

USVI Actively Pursuing Big Box Stores to Fill Void After Kmart Closures, Bryan Says

With two of three Kmart stores shuttered, Governor Bryan says efforts are underway to attract medium and large department retailers. He noted the challenges of small populations and low median incomes but vowed to restore in-person shopping options.

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On Monday, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. discussed the territory's retail environment, saying that there were currently efforts underway to attract new “big box” stores to the Virgin Islands. The governor's comments come following the [recent closure of two of the territory's three KMart stores](#).

“We have a lot of lines in the water trying to attract both medium and large department stores,” said the governor. “We’re actively pursuing new big box stores to come to the Virgin Islands to fill that space.”

Even with the ubiquitous nature of e-commerce, Governor Bryan says that “we recognize not everybody has the wherewithal to be able to go on Amazon and purchase.” Access to internet, access to a credit or debit card, or even merely a preference for in-person shopping could drive people to stores.

While the governor encourages and welcomes investment from local entrepreneurs, noting that “there’s a company in St. Croix...that is planning on opening a department-level store,” he acknowledges that such a project is an enormous challenge. “You gotta be able to be diversified, so it’s a lot of inventory to carry a store like that, with employees.” He noted the added costs of operating in a large physical space. “You gotta cool it, the air, the power, everything else. It’s a great challenge.”

However, inviting a national retailer to establish a presence in the territory will also be challenging. Governor Bryan noted that because of the multitude of single-income households, median salaries are artificially low. “If we had more married people or more people living together, our household income would probably rise to about 75 or 80 [thousand dollars], more in line with what it is in the United States,” he argued. The lower median salary coupled with the small populations on St. Thomas and St. Croix do little to make the territory an attractive prospect for big corporations.

Nevertheless, efforts will continue to ensure that department store shopping can return.