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\$4.8 Million in Grants Awarded to Enhance Public Safety in U.S. Virgin Islands

The \$4.8 million in federal grants aims to enhance crime prevention, support victims, and improve law enforcement across the USVI, funding youth programs, technological upgrades, substance abuse treatment, and community safety initiatives

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The V.I. Law Enforcement Planning Commission (LEPC) has announced the awarding of approximately \$4.8 million in federally funded grants to support public safety initiatives across the territory. These funds aim to bolster crime-fighting, crime prevention, juvenile justice programs, and services for crime victims throughout the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The grants, allocated to law enforcement agencies, the courts, and various non-profit organizations, will support a range of community-based initiatives, the LEPC said. These include programs designed to assist at-risk youth, therapeutic services for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, legal aid for crime victims, and treatment for substance abuse among incarcerated individuals. The funds also cover technological upgrades for the Virgin Islands Police Department (VIPD), equipment for the Medical Examiner's office, communication tools for law enforcement, and services for those re-entering society after incarceration.

LEPC Director Moleto A. Smith Jr. said the grant awards align with Governor Albert Bryan's vision of fostering safe communities in the Virgin Islands. "Our recent awarding of these important federal funds to support law enforcement agencies, community-based organizations, and other criminal justice stakeholders is a significant step in our comprehensive three-part strategic approach," said Smith. The strategy includes establishing a criminal justice data repository, enhancing system-wide collaborations, and aligning resources to sustain safety initiatives.

The funding comes from multiple federal sources administered by the U.S. Department of Justice (USDOJ), including the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grants (JAG), Violence Against Women Act (STOP) Grants, Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Grants, and the Residential Substance Abuse Treatment Program (RSAT), according to the release. The grant distribution followed a rigorous process initiated earlier in the year, with LEPC issuing Requests for Proposals (RFPs) and establishing an independent review committee to assess applications.

According to Smith, the grant awards result from the dedicated efforts of the LEPC team and the review committee. "Over 30 awards have been granted to criminal justice and community-based entities, and I extend thanks to everyone involved in this process," he said.

The grants support various initiatives, including:

- Youth Programs: Afterschool and outreach programs targeting at-risk youth with a focus on crime prevention.
- Technological Enhancements: Upgrades to the VIPD's crime-fighting capabilities.
- Substance Abuse Treatment: Services for individuals incarcerated due to substance abuse issues.
- Victim Support Services: Therapeutic, advocacy, and legal assistance for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and other violent crimes.
- Court Support: Victim advocacy services and additional resources for the Courts.
- Equipment and Supplies: Resources for Medical Examiner activities and communication tools for law enforcement.
- Reintegration Programs: Support for individuals previously involved in the justice system.

The LEPC said it remains committed to advancing criminal justice initiatives through collaboration, guidance, and resource allocation.