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Sen. Frett-Gregory Calls on DPNR to Release Available \$10 Million for Fishing Community

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According to the Office of Senator Donna Frett-Gregory, more than \$10 million in funding is available to assist eligible members of the fishing community who suffered economic loss from the 2017 storms, and Ms. Frett-Gregory is calling on the Dept. of Planning and Natural Resources "to do what is necessary to make this funding—which has been on hand since 2019—available to our local fishing community."

"Now more than ever, our fishing community will need support to be able to withstand the financial impact from COVID-19 as they continue to recover their losses from the 2017 storms," said Ms. Frett-Gregory.

The senator's letter to the commissioner states that DPNR partnered with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to receive \$10.7 million dollars. The goal was to establish a four-year program to support fishing businesses that experienced economic hardship as a direct result of Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Ms. Frett-Gregory said the money is especially critical to the survival of the fishing community, since many did not qualify for assistance programs like the FEMA emergency assistance grants and the Small Business Administration (SBA) loans.

“Being able to receive thousands of dollars in direct payments to repair damaged vessels, purchase necessary gear and to rehabilitate fishing facilities will help to boost the fishing economy and to sustain the fishing community’s livelihood,” she said Monday.

Ms. Frett-Gregory stated that providing the fishing community with access to financial resources will not only ensure they continue to thrive, but that Virgin Islands residents are able to catch, cook and consume their own food—especially during a time when the pandemic has forced closures of ports and borders across the world.

“Just today in the governor’s press conference, it was mentioned that financial resources would be moved around to assist members of the agricultural community, which would require legislative approval or proper procurement, whichever is applicable. But there was no mention of what the territory is doing to ensure fishers will have access to the \$10M available right now,” said the senator.

With the worsening pandemic, it is clear that industries providing basic necessities, like food, must be protected for the benefit of the entire Virgin Islands community. A thriving fishing community helps to provide food security for Virgin Islands residents, Ms. Frett-Gregory said..