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Press Contact

Richard Motta Jr.

340-474-2399

www.vi.gov

richard.mottajr@go.vi.gov

Governor Bryan Details Efforts to Halt Virus Spread And Keep Territory Afloat Financially

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS — During his update on COVID-19 on Monday, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. said the Government of the Virgin Islands is in a critical situation regarding its financial status, and he detailed the efforts his Administration has been taking to lobby the federal government for assistance.

However, the Governor also said all signs indicate that the most recent restrictions on beaches and bars, and the stringent screening procedures in place at the Limetree Bay facility on St. Croix, are having a positive effect on halting the spread of the virus.

“Our decisions are driven by data and we monitor the information coming in from our labs, hospitals and clinics across the Territory daily,” Governor Bryan said. “In this regard, we have noticed a reduction in the rate of positivity at the same that we have ramped up our testing.”

Lt. Governor Tregenza Roach also appeared during this week’s COVID-19 update to discuss the workings of his office, which is the second-highest generator of revenue, behind the Internal Revenue Bureau. In addition to thanking his staff for keeping the business of the Government of the Virgin Islands going through the pandemic, the Lt. Governor also noted that the amnesty period had just closed on July 17.

“We want to thank all those members of the public who came forward to discharge their obligations to the Government of the Virgin Islands,” Lt. Governor Roach said. “We recognize that, yes, we are in a public health crisis at the very moment we are struggling to maintain the integrity of our government.”

Governor Bryan said he is aggressively lobbying federal officials and working with Delegate Stacey Plaskett to make sure the Virgin Islands stays on the agenda for Congress as it meets this week to work out a third stimulus package.

That package is expected to include:

- Another round of stimulus checks
- Forgiveness of \$300 million in Community Disaster Loans
- The extension of unemployment benefits
- Payroll tax cuts
- Additional funding for businesses
- Funding for states and schools to help stabilize their budgets

“Our government has been operating on fumes the last few months, and we are facing an extremely austere budget for Fiscal Year 2021,” Governor Bryan said. “This stimulus package promises to provide the shot in the arm needed to maintain the level of government service we need as we ride out the impacts of the pandemic. “It will also provide the wiggle room we need to pay the financial obligations that we have as a government.”

Governor Bryan said the closure of the bars has had an impact on the spread of the virus, and the only difference in restrictions between now and June 1 is that the hotels are allowed to take reservations and patrons are allowed to dine-in at restaurants.

The Governor said his Administration continues the delicate dance of trying to balance the three-legged stool that is the Territory’s response to the pandemic.

“We are trying to protect the public health and avoid our people from becoming ill, ending up in the hospital or dying from this virus,” Governor Bryan said. “We are trying to maintain our economy and keep our people gainfully employed and our small businesses from failing. Finally, we are trying to maintain your personal freedoms and allow you to enjoy the greatest quality of life that we can afford you during these times.

I don’t take great pleasure in restricting the free movement and activities of our citizens, but we will do what we must to keep all of us safe,” Governor Bryan said.

Social Security stimulus checks

The Bureau of Internal Revenue will complete its finalization of the Social Security listing this week for those who are due a COVID stimulus payment. The Administration expects to distribute about \$8 million to Social Security recipients next week.

COVID-19 cases

- Currently tracking 163 active cases
- 6,972 individuals tested to date (almost 7% of the population)
- 6,617 of those tests were negative

- 304 tests came back positive
- 51 tests are pending
- 135 people recovered
- 6 fatalities to date
- One COVID-19 patient is hospitalized at Juan F. Luis Hospital on St. Croix.
- Four COVID-19 patients, one of whom is on a ventilator, are hospitalized at Schneider Regional Medical Center on St. Thomas.

Governor Bryan's next COVID-19 update is scheduled for 1 p.m. on Monday, July 27.

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