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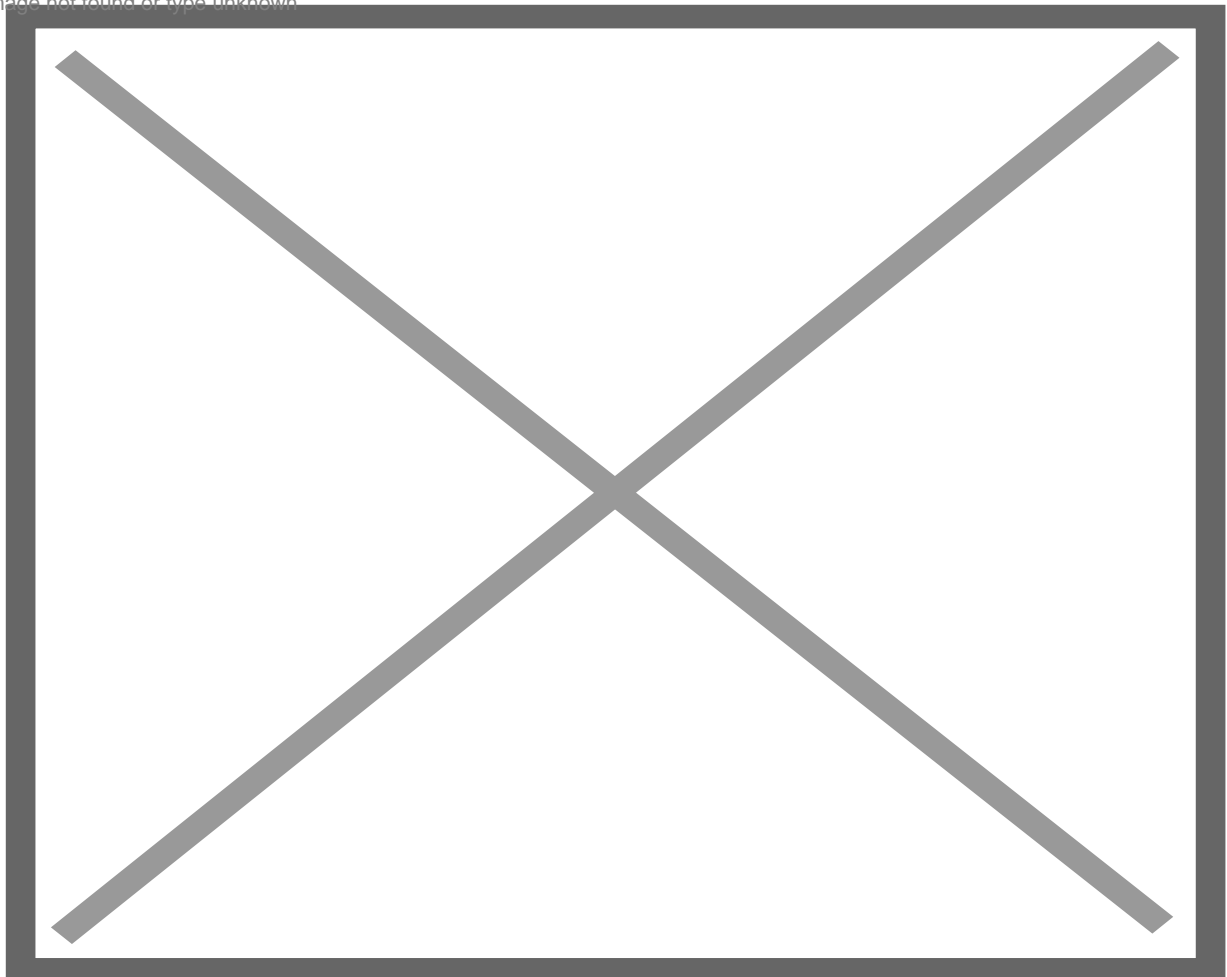
## **No Immediate Disaster SNAP Benefits Following Biden's Disaster Declaration; USVI Moves Forward with FEMA Assessments; Power Restoration Nears Completion**

**Federal disaster declaration triggers 75% federal funding for recovery efforts; Power restoration hits 99% on St. Croix, 96% on St. Thomas, and 97% on St. John as FEMA and local officials begin comprehensive damage assessments**

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During Monday's Government House press briefing, USVI residents received updates following the federal disaster declaration issued by President Biden in response to Tropical Storm Ernesto.

Despite the declaration, the possibility of Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (D-SNAP) benefits remains uncertain, as access to these emergency funds has not been approved at this time.

Ryan Nugent, director of communications for the Department of Human Services, clarified that while the federal disaster declaration is in effect, it does not currently include funding for emergency SNAP benefits. "At this time, emergency benefits are not available," Nugent stated, adding that "we may have an opportunity to revisit" the availability of D-SNAP benefits after further evaluations are conducted. For now, food replacement benefits remain limited to households already enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, with eligible recipients able to receive up to one month of food.

With the federal disaster declaration in place, FEMA will collaborate closely with the Virgin Islands government to conduct comprehensive damage assessments across all affected areas, said Bryan administration communications director, Richard Motta. These assessments will focus on debris cleanup, energy restoration, and other critical recovery activities. Mr. Motta also highlighted the substantial federal funding that underwrites the support package. "The emergency protective measures, including include direct federal assistance under the Public Assistance Program, will be providing up to 75% federal funding," he emphasized.

Meanwhile, power restoration efforts across the territory are nearing completion. Don Gregoire, Territorial Incident Commander for the V.I. Water and Power Authority, reported progress, stating that "St. Croix is 99% restored, Saint Thomas is 96% restored, and Saint John is 97% restored." Crews are continuing to work on bringing the remaining few non-functional feeders back online, including feeders 6A, 6B, 7A, 8B, and 10B.

Mr. Gregoire also highlighted the collaborative efforts involved in the restoration process, noting that "VI Fire Services have been assisting WAPA with extinguishing pole fires," which included 25 pole fires on St. Croix, 28 on St. Thomas, and one on St. John. He also acknowledged the support from the V.I. Police Department and the V.I. Department of Public Works in these efforts.