

REPORT FROM THE CABINET OF ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY 16th SEPTEMBER 2026

The Cabinet of Antigua and Barbuda commenced its meeting with a meditation and prayer delivered by Pastor Davis, who based his reflection on **Hebrews 2:1–4**. The passage urges believers to pay careful attention to the things they have heard, so that they do not drift away from the truth and guidance of God.

Reflecting on Hebrews 2, the pastor drew particular attention to the opening admonition: *“Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.”* He explained that the passage calls for attentiveness and spiritual discipline. It is not enough merely to hear the Word of God; believers must take heed of it, retain it and allow it to guide their actions.

He reminded Cabinet that amid the many demands, pressures and responsibilities of leadership, there can be distractions that make it difficult to hear and respond to God's direction. The scripture therefore provides an important reminder that those entrusted with responsibility must remain grounded in sound principles and attentive to the wisdom that comes from above.

The pastor further reflected that Hebrews 2:1–4 speaks to the seriousness of God's message and the responsibility that accompanies receiving it. God's guidance, he noted, should never be treated casually or ignored. Rather, His Word should provide a foundation upon which decisions are made and lives are ordered.

Applying the scripture to the work of the Cabinet, the pastor observed that national leadership carries tremendous responsibility. The decisions taken by Cabinet affect individuals, families, communities and the future direction of Antigua and Barbuda. Members must therefore continually seek wisdom, understanding and discernment as they deliberate on matters affecting the nation.

He encouraged members of the Cabinet to make time, even amid their demanding schedules, to listen for God's voice and to allow divine principles of justice, compassion, humility and service to influence their work.

The pastor gave thanks to Almighty God for the gift of another day and for another opportunity to gather, to give thanks and, most importantly, to listen to His voice. He reminded members of the Cabinet that each new day is a blessing and should be approached with gratitude and a willingness to seek God's direction.

In concluding the meditation, the pastor offered prayers for **the** Prime Minister, members of the Cabinet and the people of Antigua and Barbuda. He thanked God for another day of life and service and prayed that Cabinet would remain attentive to His voice.

He asked Almighty God to grant members of the Cabinet wisdom from on high, giving them discernment to make sound decisions, courage to do what is right, compassion in their service to the people and strength to faithfully discharge the responsibilities entrusted to them.

The pastor committed the deliberations of the Cabinet into God's hands, praying that His guidance would remain with its members throughout their meeting and that their decisions would contribute to the peace, wellbeing, progress and continued development of Antigua and Barbuda.

1.

Cabinet Backs Operation Iron Grip and Orders Review of Child Justice Act as Government Strengthens Crime-Fighting Measures

The Cabinet of Antigua and Barbuda has reaffirmed its full support for the Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda as it continues Operation Iron Grip, while agreeing to a review of provisions of the Child Justice Act dealing with the diversion of juveniles accused of firearm offences and other serious crimes.

The matters formed part of extensive Cabinet discussions on Wednesday on national security, youth involvement in serious crime, and the Government's continuing efforts to strengthen the legislative and law-enforcement framework.

Cabinet noted the progress being made by the Royal Police Force through Operation Iron Grip and commended officers for their recent successes in suppressing serious criminal activity.

Operation Iron Grip was launched in June as a targeted crime-fighting initiative aimed at disrupting criminal activity and increasing visible police presence, particularly in identified hotspot communities. Public reporting at the launch indicated that the operation would involve targeted enforcement and greater police activity designed to disrupt the movement and operations of persons engaged in criminal activity.

The Cabinet noted that the initiative complements other measures being pursued by the Government to strengthen public safety, including the expansion of the national CCTV surveillance network. Government is currently deploying more than 200 cameras at strategic locations to assist the Police with crime prevention, detection and investigations. This process is expected to be completed by the end of September.

Cabinet pledged its continued support to the Commissioner of Police and the men and women of the Royal Police Force and reiterated that the Police will be provided with the resources and institutional support required to effectively discharge their responsibilities.

Cabinet again appealed to members of the public to support the Police by providing information concerning criminal activity. Members emphasized that effective policing requires cooperation between law enforcement and the communities they serve and encouraged citizens with relevant information to make it available to the Police.

