

Towards Establishing a Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) in Jamaica

Presented by: Cheryl Gibson, Assistant Clerk,
Houses of Parliament, Jamaica

Background

- **World Bank Institutional review of the Parliament in 2011, tabled in 2013:**
 - **Recommendations made for the Institutional Strengthening of the Office of the Clerk to the Houses;**
 - **One recommendation was the establishment of a technical unit headed by a Parliamentary Budget Officer.**

Background (Continued)

- **The unit would primarily support the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee (PAAC), which was in need of permanent independent support on budgetary matters throughout the year, particularly with its new mandate of examining supplementary estimates prior to them being approved by the Standing Finance Committee and the House of Representatives**

Purpose of the Office

undertake research upon the request of the PAAC and other committees

assist with budget-related research and analysis and provide critical accounting expertise

provide analysis on the state of the nation's finances and trends in the national economy

use interns from the various faculties of the University of the West Indies (UWI) to augment research capacity

be independent and governed by legislation

Support for the Establishment of the Office

- Grant funds in excess of US\$600,000.00 committed for the design and establishment of “a Technical Office for fiscal and budget analysis”
- Funding provided under agreement with the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) and the European Union (EU) and the Government of Jamaica (GOJ)

Support (Continued)

- Pilot project implemented to model the functions of the office and allow for delivery of services while the office is being designed
- Consulting firm, InfoCivitas, headed by the first Canadian PBO, has been engaged since November 2016 to lead the process of establishing the office
- Three Researchers and an Administrator hired to support the research requirements of the office

Challenges in Establishing the PBO

Identifying a Parliamentary Budget Officer and Deputy

- advertisement in the two main local newspapers
- head hunting carried out by InfoCivitas have resulted in limited interest in the posts
- In the interim the researchers are being guided by InfoCivitas with specific assignments and research duties

Difficulty engaging the Parliamentary leadership

- scheduled meetings with members of the Project Oversight Committee* have seen low attendance
 - impacts the communication of information pertaining to the project.
- ***Members:**
- Speaker of the House of Representatives;
 - President of the Senate;
 - Leaders of Government Business in the House and Senate;
 - Leaders of Opposition Business House and Senate

Challenges (Continued)

Relationship with Committees

- No structured way of communicating committee assignments.
- Proposed protocol accepted by the committee Clerks and Researchers, to be formally communicated to committee chairs.

New Internship agreement not yet effected

- Consultants have been in discussion with UWI but a formal agreement is yet to be signed.

Physical Office Space

- space identified but has taken an inordinate length of time to be ready for occupancy (about 90% completed).

Challenges (Continued)

Concerns raised regarding the mandate of the PBO

- Through consultations with key public figures, concerns were raised regarding the mandate of a PBO and its proposed operation *vis á vis* the PBO in Canada or the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) in the United States, and its suitability to the Jamaican context.
- Proposal made that an independent fiscal oversight authority would better suit the needs of the Government
- The Prime Minister has advised that all efforts at hiring a Parliamentary Budget Officer and a Deputy should be halted until Cabinet is provided with detailed information on the proposed Budget Office.
- A Cabinet Submission was prepared and submitted to the Cabinet Secretary for submission to the Cabinet. We await their response.

The way forward

- The office is no longer officially referred to as the Parliamentary Budget Office or PBO
- The new name being proposed is the Parliamentary Research Office
- Broader research mandate which would include budget-related research
- A Director and Deputy Director of Fiscal Analysis and Research will be recruited as soon as approval is given for the changes to take effect

