

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Senate to Take Up Bryan's 60-Day State of Emergency Extension Request Today

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The Earl B. Ottley Legislature in St. Thomas in 2015 By. ERNICE GILBERT FOR VI CONSORTIUM

The 33rd Legislature during a Committee of the Whole hearing today will take up Governor Albert Bryan's request for a 60-day state of emergency extension, which the governor said is needed as his administration continues to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic. The current state of emergency declaration expires today.

"The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have reported that as of August 3, 2020, the Coronavirus Disease, the severe acute respiratory illness that can spread

among humans through respiratory transmission and presents itself with symptoms similar to those of influenza, has sickened more than 4,649,102 people and killed over 154,471 in the U.S. alone," Mr. Bryan wrote in a transmittal letter to Senate President Novelle Francis last week.

V.I. law allows only for a 30-day extension, but Mr. Bryan has asked the Senate to suspend the portion of the law that limits the extension to 30 days — Title 23 of the V.I. Code — contending that the virus is unpredictable and is expected to continue affecting the USVI for a long time.

"COVID-19 is unpredictable at this time but projected to last another several months, up to a year," Mr. Bryan wrote. He also said a 60-day extension would avoid "having to call a Legislative session every month so as not to expose the Legislature and its staff to COVID-19."

A state of emergency declaration, usually declared after a natural disaster, gives governors powers they would otherwise not have under normal circumstances.

However, it remains to be seen whether the Legislature will grant Mr. Bryan his request, or the 60-day extension he has asked for, following the scandal that captured the territory's attention when it was revealed that the Dept. of Health had awarded a \$1 million contact tracing deal to Avera, a company with zero experience in the field whose local licensing documents had not been approved, and whose owners include the governor's daughter, Aliyah Bryan.

D.O.H. [has since disqualified Avera](#) due to failure "to submit their corporate documents on time," said Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion. The department had previously approved the agreement within 72 hours under the exigency protocol allowed through the state of emergency declaration.