

The Virgin Islands Consortium

In Defense Of D.O.T.'s Marketing Efforts, Commissioner Nicholson-Doty Labels Newspaper's Report As False, Reckless

Tourism / **Published On February 14, 2017 10:27 AM /**

Staff **February 14, 2017**



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The Virgin Islands Department of Tourism, in a press release issued on Sunday, sort to rebut statements made in a local newspaper that D.O.T. says were inaccurate.

D.O.T. Commissioner Beverly Nicholson-Doty, according to the release, noted that it was not only "deceptive," but "dangerous," for The Virgin Islands Daily News to "mislead Virgin Islanders with an editorial implying the Department of Tourism has no performance

matrix for its contracted services."

The Consortium has not examined the article.

According to the release, the paper's editorial had called into question the value of the department's contracts with advertising, marketing and promotional companies.

Mrs. Nicholson-Doty said that it was an "indication of the quality of the newspaper's reporting" that it provided a list and contract details for companies, some of whose contracts have expired, have not been renewed and who are no longer providing services to the department, according to the release.

"Such editorializing without due diligence in fact-checking is irresponsible and reflects an absence of professional journalism standards," Mrs. Nicholson-Doty said. According to the release, the commissioner added that, "such unfounded claims threaten the livelihoods and well-being of all islanders who depend on the more than \$2 billion direct and indirect contribution that tourism brings to the U.S. Virgin Islands economy."

According to the release, Mrs. Nicholson-Doty indicated that D.O.T.'s contractors play an integral role marketing the destination in the national and international media, and placing advertising that attracts visitors to the territory. She said contractors are committed and accountable to a detailed scope of work, performance standards and deliverables.

She gave the example of important increases in marketing in Denmark to spur Centennial-related travel, and public relations efforts that have earned millions of dollars in exposure for the U.S. Virgin Islands. No document was sent to this publication verifying those claims, however.

"Thousands in our economy depend on tourism. Arrivals and new bookings would grind to a halt if we interrupted our marketing and advertising efforts," Mrs. Nicholson-Doty said, adding that the territory is bound by law to market and promote the destination.

According to the release, D.O.T. has saved millions of dollars in rent payments by closing brick and mortar offices in the marketplace, has moved its St. Thomas office from a private to a government-owned facility, and is gradually transitioning to a sales force of mostly independent contractors, thereby reducing Government expenditures.

"This ill-informed campaign of attacks on the government, and by extension the people of the Virgin Islands, as well as our contracted partners, is reckless," Mrs. Nicholson-Doty continued. "We find it time consuming to refute these examples of false news in our media, but we have a responsibility to the Virgin Islands public to set the record straight."