

## Shutdown Fallout: SNAP Benefits Paused in Virgin Islands as Legislature Prepares Emergency Funding Plan

The Department of Human Services confirms delays in November SNAP payments, citing the federal funding lapse. Senate President Milton E. Potter is leading efforts to bridge the gap using local reserves until Congress restores funding.

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The federal government shutdown has created immediate hardship for thousands of Virgin Islanders who rely on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, prompting urgent legislative action from Senate President Milton E. Potter.

In a statement issued Thursday, Potter said the Senate is acutely aware of the pressure the shutdown is placing on local families. “The Senate is fully aware of the strain this shutdown will place on Virgin Islands families,” he said. “At a time when our people are already contending with high living costs, inflation, and economic uncertainty, any disruption to food assistance programs will keep me up at night. The Legislature will not stand idly by while our most vulnerable citizens suffer.”

His remarks follow an announcement from the V.I. Department of Human Services confirming that November SNAP benefits will be disrupted because federal funds have been paused by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). According to VIDHS, the FNS has instructed all states and territories to stop transmitting benefit files to Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) vendors until federal appropriations are restored, temporarily halting the process of loading monthly funds to EBT cards.

As a result, households in the Virgin Islands will not receive November benefits until Congress restores funding, forcing families to manage without their expected food assistance for the month.

In response, Potter has submitted two emergency bill draft requests — Amendment No. 36-593 and Bill Draft Request No. 25-0884 — to the Legislature’s legal counsel. The proposals would authorize the use of local funding sources, including the territory’s Rainy Day Fund and any available balances within the FY 2026 budget, to ensure that food assistance and other essential social programs continue without interruption during the shutdown.

“If there was ever a time to use our Rainy Day Fund, it is now,” Potter said. “Our citizens need immediate help, and it is both our elected and moral duty to act decisively to ensure that no family goes hungry and no child is left without support. In times of crisis, leadership must be both compassionate and responsive.”

Potter also directed that the Committee of the Whole, scheduled to convene on October 29, include testimony from the government’s financial team on the projected fiscal impact of the shutdown. Based on that analysis, the Senate President intends to bring emergency legislation before the full body on October 30 to formally authorize the use of local funds for essential November benefits.

Once federal funding resumes, the Virgin Islands government plans to replenish any funds used to cover the shortfall, according to the release from the Senate President’s office.

Potter emphasized his intention to work closely with the Department of Finance, the Office of Management and Budget, and the Department of Human Services to ensure the smooth continuation of assistance programs.

“The Legislature will continue to be proactive and solutions-driven,” he said. “This is not about politics. It is about people, and the Senate will do what is necessary to protect our community.”

VIDHS officials are advising SNAP recipients to budget their remaining funds carefully, plan ahead, and check their EBT card balances by calling 1-866-884-2868 or logging into the EBT mobile app at [www.fisglobal.com/ebtedgemobile](http://www.fisglobal.com/ebtedgemobile).

For questions or assistance, recipients can contact their caseworkers:

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St. Croix: (340) 772-7100 ext. 7159, 7066, or 7012

- St. Thomas: (340) 774-0930 ext. 4303 or (340) 774-2399
- St. John: (340) 774-0930 ext. 4275, (340) 725-6221, or (340) 776-6334

Officials added that the government will continue working with federal partners and lawmakers to advocate for a swift resolution, while ensuring that no family in the Virgin Islands is left without food assistance during the ongoing shutdown.

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