



**PILOTING OF THE BILL TO AMEND THE REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE ACT TO
EXTEND THE PERIOD FOR HOLDING LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS**

By Hon. DESMOND McKenzie

MINISTER OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

JANUARY 25, 2022

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- Madame Speaker...
 - Just over 14 months ago, on November 24, 2020, this Honourable House passed an amendment Act to **Temporarily Modify the Representation of the People Act**, in order to postpone the holding of a general election of members to serve on the respective Councils of Municipal Corporations and a general election of the Mayor of the Portmore City Municipality.
 - As the country is aware, this became necessary because of the public health emergency posed by COVID-19, as well as the need for recovery from the extensive rains experienced in that year. The amendment Act therefore created a special extension period for the holding of Local Government Elections, the last day of which is February 27, 2022.

- Unfortunately, Madame Speaker, the reality today is that the pandemic continues to severely test every aspect of national life. A comparative analysis reveals the brutal fact that more Jamaicans are in hospital now than at the end of 2020.
- On **November 29, 2020**, which would have been exactly four years after the last local government elections held in 2016, an overall 10,763 people had tested positive for COVID-19, with 54 testing positives within the previous 24 hours. The age range was 12-83 years. 70 people were in hospital, with 11 moderately ill and 9 critically ill. 773 people caught the virus through local transmission, at a time when community spread had just emerged in the country.
- Madame Speaker, that unwelcome picture is significantly worse now. As of **January 23**, an overall 120,682 people caught the highly contagious Delta variant of the virus, which has been in Jamaica since August 2021. 1,117 people contracted the virus within the previous 24 hours. The victims range in age from 7 days - **7 days** Madame Speaker - to 103 years. Our bed capacity has virtually been exhausted, with 546 people in hospital. Back in November 2020, all parishes except Kingston & St. Andrew, St. James and St. Catherine had less than 1,000 new cases.

- Now, every single parish has cases in the thousands, with Kingston and St. Andrew leading with 32,272, and Portland having the lowest number of 3,228. The COVID-19 positivity rate is 48%. In this public health context, Madame Speaker, **it is difficult to argue that the holding of the local government elections by the end of next month, important as they are, will not objectively be regarded as an occasion that will intensify the current fourth wave of COVID-19.**
- It is with this at the forefront of the Government's thinking, that I must regrettably advise the House that we are here to seek its approval to postpone the local government elections beyond February 27, 2022. However, the Government recognizes that the election of political representatives at the local level cannot be postponed indefinitely. **As the Minister responsible for Local Government, I wish to assure the House and the country that we are still committed to having the next Local Government Elections, in the shortest practicable time. The commitment of this Administration to the local government system is well known. It is a critical part of national life which will remain unthreatened by the postponement of Local Government Elections Madame Speaker.**

- I also want to urge much greater observance of the public health protocols, and much greater take-up of the range of vaccines that are available, so we can overcome this wave, and facilitate the holding of the local government elections in good time.
- Thank you, Madame Speaker.

Hon. Desmond McKenzie CD, MP, JP
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