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Governor Bryan Issues Statement in Response to President Biden's Support for Parity in U.S. Territories

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS — Governor Albert Bryan Jr. on Wednesday issued a statement in response to President Biden saying U.S. Territories should be on equal footing with states regarding federal programs.
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President Biden said the U.S. Justice Department's defense of continued discrimination against residents of U.S. Territories in federal programs is inconsistent with his Administration's policies and values, and he called on Congress to amend the existing laws.

"As I've said before, there can be no second-class citizens in the United States of America. My administration will work with members of Congress to make these legislative fixes a reality," President Biden said.

Governor Bryan on Wednesday praised the Biden Administration's firm commitment toward achieving parity between the U.S. Territories and states in all federal programs.

"I commend and thank President Biden for his acknowledgement that all the U.S. Territories are not treated at the same level as the states when it comes to federal assistance," Governor Bryan said. "The President's call for Congress to move legislation to achieve parity for the territories supports our long-standing lobbying efforts in Washington toward this same goal.

"Achieving parity in federal programs that are critical to the U.S. Virgin Islands is of paramount importance, and President Biden's acknowledgment that there is an imbalance between the states and territories brings the promise of achieving that equality and is much welcomed," the Governor said.

President Biden's statement comes after a review that was ordered in September under President Trump of United States v. Vaello Madero, a 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals decision that the denial of SSI benefits to residents of Puerto Rico is unconstitutional.

The court granted review, and the Justice Department filed a brief Monday before the U.S. Supreme Court.

"Congress has the power to deny otherwise eligible U.S. citizens in the territories access to Supplemental Security Income benefits based solely on where they happen to live," the Justice Department brief said.

“The Department of Justice has a long-standing practice of defending the constitutionality of federal statutes, regardless of policy preferences. This practice is critical to the Department’s mission of preserving the rule of law,” President Biden said.

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