GOVERNMENT HOUSE
UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

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Finance Commissioner Nominee Bosede Bruce, left, joins Governor Albert Bryan Jr. and Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion for Monday's weekly press briefing at Government House on St. Croix

Governor Bryan Ends Beach Curfew, Eases COVID-19 Restrictions for Restaurants

Governor Announces Native St. Johnian Bosede Bruce as Nominee for Finance Commissioner

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS — During the Government House weekly press briefing on Monday, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. ended the curfews at all of the Territory's beaches, which had been ordered closed by 5 p.m. on weekends and holidays to help mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

The existing curfew will be lifted beginning Friday, April 23; however, the restrictions prohibiting grilling, DJs and live or amplified music as well as social distancing and mass gatherings guidelines will remain in effect.

Additionally, Governor Bryan said because they pose less of a risk to transmission of infection now than they did previously, restaurants can now place tables 4 feet apart.

"I am encouraged by our progress thus far to achieve herd immunity and promised several weeks ago that we would look at restrictions we can safely remove as we move forward with our vaccination strategy," Governor Bryan said. "These lessened restrictions will allow us to deploy our law enforcement resources in the other areas that they patrol that require their attention.

"I am appealing to the listening public to exercise the good judgment and restraint that will continue to keep our community safe from this virus," the Governor said. "If we cannot practice good judgment and restraint, I will be forced to reinstitute the curfew."

Finance Commissioner Nominee

Governor Bryan also announced that he has chosen Bosede Bruce as his nominee to lead the Virgin Islands Department of Finance. Commissioner Nominee Bruce is a native of St. John who is returning to the Territory from Chicago, where she was the comptroller for Echelon Property & Casualty Insurance Company.

Ms. Bruce earned a bachelor's degree in Accounting from Tuskegee University and a master's degree in Business Administration from the University of the Virgin Islands, and she has more than 20 years' experience in accounting, finance and financial reporting structure.

27th COVID-19 Victim

Governor Bryan also extended sincere condolences to the family of the Territory's 27th death from COVID-19, who died last week.

"Our latest Virgin Islander to succumb to COVID-19 is a stark reminder that this virus is still a threat to the health and safety of our community. That is why we continue to urge everyone to take the vaccine and continue to wear your mask, practice safe social distancing and wash, wash, wash your hands," the Governor said. "You don't have to go to that mass gathering. You can stay away and keep not only you, but your family safe. I pray to dear God that this will be the last Virgin Islander to lose their life to this awful pandemic."

As of April 16, the Virgin Islands Department of Health is tracking 51 active cases: 23 on St. Croix; 27 on St. Thomas; and 1 on St. John.

To date:

- 94,697 people have been tested
- 91,656 tested negative
- 3.041 tested positive (1,334, on St. Croix; 1,489 on St. Thomas; and 218 on St. John)
- 2,963 have recovered
- Three patients are hospitalized with COVID-19 at Juan F. Luis Hospital on St. Croix, and there are no patients hospitalized at Schneider Regional Medical Center on St. Thomas.

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

- **Home Depot** on St. Thomas on Tuesday, April 20, from 1 to 3 p.m.
- **Canegata Rec Center** on St. Croix on Tuesday, April 20, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- **The V.I. Port Authority Gravel Yard** on St. John on Wednesday, April 21, from 1 to 4 p.m.
- **Budhoe Park** on St. Croix on Thursday, April 22, from 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.
- **Fort Christian parking lot** on St. Thomas on Thursday, April 22, from 1 to 3 p.m.

Persons can pre-register online for pop-up testing at covid19usvi.com/testing.

New Community Vaccination Center Locations

On May 10, the Community Vaccination Centers (CVC) will relocate from both UVI campuses.

St. Croix's CVC will be relocating to the Nissan Building in Christiansted, and on St. Thomas, the CVC will move to the Community Health Clinic on the 2nd Floor at the Schneider Regional Medical Center.

To date:

- 34,265 first doses have been administered
- 23,149 second doses have been administered
- 57,414 total doses have been administered

To make an appointment to get the free vaccine, call 340-777-8227 or visit covid19usvi.com/vaccine.

The COVID-19 hotline remains open 7 days a week from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. for callers to report suspected cases of COVID-19. On St. Croix, call 340-712-6299 and in the St. Thomas-St. John District, call 340-776-1519.

Emergency Rental Assistance Program
The Emergency Rental Assistance Program to assist families who have fallen behind on rent payments as a result of the pandemic is currently open for residents to apply.

For more information, go to www.vihfa.gov/erap or contact the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority at 340-772-4432 or 340-777-4432.

Mortgage Assistance Program
The Government of the Virgin Islands was successful in getting $8.5 million from the U.S. Department of Treasury to provide Mortgage Assistance to Virgin Islands homeowners who have fallen on hard times due to the pandemic.

The program will provide relief to residents who are behind on their mortgage payments and who meet the qualifications set forth by the federal government. Like the Emergency Rental Assistance Program, the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority will administer this program and will have more information to share with the public before the program opens.

Proposed Gun Legislation
During his closing remarks, Governor Bryan clarified his proposed legislation to greatly reduce the number of illegal firearms that come into the Territory and said that last week's Senate committee hearing did not address a number of key aspects of the bill that have misconstrued in the Senate and in the media.

The bill proposed language that required individuals to report their intention at least 24 hours in advance of importing weapons into the territory, which changes the law from the current reliance on the honor policy that depends on individuals declaring their firearms only after they have already arrived in the territory.

"This is a gap in the existing law that criminals continue to take advantage of to bring guns into the Territory without declaring them. If it is passed it would be a felony for any firearms to arrive in the territory that have not been previously declared," Governor Bryan explained. "Law-abiding citizens will declare their weapons, and the assumption will be that failure to declare your firearms to the VIPD is an intentional criminal act. This allows law enforcement to utilize their limited resources proactively."

The bill also provides for safe storage of firearms in the home, and it increases penalties for failure to report in a timely fashion if a legal firearm as lost or stolen.

Governor Bryan also clarified misinformation that arose during the committee hearing about reciprocity, which became the focus of the conversation on the Senate floor. The new legislation is an attempt to clarify the existing reciprocity allowed by Virgin Islands law.

“We found that it would be far more efficient if we had 24-hour notice and meet you at the airport, then take the guns away from you, make sure they’re properly bought and registered and make sure that you are properly certified to carry a firearm,” Governor Bryan said. “The firearm policy that we have on the books is so confusing and has so many loopholes, and reciprocity is one of them. If [the Senate] wants to do away with reciprocity from other states, it is their option to do it. The Governor can’t change the law, only the Legislature can.

“None of these measures are arbitrary and nothing in the legislation encourages the importation of firearms into the territory as was implied,” Governor Bryan said. “We want to effectively separate the legitimate law-abiding gun owners in the territory from those that utilize illegal firearms and are a part of the criminal element in our community.”

Employees of the Year

Governor Bryan also congratulated the 2021 Government House Employees of the Year: Delma Bermudez on St. Croix and John J. Gumbs II in the St. Thomas-St. John District.

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