



Parliament of Sint Maarten

Staten van Sint Maarten

To the Hon. Prime Minister and Minister of General Affairs
Ms. S.E. Jacobs
Administration Building
Philipsburg

UV/276/2019-2020

Philipsburg, April 30, 2020

Re: Questions from MP A.J.G. Romou concerning school repairs

Hon. Prime Minister Jacobs,

Herewith I submit to you questions posed by Member of Parliament, Ms. A.J.G. Romou pursuant to article 62 of the Constitution and article 69 of the Rules of Order of the Parliament of Sint Maarten.

The letter is self-explanatory.

Yours truly,

R. Brison
President of Parliament

Linette A. Gibs

STATEN VAN SINT MAARTEN

From: Linette A Gibs <linamgibs@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, April 28, 2020 3:48 AM
To: Linette A. Gibs
Subject: Fwd: questions for ministers
Attachments: Parliament MIn AZ Round 1 questions- 2020 budget.docx; Parliament Min Jus Round 1 questions- 2020 budget.docx; Parliament Min Education Round 1 questions- 2020 budget.docx; Parliament Min TEATT OR FINANCE Round 1 questions- 2020 budget.docx

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----- Forwarded message -----

From: Angelique Romou <angelique.j.romou@gmail.com>
Date: Mon, Apr 27, 2020, 16:23
Subject: questions for ministers
To: <nancy.joubert@sxmparliament.org>
Cc: <linamgibs@gmail.com>, Angelique Romou <info@angeliqueromou.com>

-- FYI

Kind regards,

Angelique J.G. Romou MSc

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Angelique J.G. Romou

Member of the Parliament of
Sint Maarten

April 27th 2020

Meeting: Virtual Plenary Public Meeting regarding the budget of Sint Maarten for the financial year 2020 (IS 764/2019-2020 dd20apr2020)

Ministry of General Affairs

- In the responses provided from the Honorable Prime Minister to one of the question posed by MP Claudius Buncamper, the Prime Minister indicated that school repair projects related to the Trust Fund will begin in the summer school holiday July 2020. I can imagine that COVID-19 has delayed repair efforts. With this in mind, I have a few questions that I would like to pose to the Prime Minister, in collaboration with the minister of Vromi through you Mr. Chair:
 1. With the new school year scheduled to start on August 10th, will the vital repairs be concluded by then?
 2. If not, what is the new revised timelines of when these repairs will be completed and how will these repairs take place? For example; only during school breaks?
 3. With July 2020 being in the hurricane season, have repairs been prioritized and if yes, what are these priority repairs?
 4. There is undoubtedly opportunities internationally for funding through the sourcing of grants and now more than ever, we need to find creative ways to fund valuable projects on the island. I know that the Department of Foreign Affairs has experience with grant proposals and in sourcing grants within the EU and there are many civil servants with the gift of writing. Are there any plans to actively seek grant opportunities for which Government or NGOs can apply? Any plans to mobilize a team to undertake the writing of grant proposals with the possible supervision by the Department of Foreign Affairs?



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Ministry of Justice

In the 2020 Policy Actions of the Ministry of Justice, the further construction and improvement of the center for the detention, care and support of the delinquent juveniles was included. I was happy to read that improving Miss Lalie Center is a policy action for 2020 as I believe proper care, education and rehabilitation can be an effective intervention to deterring our youngsters from further criminal activities in the future.

However, I have a few policy related questions for the Minister of Justice and Minister Samuel if necessary;

- Are there currently any juveniles at the Miss Lalie Center?
- With compulsory education in mind, what is the current role of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport as it relates to the continuation of education for youngsters whilst in the center? Especially the role of the Division for Inspection and the Department of Youth.
- Can the Minister of Justice give a description of some of the improvements planned for Miss Lalie Center, especially as it relates to care and education programs within the center?
- What is the role of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport in the development of the plans to further improve the center? Structured educational programs is a key requirement in the rehabilitation process and I would like to ensure that the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports plays a key role in the supervision of quality educational programs for youngsters at the center.



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Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport

Distance Learning

Around the world, online learning also called distance learning is the new method of delivery instruction and ensuring the continuation of learning at home.

However for distance learning to effectively work, two keys things are necessary: a device and connectivity. As all children have a right to education and no child should be left behind, I have the following questions:

- Does the Ministry know how many students do not have access to devices and/or internet?
- What is the ministry's plan to secure devices and connectivity for our most vulnerable students who do not have access to devices or internet or both?
- What is currently being done for teachers who have no access to a device, or internet or both?
- In Minister Samuel's answers to Parliament on Saturday, the honorable minister indicated that each schoolboard submitted a school continuity plan. How is the execution of these plans being monitored and how is accountability taking place during this crisis?
- Is there research being done to know if children are learning from home without a proper breakfast? During regular conditions we often heard of children coming to school hungry and the importance of nutrition and the importance of breakfast to a child's learning. Are there any measures currently being implemented to identify and address these needs during this crisis ?

School feeding programs in SXM provide children with probably the most nutritious meal of the day which is essential for the development and wellbeing of the child. It won't be easy but government should use the school or district communities or a home delivery program to ensure that these children get that meal. If the above is not feasible let's look at giving cash cards or food stamps etc that's these children can get that meal they so need. Opening of schools might be very slow as government would want to ensure a new outbreak won't be on the horizon so proper planning needs to

happen. This of course can change on a day today basis dependant on world developments.

Additionally, I recommend that we have a special hotline for the education needs of the children. For example, a 915 hotline or similar where parents can contact for special requests for the children, as this to must be addressed before we have a learning pandemic.

