

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Virgin Islanders Get 26 Additional Weeks Of Unemployment Assistance As Congress Approves Recovery Reforms Recommended By Governor Mapp

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The United States Senate gave final approval to the Disaster Recovery Reform Act of 2018 on Wednesday, according to a Government House release. The Act retroactively provides an additional 26 weeks of disaster-related unemployment assistance for the U.S. Virgin Islands for a total of 52 weeks of assistance following the disaster declarations for Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

The legislation will make an additional \$8 million in assistance available to approximately 1,340 Virgin Islanders, Government House said.

“We have had countless meetings, letters and calls with many members of Congress to ensure they understand all the challenges of our recovery,” said Governor Kenneth Mapp. “Our efforts have paid off -- hundreds of workers displaced by the storms should soon be able to collect additional unemployment benefits.”

The Disaster Recovery Reform Act, which is part of a comprehensive Federal Aviation Administration reauthorization bill, also includes amendments to the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act lobbied for by Governor Mapp that will provide the Territory additional flexibility in the use of federal disaster funding, according to Government House.

The bill increases the use of FEMA funds for building upgrades to modern building codes and standards, as well as expands the types of resiliency projects that can be funded. The bill also increases the reimbursement rates that the Virgin Islands receives for administrative costs associated with disaster recovery and provides the Territory with the option to manage direct temporary housing and permanent housing construction assistance programs in the event of future disasters.

The legislation was approved earlier by the House and now goes to President Donald Trump, who is expected to sign the bill into law. The Mapp administration has been working very closely with the White House, federal officials and Members of Congress since Hurricanes Irma and Maria devastated the Virgin Islands last year.

Mr. Mapp praised the House and Senate actions and the Trump administration’s support for the extension of disaster-related unemployment assistance for the U.S. Virgin Islands.

“This bill reflects Congress’ understanding of the unprecedented severity and damage caused by the hurricanes, as well as the federal government’s extraordinary commitment to helping the U.S. Virgin Islands,” he said.

The governor also thanked Virgin Islands Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett for her advocacy in support of the Territory’s recovery.