

**OPENING SPEECH BY MR MASAGOS ZULKIFLI,
MINISTER (SOCIAL AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT)
AT THE SECOND READING OF THE
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SERVICE (AMENDMENT) BILL
ON 13 JANUARY 2026**

1. Mr Speaker, I beg to move, “That the Bill be now read a second time.”
 - A. **INTRODUCTION: EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL SERVICE SECTOR AND NCSS**
 2. The National Council of Social Service (NCSS) plays a vital role in Singapore’s social service sector, driving better outcomes for those who need support.
 3. Communities coming together to support those in need have always existed.
 - a. In the early independence years, the social service sector was primarily made up of many small voluntary groups, each doing their best with limited resources. To coordinate and bring together these groups, NCSS’ predecessor, the Singapore Council of Social Service (SCSS), was formed in 1958.
 - b. By 1992, rapid economic growth brought new social challenges. **To take on a more strategic and proactive role in welfare planning and provision, SCSS was restructured to become NCSS, serving as a statutory board and membership body.**

4. **Today, social needs are more complex and cut across multiple domains**, such as economic and health. Greater coordination and collaboration are needed across the sector.

- a. To more holistically support those they serve, social service agencies (SSAs) have expanded beyond addressing singular causes.

5. **The broader ecosystem supporting social services has also expanded.** While SSAs remain our sector's backbone, we now have more stakeholders such as social enterprises, corporates, and philanthropic organisations.

6. In response to these shifts, **the Government and NCSS have been partnering more closely over the years to support the sector, playing distinct yet complementary roles.**

- a. MSF leads the development of social policies, rolls out nationwide initiatives, and performs key statutory functions.
- b. For example, MSF has stepped up in developing, managing and co-funding a range of social services, such as family services, to raise their quality and accessibility.
- c. In addition, MSF's funding for social service programmes has doubled in the last decade, from \$172mil in FY14 to \$346mil in FY24. NCSS has taken on a larger role as sector developer, to strengthen social service delivery, build organisational and professional capabilities, and develop the social service ecosystem. **To ensure that NCSS is adequately resourced to fulfil this expanded role, the Government has**

progressively increased its funding over the years, particularly by providing full funding for NCSS' core functions since 2022.

7. **This has enabled NCSS to invest in building the sector's longer-term capabilities.** To share some examples:

- a. NCSS set up the Community Capability Trust in 2020 to strengthen the organisations that deliver services, including helping SSAs adopt digital technologies that improve the quality and efficiency of their services.
- b. NCSS has also introduced various initiatives to develop the people that deliver our services.
 - i. The Social Service Institute (SSI) operates as the sector's main Continuing Education and Training centre to upskill social service professionals.
 - ii. NCSS also supports the sector in talent attraction and retention through programmes like Sun Ray, to develop sector leadership.
- c. NCSS published the Sustainable Philanthropy Framework and Guidelines for Social Impact Metrics in 2024 and 2025 respectively, to encourage long-term corporate philanthropy and support businesses in measuring their social impact.
- d. In tandem with the Sector Evaluation Framework launched by NCSS in 2022, the sector now has a common language to measure the impact of services. This enables providers and funders to deliver better outcomes for service users.

B. IMPETUS AND OBJECTIVE OF THE BILL

8. The NCSS Act, which empowers NCSS to carry out its role, has remained largely unchanged since it was enacted in 1992. Given the significant shifts in our social service landscape, MSF and NCSS reviewed how NCSS should be best positioned to continue serving the sector effectively.
9. This Bill is the result of that review and reflects both NCSS' and the sector's proposals.
10. To shape this Bill, we conducted extensive engagements with about 300 NCSS member organisations and members of public.
 - a. I thank all who gave their views and ideas. Your feedback has helped us better understand the sector's needs and aspirations, and has been instrumental in shaping the current proposed amendments.
11. **I will now share the key provisions in the Bill, which can be grouped into four key areas.**
 - a. First, to reflect NCSS' role as sector developer;
 - b. Second, to introduce a streamlined sector membership framework;
 - c. Third, to strengthen the Council, the Community Chest, and NCSS' committees; and
 - d. Fourth, to update and align the Act with those of other statutory boards.

c. **KEY AREA 1: REFLECTING NCSS' ROLE AS SECTOR DEVELOPER**

12. The first key area relates to refreshing NCSS' objectives, functions and powers.
13. **NCSS has responded to shifts in the landscape and expanded to become a sector developer for the social service sector.** NCSS does so in three important ways, which are articulated as NCSS' core objectives in the Bill.
 - a. First, strengthening social service delivery; second, building the capability of sector stakeholders; and third, developing the broader social service ecosystem.
 - b. Clause 6 reflects this by inserting a new section 11 (on Objectives and functions of Council) and section 12 (on Powers of Council). It also gives NCSS clear functions and powers to pursue these objectives.
14. The updated scope of NCSS' objectives and functions also clarifies its mandate to develop the wider social service sector, beyond focusing on specific stakeholders. Allow me to elaborate how NCSS' work will reflect this.
 - a. **First, in terms of strengthening social service delivery:**
 - i. The social service sector exists to improve the lives of persons with social needs. NCSS will monitor service users' progress and make data available to the sector. This is important, so that we have a feedback mechanism for service providers,

funders, and philanthropic organisations to improve the outcomes for service users and increase their social impact.

