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Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority Disburses \$31 Million In Payments To FEMA Step Contractors

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Men performing roofing work

The Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority (VIHFA) doled out to \$31 million to FEMA roofing contractors, many of whom are finally being paid for their work in the immediate aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017.

The money is the first allotment of \$233 million that the Federal Emergency Management Agency obligated to the territory at the end of December for the Sheltering & Temporary Essential Power (STEP) program, known locally as the Emergency Home Repairs Virgin Islands (EHRVI) program.

Approximately \$31 million of a series of payments is being disbursed to the program's prime contractors, AECOM and APTIM, according to the VIHFA. This is another delayed payment, helping bring an end to a controversy that [threatened homeownership in the territory](#) and caused fallout [as far away as the halls of Congress](#).

In the territory, unpaid contractors were prepared to enforce liens on Virgin Islanders' homes that had been repaired under the program. One subcontractor to AECOM filed complaints to foreclose on all liens. With the FEMA funding now being released, the liens will most likely be abandoned by the company.

Casting a favorable spin, VIHFA Executive Director Daryl Griffith said, "Despite the funding delays, which have been very frustrating for dozens and dozens of contractors, the program enabled over 24,000 residents to safely shelter in their own homes when St. Thomas was struck by Hurricane Dorian in August of last year."

The STEP program, which was implemented after Hurricanes Irma and Maria caused devastating destruction throughout the USVI in 2017, has been plagued by funding delays, but was successful in repairing over 6,500 homes in record time.

"We are very proud of what we accomplished through the STEP program, including FEMA's first permanent roof pilot program that repaired and fortified over 1,500 roofs," Mr. Griffith continued in a prepared statement Thursday.

"Since the STEP program ended in April 2019, we have now paid out over \$211 million so far to the prime contractors, AECOM and APTIM, who in turn issue payments to their tiers of subcontractors," the director said.

After months and months of prior negotiations between FEMA leadership, Griffith and Office of Disaster Recovery Director Adrienne Williams-Octalien, Gov. Albert Bryan met in October at FEMA's headquarters in Washington, DC with then-Acting Administrator Peter Gaynor.

"I am very grateful for the collaboration Administrator Gaynor and his staff have shown to help get our recovery back on track with the release of this next iteration of funds," said Mr. Bryan. "This first \$31 million of a total of \$233 million, will pay our very patient primes and their subcontractors for their labor costs, management services, and inspections."