

## ***Call for OPEN DATA for Parliamentary expenses***

*No More Secret Spending!*

*Public Money is Our Money!*

***This is an open call for the Administration of our Parliament to take the lead in publishing all the details of Parliamentarian's expenses for the past ten years – 1st January 2005 to 31st December 2015.***

Recent revelations have sparked a national discussion on the use and abuse of MPs' entitlement to Public Money for the operation of Constituency Offices. We are now having a vital and long overdue national conversation about the proper use of MPs' benefits and the need for the public to scrutinize this aspect of public money expenditure.

Our Parliament provides freely-available information with great ease of access at [www.ttparliament.org](http://www.ttparliament.org) and in its various online broadcasts, as well as GISL and 105.5FM.

The details of the Constituency Office expenses of MP Marlene McDonald were disclosed to Fixin T&T under the Freedom of Information Act. That precedent having been established, it is difficult to imagine that any tenable objection could be raised to the publication of the same information for the other 40 MPs.

We are therefore proposing to the Administration of the Parliament that they take this historic opportunity to lead the transition from the current 'Freedom of Information' paradigm, in which citizens have to apply for information, to the modern, more proactive, approach of 'OPEN DATA' in which public information of interest is routinely published on a voluntary basis online, in searchable databases.

We also suggest that the Legislature consider the lessons from the UK Parliament (often considered to be the our 'Mother' Institution), which, as a response to the parliamentary expenses scandal in 2009, announced the creation of the **Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA)**, intended to manage Members' expenses at "arm's length" from the House.

Our Parliament is our highest Court and it is important that it take the lead in setting higher standards of Transparency, Accountability and Good Governance. These challenging times call for non-partisan and decisive leadership: we expect no less from our Parliament.

Specifically, our call is for the details of MPs expenses to be published for the ten year period – January 1st 2001 to December 31st 2015, with quarterly updates as necessary. The expenses which should be disclosed are -

- Details of annual allocation of Public Money to be spent via Parliament for operation of Constituency Offices;
- Guidelines on the use of those sums of Public Money, together with changes in those guidelines, with updates to show when these were in force;

- MP's names;
- In relation to each MP's office/s, names of employees to include period of employment, position held, salary etc;
- In relation to each MP and their office/s, details of the non-salary expenses claimed and paid, to include utilities (TTEC, TSTT, WASA etc) furniture/equipment rental etc;
- In relation to each MP's office/s, details of the rentals paid, lease/tenancy agreement;
- Annual Financial Reports submitted to the Parliament by MPs and the consolidated Financial Reports to the Parliament.

Many of the positive steps taken by our Parliament in relation to disclosure of information were supported by former Speaker of the House, Wade Mark. We expect this to be continued by the current Speaker of the House, Bridgid Annisette-George.

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Afra Raymond

Disclosure Today

Trinidad & Tobago Transparency Institute

Constitution Reform Forum