



BAHAMAS INFORMATION SERVICES

LINKING PEOPLE AND GOVERNMENT

The Government and NIB Design Temporary Programme for Self-Employed who Rely on the Tourism Industry

By Llonella Gilbert

NASSAU, The Bahamas -- Due to forces entirely beyond their control, thousands of self-employed people who rely on the flow of cruise ship and stopover visitors, are now unable to make a living over the next few weeks Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance the Hon. K. Peter Turnquest said.

“As such, the Government has partnered with NIB to design a temporary programme that will provide weekly payments of \$200 to persons who meet the eligibility criteria, for a period of up to eight weeks. That is, an eligible person can receive up to \$1,600 over the eight-week period,” DPM Turnquest stated as he announced an update on the government’s stimulus measures in response to COVID-19 in the House of Assembly, Monday, March 30, 2020.

“I am grateful that the Board eagerly accepted this challenge and I am happy to advise that on the 26 of March 2020, NIB launched its new online application process for the Government Funded Unemployment Assistance for COVID-19. The portal enables applicants to apply online and to submit the necessary documents via email to prove their identity and that they work in the tourism sector as a self-employed person. To date, NIB has received 1,563 applications.”

He advised that the Government will expand this programme to other licensed self-employed persons who are impacted by the COVID-19 Emergency Orders. Given the aggressive actions taken by the Government in the interest of public safety, these self-employed persons, outside of the tourism trade, are also facing the complete loss of income and the challenge of meeting their financial obligations. They too will receive a benefit payment of \$200 per week for the length of the quarantine period which at present will go at least until April 8.

These self-employed persons must ensure they meet the following requirements:

- The self-employed person must have a valid business license issued by the Department of Inland Revenue.
- They must have no additional employees. A sole proprietor with employees can apply for the government’s Small Business Continuity Loan programme.
- The self-employed person must have and provide a copy of their National Insurance Board Card or other government ID with their NIB number.
- They must not be in full-time employment and thus eligible for other NIB employment benefit
- They must be able to demonstrate active income from their related business in either January or February 2020. This could for example be in the form of a copy

of a bank statement showing business related inflow for the month. This provision is to ensure that only persons with active businesses obtain consideration.

- They must either be registered as self-employed with NIB or become registered at application for this benefit.

DPM Turnquest stressed, “I wish to emphasize again that this benefit for Self-Employed persons outside of the Tourism trade will be paid for a period corresponding to the period of the ongoing Emergency Orders. NIB will administer this expansion. They will announce the related steps for these persons and applications for this element, which should begin by next Tuesday, April 7.

He added that the Department of Inland Revenue has indicated that there are just over 7,000 self-employed persons across The Bahamas who meet these criteria. The Ministry of Finance is budgeting an initial \$5.9 million to cover these additional self-employed persons impacted by the current lockdown.