

The Virgin Islands Consortium

USDOJ Removes 'High-Risk' Label From USVI Law Enforcement Planning Commission, Grant Funding Fully Accessible

The designation, first imposed in 2012, placed key DOJ grant funds on hold; officials say internal reforms satisfied federal auditors, allowing continued funding for radios, man-down systems, victim services, surveillance cameras and corrections programs.

Government / **Published On February 18, 2026 06:45 AM /**

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The U.S. Department of Justice has removed its "high-risk" designation for the USVI Law Enforcement Planning Commission, Director Moletto Smith announced on Monday during the Bryan administration's weekly press briefing.

The designation, imposed in 2012 and reaffirmed in 2020, meant that key grant funding from USDOJ set to be administered through LEPC had been placed on hold. The Commission, Mr. Smith said, has for the last two years worked on “strengthening internal controls, risk management assessments, compliance monitoring and other operational enhancements.”

These efforts met with the approval of the USDOJ Audit and Review Division and resulted in the removal of the high-risk designation as of last week. This, Mr. Smith says, will allow LEPC “to continue funding key priority areas across the criminal justice segment.”

He pointed to upgraded radios and man down systems, a residential substance abuse treatment program and a Bureau of Corrections entry program as examples of what this grant funding has already paid for. “It enabled us to fund the temporary morgues, administrative office facility on St. Croix, as well as critical equipment for the medical examiner unit of the Department of Justice,” Mr. Smith continued. Vehicles and training for the judiciary and judicial staff have also been funded through these grants, along with surveillance cameras with license plate readers in Frederiksted St. Croix.

Grant funding has also been distributed to several community-based nonprofit organizations that have provided “sheltering, counseling, legal support, medical and other services for victims of sexual assault and abuse, domestic violence and physical abuse territory-wide,” Mr. Smith disclosed. Case backlogs at the Department of Human Services have been reduced with the help of this federal grant money, along with claims on the Virgin Islands Criminal Victims Compensation Commission.

Because the funding are formula grants rather than fixed-amount allocations, Mr. Smith explained that despite the previous high-risk designation, the territory has not lost out on any money. “What happens is that you’re not able to access the funding until certain compliance requirements are met,” he said. The funding holds that were in place between 2010 and the end of that decade were able to be released in 2020, despite the designation remaining in place. Now that the Virgin Islands is no longer considered high risk, there should be no more holds either. Some funding at risk of lapsing at the end of 2025 has been extended through the end of this year, Mr. Smith disclosed.

“All our grants are current. All our funding is not in jeopardy, and we are at an excellent place in terms of supporting the projects and the criminal justice areas,” he concluded.