

The Virgin Islands Consortium

FEMA Approves Bryan's Request For Extension Of Home Repair Program

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Ernice Gilbert **January 30, 2019**



The federal government on Friday approved Governor Albert Bryan's request to extend the USVI's Sheltering and Temporary Essential Power (STEP) program, which would allow for the completion of work on the remaining eligible homes past the original deadline of January 31.

The extension is good news for the U.S. Virgin Islands, which continues to rebuild after Hurricanes Irma and Maria devastated the territory in 2017, with most of the funding being provided by the federal government. During his State of the Territory Address of Monday, Mr. Bryan said without the funding from the federal government, the Government of the Virgin Islands would not have been able to meet its obligations

following the storms.

The governor addressed his two-week-old letter to FEMA Federal Coordinating Officer Michael Byrne. In it, Mr. Bryan 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. He reminded Mr. Byrne that 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. There are 480 five-person roofing crews in the territory and another 75 crews who were to arrive last week. The STEP program was 79 percent complete as of earlier this month, Government House said.