



*Public Service Union of Belize*  
P.O. Box 458, South End Governor General's Field  
Belmopan City, Belize, C.A.  
**Internationally affiliated with PSI and CPSA**

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **PSU SUPPORTS A MODERN, EFFICIENT TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM — BUT NOT WITHOUT PROPER CONSULTATION, DISCLOSURE AND FAIR TREATMENT FOR ALL**

The Public Service Union (PSU) supports a modern, efficient and safe public transportation system for Belize. Better buses, better terminals and more reliable service are in the interest of every commuter, and the Union has no quarrel with that goal.

The PSU takes note of the special sitting of the Senate tomorrow, October 29, 2026, at which the Public Transportation Investment Bill, 2026 will be tabled for the Senate's consideration. The Union has serious concerns about the Bill. The way it has been developed, and what it provides, fall short of what the law and fairness require.

#### **NO CONSULTATION WITH THE UNION**

The Bill's only provision for workers, section 6, concerns the public officers of the Government of Belize Terminal Management Unit, whom the PSU represents. The Union was not meaningfully consulted on it.

Consultation is not a courtesy. The Collective Bargaining Agreement between the PSU and the Government requires the Government to consult the Union on matters affecting its members. Section 45(3)(b) of the Labour Act likewise requires an employer, as early as possible, to consult the recognized trade union and the Labour Commissioner on how to avert or reduce the adverse effects of a reorganization, how workers' claims are to be settled, and how the effects on the workers concerned are to be mitigated.

The Union concedes that a virtual meeting was held in or around April when we first expressed concern on this matter in which it was agreed that there would be meaningful consultations and full disclosure relating to the impact on staff and their entitlements. To date, no disclosures has been made. The Union was invited to a second meeting at the Police Training School in August in which management informed the staff of the proposed drafting of the legislation and gave its commitment to protecting their rights and benefits as per the laws that govern them. The Union was never invited to provide input into the legislation by the Department, and neither did the Department formally share the draft legislation with the Union.

#### **NO DISCLOSURE AS THE LAW REQUIRES**

Section 45(3)(a) of the Labour Act requires an employer to inform the recognized trade union and the Labour Commissioner, as early as possible, of the reasons for the contemplated terminations, the names, numbers and categories of the persons likely to be affected, the period over which the changes will be carried out, and a list of the workers' existing and expected claims.

The Union has not received that information. Nor does the Bill say how many workers are affected, what criteria will govern their placement, or what happens to the pension and other entitlements of those who accept employment with the National Bus Company. Section 6(2) promises that their rights and benefits continue, while section 6(3) deems them to have ceased to be Government employees on acceptance. The Bill does not explain how both can be true. Open Vote workers affected by the Draft Public Transportation Bill are entitled to pension pursuant to Section 6 and Regulations 23 of the Pensions Act. The Bill is deficient in addressing this very important entitlement.

The same lack of disclosure extends to the terminals. The Bill refers to "Lease Terminals" without defining them, and the terms of any lease have not been disclosed. The Joint Unions have also repeatedly asked for the revenue the terminals currently earn, in order to assist the Government with revenue enhancement. That information has not been provided.

### **UNFAIR AND DISCRIMINATORY TREATMENT OF OPERATORS**

Section 5 of the Bill exempts one company, the National Bus Company, from GST, customs, excise and related duties on buses, spare parts, tyres, equipment and construction, for five years. Operators who have not joined NBC, including those serving Belize City and the north, receive no exemption at all. They are expected to buy the same or better buses and parts and serve the same commuters, but at a higher cost than their competitor.

That is neither fair nor sensible. Tax exemptions are a cost to the Belizean people, and they are justified only if they buy better service for all. If the aim is to help operators provide better buses, every operator should be treated as an equal and receive the same exemptions under clear, published rules. An operator that exercises its right not to associate with NBC should not be penalized for it.

### **WHY THIS MATTERS TO THE PSU**

The PSU represents public officers across the country, including in Belize City and the north. These officers rely on public buses to get to work on time and safely, and their ability to do so depends on operators in those regions being able to renew their fleets and maintain reliable service. When operators in those regions are placed at a disadvantage by law, public officers and all commuters in those regions bear the consequences. The Union has a duty to its members, as workers and as commuters, to speak up.

### **OUR POSITION**

The PSU calls on the Senate and the Government to:

1. Require that the Union be consulted, and the information described in section 45(3) of the Labour Act be provided, before the Bill proceeds, and write those requirements into section 6;
2. Amend section 6 so that the pension and other entitlements of Terminal Management Unit workers are expressly protected;
3. Amend section 5 so that all licensed bus operators receive the same exemptions under clear, published criteria, with no operator disadvantaged for choosing not to join NBC; and
4. Make clear that the terminals are not among the assets transferred to NBC and lay before Parliament any lease and the revenue the terminals earn, so that the Belizean people can see that they receive value.

The PSU remains ready to engage constructively with the Government. A modern transportation system is best built with the workers and operators who will run it, not around them.

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