

Chuck Gets Praises From Bar Association, Warning From PNP

The Gleaner

Jamaican lawyers are commending Justice Minister Delroy Chuck for his leadership since taking office approximately 100 days ago, although the Opposition is warning him about making announcements without engaging his staff on serious policy discussions.

"The minister of justice deserves credit for the efforts he has made," Sherry-Ann McGregor, president of the Jamaican Bar Association (JBA), told The Gleaner.

According to McGregor, Chuck "has been accessible and responsive to the concerns expressed by the JBA regarding the state of the justice system and the dire need for improvements".

However, the Bar association says it remains concerned about the issue of underfunding, which McGregor said "underlies most of the problems in the justice system".

Some of those issues include increasing salaries for key members of the justice sector as well as improving and increasing the courtroom stock.

The JBA said priority also needs to be placed on the provision of an annual report on the justice system as well as more judges.

Approximately \$5.9 billion has been budgeted for the justice ministry this fiscal year, down from the \$6.1 billion allocated for the 2015-2016 financial year.

Questioned on his performance so far, Chuck told The Gleaner that some of the JBA's concerns are among his priorities.

LEGISLATION MAIN FOCUS

"I think we have done fairly well. One of the main focuses of the Ministry of Justice was to ensure that legislation comes to Parliament. We have a number of legislation which have been laid in Parliament," he said, pointing to those relating to the Independent Commission of Investigations and the Integrity Commission.

Early in his tenure, Chuck created controversy when he called for judges to dismiss cases that have been in the system for five years and more by the end of 2016.

Mark Golding, the opposition spokesperson on justice and Chuck's predecessor from the previous administration, said the announcement demonstrated that the minister might not be consulting with his technical staff in the ministry.

"I've heard the minister say things, which appear to be policy positions but are really ideas of his, which are not really thoroughly thought through yet," Golding said.

"Mere ideas can't really be policy. Those ideas need to be tested." said

Nonetheless, the opposition spokesman said some things were going well.

"There's been continuity in the legislative programme in that a number of the things I left in an advanced stage are now on the Government's legislative agenda. I think that's a good thing. Mr Chuck has reached out to me and we have a good working relationship," Golding said.

"He's pursuing some initiatives, which I wish him well with, in terms of trying to get the private sector to develop land that the Government owns and to provide some court facilities as part of that deal."

Along with plans to cut the backlog and improve the justice system, the Andrew Holness administration had promised in its 2016 election manifesto that "within our first 100 days in

office, we will amend the plea-bargaining law" to facilitate cooperation of criminals with prosecutors.

This has not been fulfilled.

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The End