

logo not found or type unknown

Human Trafficking Council Secures Funding and Reassures Immigrant Victims of Legal Support and Safety

The newly established council prioritizes victim services with \$15 million in funding, ensuring undocumented victims receive legal protection and access to public aid without deportation fears

Government / **Published On September 24, 2024 06:59 AM /**

Janeka Simon **September 24, 2024**

Image not found or type unknown



Over a year after it was [first announced](#), the Territorial Council on Human Trafficking met for the first time last week, with Ian Clement of the V.I. Dept. of Justice appointed as chair.?

During Monday's Government House press briefing, which was broadcast from St. John, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. reminded the public that "this law has actually been on the Virgin Islands books for like, 20-30 years, and I think throughout the years it probably got lost. We just

reassembled the council.”

Apart from Mr. Clement, council members include:

- V.I. Police Department Lieutenant Deborah Hodge (vice chair)
- Jason Marsh, representing VIPD Acting Commissioner Mario Brooks
- Department of Human Services Commissioner Averil George
- Law Enforcement Planning Commission Director Moleto Smith
- St. Croix Administrator Samuel Sanes
- Peace Officer Standards and Training Director Gleston McIntosh
- Department of Justice Victim Advocate Ruth Warren
- Women’s Coalition Executive Director Clema Lewis
- Family Resource Center Executive Director Anya Stuart.

?

The council’s mandate, according to the announcement made last week, is to come up with a comprehensive plan to provide services to victims, collect data on human trafficking in the territory, promote public awareness of the problem, and coordinate training for government workers on combating human trafficking and supporting victims.

Without explicitly confirming a query on whether any of the \$75 million from the settlement of an Epstein-related lawsuit with JPMorgan had been received, Governor Bryan nevertheless said that the council would have access to approximately \$15 million “to appropriate for training, awareness...and to assist those victims of human trafficking.”

The council’s first task, the governor said, would be to design a starting budget. “I want to make sure that this money lasts for a while, so we could keep the council not only active but effective.”

Mr. Bryan called last Wednesday’s meeting informational, saying that he was disabused of the common misconception that victims of human trafficking are mostly “sex workers and the type...I was made to understand that trafficking covers a lot more than that,” he said.

He also offered public reassurances to anyone living in the Virgin Islands who has been a victim of trafficking. “You can turn yourself in. You will not be deported, so you’re safe and secure. The federal government has resources to help you.” Governor Bryan noted that victims of trafficking are eligible for special visas to regularize their stay in the United States. “It usually takes them six months to a year for them to become independent again, and they are eligible for public assistance, welfare, food stamps and those kinds of things.”

Despite the federal assistance, however, local authorities were still responsible for a large portion of the support for victims of trafficking. “We got our work cut out for us,” the Governor remarked.