

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Senators Meet Via Teleconference to Discuss Territory's Coronavirus Response

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The Earl B. Ottley Legislative Building in May 2015. By. ERNICE GILBERT/ VI CONSORTIUM

Senate President Novelle Francis and the members of the 33rd Legislature met Wednesday to discuss the Legislature's ongoing response to COVID-19, Mr. Francis's office has announced. According to the release, members, who met by teleconference, have implemented social distancing in an effort to reduce transmission of the disease.

All senators participated in the call.

Mr. Francis said a critical priority of the Legislature is to provide support to the executive branch as it manages the financial impact of COVID-19. "Members are fully prepared to act on information provided to them by Governor Albert Bryan, Jr. in a meeting held on Friday, March 13 and based on their own assessments of the threat that COVID-19 poses to the territory's economic stability, which is still recovering from the 2017 hurricanes," the release said.

During the meeting, senators discussed revisiting the 2020 budget based on changing revenue projections and a strategy to address current and future Community Disaster Loans. The group also discussed issues affecting the public health and ways to contain the spread of the virus, consistent with measures taken by affected jurisdictions across the country, according to the release.

Mr. Francis said a multitude of factors, including the state of the territory's healthcare system and still recovering economy, demands an aggressive strategy to manage the transmission of COVID-19. "We must do all that we can to flatten the curve and slow the spread of coronavirus," he said. "While we work to slow the transmission, we must be ready to take all necessary steps to protect the health of our community and economy."

Senators are said to be considering various proposals, to include cancelling all public events, consistent with guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and implementing a territory-wide sick leave policy that protects employee health and jobs.

Mr. Francis also said that he and his colleagues will continue to work closely with the Executive branch and Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett to manage the fluid circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We have overcome big challenges in the past, and we will do it again by working together," Mr. Francis stated.

The members of the Legislature urge anyone who suspects they have been exposed to the virus or are experiencing symptoms to contact the Department of Health at (340) 712-6299 or 776-1519.