

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Territory Receives \$419,000 From CDC to Combat Coronavirus

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The USVI has received \$419,000 in funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to support the territory's response to the coronavirus disease.

The funding was announced by Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett.

"As a Member of Congress, we recognize that Americans urgently need a coordinated, fully funded, whole-of-government response to keep us safe from the widening coronavirus epidemic. Today I met with the CDC director, the head of NIH, along with other officials combatting the virus. I was informed of specific funding immediately available for the Virgin Islands to combat COVID-19," she said.

"Local health departments, like the one in the Virgin Islands, are on the frontlines to responding to the COVID-19 outbreak, and my office is deeply grateful for their work so far. Today the CDC is disbursing \$419,000 in new funding as called for by Congress. Awarding this funding will accelerate planning and operational readiness for COVID-19 preparedness and response," Ms. Plaskett said.

The funding will allow local health officials to implement critical steps necessary to contain and mitigate the spread of the virus in territory.

Governor Albert Bryan will hold a press conference at Government House on St. Croix at 9:00 a.m. today to discuss his administration's efforts to combat the virus. Mr. Bryan is expected to announce his decision on St. Patrick's Day Parade, set for Saturday on St. Croix, and the upcoming Carnival VI activities in St. Thomas, which consume most of April, during the press conference.

All across America, local officials are banning large public gatherings. Sports leagues — from the N.C.A.A., NBA, MLB and NHL — have suspended competition. Even Broadway in New York has gone dark.

Closer to home, neighboring Puerto Rico, which doesn't have a confirmed case as yet, banned large gatherings as well. This means the highly anticipated Afro Nation event that was scheduled for March 18-21, won't happen. Puerto Rico's action is strategic: By banning large gatherings, the island's leaders seek to prevent the possible spread of the virus by persons who may have the disease but have yet to be detected.

Puerto Rico Governor Wanda Vazquez declared a state of emergency on Thursday and activated its National Guard in response to the coronavirus. Guard units will be stationed at the island's airports to screen all arriving passengers, the governor made known during the press conference.

St. Maarten Carnival on Thursday night the postponement of their event. In a post published on Facebook, the organization said, "The SCDF [St. Maarten Carnival Development Association] hereby informs the general public that the Government of St. Maarten has decided to postpone Carnival 2020 in response to the rapid spreading of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The foundation was informed of this in a meeting called by Government on Thursday, March 12 and agrees that public safety comes first. The SCDF will issue a series of notices to the public and all Carnival stakeholders in the coming days. Please monitor the media for updates."

The number of confirmed cases in the U.S. has risen to more than 1,300, with at least 38 deaths. The pathogen has spread to 116 countries, has infected over 127,000 people, and has killed over 4,700. In Italy, where the virus has been the most devastating outside of China, nearly 200 people died in 24hrs (Tuesday-Wednesday). So far, more than 900 people have died from the virus in Italy, and over 12,400 infected.

Currently there are no confirmed cases in the U.S. Virgin Islands, though health officials expect the pandemic to eventually reach the territory's shores. So far, out of four suspected cases sent to be tested, three have returned negative. The status of the fourth case is expected to be revealed during the Friday morning press conference.