Cabinet also held lengthy discussions on the operation of the Child Justice Act, 2015, particularly as it relates to children and juveniles alleged to have committed firearm offences and other serious crimes.

The Act defines a child as a person under 18 and establishes a system under which certain matters involving children may be diverted away from formal court proceedings. Among the stated purposes of diversion are holding a child accountable, encouraging rehabilitation and reintegration, avoiding unnecessary stigmatization and preventing a child from acquiring a criminal record.

Under the existing legislation, the Child Justice Board considers whether a matter may be diverted after taking account of several factors, including recommendations from the Director of Public Prosecutions or a designated prosecutor, the assessment of the child, the views presented at the initial inquiry, the child's willingness to acknowledge responsibility and the child's age.

Cabinet agreed that, in light of concerns surrounding the involvement of some young persons in firearm-related and other serious offences, the operation of these provisions should now be reviewed.

The Office of the Attorney General has therefore been tasked with conducting a review of the Child Justice Act, with particular attention to limiting the circumstances in which matters involving firearms and other serious criminal offences may qualify for diversion.

The review will examine the existing statutory framework and make recommendations to Cabinet on any amendments considered necessary. Cabinet stressed that the exercise must appropriately balance the rehabilitative objectives of the child-justice system with the protection of the public and the seriousness of offences involving firearms and violence.

The existing Act already recognises that diversion is not automatic. It establishes conditions for consideration of diversion and provides for matters to proceed to plea and trial where diversion does not occur and the Director of Public Prosecutions decides to prosecute.

As part of its discussions on public safety, Cabinet also reiterated its warning concerning the wearing of masks or other face coverings in circumstances where they are being used to conceal a person's identity.

Cabinet advised the public that face coverings should not be worn for the purpose of concealing identity, except where their use is legitimately required in the performance of work or other circumstances permitted by law. The Government's renewed attention to the issue comes against the background of incidents in which offenders have reportedly used masks or other coverings while committing crimes.

Cabinet has requested that the Police continue to enforce the applicable laws and urged members of the public to cooperate fully with lawful directions from police officers.

Cabinet emphasized that the measures form part of a broader approach to crime prevention and public safety that combines stronger policing, modern surveillance technology, legislative reform, youth intervention and greater community cooperation.

Cabinet reaffirmed that while law-enforcement agencies have a critical role to play, reducing crime requires the participation of families, schools, churches, community organisations and citizens.

The Cabinet again pledged its full support to the Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda and Operation Iron Grip and called upon all law-abiding residents to work with the Police as the country continues its efforts to make communities safer and to protect the lives and property of citizens and residents.

Cabinet Receives Update on Number Portability; November 23 Target Set for Launch

The Cabinet of Antigua and Barbuda today received a detailed presentation on the implementation of Mobile Number Portability, an initiative that will allow telecommunications customers to change service providers while retaining their existing telephone numbers.

A senior manager of the Antigua Public Utilities Authority (APUA), accompanied by a consultant engaged in the implementation process, appeared before Cabinet to provide an update on the technical work completed to date, challenges encountered among the telecommunications operators, outstanding testing requirements and the proposed timetable for bringing the service into operation.

Cabinet was advised that the project, which commenced in 2022, is a technically complex undertaking requiring the systems of the country's telecommunications operators to communicate seamlessly with a central clearinghouse. The process involves changes not only to network infrastructure but also to business, customer-service and retail systems.

The consultant explained that once number portability becomes operational, a customer wishing to move from one telecommunications provider to another will be able to do so without surrendering the telephone number he or she already uses. This is expected to give consumers greater freedom of choice and encourage stronger competition among telecommunications providers.

Cabinet was informed that the implementation process has now reached the important porting and routing testing stages.

Porting testing confirms that the systems of the various operators can successfully process the transfer of a customer's number from one network to another. Routing testing ensures that calls and text messages sent to a transferred number are correctly directed to the network currently serving that customer.

Cabinet was advised that the principal outstanding issues identified to date are not expected to prevent the operators from significantly accelerating the number of test transactions and moving the project towards completion.

