



TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO POLICE SERVICE CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS UNIT

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MEDIA RELEASE

Commissioner's Cup postponed due to Ministry of Health's refusal to allow medics, trainers, coaches, security, or substitutes at tournaments

In keeping with the TTPS' desire to respect Government policy, the Commissioner of Police, Gary Griffith, wrote to the Minister of Health seeking guidance and clarification as it relates to hosting the Commissioner's Cup.

Notwithstanding the fact that the very Minister of Health has advised political parties on how to comply with the law while maintaining more than 25 persons in a general space. The TTPS preferred to conduct our tournament in a manner that would not in any way contravene either the policy desire of the Government or the actual law. The answer provided by the Ministry of Health makes it clear to me that the strictly legal interpretation of the law is to be applied during the Commissioner's Cup.

The Minister of Health, during an interview aired on television, recommended ways for more than 25 persons to comply with the law while doing a political walkabout for the election campaign but appears not to be as flexible for our football tournament. It's clear for the sake of this tournament that players, referees, support staff, and coaches all count towards 25. However, in an election walkabout, smaller groups are not, according to the Minister, violating the Public Health Ordinance even if all these groups are in one general space. (Interestingly many of these same walkabouts have scores of children participating). It is this precise inconsistency that I, as Commissioner, have been trying to get clarified by someone...anyone, in the Ministry of Health for weeks. Instead, I'm met with - 'we advise, we recommend or we prefer, etc.'

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As CoP, I continue to ask to meet with the Minister of Health, to clarify the scope and flexibility that TTPS officers should use in certain situations as well as how 'a group of 25' is to be interpreted. The Minister of Health appears not to want to have a dialogue on this matter of interpretation, to the point that he told the CoP that 'he is busy'.

Whilst it is good that the Health Minister could interpret 25 or less in ways that assist his objectives for political parties, the citizens are not as fortunate. Varying interpretations of the law by police officers lead to some people being 'shut down' while others are being allowed to continue. At this time, I have no firm parameters to guide the actions of the TTPS.

Today the TTPS received correspondence from the Ministry of Health's State Counsel 1, indicating that the Commissioner's Cup CAN indeed be allowed to proceed BUT that it must do so with a total of only 25 persons per game.

We are at a loss to understand how this is even possible. Each team has 11 players and a coach, plus there are also referees, linesmen, and support staff. Is the correspondence suggesting we have no coaches, substitutes, and/or no medical/first aid personnel at games? In order to maintain the strict 25 numbers, we can only have the two teams of 11 along with the referee and two linesmen. This is the precise type of confusion in interpretation that I have been trying to clear up with MOH and/or the Chief Medical Officer for weeks now. The correspondence I received today in fact further confuses the situation rather than assists me in determining the way forward.

The Ministry's comments continue to run in stark contrast to the Government's stated policy and legal position that organized team sports are NOT prohibited and therefore allowed providing there are NO SPECTATORS.

It is not the desire nor intention of the CoP to run afoul of the objectives of the Public Health Ordinance however we also want to develop an avenue for our youth to spend their energies in a positive, productive, and progressive manner. The Commissioner's Cup allows for healthy competition and rivalry between and

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amongst some of the very communities that otherwise will be at each other's throats. We appreciate the nuances of the situation involving COVID-19 and we equally, appreciate that there MUST be a new normal but all we are asking for is clarity and consistency, if not for our competition, for the country at large.

I continue to find it strange that the Minister of Health continues daily to state that young persons playing organized team sports is not recommended, (young people being described as those under 18) even going as far as suggesting that parents play football with their kids in their backyard, yet he says nothing about the same young persons in water parks, being on a beach, or being in a movie theatre which is enclosed. In each of those situations, young people can number in the hundreds in a relatively confined space. He is also apparently okay with persons over 18 playing an organized sport, however for this to happen the interpretation of the MOH's State Counsel 1 clearly cannot be applied since the numbers for such a competition will surely exceed 25 in total. Even more interestingly, the proposed Government-sanctioned CPL tournament will be in violation of the said ordinance based on the interpretation of the Ministry of Health.

As the agency responsible for enforcing the advice given to the TTPS by the Ministry of Health, it is convenient, confusing, impractical and difficult to enforce.

In this regard, the CoP wishes to state that based on the correspondence sent to the Office of Commissioner today, that rather than have a tournament with no coaches, no medics, no trainers, no security, and no substitutes, and rather than risk injury to players who cannot be substituted even if they were to, unfortunately, get injured, I shall officially CANCEL/POSTPONE the Commissioner's Cup. This I'm sure will please the Health Ministry as it has clearly been their objective to so influence me all along.

One thousand plus young people would be losing the opportunity to participate in a low-risk structured tournament, that would have ensured that they remain healthy and possibly given them economic opportunities of obtaining scholarships to England or to ply their trade in the professional and semi-professional leagues in Trinidad and Tobago.

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They are now free instead to flock to beaches, go to movies and water parks. Or even most ironically attend political walkabouts.

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END

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