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# Bryan Wants Senate to Pass Bill That Creates Board to Regulate 'Mass Gatherings' With 50 People or More

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Ernice Gilbert **August 03, 2020**

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**A 'Sunny Side Up' Event organized by Island Vybez Promotions and held in 2019 at the Captain Morgan Visitor Center. By. Reemy-Reemz Photograpy & Videography**

Governor Albert Bryan is pushing the Senate to pass an aggressive bill Mr. Bryan has introduced that would create what is being called the Board of Mass Gatherings, whose responsibility would be to regulate events that are expected to have more than 50 people in attendance, or more than 100 people "if 51 percent or more of those persons may reasonably be expected to be younger than 21 years of age, and it is planned or may be reasonably be expected that alcoholic beverages will be sold, served, or consumed at or around the gathering" for more than 5 hours "or for any amount of time during the period beginning at 7:00 p.m. and ending 4:00 a.m."

The law would create a new position called Mass Gathering Coordinator. This person would be appointed by the commissioner of the V.I. Police Department, according to language in the bill. The measure also calls for a number of law enforcement officers to be present at the gathering to aid in "managing internal security and public order during the mass gathering."

It appears that passage of such a measure would mean more government involvement in private events covering a wide array of activities, save for a few exceptions: churches, events on private property that is not commercial in nature, activities conducted by the government, or events whose organizers were already required to obtain authorization from the Fire Marshal, the VIPD, and the Environmental Health Services Department, according to the bill. These gatherings — whether home party or church — cannot exceed the seating capacity, according to the bill.

The measure would require organizers to get a permit for all events outside the exemption scope, once the event is expected to attract more than 50 people. Those who would break the law would face a \$1,000 fine or 90 days of imprisonment. Additionally, "Each day of the violation is a separate offense," reads the bill. "Any law enforcement agency with jurisdiction over the location of the event shall have citation power..." The law prohibits permits for multiple events at the same time.

The measure also calls for the event organizer to apply for a permit 45 days prior to the event in order to be considered for approval. The application document asks for financial statements that "reflects the funds being supplied to finance the mass gathering" along with "each person supplying the funds," among a surfeit of other requirements. Read the bill [here](#).

Mr. Bryan has been imploring Senate President Novelle Francis to get the 33rd Legislature to take action on the bill, which the governor said was sent to the Legislature in December 2019 in response to [a shooting at the Floatopia event](#) at the Fort Frederik Beach that left six people injured.

With no action taken on the measure since it was forwarded to the Legislature, the governor now points to the Covid-19 pandemic as reason for the Senate to take it up, contending that "mass gatherings are one of the main causes for the second wave of the Coronavirus that has continued its spread throughout the territory since the beginning of July," according to Government House.

Mr. Bryan said, "I strongly believe the Legislature's prompt consideration and enactment of the Mass Gathering Act will strongly aid in the protection of the Virgin Islands Community during this pandemic and after."

The governor said that recent examples of problems that the Mass Gathering Act could have addressed if it had been enacted are:

- Unauthorized organizers facilitating public parties that do not promote social distancing and allow for mass gatherings.
- Flash crowd mass gatherings, such as marine events on boats ("raft ups"), at beaches and in public businesses that do not promote social distancing and allow for mass gatherings.

"For these reasons, it is imperative that the Legislature consider the Mass Gathering Act," Mr. Bryan wrote in a letter to Mr. Francis. "I am asking that the Legislature give this Act the prompt action previously requested, in light of the extant circumstances presently faced by law enforcement personnel."

Mr. Francis told the Consortium Sunday the measure will be heard during a Committee of the Whole hearing on August 10. "We'll be convening a Committee of the Whole to hear the particulars of it; it has been sent down for quite some time. He [the governor] has asked us to prioritize it so we'll be taking it up and making a decision," he said.

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