The presentation also outlined work being undertaken to ensure that international services function properly after portability is introduced, including issues associated with SMS-based two-factor authentication used by many online platforms and digital services.

Following discussions with the telecommunications operators, Cabinet was advised that a November 23, 2026 target date is considered achievable for the introduction of number portability.

The consultant explained that the implementation schedule has been deliberately structured to provide sufficient time for the remaining technical work, end-to-end testing and public education programme, while minimising the possibility of disruption to telecommunications services.

Cabinet was advised that the operators have committed to completing porting testing by October 23, after which further routing and end-to-end testing will continue. Testing will also extend to the retail environment to ensure that the experience of customers seeking to transfer their numbers works as intended before the service is made available nationally.

The proposed November 23 date also takes account of Antigua and Barbuda's hosting of major Commonwealth activities in November. The implementation team advised that introducing significant technical network changes during that period would create unnecessary risk and that an appropriate interval should be allowed before the new service is activated.

Cabinet was also informed that a comprehensive public education and awareness campaign is being prepared to ensure that consumers understand how number portability will work, the procedures for transferring a number and their responsibilities when requesting a transfer.

The Ministry has already been actively preparing the public awareness component, which will be rolled out ahead of the introduction of the service.

Cabinet noted that the successful implementation of number portability requires coordinated action among APUA and the other telecommunications operators, the central clearinghouse, technical consultants and the Government, with each party required to complete its respective component before the system can be successfully launched.

Cabinet welcomed the progress reported and acknowledged the considerable technical work that has been undertaken to advance the initiative. Members stressed, however, the importance of adhering as closely as possible to the revised implementation schedule and ensuring that all necessary testing is satisfactorily completed before the service becomes available to the public.

The Government views number portability as an important consumer-empowerment measure that will give Antiguan and Barbudan greater flexibility in choosing their telecommunications provider without the inconvenience of having to change a telephone number that may have been used for many years.

Cabinet looks forward to the completion of the remaining technical and public-awareness work and to the targeted November 23, 2026 introduction of number portability in Antigua and Barbuda.

3.

Cabinet Reviews Major Advances in Water Production, Storage and Distribution; Ffryes RO Expansion to be Handed Over September 24

The Cabinet of Antigua and Barbuda on Wednesday received an update from the Minister responsible for the Antigua Public Utilities Authority (APUA), the Honourable Melford Nicholas, on continuing efforts to improve the production, storage and distribution of potable water throughout Antigua and Barbuda.

Cabinet noted that significant progress continues to be made in expanding the country's desalinated water production capacity while simultaneously addressing storage and distribution constraints that have historically affected the reliability of supply to households, businesses and other consumers.

The improvements form part of the Government's continuing programme to achieve a more reliable and resilient national water system through investment in reverse-osmosis technology, storage facilities, pumping infrastructure and the replacement and upgrading of ageing pipelines.

APUA figures published in June indicated that APUA's potable water production had risen to approximately 11 million imperial gallons per day, compared with approximately 3.5 million gallons daily in 2014.

Cabinet noted that increasing production alone will not completely resolve the country's water challenges and that Government and APUA are therefore placing increased emphasis **on** storage, transmission and distribution so that the additional water being produced can be reliably delivered to communities.

The Minister informed Cabinet that another important addition to the national water-production infrastructure will shortly be formally handed over with the completion of the Ffryes Beach Reverse Osmosis Plant Expansion.

The expanded facility is scheduled to be handed over at a ceremony at the Ffryes Beach Reverse Osmosis Facility on Thursday, September 24, 2026, as part of the continuing cooperation between the Governments and peoples of Antigua and Barbuda and Japan.

The Ffryes project forms part of the strategy to strengthen water supply to the south-western section of Antigua. Government planning documents had identified an additional one million imperial gallons per day of reverse-osmosis capacity at Ffryes as part of the broader expansion of desalination capacity.

Cabinet expressed appreciation to the Government and people of Japan for their continued partnership with Antigua and Barbuda and their contribution towards strengthening the country's water infrastructure.

As part of the drive to address storage and distribution, Cabinet also considered and approved a recommendation from Minister Nicholas concerning four existing water-storage tanks at the former United States Air Force Base at Coolidge.

