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To: ALL MEDIA

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Recipients of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Information Commissioner's Award Honoured**

Hamilton, Bermuda. Information Commissioner Gitanjali Gutierrez formally announced the recipients of the 2020 Information Commissioner's Award for Information Officers. This is the second year for the Information Commissioner's Award, which is presented annually as part of the commemoration of the International Right Know Day falling on 28 September each year.

This Award honours individuals who have excelled in their role as Information Officers in one or more of the following areas: Communication, Innovation, Leadership and Service. Nominations for the award were invited and encouraged from all public authorities, providing an opportunity to recognize individuals for their hard work and dedication while serving as Information Officers.

Two Information Officers received the 2020 Information Commissioner's Award: Mr. James Needham, of the Land Valuation Department, and Mrs. Debora Goins-Francis, of the Bermuda Hospitals Board (BHB).

Commissioner Gutierrez recognizes Mr. James Needham for excelling as the Information Officer for the Land Valuation Department, a responsibility he has held since June 2016. Mr. Needham's leadership, consistent communication and dedicated service have influenced his colleagues to recognise the value of the PATI Act and the importance of strengthening the Department's transparency. Mr. Needham's hard work to ensure that the Department makes proactive disclosures, along with his diligence and openness when working with PATI requesters or anyone seeking information from the Department, has made the Department more transparent to the public in concrete ways.

Director Diane Elliott, Land Valuation Department, stated, "Mr. James Needham exemplifies the true spirit of the PATI Act in his role as Information Officer for our Department. I strongly believe that as a result of Mr. Needham's proactive disclosure of information, and his due diligence and openness when working with PATI requesters, the Department has received fewer PATI requests. Individuals are pleased to discover that the information they seek is already publicly available. This is a credit and testament to Mr. Needham's hard work and commitment. I am pleased to see it recognised and awarded."

Mrs. Debra Goins-Francis has been the Information Officer for the BHB since the PATI Act became operational. Her ongoing commitment to the PATI Act and good governance is reflected in her selection for the Information Commissioner's Award for the second year. Notably, the Information Commissioner recognizes Mrs. Goins-Francis for continuing to inspire her colleagues to adhere to the principles of accountability, transparency and openness with the public at a time when the BHB was under tremendous stress from the COVID-19 pandemic. Mrs. Goins-Francis's steadfast commitment to the good governance principles underlying the PATI Act have benefitted the BHB and the public it serves.

Board Chairman, Mr. William Madeiros stated, “On behalf of the Board, I would like to congratulate Mrs. Goins-Francis. BHB receives regular queries and many of them are highly complex, or asking us for information which has never been shared before. This is a challenging area of work, and Mrs. Goins-Francis has done a superlative job navigating the legislation to help us become a more transparent and accountable organisation.” BHB CEO Dr. Michael Richmond stated, “Mrs. Goins-Francis’ tireless hard work and commitment to ensure BHB meets PATI requirements has helped support a process of increased information sharing at BHB with our community. We are so proud to see her work recognised by the Information Commissioner.”

Information Commissioner Gitanjali Gutierrez stated, “A committed and supported Information Officer can be the catalyst for tremendous positive influence on the culture within their public authority. In addition to working well with PATI requesters, this year’s award recipients are also change leaders who are effectively guiding their public authorities through the process of becoming more open and accountable to the public. We commend their courage and contributions to good governance and public access to information in Bermuda”.

The Information Commissioner’s Office expresses its appreciation to all Information Officers. From those individuals who have steadily held this position since the PATI Act came into force five years ago, to those who have been recently appointed, it is the Commissioner’s hope that each officer continues to represent themselves and their respective public authorities in a manner that elevates the public’s rights under the PATI Act.

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Editor's Notes:

The Information Commissioner’s Office is an independent public office responsible for promoting the use of and overseeing compliance with the Public Access to Information (PATI) Act 2010. The PATI Act gives the public a right to access records held by public authorities, subject to listed exemptions and administrative grounds for denial of access. Individuals who are dissatisfied with the response of a public authority may seek an independent review by the Information Commissioner. The Information Commissioner shall investigate, and the decisions by the Information Commissioner are legally binding.

Photo credit:

Jason Swan, Department of Communications

1. Information Commissioner Gitanjali S. Gutierrez and 2020 Awardee Mr. James Needham, Information Officer for the Land Valuation Department; and Diane Elliott, Director of Land Valuation Department
2. Information Commissioner Gitanjali S. Gutierrez and 2020 Awardee: Mrs. Debra Goins-Francis, Information Officer for the Bermuda Hospitals Board (BHB); and Dr. Michael Richmond, Chief Executive Officer for the BHB

Further information about the Information Commissioner’s Office is available at [www.ico.bm](http://www.ico.bm).