

Williams Delight Residents Receive \$15,000 Grants for First Homes

Senator Marise James delivers grants to aid longtime residents in achieving homeownership, highlighting the importance of community advocacy and the transformative power of economic security

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Recipients of the \$15,000 grants along with proponents standing together at the Frits E. Lawaetz Legislative Conference Room on St. Croix. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

Last March, Senator Marise James heard for the first time about the struggles some residents of Williams Delight were facing in their quest to become homeowners. In May, she announced a [groundbreaking program](#) to smooth the journey for some. On Monday, the lawmaker presented twenty residents with \$15,000 cheques - grants to be used in the purchase of their first homes. Many receiving the grants had been living in the community for decades – one man now on his

way to homeownership had been a resident for 47 years.

“I want to begin by thanking the governor for agreeing to the letter I sent him,” Senator James said to the small crowd assembled in the Frits. E Lawaetz Legislative Conference Room on St. Croix. The letter, she said, reminded him of a program extant since 1995 that some people had not yet been able to access, “because we all don’t have the same life and circumstances and events that happen in our lives.”

Ms. James explained that she was prompted to write following a town hall convened by her colleague Marvin Blyden, chair of the Senate Committee on Housing, Transportation and Telecommunications. “It’s very important that the people of Saint Croix understand that change can happen when you also speak out, you have the power. And that was really what you did, was you planted a seed in me while I was sitting up there,” she said, explaining that she took the governor up on his invitation to send in proposals on how to utilize American Rescue Plan Act funds that had yet to be obligated. “I wrote that long letter asking him to give the grants. And he immediately said yes,” Senator James recounted. “I need everybody to understand. It wasn’t even any thinking.”

The senator noted that the recipients of the grant will no longer need to pay rent while going through the closing process on their properties, and advised them to save those funds and apply them to the closing costs on their purchases. Homes will also be renovated or rehabilitated before closing, the lawmaker noted. Ms. James also advised the new would-be homeowners to secure their own legal representation, promising to seek out pro bono services on their behalf. “The attorney who’s doing the closing doesn’t represent you, that person represents the Housing Authority, so I don’t want you to go to a closing without an attorney,” she cautioned.

Both Senators James and Blyden emphasized the importance of home ownership as a foundational rung in the ladder to economic success. The grant, according to Ms. James, will go a long way towards helping to make recipients’ pathway to homeownership “both manageable and successful.” However, she cautioned that “homeownership is more than just possessing a house. We believe that homeownership strengthens families by building a foundation for your future,” she continued. “You are securing a home where memories will be made, establishing a legacy for generations to come.”

The program is being facilitated via the VI Housing Authority.