that if we can help someone, as we pass along, then we know that our lives are not in vain!

Let this Bill be a lasting testament to our commitment, a statement that we will not abandon our urban communities to neglect. We stand here today with a vision for change, knowing this journey will take time and resolve—

but firm in our belief that together, we can restore and uplift every corner of The Bahamas for generations to come. Let's truly make it a 'New day!'

Madam Speaker, let us take pride in this moment. This is a historic milestone, and the progress that will flow from today's decision will enrich the lives of countless Bahamians, now and into the future. This Bill is a promise - a promise that we are building a Bahamas where every community, every family, and every child can thrive.

Let us move forward with purpose, with vision, and with the firm resolve that the best days of The Bahamas lie ahead. Because Madam Speaker, at the end of the day, when all is said and done – **we are one; we are one Bahamas!**

Carmichael so moves...