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Governor Bryan Urges Local Businesses To Take Advantage of SBA's Paycheck Protection Program

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS—During his press briefing on Friday, April 3, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. urged local business owners to take advantage of the U.S. Small Business Association's "Paycheck Protection Program," which will provide loans to businesses so they can keep their employees on the payroll.

Under the program, employers of businesses of 500 or fewer employees can get a low-interest loan, and the SBA will forgive the loan if all employees are kept on the job for eight weeks and the money is used for payroll, rent mortgage interest or utilities.

"This is an amazing opportunity, and it would be a shame not to take advantage of it," Governor Bryan said during the press conference.

More information about the Paycheck Protection Program is available at sba.gov.

Governor Bryan also updated the number of cases of COVID-19 in the Territory.

To date, of 248 persons tested, 154 tests came back negative, 38 were positive and 56 cases still are pending. Of the 38 positive cases, 29 of those individuals have made a full recovery.

The Governor also said that one of the persons who tested positive for Coronavirus is currently hospitalized at Juan F. Luis Hospital on St. Croix, and two individuals, one who has tested

positive and one under investigation are hospitalized at Schneider Regional Medical Center on St. Thomas.

Once again, Governor Bryan stressed that there is no curfew in place and no immediate plans to implement one.
"We have found that in this instance a curfew is counterproductive to achieving the containment strategies recommended by the Department of Health and the CDC," Governor Bryan said. "A prime example of this occurred on our sister islands in the BVI, where there were reports of residents out en masse to stock up on needed supplies."

"While we hope to avoid curfews, if we are unable to properly regulate safe social distancing, it will become necessary here as well," the Governor reiterated.

Other updates the Governor gave during the press conference included the announcement that Spirit Airlines has cancelled flights to the Territory from April 8 to May 5.

"We've been monitoring flights into the Virgin Islands, and the average passenger load is about 30 people per flight coming from the mainland," Governor Bryan said. "Even though the downturn is welcome, the commissioner of Tourism and his team are working with the airlines to ensure that people who need to go to the mainland for emergencies and medical services can still get out and medical and other personnel can fly in."

Governor Bryan also said the Territory has gotten approval for the deployment of the National Guard under Title 32 of the Stafford Act, which means the Federal Emergency Management Agency will fund 100 percent of the costs associated with preventing, mitigating and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Governor Bryan also confirmed that traditional Easter camping in the Territory has been postponed for the year, and he reminded people that the Virgin Islands still is under a state of emergency and the stay-at-home order and closure of non-essential businesses remains in effect until April 30.

"So far, we've had to issue a citation and close four businesses on St. Croix, and we've closed 11 businesses in the St. Thomas-St. John District," Governor Bryan said. "We've had too many repeat offenses, and I've instructed our law enforcement to adhere to a strict one-strike rule. If you are caught in violation of the order, we will be forced to shut you down."

Governor Bryan's next COVID-19 update is scheduled tentatively for Monday.

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