The four tanks, situated on property owned by the Antigua and Barbuda Social Security Board, have a combined storage capacity of approximately two million gallons.

Cabinet agreed that APUA should proceed with the necessary arrangements to acquire the four tanks together with the portion of land on which they are situated. The Authority has also been authorised to undertake the required survey, valuation and transfer arrangements with the Social Security Board.

Under the proposed arrangement, water produced by the Ivan Rodrigues Reverse Osmosis Plant and the Seven Seas Barnacle Point facility will be pumped to the Coolidge tanks for storage and onward distribution to the northern section of Antigua.

The proposed development also includes a pump station and dedicated standby generation to strengthen the reliability and resilience of the supply system.

Cabinet emphasised that the Government's objective is not simply to produce more water but to ensure that the increased production translates into more consistent delivery of water to consumers.

The Minister reported that work therefore continues on strengthening the distribution network, increasing storage and addressing weaknesses in sections of the existing pipeline system.

Cabinet acknowledged that interruptions may still occur as work continues on the system and as APUA manages maintenance, storage and distribution. However, members noted that the substantial expansion of production capacity provides a stronger foundation upon which to address the remaining distribution challenges.

Cabinet reiterated that access to a dependable supply of potable water remains one of the Government's highest infrastructure priorities.

The Cabinet affirmed that the Ffryes Beach RO expansion, acquisition of an additional two million gallons of storage capacity at Coolidge, continued expansion of desalination production, and improvements to the transmission and distribution network collectively represent major components of the Government's strategy to strengthen national water security and build a more resilient water system for Antigua and Barbuda.

4.

Cabinet Approves Development of Five-Year Strategic Plan for Antigua and Barbuda Airport Authority

The Cabinet of Antigua and Barbuda has approved a proposal from the Minister for Tourism, Investment, Civil Aviation and Transportation, the Honourable H. Charles Fernandez, authorising the Antigua and Barbuda Airport Authority (ABAA) to proceed with the development of a comprehensive Five-Year Strategic Plan for the period 2027–2032.

The plan will provide a roadmap for the future management, development and growth of both the **V.C. Bird International Airport** and the **Barbuda International Airport**, recognising the increasingly important role of the country's aviation infrastructure in tourism, trade, investment, connectivity and national economic development.

Cabinet noted that V.C. Bird International Airport currently serves approximately one million passengers annually, while its existing terminal infrastructure is capable of accommodating approximately **1.5 million passengers per year**. This provides scope for further growth through expanded airline services, route development, increased tourism activity and improved regional and international connectivity.

The Government has continued to invest in the development and modernisation of V.C. Bird International Airport, recognising its importance as Antigua and Barbuda's principal international gateway.

Under the proposal approved by Cabinet, the Airport Authority will invite suitably qualified consulting firms and consultants with demonstrated expertise in aviation strategy, airport planning, transportation and logistics, organisational transformation, stakeholder engagement and strategic planning to submit proposals.

The successful consultant will undertake a comprehensive assessment of the Airport Authority's present position, identify future opportunities and challenges, consult key stakeholders and develop an actionable and measurable implementation framework.

The strategic planning exercise will examine several areas critical to the future development of the country's airports, including passenger transportation, air cargo, commercial development, technology, sustainability, organisational performance and regional aviation connectivity.

Cabinet considers the exercise particularly important as Antigua and Barbuda seeks to strengthen its position as an aviation gateway within the Eastern Caribbean. The Government has separately pursued initiatives aimed at improving regional air links, including cooperation with neighbouring territories to expand connectivity, tourism and economic exchange.

The strategic plan will also be developed against the background of the Government's continued investment in airport infrastructure. Prime Minister Gaston Browne recently identified the continued expansion and modernisation of V.C. Bird International Airport as one of the areas contributing to national economic activity.

Cabinet emphasised that the exercise will encompass both airports managed by the Antigua and Barbuda Airport Authority.

For V.C. Bird International Airport, the plan is expected to help position the facility to make greater use of its available passenger capacity, attract and support additional airline services, improve the passenger experience and identify new commercial and aviation opportunities.

