

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Governor Bryan Signs Bill Including St. John Land Exchange Amendment

Bryan's signature clears path for land exchange deal to move forward.

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Whistling Cay, St. John USVI By. GETTY IMAGES

Governor Albert Bryan has officially signed Bill No. 35-0159, passed in the December 19 session of the 35th Legislature, which includes the St. John Land Exchange amendment. The governor's action was announced by Government House on Monday.

In a transmittal letter addressed to Senate President Novelle Francis, Mr. Bryan expressed gratitude to the 35th Legislature for the St. John Land Exchange amendment. He emphasized that this amendment is crucial in correcting the text of Act. 8741, thereby

ensuring the possibility of obtaining a clean title.

A key feature of Bill No. 35-0159 is Section 10, which amends the language concerning the use and public access to Whistling Cay and the Fungi Passage waterway.

During Senate debate in December, Senator Angel Bolques, on behalf of Senator President Novelle Francis, tacked on an amendment to non-germane bill 35-0159 that strikes Section 3 of Act 8741 (the land swap legislation) and replaces it with a new Section 3 that reads as follows "the Government of the Virgin Islands may exchange the land in section one, so long as the use and public access to Whistling Cay and its waterways known as Fungi Passage remain consistent with the National Park Service Organic Act 54 USC Section 100101 and all applicable federal laws and regulations." The amendment had [previously elicited](#) strong opposition from several lawmakers.

Aside from the land swap matter, the bill includes fund appropriations for various government agencies, including the Office of Management and Budget, the Division of Personnel, the Department of Finance, and Property and Procurement. Notably, it also provides financial support to the Schneider Regional Medical Center, specifically targeting the equipment, supplies, and staffing needs of the Interventional Cardiology Unit.

Another significant aspect of the bill is Section 5, which mandates that every government agency and department should provide all oral and written communications to the public in both English and Spanish. Mr. Bryan pointed out that this requirement is "overly broad" and could potentially apply to both internal and external communications. He noted the current resource limitations in meeting this mandate but affirmed the government's commitment to providing equal access for the Spanish-speaking community. He acknowledged the goal of inclusivity and promised to prioritize this as resources become available.

"Government does not currently have the resources to meet this mandate, however it is important that we provide equal access to Government for our Spanish-speaking community," he said. "Therefore, I acknowledge that this is our goal, and as we work to meet it, we will continue to prioritize inclusivity for all residents of our Territory."