- ii. NCSS will also collect and use data to identify emerging needs and to allocate resources to services that address critical and unmet needs. For instance, NCSS launched the Disability and Inclusion Panel Study in 2022 to understand the experiences and needs of persons with disabilities and their caregivers, which informs Singapore's broader strategy for disability inclusion.

b. Second, in terms of building the sector's capabilities:

- i. NCSS will ramp up existing efforts to develop the sector's organisational and professional capabilities, such as by enhancing the Organisational Health Framework for Social Services. This will enable service providers to identify their strengths and areas for development, so that they are better able to deliver services.
- ii. NCSS will also drive efforts to better harness volunteers and technology in the sector, enabling service providers to innovate, expand their outreach and improve services.

c. Third, in developing the broader social service ecosystem:

- i. In the spirit of 'We First', NCSS will ramp up efforts to encourage those who are able to contribute their time, talent, treasure, testimonies and ties to uplift communities in need.
- ii. NCSS will pilot new ideas and technologies, and develop new partnerships with stakeholders such as social enterprises and the private sector. For example, NCSS has embarked on a pilot

with private providers, to explore new ways of delivering counselling and make services more accessible.

- iii. Another example is The Social Changemaker Series, where NCSS will bring together corporates and SSAs to co-develop solutions to address needs in the sector.

15. These efforts to meet the needs of service users and improve their quality of life are at the heart of NCSS' work.

**D. KEY AREA 2: INTRODUCING A STREAMLINED SECTOR
MEMBERSHIP FRAMEWORK**

16. The second key area introduces a streamlined sector membership framework.

17. Membership has been central to NCSS since its early years as SCSS, when it brought different agencies in our sector together.

- a. Through our engagements, many member organisations have told us that membership remains of sentimental and practical value as a platform for networking and community-building.

18. Today, NCSS has three types of membership for organisations in the sector, "Full", "Associate" and "Honorary" membership. With the change in NCSS' constitution, Clause 10 introduces sector membership, a single-tier membership framework for organisations in the sector to complement NCSS' sector developer role.

- a. **Organisations whose primary function is to provide a social service in Singapore or to directly support the provision of a social service in Singapore** may apply to become a sector member.
- b. By social service, our intent is to especially cover interventions or programmes that improve the welfare of vulnerable or disadvantaged persons in Singapore or support the emotional and psychological well-being of the local community. For instance, this would include services such as family counselling and financial assistance.
- c. We also took in feedback that organisations whose primary purpose is to directly support the provision of a social service are important players and should be able to apply for sector membership. This includes:
 - i. Professional bodies for social service professionals;
 - ii. Organisations that mobilise resources for social service providers or service users; and
 - iii. Organisations providing capability building to social service providers.
- d. An organisation's eligibility for sector membership will be assessed based on a range of factors, including what it states as its objects and how it carries out its activities.
- e. Member organisations are charged nominal membership fees today. However, fees will not be charged for sector membership.

19. With these changes, the current membership base will be rationalised and supported in their transition. **Most member organisations will experience minimal impact to their day-to-day membership experience.**

- a. All Full Council members, who make up the majority of NCSS' membership today, will be transitioned to become sector members. This is because the current criteria for Full Council members aligns with that of sector membership.
- b. NCSS will ease the transition for all other current Council members. This includes honouring all existing funding support until the expiry of the support.
- c. **As sector developer, NCSS will also continue to engage and support stakeholders in the wider ecosystem, beyond sector members alone.**
 - i. NCSS' priority is to deliver better outcomes for service users rather than to focus on an organisation's sector membership status, type or size.
 - ii. MSF and NCSS will continue to keep open channels and engagement platforms to hear from the wider sector.
 - iii. NCSS' grants or other support will also be accessible to agencies whose work aligns with NCSS' priorities, even if they are not sector members.

