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Jamaica Gov't to Work with Telecoms Stakeholders to Address Service Challenges

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JAMAICA -- Minister of Science, Energy and Technology, Hon. Fayval Williams, says the Government will be working with telecommunications providers and other stakeholders to address issues impacting service to consumers.

She said that the “quality of service challenges that operators are facing today calls for the Government to take a more assertive approach with all stakeholders to find solutions... and improve broadband access for all Jamaicans and create resilience in Jamaica’s national broadband network”.

Mrs. Williams was speaking in the House of Representatives on Tuesday (November 12), where she addressed recent complaints from citizens regarding the quality of service

from the two major telecommunications providers – Digicel and Flow.

These include dropped calls, calls not being initiated and delays in contacting customer service with sometimes inadequate redress.

She noted that following persistent complaints from customers, the Office of Utilities Regulation (OUR) has instructed the telecoms providers to immediately provide customers with service interruption notifications and service restoration times.

She said the regulator has indicated that it expects network upgrades to be carried out with minimum dislocation to customers, and where unavoidable, customers should be kept updated and given specific notifications.

In addition, the OUR has committed to “continue to explore the options that are available to incentivize providers to deal expeditiously with the issues that are causing great hardship and frustrations to consumers”.

The Minister said the regulator has highlighted “that the current problems underscore the need to include, in any future enactment or amendment of information and communications technology (ICT) legislation, powers to quickly impose and enforce sanctions for customer services breaches”.

Mrs. Williams told the House that the telecoms providers, at a meeting on November 11 and 12 with the OUR and Ministry representatives, indicated that the current issues result from a number of challenges being experienced.

Among the issues highlighted by the providers are that:

- investments in modernizing networks have not been fast enough to keep pace with the growing bandwidth demands of consumers and applications, and thus today's infrastructure is inadequate for the country's needs;
- high dependency on a single fixed infrastructure that provides little redundancies due to a lack of alternatives in the market, leaving networks susceptible to all kinds of hazards and risks;
- The significant issue of the rising incidence of theft of network equipment and the need for stiffer penalties in order to give the telecoms providers a fighting chance at maintaining resilience in their network.