For Barbuda International Airport, the strategic exercise will support Government's broader objective of ensuring that aviation infrastructure develops alongside the island's expanding tourism and investment sector.

The Government has already approved proposals aimed at the further expansion and development of Barbuda International Airport as it prepares for anticipated growth in passenger traffic, tourism investment and economic activity.

Cabinet approved the Airport Authority proceeding with the procurement of consultancy services and inviting qualified firms to submit proposals for the assignment.

The proposal establishes a competitive procurement process, with submissions scheduled to close at 4:00 p.m. on November 20, 2026.

The Authority intends to enter into a fixed-price professional services agreement with the successful consultant, with payments tied to the acceptance of specified deliverables, including an inception report, environmental scan, stakeholder consultation report, draft strategic plan and final strategic plan and presentation.

Cabinet also authorised the Authority, following the procurement process, to select the successful consultant or consulting firm and negotiate and execute the professional services contract.

The Cabinet considers the development of the 2027–2032 Strategic Plan an important component of ensuring that Antigua and Barbuda's airports are positioned not merely to respond to present demands but to anticipate future developments in international aviation, tourism, technology and regional transportation.

The Government reaffirmed its commitment to maintaining safe, efficient, commercially sustainable and internationally competitive airports capable of supporting Antigua and Barbuda's tourism industry, facilitating trade and investment, strengthening regional connectivity and contributing to continued national economic development.

Cabinet Approves Support for Cure Blindness Project Eye-Care Mission in October

The Cabinet of Antigua and Barbuda has approved a proposal presented by the Minister for Health, Wellness, Environment and Civil Service Affairs, the Honourable Michael Joseph, in support of the next phase of the Antigua and Barbuda Cure Blindness Project, scheduled for October 25–30, 2026.

The upcoming programme will bring specialised eye-care services and surgical expertise to Antigua and Barbuda through a collaboration involving the Ministry of Health, the Trinidad Eye Hospital and the Cure Blindness Project.

Cabinet was advised that the mission is intended to provide surgical expertise, medical consumables, specialised equipment and other resources required to deliver high-volume, high-quality eye-care services at no cost to patients in need.

As part of the October mission, Dr. Matthew Oliva, surgeon, will volunteer his professional services to support the delivery of specialised eye-care procedures.

Cabinet considers the October mission another important component of the Government's wider programme to reduce preventable and avoidable blindness and significantly expand access to specialised eye care throughout Antigua and Barbuda.

Earlier this year, Cabinet was informed that specialists from the Trinidad Eye Hospital were expected to perform more than 400 eye surgeries under the continuing collaborative programme involving the Ministry of Health, Sir Lester Bird Medical Centre and the Medical Benefits Scheme. That initiative was also expanded to provide eye examinations and screenings for approximately 10,000 primary and secondary school students, which is ongoing.

The Cure Blindness initiative forms part of an increasingly comprehensive national eye-health programme that combines screening, corrective eyeglasses, surgical interventions, specialist training and community-based eye-care services.

In March, Cabinet was updated on the development of the country's **“Blind Free Zone” initiative**, established through collaboration with international partners. The programme includes the development of community-based eye-care centres and specialised training for Antiguan and Barbudan nurses at the Aravind Eye Hospital in India. Government reported that approximately US\$90,000 in specialised ophthalmic equipment had already been secured to support the programme.

The Government has also partnered with Cure Blindness Project, RestoringVision and VisionSpring under the Prime Ministerial Vision Initiative. In March, Antigua and Barbuda secured 25,000 near-vision eyeglasses through RestoringVision for distribution as part of the effort to address correctable vision impairment. This initiative is also ongoing.

The Prime Ministerial Vision Initiative was formally launched in July, with Cure Blindness Project identifying Antigua and Barbuda's programme as an effort to establish the first Blindness-Free Zone in the Caribbean.

Cabinet has also previously supported efforts to introduce more advanced ophthalmological procedures locally, including plans for free corneal replacement surgeries and other complex eye surgeries through international partnerships.

Cabinet welcomed the fact that the October 25–30 Cure Blindness mission will make specialised services available **without cost to patients**, noting that access to treatment should not be determined by an individual's ability to pay.

