

**HON. SHARON FFOLKES-ABRAHAMS
CORNWALL COMBINED DISABILITIES LAUNCH
VERNEY HOUSE RESORT
MONTEGO BAY
AUGUST 14, 2014**

Salutations:-

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thanks for the opportunity to join you today. The launch of this association comes at a period when there is increased focused on the accommodation and inclusion of persons with disabilities in our society.

We know from experience that people with a disability are considerably more likely than any other social group to be unemployed and to experience extreme deprivation. However, today I would like to focus our time, our resources and our energies where they really need to be – on the “abilities” of persons, and how we can best meet their needs.

In other words, We must work together at all levels to find the ways and the means to make sure that people with disabilities can make their own choices, have control over their own lives, and reach their full potential. The launch of this association is a significant move in that direction. This will enable you not only to better address issues that are of particular interest to you, but will also put you in a position to better influence policy.

For our part, as a Government, we are very clear about the direction in which we are going. Much of this is embodied in the Disability Act 2014.

The main objectives of the Act are to:

- Reinforce and promote the recognition and acceptance within Jamaica of the principle that a person with a disability has the same fundamental rights as any other person.
- Promote individual dignity and individual autonomy, including the freedom of choice and independence of a person with a disability.

- Ensure full and effective participation and inclusion in the society of persons with a disability, on an equal basis with others.
- Prevent or prohibit discrimination against a person with a disability.
- Promote respect for differences and acceptance of persons with disabilities, as part of human diversity and humanity.

In many cases, discrimination against persons with disabilities is taken for granted and occurs at various levels of our society, with impunity. We are moving to make that a thing of the past. One of the main provisions of the Disabilities Act, therefore, is the prohibition of discrimination and removal of barriers in education and training, employment, political office and public life, health care, housing and transportation. We are seeking to create an enabling environment where persons with disabilities can integrate into and participate in all aspects of our society.

Specifically, the Act prohibits an employer from discriminating against a person with a disability. In this regard, employers will be prohibited from discriminating in the terms of employment offered

to the person with a disability, in relation to opportunities for promotion, transfer, training or the receipt of any other benefit.

Under the Act, health care is to be provided without discrimination on the basis of a disability. Persons with disabilities should be able to access general health care services and facilities. Further, the health care should include:

- Screening
- Early detection
- Treatment
- Rehabilitation
- Identification and intervention and
- Services designed to prevent or minimize any further disability.

Over the years, provisions made for persons with disabilities to access public or commercial premises have been far less than adequate. That is an undeniable fact. Under the Disabilities Act, facilities to be altered in public and commercial premises include:

- Bathrooms
- Telephones
- Drinking fountains and
- Emergency exists, if any

Ladies and gentlemen, we are seeking to ensure that those persons with a disability get the support that they need, to be able to do the best that they can, and be able to participate, in the way that they want to participate in our society. Our aim is to enable people with disabilities to exercise choice and control their own lives.

The new Disabilities Act seeks to ensure appropriate support for all persons with disabilities – whether at work, using public transportation, or gaining access to public and commercial buildings. What we are seeking, therefore, is not charity, but support that delivers true independence.

Indeed, we must all play our part in the inclusion process:

- By including people with disabilities, as we do other members of our community, as part of our lives, at school, work or in community and sporting activities;
- By supporting the efforts at all levels of Government and private enterprise in facilitating change, and

- By working with disability advocacy organizations, such as yours, to achieve positive changes.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my great pleasure to welcome the launch of the Cornwall Combined Disability Association.