E. KEY AREA 3: STRENGTHENING THE COUNCIL, THE COMMUNITY CHEST, AND COMMITTEES

20. **The third key area focuses on strengthening the Council and its committees.** As NCSS' responsibilities expand, we must ensure that the Council is fit-for-purpose and understands the sector's needs, to provide effective governance and lead NCSS and the sector through the fast-changing landscape.
21. In line with other statutory boards playing a sector developer role, Clause 5 provides that NCSS will be constituted and governed by its Council, headed by a Chairperson.
22. Clause 5 also introduces amendments to broaden representation on the Council, through a Council appointed by the Minister and widened pool of eligible candidates.
 - a. Today, excluding the President, half of the NCSS Board is elected by member organisations.
 - b. **We want to ensure that the sector's diversity, vibrancy and voice is reflected in the Council, and it possesses an optimal mix of skills, experience, and knowledge, to guide NCSS' work.** A fully-appointed Council, with nominations from sector members, will enable us to achieve this.

To this end:

- i. **We will move away from the current restrictions applicable to the NCSS Board, and allow employees of sector members to sit on the Council.** The practical, operational and programmatic expertise of senior management of sector members will complement the governance perspectives that other Council members can provide.

- ii. **I would like to assure members that at least half of the Council, excluding the Chairperson, will be appointed from individuals nominated by sector members. So putting aside the Chairperson, it will always be at least half from sector nominees.** For example, if there are 10 Council members appointed from sector members' nominations, the Minister will appoint at most 10 other Council members, as well as the Chairperson. This is similar to today's practice, where about half of the NCSS Board consists of individuals elected by NCSS member organisations, as earlier mentioned.
 - iii. Sector members will be invited to submit one nominee each, who must be from their organisation at the point of appointment onto the Council, as a potential Council candidate. The NCSS Chairperson, operationally assisted by a Nominations Committee comprising respected sector leaders, will submit the full list of eligible nominations to the Minister for consideration.
- c. **These changes are important as NCSS plays a critical role in the sector, as a fully funded statutory board with expanded objects, functions and powers as sector developer.**

23. The Council will comprise a maximum of 27 members and a minimum of 15, with a maximum term of three years.

- a. Today, the NCSS Act provides for a Board of 23 members, with a maximum term of two years.
- b. **By providing for a range in the Council size, we will have greater flexibility in determining the optimal Council size for each term, informed by the sector's needs.**

- c. For the incoming Council in 2026, we intend to maintain a Council size comparable to today's Board. This will allow us to balance both diversity on the Council and agility in NCSS' decision making.
- d. **By setting the maximum Council term at three years, Council members will have a longer runway to contribute meaningfully to NCSS' work.** Council members may also be re-appointed, subject to the Public Service Division's (PSD) guidelines that apply to statutory boards.

24. Along with the amendments to NCSS' committees, we will also refresh the functions of Community Chest (ComChest for short), which serves as NCSS' philanthropic and engagement arm. **Clause 7 provides that ComChest's role extends beyond fundraising to include mobilising other resources, such as volunteers.**

F. KEY AREA 4: TO UPDATE AND ALIGN THE ACT WITH THOSE OF OTHER STATUTORY BOARDS

25. Finally, we have also taken this opportunity to update the NCSS Act in line with current legislation for other statutory boards with similar functions. This includes:

- a. Modernising the language and structure of the Act, such as updating the financial provisions;
- b. Strengthening clauses relating to the governance of the Council, ComChest and NCSS' committees to maintain high standards of conduct;

- c. Providing for Council members to be paid an honorarium in line with the Public Service Division's guidelines; and
- d. Reclassifying NCSS as a Group 1A public body in the First Schedule to the Public Sector (Governance) Act 2018, similar to other statutory boards that play sector developer roles.

G. CONCLUSION

- 26. Let me conclude. **The work of the social service sector directly impacts the lives of our citizens, especially those in need.**
 - a. The social service sector has always been driven by its strong sense of purpose. This is a strong foundation for us to build upon.
 - b. As our sector faces increasingly complex social needs, our policies and institutions must continue to strengthen, support, and transform the sector so that we not only meet the needs of today, but are prepared for what lies ahead.
- 27. To build a future-ready sector, we will continue to take a strengths-based approach; be proactive to address problems upstream; and **adopt a whole-of-society approach.**
 - a. The Government cannot do all this alone. Even with increased Government involvement, **we need the continued partnership of our sector and community to support those in need.**
- 28. **NCSS has played an instrumental role in sustaining this ethos,** including by rallying the community to give their time, talent and treasure back to society.

- a. NCSS' efforts empower stakeholders from the sector and wider community to play their part, contributing to our 'We First' society.
- b. The enhancements in this Bill will further position NCSS to carry out this role.

29. **This Bill reflects MSF's and NCSS' shared commitment to building a strong and future-ready social service sector, supported by a compassionate and giving society.**

30. Mr Speaker, I seek to move.
