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PRESS STATEMENT

TELECOMMUNICATIONS UPDATE/ COVID-19

Roseau, Dominica, April 03, 2020: for immediate release

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) will test the ability of telecommunication operators to adequately respond to the increasing traffic demand on their networks, both in terms of capacity requirements and quality of service to meet the needs of citizens in response to the pandemic. Service Providers must ensure that their networks are dimensioned for such sudden increase in traffic due to mass calling situations, innovative use of online services whether it be for school, tele-medicine type services for health professionals, online trading by business entities, delivery of public services online, or even simple communication between friends and family. The Coronavirus pandemic, has also provided us with an avenue to be innovative and maximize the use of existing technologies.

The Government of Dominica, through foresight and proactive planning, went into an agreement with telecommunications provider DIGICEL in January 2019 in order to enhance telecommunication infrastructure and services at all government service facilities (Government Offices, Schools, Police stations, Hospitals and Health Centers). This network will provide multiple layers of redundant connectivity including underground and overhead fiber, and cloud services to host Government data and services. The contract, through the Learning Hub technology, facilitates students and teachers to connect online to pursue classes without being

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charged. Additionally, health professionals, through the “Connected Health” facility are able to provide patient care via both audio and video facilities from the Dominica-China Friendship Hospital to thirty (30) rural health centers strategically located around Dominica.

Government has had extensive discussions with local telecommunication operators who have all expressed their commitment to collaborate with and support the Government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. While the Operators will be engaged in monitoring online traffic in an effort to manage increased traffic, it is also anticipated that special arrangements will be included to lower the cost barrier in order that as many citizens/customers as possible gain the required access to the service during this period. Additionally, Service Providers have engaged their business customers to ensure that their online capacity is adequate to conduct business transactions online.

As of Wednesday April 1st, 2020, Wi-Fi networks have been established in fifty-six (56) primary schools and thirteen (13) secondary Schools in keeping with the terms and agreement of the Digicel contract. The bandwidth in schools in communities that do not currently have access to broadband connectivity will be increased above the stipulated range.

Telecommunication operators have established a mechanism to distribute SMS (Text) messages to consumers in attempts to keep the population informed. This is in collaboration with the Health Promotion Unit of the Ministry of Health, Wellness and new Health Investment. Operators have provided COVID-19 Hotlines at no cost to Government. The COVID -19 hotlines are 448-2151/448-2153/448-2156 /1800-219 or 611-4325.

The hospitality sector has also been assisted through concessions to reduce the economic impact due to low or no tourist arrivals. Some operators have also taken a policy decision to suspend disconnections for two (2) months effective March 2020.

The Ministry responsible for telecommunications and by extension the Government of Dominica is committed to ensuring that all Dominicans have access to affordable telecommunication services irrespective of geographic location, economic or social status. Additionally, Government will be working in a collaborative partnership with the telecommunication service operators to ensure island wide connectivity. We applaud the

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operators for their contribution to our response and look forward to continued collaboration and partnership. We spare no effort in ensuring that all avenues are explored as we seek to develop a robust and sustainable telecommunications network.

The Ministry urges all Dominicans to continue practicing good hygiene and adhere to the recommendations from our Health Care Professionals.

Stay Safe and God Bless!

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Senator the Hon. Oscar George

Minister of State with responsibility for

Telecommunication and Broadcasting