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JFL's Reconstruction Efforts Get Federal Boost While WAPA Lines Up for \$1.6 Million in Federal Grants to Cover 'Management Costs' Related to Previous Federal Grants

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Juan F. Luis Hospital By. ERNICE GILBERT FOR VI CONSORTIUM

The Juan F. Luis Hospital is set to receive about \$1.4 million in federal grants to boost rebuilding efforts while WAPA is going to receiving \$1.6 million to cover the “management costs” incurred when the authority received millions more in federal dollars to help storm recovery efforts, Congresswoman Stacy Plaskett announced Wednesday.

The total \$3 million in Federal Emergency Management Agency grants will, among other things:

- Provide money for the JFL Hospital hire contractors to build-out temporary space for the Radiology Department, as needed to purchase and accommodate new equipment for the department.

According to Ms. Plaskett, "... The proposed scope of work includes: Purchase of a Philips CT Scan Machine with warranty. Purchase of a Philips X-Ray Machine with warranty. A&E design of the Radiology Department according to the regulatory standards and requirements. Retrofit of walls, booth windows and doors with lead-lined panels per manufacturer specifications. Design, construct and install a concrete pad to replace the CAT Scan Room floor per the manufacturer's technical specifications. Design and install concrete footings under the THS to support the weight of the radiology equipment per the manufacturer's technical specifications. Design and install restrooms for patients who may require them at the point of service. Installation of a UPS system on the CT Scan and the X-Ray machine to protect the motherboards in light of frequent power grid failures and surges. Installation of headwalls in the radiology rooms that will supply emergency medical air, oxygen and vacuum suction."

The \$1.6 million grant for the V.I. Water and Power Authority is, essentially, money given the authority to manage federal dollars given the agency previously.

"The grant is for \$1,674,043.04 in federal funding to the V.I. Water and Power Authority (WAPA) Management Costs," Ms. Plaskett said. "Management Costs are any indirect costs and administrative expenses that are reasonably incurred by a Grantee in administering a grant award. During the incident period, Hurricane Maria caused severe winds, heavy rainfall, and flooding that inundated the power generation, transmission, and distribution facilities of the WAPA facilities on St. John. Project scope of work included within this Management Cost Award are: emergency protective measures for power restoration, drinking water distribution; and permanent work repairs to St. John Water System Facilities, which include water tanks and a well."

Pandemic EBT Approved

Ms. Plaskett, a member of the House Agriculture Committee, also announced that the [USDA has approved the Pandemic EBT program](#) for the territory during the COVID-19 crisis.

The Virgin Islands has been approved to operate Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT), a new program authorized by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), which provides assistance to families of children eligible for free or reduced-price meals dealing with school closures, Plaskett's office said in a written statement.

"The U.S. Virgin Islands will be able to operate Pandemic EBT, a supplemental food purchasing benefit to current SNAP participants and as a new EBT benefit to other eligible households to offset the cost of meals that would have otherwise been consumed at school. For the 2019-2020 school year, the US Virgin Islands had approximately 13,200 children eligible for free and reduced-priced lunch (all children in participating schools).

"Under FFCRA, States have the option to submit a plan to the Secretary of Agriculture for providing these benefits to SNAP and non-SNAP households with children who have temporarily lost access to free or reduced-price school meals due to pandemic-related school closures. State agencies may operate Pandemic EBT when a school is closed for at least five consecutive days during a public health emergency designation during which the school would otherwise be in session.

“The implementation of Pandemic EBT is in line with USDA’s commitment and the efforts of my office to keep Virgin Islanders safe, secure, and healthy during this national emergency and to keep Virgin Island children fed when schools are closed. My office is working with the USDA and local authorities to ensure schools and other program operators can continue to feed children. This latest action complements previously announced flexibilities for the Child Nutrition programs that:

- Allow parents and guardians to pick up meals to bring home to their kids;
- Temporarily waive mealtimes requirements to make it easier to pick up multiple-days’ worth of meals at once;
- Allow meals to be served in non-congregate settings to support social distancing;
- Waive the requirement that after-school meals and snacks served through certain programs be accompanied by educational activities to minimize exposure to the novel coronavirus; and
- Allow states, on an individual state-by-state basis, to serve free meals to children in all areas, rather than only those in areas where at least half of students receive free or reduced-price meals.

Today’s announcement is the latest in a series of actions that USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service has taken to uphold the USDA’s commitment to ‘Do Right and Feed Everyone’ during this national emergency.

USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) administers 15 nutrition assistance programs that leverage American’s agricultural abundance to ensure children and low-income individuals and families have nutritious food to eat. FNS also co-develops the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, which provide science-based nutrition recommendations and serve as the cornerstone of federal nutrition policy.