This line can be available during certain hours of the day and be manned by Ministry personnel. This would also give the Ministry key data and information as to the types of problems and obstacles parents are facing to facilitate learning at home.

Request for Update on Exams

- We know that FBE exams have been cancelled. What decisions have been taken regarding secondary education exams?
- I read that CXC has revised its examination strategy and will employ the E testing modality as quoted from their website. Does this require extra preparations on behalf of the Division of Exams to accommodate this revision (like setting up a test center) and do these extra preparations have financial implications?
- With FBE examinations cancelled, what does this financially mean for government? Were monies saved due to this development?

Education Reform

Minister Samuel, through you Mr. Chair, you indicated that education reform is a priority for the Ministry. So with that in mind, I took a look at the budget to pinpoint activities of educational reform and the investments proposed by Government.

Then I took a look at the organizational structure of the Ministry to identify who would lead educational reform. According to the formation, the Division for Educational Innovation would be responsible. According to information provided by Government, two key responsibilities amongst others stood out.

They are:

- To initiate and prepare education plans for the educational sector of St. Maarten.
- To initiate and implement all educational reforms on behalf of St. Maarten, with the main purpose of improving the quality of education in St. Maarten in order to guarantee the success of all children in the educational system of St. Maarten.

So based on that, one will conclude that this is the division to lead educational reform. However, the budget does not reflect this. The Division has one of the smallest, if not the smallest operational budget of the entire Ministry. A mere NAF 130 or so thousand guilders is budgeted for projects, not taking into account the ICT in Education funds that were specifically earmarked for the iSTEP Project.

Therefore my questions are:

- What education reform projects or activities is the Division leading/ working on?
- Minister you mentioned that secondary education and special needs are priority areas for reform. What is the Ministry's plan for such reform and what is the role of Innovations in this?
- Minister Irion introduced Innovative Fridays during his tenure as Acting Minister of ECYS and the Division for Educational Innovation was chosen for the pilot. I can imagine the COVID-19 pandemic has put a halt on many things, however can you update on the progress of the initiative and if this program will continue post state of emergency? The reason I am asking this is because such initiatives have reaped great benefits for companies globally that have implemented it. With the division being responsible for educational reform as suggested in the formation, such an initiative can mean innovative developments for education and the Ministry. These type of initiatives can also come up with resolutions for obstacles the Ministry is now facing as a result of the pandemic. Therefore I am interested in knowing what role this initiative can play especially as anticipate our road to our recovery from the pandemic.
- About 15 years ago (or more), Foundation Based Education was introduced. Has FBE been evaluated? If not, what are the plans for the evaluation of the FBE method?

Division for Study Financing

Due to the developments with COVID-19 and travel restrictions, SXM students in the US, who are study financing recipients have opted and applied to the Division to follow summer school programs.

Through you Mr. Chair, can the Minister indicate the following:

- How many of our students submitted requests to the Division for Study Financing to follow summer programs?
- How many of these requests were approved, how many were denied?
- What are the most prevalent reasons for denial of such a request?
- Students have the option to appeal, what is the appeal process?

Division for Public Education

- DPE Privatization has quite a significant budget increase and amount in comparison to last year where it stood at 0. It is very possible that it is a new budget post. Can you give a breakdown of the projected activities this budget post entails?
- School materials have been a plight for public school teachers for many years. What is the Ministry doing to address this issue and is the Ministry looking into digital resources to curb costs but still provide the necessary content?
- I know that the Ministry and the Division for Public Education has been working on the restructuring/revamping of St. Maarten Vocational Training School. Can you give an update as to the progress made and a synopsis of the future plans for the school as it pertains to this? Additionally, does these plans include establishing an official status for the school? Seeing that this also forms part of education reform, what is the role of Division for Educational Innovation in this process?
- Now more than ever, COVID 19 has shown us the importance of further developing agriculture on the island. One way we can sustain agriculture in the long term is by educating our youth. I know the Ministry some years ago commenced with the inclusion of agriculture in the curriculum through a local agriculturist Joslyn Richardson. Can you give an update on what the Ministry is doing presently on the further development and inclusion of agriculture in the curriculum? I am certain that Mr. Richardson as well as Mr. Deniscio Wyatt and other agriculturalists will be willing to assist with this.

UNESCO

As an Associate Member of UNESCO, the Ministry can tap into UNESCO funding possibilities. Especially as we are now talking Stimulus, Relief and cost cutting, being able to access external funds is a way that government can tap into funding to carry out valuable initiatives. Therefore, my questions are;

- Has Unesco Sint Maarten identified any UNESCO funded opportunities, especially COVID -19 related funding opportunities, that St. Maarten is eligible for?
- What are the UNESCO funded participation programme projects currently being executed on the island? And was Sint Maarten able to utilize the full amount that can be allotted under this program? Are any of these projects being executed by Government?

Department of Culture

Minister in your responses you indicated the importance of the orange economy. For the public at large can you explain what is the orange economy and what policies are the Department of Culture working on to further stimulate and promote opportunities for the Orange Economy?



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Ministry of TEATT/ FINANCE

Seeing our vulnerable financial and economic position, we must as much as possible limit the out flow of money and stimulate the flow of money within the economy.

I have a few question for Minister of TEATT and/or Minister of Finance regarding money transfer companies on the island.

When a person sends money out of this country, what is the percentage or tariff government collects per transaction?

What is the amount collected from Government in transaction tariffs from these money transfer companies?

Let us take the figures of 2019 or 2018 if the figures of 2019 is not readily available?

How many transactions take place on a yearly basis?

How does government recoup these funds from these companies?