

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bryan Signs Proclamation Recognizing April As Sexual Assault Awareness Month

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Governor Albert Bryan showed his support for sexual assault prevention efforts in the territory during a proclamation signing ceremony at the Arthur Abel Complex in Frederiksted last Wednesday, according to a release issued by the V.I. Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Council (DVSAC). The proclamation, which officially recognizes April as Sexual Assault Awareness Month and Child Abuse Prevention Month, raises public awareness and educates the community on what sexual violence is and how to prevent it. The theme for 2019 is "I Ask", championing the idea that consent is a normal, healthy, and necessary part of everyday interactions, DVSAC said.

During the ceremony, the V.I. Sexual Assault Response Team -- an initiative spearheaded by DVSAC and made possible by the commitment of multiple agencies -- also officiated their commitment to a coordinated response for survivors through a symbolic signing of an interagency memorandum of understanding.

Khnuma Simmonds, executive director of DVSAC; COL Shawn Harris of Virgin Islands National; Carolyn Forno of the Women's Coalition of St. Croix; Natalie Lewis of the Department of Human Services; Vanessa Hewitt-Quinland of the Office of the Attorney General; Jason Marsh, acting V.I.P.D. commissioner, and Jason Henry of the AIDS Education Training Center, were all present to participate in the momentous occasion highlighting the importance of supporting victims and survivors of sexual assault, those that work alongside them, and that prevention is a community effort, DVSAC release said.

To close the series of events in honor of Sexual Assault Awareness Month, V.I. SART alongside Governor Bryan, recognized Dahlia Stridiron-Felix with the Visionary Voice Award. The Visionary Voice Awards, which are offered by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) in conjunction with state, territory and tribal coalitions for Sexual Assault Awareness Month each April, recognizes the creativity and hard work of individuals around the country who have demonstrated outstanding work to end sexual violence.

Mrs. Dahlia Stridiron-Felix, who is the director of counseling services at the University of the Virgin Islands, St. Thomas Campus, is an active member of DVSAC and coordinates all of the Sexual Assault Awareness Month (and Domestic Violence Awareness Month) activities on campus, according to the release.

"Dahlia engages students, is genuinely passionate about the cause, and is a positive example of what a marriage between advocacy, education, and awareness looks like," said Ms. Simmonds. "DVSAC could not do our work without her and the V.I. SART is fortunate to have her as an ally as we continue our multi-disciplinary, territory-wide initiatives to support survivors."