

Bryan Seeks Homeland Security Talks to Broaden H-1B Visas for Caribbean Workers in the Virgin Islands

Efforts to expand H-1B visa access for the Virgin Islands continue despite cancelled talks with DHS and new federal screening rules, as officials cite workforce needs and express preference for workers from Caribbean nations familiar with local culture.

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Even amid tightening visa and immigration controls and enforcement on the mainland, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. is advancing efforts to ease access into the territory by skilled Caribbean nationals seeking employment.

On Monday, the governor disclosed that a hoped-for meeting with Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem had recently been cancelled. The discussion was to have centered around

expanding the categories of H1B visa the United States Virgin Islands is allowed to accept, beyond sports, energy and entertainment.

A lobbyist group representing a contractor doing business in the territory is working feverishly to reschedule, Governor Bryan said. “I gott to go follow up...to make sure that we get that done because our recovery is heavily dependent on being able to bring on foreign labor. When I say foreign labor, I mean foreign to the Virgin Islands,” he explained.

Governor Bryan expressed a preference for seeking additional laborer from traditional source markets. “I rather have people who are already reflective of our diaspora to come and join us,” he declared during Monday's press briefing. “We want people more akin to have our moral values and cultures to come.”

Whether the governor will make headway on this goal remains to be seen, especially with recent additional requirements for those seeking to visit the United States for work or tourism. The U.S. Department of State recently announced a required “online presence review” for H1-B visa applicants and their dependents, deepening scrutiny of their social media activity. The review also applies to users of ESTA - the Electronic System for Travel Authorization that allows citizens of certain countries visa-free access to the United States. The changes suggest a tightening, not relaxing, of rules governing access to the United States and its territories.

Several countries in the Eastern Caribbean have also been the subject of stated U.S. security concerns over [citizenship by investment programs](#). According to Governor Bryan, “If we're going to accept people onto our shores, I rather have people from Dominica, St. Kitts, Trinidad, Saint Lucia.” Three of those four countries operate CBI programs, however. With visa issuances to nationals of those countries already reportedly in question, requesting visa-free access into the Virgin Islands might be a tough sell.