

The Virgin Islands Consortium

DHS Says Funding For Catholic Charities Homeless Program Has Been Identified

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ST. THOMAS -- The Department of Human Services announced on Tuesday that funding has been identified for the Catholic Charities' "Home at Last" program, which aims to reintroduce homeless individuals to the community after going through a series of rehabilitation efforts, including support and counseling from the program's group of social workers -- with the first step being the placement of the homeless individual into an apartment to be taught important life skills.

The announcement follows media reports that the government had not funded the program since October 1, 2016.

"We fully understand the severity of the impact if we are unable to continue to house those homeless individuals who have benefited from this program," said Felecia Blyden, D.H.S. commissioner-designee. "This issue was a priority for management at the Department of Human Services, and we pursued every avenue to find a resolve."

Catholic Charities earlier determined that because of the lack of funding, the program would not continue. However, according to the release, once Ms. Blyden was notified of the impending closure of the program, she verified that the legislature had determined that, "The sum of \$500,000 is appropriated in the fiscal year ending September 30, 2017, from any available funds within the Department of Human Services for Catholic Charities Home at Last Program," and took action to assure the availability of funds.

"In collaboration with OMB [the Office of Management and Budget], funding has been identified from the Crisis Intervention Fund that would adequately fund this program," Ms. Blyden said. "It would have been detrimental for those who have struggled thus far with homelessness; and it would have been a setback for the program and this community."

Ms. Blyden said the Crisis Intervention Fund is an appropriate alternative funding source for permanent housing for the territory's homeless.