

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Blyden Calls on Plaskett to Seek From Congress Amendment of Revised Organic Act to Allow Emergency Sessions Outside of Charlotte Amalie

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Senator Marvin Blyden said Monday that last week he sent correspondence to Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett seeking her assistance in amending the Revised Organic Act to allow the V.I. Legislature to meet in emergency situations outside of the territory's capital of Charlotte Amalie.

Currently, Section 7(b) of the Revised Organic Act states, "Sessions of the legislature shall be held in the capital of the Virgin Islands at Charlotte Amalie, Saint Thomas." Mr. Blyden said this language prevents the Legislature from meeting if an emergency makes

it impossible for members to be physically present in the capital.

In his letter to Ms. Plaskett, Mr. Blyden noted that as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, legislative bodies throughout the nation are amending their rules and constitutions to allow for remote voting in emergencies. The senator requested that the Delegate to Congress spearhead this effort as the USVI's representative in Washington, since the power to amend the Organic Act resides within Congress.

The senator's move follows a recent [embarrassing scene](#) at the Legislature, where Senators Alicia Barnes and Allison DeGazon were barred from participating in a session where a critical measure to allow the government to borrow was being decided. Senate President Novelle Francis contended that the Revised Organic Act prohibited remote voting, and Ms. Barnes and Ms. DeGazon were attempting to participate via video from St. Croix.

Mr. Blyden has also submitted a resolution urging Congress to support such legislation, and he has submitted local legislation to amend the Rules of the Legislature to allow remote participation in emergencies, according to Mr. Blyden's office.

Mr. Blyden, currently leader of the majority in the Senate, understands the importance of ensuring that the Legislature continues to operate in times of emergency. He firmly believes that it is the Legislature's responsibility to adjust to the times and ensure that it continues doing the work of the people while protecting the health and safety of legislators and staff.