

## \$2.76 Million Headed to 10,603 Households in USVI to Keep Food Aid Flowing Amid Federal Shutdown

**The Bryan administration has approved \$2.76 million in local funds to provide immediate relief, with 10,603 SNAP households set to receive paper checks covering half their November benefits once the Legislature finalizes the transfer.**

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The Government of the Virgin Islands has moved to protect thousands of families from food insecurity, approving a \$2.76 million emergency plan to sustain the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) during the ongoing federal shutdown. Paper checks covering half of November's benefit amount will soon be mailed to 10,603 households across the territory — 4,780 in St. Thomas (\$1.19 million), 258 in St. John (\$66,598), and 5,537 in St. Croix (\$1.5 million). The figures provided by DHS differ from those cited in Senator Kurt Vialet's

[Wednesday press release](#), indicating a likely miscalculation on the senator's part.

Finance Commissioner Kevin McCurdy told lawmakers on Wednesday that the Department of Finance has already “processed and validated the files” for distribution. “Once this body approves the movement of the money, Finance is ready to have those checks printed almost immediately,” he said. DHS officials emphasized that paper checks are the “fastest, most efficient, and compliant” way to deliver the funds, as reprogramming the electronic benefits system to issue partial payments would take at least a month.

The emergency measure follows an October 10 directive from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service ordering the territory to suspend SNAP benefits for November due to funding shortfalls caused by the federal shutdown. “SNAP is more than a program. It is a lifeline for thousands of Virgin Islands families,” said Human Services Commissioner Averil George. She explained that DHS, under Governor Albert Bryan's direction, acted “swiftly” to implement a local plan bridging the gap in federal funding.

According to Ms. George, beneficiary records have already been sorted by ZIP code to ensure timely delivery through the Postal Service once legislative approval is granted. Lawmakers are expected to finalize the funding transfer by Thursday, leaving just two days before November allotments would normally be due.

Some senators expressed concern about issuing paper checks. Senator Alma Francis Heyliger worried that recipients might misuse funds instead of buying food. “We're going down a realm that's potentially dangerous, and I actually want our people to actually eat,” she said, suggesting gift cards redeemable at local stores. Ms. George responded that DHS lacks the staffing capacity for such a system, adding that “the onus is on the individual to do what is right.”

Roughly one in five Virgin Islanders relies on SNAP to meet basic nutritional needs, according to DHS. The program distributed \$60.5 million in benefits during FY2025 — including \$33.3 million on St. Croix alone. Ms. George warned that the federal shutdown has created a “cascading effect,” endangering not only families but also local retailers who rely on SNAP transactions for business.

Senators urged compassion and prudence. “I'm asking all the food providers to please have a conscience. This is a national emergency,” said Senator Hubert Frederick. “We're all suffering. This is a plea of compassion.” Senator Novelle Francis called for behavioral adjustments among recipients, while Senator Kurt Vialet appealed to grocery stores to avoid price hikes. “We cannot afford an increase in anything,” he said. “If you're able to reduce your prices a little... then do that.”

The local funds used to sustain the program will not be reimbursed once the federal shutdown ends. Still, Ms. George said the immediate priority is to keep families fed. “This is a short-term measure to help families,” she said.

SNAP recipients who need assistance with their checks can contact DHS via email at [usvisnaprelief@dhs.vi.gov](mailto:usvisnaprelief@dhs.vi.gov). Residents in St. Thomas/St. John can call (340) 772-7110, while those in St. Croix can reach (340) 715-6909.