

**Statement of the Chief Justice on the launch of
the Bahamas Digital Payment Platform (DigiPay)
in the Courts.**

25 March, 2021

Good Morning,

In 2019 I publicly stated that there is an urgent *need for reform and modernization of the Court System in The Bahamas and promised bold initiatives, uninhibited by tradition and status quo thinking. I foreshadowed systemic, procedural, administrative and operational paradigm shifts in the Courts including major changes to our delivery mechanisms... and declared that the Judiciary accepted the mantle to direct and implement that change which will involve fundamental re-thinking of our processes and procedures.*

In furtherance of that commitment I launched in June, 2019 the **Court Modernization Reform Initiative – COMRIN** – as the vehicle to drive the overhaul of the machinery of justice in the Bahamas. The ultimate objective is simple – to bring the Court system in The Bahamas into the 21st century in compliance with best practices.

In pursuance of this Initiative we have already (i) introduced a new technology platform in the Court system; (ii) automated a number of our work processes including the Listing Office which is responsible for assigning court dates in New Providence in the Supreme Court; (iii) launched on line procedures for the electronic delivery of court documents to judicial officers; and (iv) migrated to a virtual environment for remote court hearings using Zoom and Webex.

Additionally, in December, 2020 we signed three important contracts with external vendors and service providers in connection with (i) the design and implementation of the Integrated Case Management System for the Courts; (ii) the digitization of court records; and (iii) the design and implementation of a customized electronic payment system in the Magistrates Family Court to upgrade and automate the process of making and receiving payments for maintenance, child support and other matters under court orders.

The direct benefits for the public of all these initiatives, and more to come, will include (i) easier and more convenient access to court services; (ii) the reduction of the waiting time for court dates; (iii) the proactive and focused case management by judicial officers which will reduce adjournments and delays; (iv) the reduction of the amount of time it takes to complete

cases; (v) enhanced on line tracking and monitoring capabilities for litigants to check on the status of their cases including hearing dates; and (vi) the introduction of a range of e Services starting with e filing which will transform the whole process of filing court documents making it unnecessary to physically visit the Registries or cashier stations throughout the Court system.

Today, we are taking another step in the modernization programme by focusing on the court's service platform with the announcement of the integration of the **Bahamas Digital Payment Platform (DigiPay)** into the court processes. As you have heard, this means that persons using the courts in New Providence will now be able to conduct cashless transactions by using a credit card or debit card to pay (i) fees for filing court documents; (ii) fines imposed by the court; and (iii) traffic tickets in the

Traffic Court. The DigiPay platform will be available in New Providence in the Magistrates Courts, the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal. Now, lawyers and court users will no longer have to provide cheques or cash when filing documents in those courts and members of the public will not have to carry large amounts of cash when paying fines.

DigiPay is a significant upgrade of the Court's service platform as we in the Judiciary seek to improve our business processes to bring them in line with the expectations of court users. We want the business dealings with the courts and the use of our public access points to be comparable with competitive standards in the private sector where members of the public are not inconvenienced or frustrated by inefficiencies, poor service and outdated business practices. All of this represents our commitment in the Judiciary to fundamentally reform the way we conduct

the affairs of the Courts in providing open access to justice in The Bahamas.

I wish to recognize the critical role of the Ministry of Finance and its officers in extending the DigiPay platform to the Courts. I express my appreciation to the Minister, the Acting Financial Secretary and all public officers who worked on this project together with our team in the Judiciary. Your expertise, efficiency and hard work on this project is reflective of the skill, competence and talent which exists throughout the civil service and the court system. Indeed, the integration and roll out of DigiPay in the Courts is a sterling example of the effective collaboration between the Judiciary, as one of the separate branches of Government, with a major Government Ministry in order to advance the public interest and provide improved services for members of the public. It serves as a model for progress as we

leverage and deploy our national resources to achieve optimal performance across multiple public platforms.

The DigiPay platform is currently operational in the Magistrates Court, the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal in New Providence and can be used by lawyers and court users as of today. We are continuing our dialogue with representatives of the Ministry of Finance with regard to extending the DigiPay platform to the courts in Grand Bahama and Abaco and will have a further report on this in due course.

As we continue to roll out the components of the Court Modernization and Reform Initiative on the journey to a paperless 21st century court system, I will periodically report to the Bahamian public the status of the multiple initiatives. I welcome feedback and

suggestions on the programme as we seek to ensure that, over time, lawyers and members of the public who use the courts will see the benefits in tangible ways as we incrementally bring on line the reforms and changes in the court system.

I encourage court users to take advantage of the new DigiPay platform and one again, I express my gratitude to the Minister, the officers at the Ministry of Finance and the team in the Judiciary for this collaborative endeavor. We in the Courts are very pleased to now be a part of the digital future for payments through the DigiPay platform.

Sir Brian M. Moree Kt.; QC
Chief Justice
The Commonwealth of The Bahamas.