

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bryan Administration Proceeds With Merger Of V.I. Fire Service And EMS

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The Office of the Governor, the Department of Health (D.O.H.) and the Virgin Islands Fire Service are moving forward with plans to integrate D.O.H.'s Emergency Medical Service (EMS) with the Virgin Islands Fire Service to form what will be called the Virgin Islands Fire and Emergency Medical Service (V.I.F.E.M.S.), Government House said Monday.

Government House said the integration project team, led by the Office of the Governor and spearheaded by the governor's public policy advisor, Marise James, convened a meeting July 19 to continue work on key components of the integration plan.

"I have assembled a team of cabinet members and policy advisors to assist the members of the Department of Health and Fire in the development of the integration plan," Ms. James said. "The first planning sessions have been led by Personnel Director Dayna Clendenin because the employees are the most important part of a successful integration."

"Transferring EMS with Fire requires a systematic approach to implementing the consolidation to ensure success moving forward," said Ms. Clendenin during the July 19 meeting. "The leadership of the DOH, Fire Service, Office of the Governor, Division of Personnel and Office of Collective Bargaining have formed a project team to execute the transition."

As part of the integration, the newly formed V.I.F.E.M.S. will leverage the benefits of a combined fire and EMS system, Government House said.

Mr. Bryan noted the benefits of the merger. "If nothing else, we must be ever cognizant that we are completely cut off from the rest of the world in the face of any disaster and having more people trained and ready to respond to medical emergencies could never be a bad thing," he said. "Not only do we realize the skills and availability of additional medical responders, but they are also spread out and strategically placed at deployment locations throughout the territory."

Mr. Bryan added, "The reason for this integration is to make our communities safer. A territorial system of emergency medical care is necessary to promote the health, safety, and welfare of the residents of the territory. Reducing response time to medical emergencies is a critical objective of this integration."

Government House said each agency listed current processes the integration can help improve and also detailed issues that would need to be resolved before the transition is complete.

During the meeting which included over 30 representatives from both V.I.F.S. and EMS, the governor said "most of our population is over 55 years old," as he stressed the importance of finding a more effective way to serve residents in need of emergency medical care on each island, according to Government House.

In the meeting, the Division of Personnel shared that residents and interested parties have begun contacting the agency to inquire about new career opportunities the integration could bring now that talks are advancing.

In early June, Office of Collective Bargaining Director Joss Springette met with union officials for V.I.F.S. and EMS employees to discuss the integration and to ensure the concerns of the union members were adequately addressed, according to Government House.

"We encouraged the unions to share any other information, suggestions or concerns they may have with the agency heads and their respective members of the project team," said Ms. Springette.

Government House said the next meeting of the integration team is scheduled for early August.

