The Virgin Islands Consortium

U.S. Department of Commerce Invests to Support Growth of the Medical Sector in U.S. Virgin Islands Following 2017 Hurricanes

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Today, U.S. Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross announced that the Department's Economic Development Administration (EDA) is investing $28.6 million in the University of the Virgin Islands to support efforts to diversify and strengthen the resiliency of the Island economy by helping to grow the medical sector. The two grants, to be located in a Tax Cuts and Jobs Act designated Opportunity Zone, will be matched with $3 million in local funds, and are expected to help generate $35 million in private investment, the U.S. EDA said.

“The Trump Administration and the Department of Commerce understand the challenges faced by the U.S. Virgin Islands following the devastating 2017 Hurricane season and are committed to helping them recover and build back stronger,” said Mr. Ross.

“In 2018, EDA made $587 million in Congressional supplemental appropriations available to eligible grantees in communities impacted by natural disasters in 2017,” said U.S. Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Economic Development Dr. John Fleming. “We are pleased to support bottom-up, local strategies designed to help diversify and grow the Island’s economy in the wake of Hurricanes Irma and Maria and the location in an Opportunity Zone will help spur additional private investment.”

The U.S. EDA investments announced to the University of the Virgin Islands are:

- $14.5 million to support the construction of the Medical Research and Training Center, which will focus on advanced innovations in medical research, education and practice, and serve as a training ground for the use of new, high-value medical practice devices. The project will be matched with $1.5 million in local funds.
- $14.1 million to support the construction of the University of the Virgin Islands’ new Medical Simulation Center at the University’s Albert A. Sheen Campus. The facility will include trauma and hybrid operating rooms, 18 surgical skill lab areas, four team training rooms, and an auditorium with an open atrium. The project, to be matched with $1.5 million in local funds, is expected to spur $35 million in private investment.

According to the release, these projects are funded under the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 (PL 115-123) (PDF), in which Congress appropriated to EDA $600 million in additional Economic Adjustment Assistance (EAA) Program funds for disaster relief and recovery as a result of Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, wildfires, and other calendar year 2017 natural disasters under the Stafford Act.

The funding for these projects goes to a designated Opportunity Zone, created by President Donald J. Trump’s Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 to spur economic development by giving tax incentives to investors in economically-distressed communities nationwide. In June 2019, EDA added Opportunity Zones as an Investment Priority, which increases the number of catalytic Opportunity Zone-related projects that EDA can fund to fuel greater public investment in these areas. To learn more about the Opportunity Zone program, see the Treasury Department resources page here. To learn more about the Commerce Department’s work in Opportunity Zones, please visit EDA’s Opportunity Zones webpage.