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Administration Updates Residents on COVID-19, P-EBT Cards and Medicare Advantage for Retirees

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS — During his weekly press briefing to update residents about the status of the COVID-19 virus in the Territory, Government House Communications Director Richard Motta Jr. was joined by Human Services Commissioner Kimberley Causey-Gomez, who announced a second round of P-EBT benefits, and Division of Personnel Director Dayna Clendinen, who announced the new Medicare Advantage plan for Government retirees age 65 and older.

However, before beginning the briefing, Director Motta also gave a brief statement from Governor Albert Bryan Jr. about the passing of St. Thomas-St. John community icon Wayne "Facts Man" Adams.

"Wayne had a gift that he selflessly shared with all in our community. His penchant for information and his love of Virgin Islands history made him a household name and an icon on our local radio talk shows," Governor Bryan said. "He would frequently call in to tell of the achievements of Virgin islanders. He was an important voice, and he will be sorely missed."

Director Motta also gave further remarks about Governor Bryan's statement issued before Monday's press conference regarding the suspension of the Bryan/Roach Administration's efforts to close on the Matching Funds Securitization transaction.

"While the transaction was somewhat complicated in its structure, it ultimately promised to provide a significant cash infusion to the Treasury of the Virgin Islands over the next three years, while simultaneously reducing the long-term debt obligations of the Government by an estimated $40 million over a 20-year period," Director Motta said.

"The Governor has made it clear that is intentions were to use those savings to shore up the GERS pension system to the greatest extent possible and provide short-term relief as more long-term strategies were developed and effectuated," he said. "The extremely low interest rate market made this transaction possible, and the Administration moved aggressively to seize the opportunity for the people of the Virgin Islands."

Director Motta said Governor Bryan remains committed to averting a projected cut in benefits for the current retirees of the public pension system, and he looks forward to continued collaboration with those senators who understand the urgency of the situation and are willing to work toward solutions.

P-EBT Cards

In her update on the Pandemic-EBT cards intended to help families supplement their children's nutritional needs affected by the COVID-19 school closure, Commissioner Causey-Gomez said the Department of Human Services' application for additional P-EBT benefits has been approved. The total amount of this second issuance is $1,513,308.

The benefit amounts will vary by school and are based on the number of school days with virtual instruction," the Commissioner said. "Students attending schools that had or have in-person instruction will not receive P-EBT based on the gu8idelines provided by the federal government."

The list of eligible schools is posted to the Department of Human Services page at facebook.com/USVIDHS.

There was no application process, and some key details of the second issuance of P-EBT benefits include:

- Benefits for existing eligible SNAP beneficiaries will have the additional benefits applied to their current SNAP cards.
- Existing P-EBT beneficiaries will have benefits posted to their P-EBT cards
- New eligible non-SNAP recipients will receive a card at the address provided by parents and guardians to the respective schools.
- P-EBT benefits can be used to purchase food items at authorized NAP retailers and are not transferable.

Medicare Advantage Plan

Personnel Director Clendinen said that beginning January 1, the Government of the Virgin Islands will roll out the new Medicare Advantage Plan for retirees 65 and older.

"This is a first for the Territory and it means that the more than 6,000 retirees within the Territory who are over 65 will now be a part of the 1.3 million Group Medicare Advantage Members," Director Clendinen said.

Benefits of the new plan include:

- $0 co-pay for all doctor visits
- $0 deductible
- $500 allowance for Vision and Hearing Aid Exams
- Free virtual consultations with nurses 24/7
- Free access to fitness centers or gyms
- Gift reward cards for housecalls, such as a virtual preventive check-up
- Part D Prescription coverage remains the same with the same co-payments already in place

Unemployment

- To date, the Virgin Islands Department of Labor (VIDOL) has issued 39,763 unemployment insurance checks totaling more than $30,514,997.
- The department also has issued an additional 27,356 Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation checks totaling $41,814,660.
- VIDOL has issued $4,187,557 in Pandemic Unemployment Assistance to self-employed Virgin Islanders and $1,305,956 in Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation.
- In total, the Bryan-Roach Administration has issued 69,717 checks totaling $77,823,170. Which is an increase of $1.5 million since last week, through the Virgin Islands Department of Labor.

COVID-19 cases

- Currently tracking 81 active cases
- 20,167 individuals tested to date (more than 20% of the population)
- 18,043 of those tests were negative
- 1,317 tests came back positive
- 1,217 people have recovered
- 20 fatalities to date
- No COVID-19 patients are hospitalized at Juan F. Luis Hospital on St. Croix.
- Four COVID-19 patients are hospitalized, one of whom is on a ventilator, at Schneider Regional Medical Center on St. Thomas.

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