

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bryan Convenes Interagency Council on Homelessness for Inaugural Meeting, Calls for 10-Year Strategic Plan

The governor convened the Interagency Council on Homelessness for its inaugural meeting, urging the development of a 10-year strategic plan and calling for expanded housing, behavioral health services, and public-private partnership to combat homelessness

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Bryan provides remarks during the inaugural meeting of the Interagency Council on Homelessness at Government House, St. Thomas. By. GOVERNMENT HOUSE.

In a renewed commitment to tackling homelessness across the territory, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. on Tuesday convened the inaugural meeting of the Interagency Council on Homelessness at Government House. The meeting marked the official activation of the Council, which is tasked with coordinating a broad-based response to homelessness in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The Council, originally created through Executive Order No. 444-2009, operates under the Department of Human Services and consists of 15 members appointed by the Governor. Its core mission is to advise both the Governor and Legislature on issues impacting those experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Members represent a cross-section of stakeholders, including government agencies, nonprofits, faith-based institutions, and community partners.

In its first official session, the Council elected officers to lead its work. Commissioner of Human Services Averil George was chosen as Chair, Danny Derima of the Virgin Islands Continuum of Care was elected Vice Chair, and Sandra Thomas Mason of Catholic Charities was selected as Secretary.

Governor Bryan, though not a voting member, emphasized the Council's role as essential to improving the lives of unhoused individuals in the territory. "My concern is for the community—especially for our unhoused residents—whose quality of life will be significantly enhanced through the coordinated efforts of our member agencies," he said.

The Governor used the occasion to call for the development of a 10-year strategic plan to address homelessness. He urged the Council to think expansively and to engage the Legislature in supporting sustainable solutions. These include the development of planned communities with integrated support services, expanded behavioral health infrastructure, the creation of more skilled nursing facilities, and diverse residential housing options to meet the needs of different populations—including youth aging out of foster care, formerly incarcerated individuals, and senior residents entering retirement.

Governor Bryan noted that homelessness in the territory stems from intersecting challenges, such as mental health struggles and a tightening housing market. He encouraged the Council to explore a range of approaches to increase access to both transitional and permanent housing.

The governor also acknowledged the indispensable role played by non-governmental organizations and nonprofits, while recognizing the significant barriers they face, particularly with funding limitations and staffing constraints. He emphasized that only through collaboration between public and private entities can the territory build the organizational strength needed to meet the scale of the problem.

Representatives attending Tuesday's meeting included members from Catholic Charities, the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority, the Virgin Islands Police Department, the Department of Justice, and the Continuum of Care Program.

Looking ahead, the Council is scheduled to reconvene on Tuesday, June 18 on St. Croix, and plans to host territory-wide Town Halls over the summer to open the floor to residents and stakeholders for input on homelessness and potential solutions rooted in community engagement.

