



**THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
GOVERNMENT HOUSE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 24, 2020

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Governor Bryan Urges Continued Diligence During Pivotal Second Week of ‘Stay at Home’ Phase

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS – During his weekly press briefing on Monday, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. stressed the need for residents to refrain from moving about the Territory as the territory enters the critical second week of its “Stay at Home” phase.

While he announced some adjustments in easing some of the current requirements of his most recent executive order, the Governor also said this week is a pivotal week and that health officials are hoping that the Territory will see a return to a virus positivity rate of 5 percent or lower.

“We have already seen a significant decline in passengers arriving by plane, especially in the St. Thomas-St. John District as a result of the moratorium on leisure travel,” Governor Bryan said. “Unfortunately, we have not yet seen the decline in positivity rates that we are hoping to achieve. This was not unexpected, as we are experiencing the result of those infections that occurred prior to the ‘Stay at Home’ order being effectuated.”

The Governor also amended some of the restrictions currently in place under his executive order and said some specific businesses/organizations can remain open:

- The Census Bureau, their contractors and workers
- Dive shops for the purpose of refilling oxygen tanks only to aid the fishing industry

- Houses of worship, which can hold services with more than 10 persons in the entire sanctuary and can provide Communion as long as it is presented to receivers in protected containers
- Professional services, such as legal services, accounting services and insurance companies to assist in compliance with legally mandated matters

“I want to assure those employees and businesses that have been negatively affected by this public health order that we are aware of their challenges, and we will not maintain this order any longer than necessary,” Governor Bryan said.

Proposed Matching Fund Revenues Legislation

During his closing remarks at Monday’s briefing, Governor Bryan spoke about his proposed legislation to create a new stream of revenue to shore up the Government Employee’s Retirement System through the Matching Fund Securitization Act.

Governor Bryan initially called the 33rd Legislature into Special Session on August 18; however, the date was pushed back because of issues at the Legislature with COVID-19, and the 33rd Legislature will go into Special Session on Tuesday, August 25.

The Governor’s proposed legislation would allow the creation of a financial entity that would refinance the debt of the Government of the Virgin Islands at a more favorable interest rate and realize revenues of about \$85 million a year for each of the next three years. Additionally, the legislation would mark the USVI’s re-entry into the bond market for the first time in 11 years and reduce the Territory’s debt service payment.

“This truly is a win-win situation for us here in the Territory, and I am looking forward to the support of the Legislature as they consider granting us the authorization to finalize this transaction in Special Session tomorrow,” Governor Bryan said. “We have already had two meetings with the Legislature, and I personally reached out this weekend to those who had remaining concerns.

“While we are two separate branches, I always remind myself that we are on the same team,” the Governor said. “We have to put aside our political agendas and do what is right for the people of the Virgin Islands, especially our retirees and our future retirees, who are counting on us to come up with a solution, and piece by piece we will.”

Unemployment

- To date, the Virgin Islands Department of Labor (VIDOL) has issued 32,406 unemployment insurance checks totaling \$24,647,231.
- The department also has issued 25,822 Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation checks totaling \$32,202,740.
- VIDOL has issued \$838,961 in Pandemic Unemployment Assistance to self-employed Virgin Islanders and \$270,263 in Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation.

- All told, the Bryan-Roach Administration has issued 58,595 checks totaling \$64,959,159 through the Virgin Islands Department of Labor.

Stimulus

- The Administration continues to issue federal Stimulus payments to V.I. residents.
- Last week the Government of the Virgin Islands issued 3,116 checks totaling \$4,344,513.
- Residents who believe they are entitled to a federal Stimulus payment but who have not received one should contact the Bureau of Internal Revenue at 340-773-1040 on St. Croix or 340-715-1040 on St. Thomas.

COVID-19 cases

- Currently tracking 261 active cases
- 14,537 individuals tested to date (more than 14.5% of the population)
- 13,458 of those tests were negative
- 984 tests came back positive
- 712 people have recovered
- 11 fatalities to date
- Two COVID-19 patients are hospitalized and on ventilators at Juan F. Luis Hospital on St. Croix.
- Seven COVID-19 patients are hospitalized at Schneider Regional Medical Center on St. Thomas.

Governor Bryan's next update is scheduled for 1 p.m. on Monday, August 31.

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