The Cabinet commended Minister Joseph, the Ministry of Health, the Trinidad Eye Hospital, Cure Blindness Project and the medical professionals and international partners who continue to contribute expertise, equipment, training and other resources to Antigua and Barbuda's expanding eye-health programme.

Cabinet noted that the programme is moving the country beyond periodic treatment of eye disease towards a more comprehensive national system focused on early detection, prevention, treatment, sight-restoring surgery and the development of sustainable local expertise.

The Government reaffirmed its commitment to working with its local, regional and international partners toward the goal of significantly reducing preventable blindness and ensuring that citizens and residents throughout Antigua and Barbuda have greater access to high-quality eye care.

Cabinet Approves Major PAHO Partnership to Advance National Mental Health Reform

The Cabinet of Antigua and Barbuda has approved a comprehensive programme of technical cooperation with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) aimed at reforming and strengthening the country's national mental health system.

The proposal was presented to Cabinet by the Minister for Health, Wellness, Environment and Civil Service Affairs, the Honourable Michael Joseph, as Government continues its programme to modernise mental health legislation and transition the delivery of mental health services towards a more integrated, community-based, person-centred and rights-based model of care.

Cabinet approved the proposed Plan of Work, “Building a Resilient, Rights-Based Mental Health System in Antigua and Barbuda,” which will guide cooperation between the Government and PAHO in implementing the wider mental health reform agenda.

Cabinet was advised that significant progress has already been made with the development of the new Mental Health Bill, which forms an important component of Government's efforts to modernise the legislative framework governing mental health care.

The Cabinet recognised, however, that legislative reform must be accompanied by improvements in the organisation and delivery of services. The approved programme will therefore place emphasis on service reorganisation, implementation of the new legislative and policy framework, workforce development, community-based care, crisis response, governance and public education.

A major objective is to move progressively away from an institution-heavy model of mental health care towards one that provides greater support within communities and integrates mental health services more closely with primary health care.

The programme will also seek to strengthen referral pathways and support the further operationalisation of the Behavioural Health Unit and Resource Centre, including the development of a functional recreational therapy programme.

Under the Plan of Work, PAHO will provide specialised technical expertise and institutional support to assist Antigua and Barbuda in implementing the reforms.

Particular attention will be given to strengthening the capacity of health professionals, law-enforcement personnel, first responders and crisis-intervention teams, recognising that an effective national mental health system requires coordinated action extending beyond hospitals and traditional mental health facilities.

The programme will also support public engagement and communication to increase awareness of mental health, encourage persons to seek assistance when needed and strengthen understanding of the reforms being introduced.

Cabinet agreed that building sustainable local expertise is critical to ensuring that the reforms continue beyond the period of direct technical assistance.

Cabinet approved a voluntary national contribution of US\$95,000 towards implementation of the PAHO Plan of Work.

The programme provides for US\$58,000 for specialised technical expertise and consultancy, US\$20,000 for capacity-building and training, US\$12,000 for public engagement and communications, and US\$5,000 for technical missions.

The Ministry of Health will also meet associated local implementation expenses, including logistical and administrative support and the national communication campaign, subject to established budgetary and administrative procedures.

Cabinet was advised that Antigua and Barbuda's continued participation in the PAHO technical cooperation mechanism will enable the country to draw upon specialised expertise while simultaneously developing the national capacity necessary to sustain the reforms over the long term.

Cabinet authorised the Ministry of Health to coordinate implementation of the Plan of Work in collaboration with PAHO and the relevant Ministries, Government agencies and national stakeholders.

The relevant Ministries and agencies will also be required to support implementation of the national mental health reform programme where necessary.

Cabinet considers the initiative an important step towards creating a modern mental health system in which prevention, early intervention, treatment, rehabilitation and community support are better coordinated and more accessible.

The Government reaffirmed that mental health reform remains an important national priority and that the new Mental Health Bill must be supported by the services, trained personnel, institutional structures and community programmes necessary to translate legislative reform into improved care.

Cabinet commended Minister Joseph and the Ministry of Health for advancing the initiative and expressed appreciation for the continuing technical partnership with PAHO as Antigua and Barbuda works towards a more resilient, responsive and rights-based national mental health system.