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Governor Bryan met with FEMA's Acting Region 2 Administrator David Maurstad last month.

FEMA Lifts Manual Drawdown Restriction for Reimbursement of Recovery Project Spending

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS – Governor Albert Bryan Jr., in collaboration with the Office of Disaster Recovery, announced Monday that the Federal Emergency Management Agency has lifted the manual draw requirement for reimbursement of post-Hurricanes Irma and Maria Recovery project spending in the territory.

While under FEMA's manual drawdown process, the USVI was required to submit funding reimbursement requests to FEMA for approval before gaining authorization to draw funds.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency imposed the manual draw requirement after a 2018 audit found discrepancies with reimbursements filed by the Virgin Islands' Government with FEMA for contract work done in the immediate aftermath of the storms in 2017.

In 2019, Governor Bryan initiated the Office of Disaster Recovery (ODR) to manage and oversee the disaster recovery process and reconcile past recovery-related discrepancies.

Since the manual drawdown implementation, ODR has developed robust grants management and administration protocols and practices in accordance with applicable Federal laws, regulations, and administrative requirements.

“The Office of Disaster Recovery has demonstrated the capacity and laid the foundation to ensure that the territory manages federal funds correctly,” said ODR Director Adrienne L. Williams-Octalien. “FEMA’s decision to lift this requirement is a testament to the hard work of our staff and their continued pledge to develop the capacity and processes to maintain an accurate accounting of recovery dollars.”

Governor Bryan said Monday that FEMA’s decision is another step forward in the Bryan-Roach Administration’s efforts to continue and, in many instances, correct and expedite the territory’s post hurricanes Irma and Maria recovery and rebuilding.

“This indicates the diligence of the Office of Disaster Recovery and our administration’s efforts to get our recovery on the right track,” Governor Bryan said. “It was a long road toward accountability, but the clean-up and the additional protocols that have been put in place are now bearing fruit for the people of the Virgin Islands. Now that we don’t have to abide by those restrictions, we can process payments and move projects more quickly.”

FEMA’s decision came in the form of a January 29 letter informing the Government of the Virgin Islands that the agency had completed its assessment of the GVI’s progress in responding to the Notice of Potential Debt Letter issued to the territory on December 15, 2020.

In the letter, FEMA noted that the ODR made substantial progress in providing supporting documentation in defense of the potential debt and that its responsiveness in conjunction with the approved Internal Control Plans led to the decision to lift the Manual Drawdown process currently in place. The Territory will continue to coordinate with FEMA to ensure compliance with all federal guidelines and standards.

The Bryan/Roach Administration continues to be committed to transparency, stabilizing the economy, restoring trust in government and ensuring the disaster recovery is completed as quickly as possible.

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