GOVERNMENT HOUSE
UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

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Government House Details How President Biden's American Rescue Plan Will Assist Virgin islanders

Governor Bryan also submits legislation and signs executive orders to help stop gun violence

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS — During Monday's Government House weekly press briefing, Communications Director Richard Motta Jr. gave details about hos President Biden's American Rescue Plan will benefit residents of the Territory during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to $1,400 stimulus checks paid directly to individuals, the American Rescue Act will help further the Government of the Virgin Islands' efforts to fight the pandemic by providing additional resources to continue building out safe and healthy infrastructure in the schools so students can safely return to the classrooms.
Additional assistance includes:

- Supplemental unemployment benefits of $300 per week will be extended through September 6
- The Child Tax Credit is temporarily expanded to $3,000 for children ages 6 to 17 and to $3,600 for children younger than 6.
- Additional funding has been authorized for the Paycheck Protection Program to issue small business loans with a special push to include nonprofits.
- Additional grant funding is available for the Virgin Islands Department of Education and the University of the Virgin Islands.
- Additional funding is available to help support child care facilities.
- Support for low-income families includes more funding for the Energy Assistance Program and to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children

- Public health funding to administer and distribute COVID-19 vaccines, provide contact tracing and buying testing supplies and personal protective equipment.
- Targeted support for bars and restaurants.
- Additional funding for the Emergency Rental Assistance program, which the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority will launch at the end of March.
- Expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit, raising the tax credit from $530 to $1,500 for adults without children and raising the income limit from $16,000 to $21,000.

"To highlight what this means for the Territory, the earned income tax credit creates a $20 million shortfall in tax revenue each tax year for the Territory and is a major contributor to the USVI's backlog in paying timely tax refunds," Director Motta said. "Because our mirror of the U.S. tax code requires the USVI to pay out more than $20 million in tax credits annually for tax revenue it does not collect, this provision in the American Rescue Plan not only gives the working poor in our Territory a financial boost, but it also provides critical support to our government in meeting this mandate of the mirror tax code."

Stimulus payments
Last week, the Department of Finance and the Bureau of Internal Revenue mailed out 9,738 stimulus checks totaling $7,161,914. This included 6,736 payments that were sent to Social Security recipients, and the government will mail an additional 7,000 checks totaling $5 million this week.

Excise tax
Director Motta also said that Governor Albert Bryan Jr. is pleased with the court's decision to allow the resumption of excise tax collection after a long and costly legal battle.

The Government of the Virgin Islands has been able to balance the budget without depending on the collection of excise tax, and now that this traditional source of revenue is once again available, the government can use it to address outstanding obligations it owes.

"Before we place these funds into the General Fund for general government operations, we will make sure that our people remain our priority, and so we will be keeping our promise of utilizing the first set of collections of excise tax to reverse the 8% pay cut owed to public sector workers as a result of the Economic Stability Act of 2011," Director Motta said.

Gun violence legislation
Governor Bryan also has submitted a number of pieces of legislation to the Legislature to support the Virgin Islands Police Department's efforts to combat gun violence in the Territory and apprehend criminal offenders.

The Governor's proposals seek to clarify reciprocity requirements for legally carrying firearms as well as the requirements for transporting firearms, ammunition and accessories into the Territory by residents and visitors.

"The proposed legislation seeks to require 24-hour notice of intent to import firearms into the Territory to facilitate VIPD search and declaration," Director Motta said. "This legislation further complements efforts to intercept illegally smuggled firearms undertaken by the VIPD and agreements currently being coordinated with the Virgin Islands Port Authority and the Territory's airline partners."

Governor Bryan also signed into effect two executive orders to help curtail gun violence.

Executive Order 510-2021 activates all Executive Branch Peace Officers Territory-wide to perform public safety functions as necessary under the direction of the Police commissioner for a period of at least 16 regular non-overtime hours per calendar month. It also mobilizes the Virgin Islands National Guard, adding to the VIPD forces as necessary, and the order will bolster police manpower, allowing for increased and effective high-visibility policing.

Executive Order 511-2021 established the Governor's Advisory Council on Community Violence Intervention comprising government, private sector, non-profit, religious and community advocates coordinating strategic interventions and contributing resources to complement the newly established Office of Gun Violence Prevention for which staff recruitments currently are underway.

Pop-Up testing sites
This week, pop-up testing sites will be at the following locations:

- **Home Depot** on St. Thomas on Tuesday, March 16 and Thursday March 18, from 1 to 3 p.m.
- **Canegata Rec Center** on St. Croix on Tuesday, March 16, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- **The V.I. Port Authority Gravel Yard** on St. John on Wednesday, March 17, from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m.
- **Buddhoe Park** on St. Croix on Thursday, March 18, from 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Vaccinations

- 20,081 first doses administered
- 9,095 persons fully vaccinated

COVID-19 cases

- Currently tracking 89 active cases.
- 50.108 individuals tested to date.
- 47,329 of those tests were negative.
- 2,767 tests came back positive.
- 2,653 people have recovered.
- 25 fatalities.
- Four COVID-19 patients currently are hospitalized, with one patient on a ventilator, at Juan F. Luis Medical Center on St. Croix.
- No COVID-19 patients are currently hospitalized at Schneider Regional Medical Center on St. Thomas.

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

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