

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bryan Requests Extension Of Federal STEP Program From FEMA

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Governor Albert Bryan, in a letter Wednesday to FEMA Federal Coordinating Officer Michael Byrne, requested an extension to the USVI Sheltering and Temporary Essential Power (STEP) program, Government House announced Thursday via release.

The extension requested by Mr. Bryan will allow for the completion of work on the remaining eligible homes past the current performance deadline of January 31.

In his letter to Mr. Byrne, the territory's chief executive highlighted the importance of the STEP Program to the people of the Virgin Islands and acknowledged the challenges the Virgin Islands Housing Authority has experienced with repairing thousands of homes in a

short period.

Mr. Bryan also underscored the need to complete repairs on the remaining homes before the 2019 Hurricane season, which begins in June, as another reason for extending the program, as it would take months to restart repairs to remaining eligible homes under other federally-funded program.

“While I understand that there are other federal programs that can fund home repairs,” the governor wrote. “A project funded by either FEMA’s Hazard Mitigation Grant Program or HUD’s Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery Program would take at least several months to get started.”

He added, “To continue STEP now without interruption is the only logical way to guarantee that these remaining 1,700 homes will be repaired before the 2019 hurricane season is upon us.”

Five thousand five hundred homes in the territory have received repairs under the STEP program with an additional 1700 awaiting repair, according to Government House. With 480 five-person roofing crews in the territory and another 75 crews arriving next week, the STEP program is 79 percent complete, according to the release.

In a letter dated December 5, 2018, [FEMA rejected the territory’s request](#) to extend the cost share for the STEP program, along with a request for an extension of the period of 100 percent federal funding for ongoing Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) mission assignments until they are completed.

“While we recognize that the U.S. Virgin Islands has been seriously impacted by Hurricanes Irma and Maria, it has been determined that further adjustments to the Public Assistance cost share arrangement beyond what the President previously approved are not warranted, reads the FEMA letter, seen [here](#). “Therefore I must inform you that your requests are denied.” The letter was written by FEMA Administrator Brock Long.

FEMA’s decision to deny the local government’s request stands to greatly impact the territory’s ongoing recovery. The 100 percent cost share proved essential in assuring the territory’s rebuild following the 2017 storms, as the local government lacks the funding to harden the territory’s infrastructure.