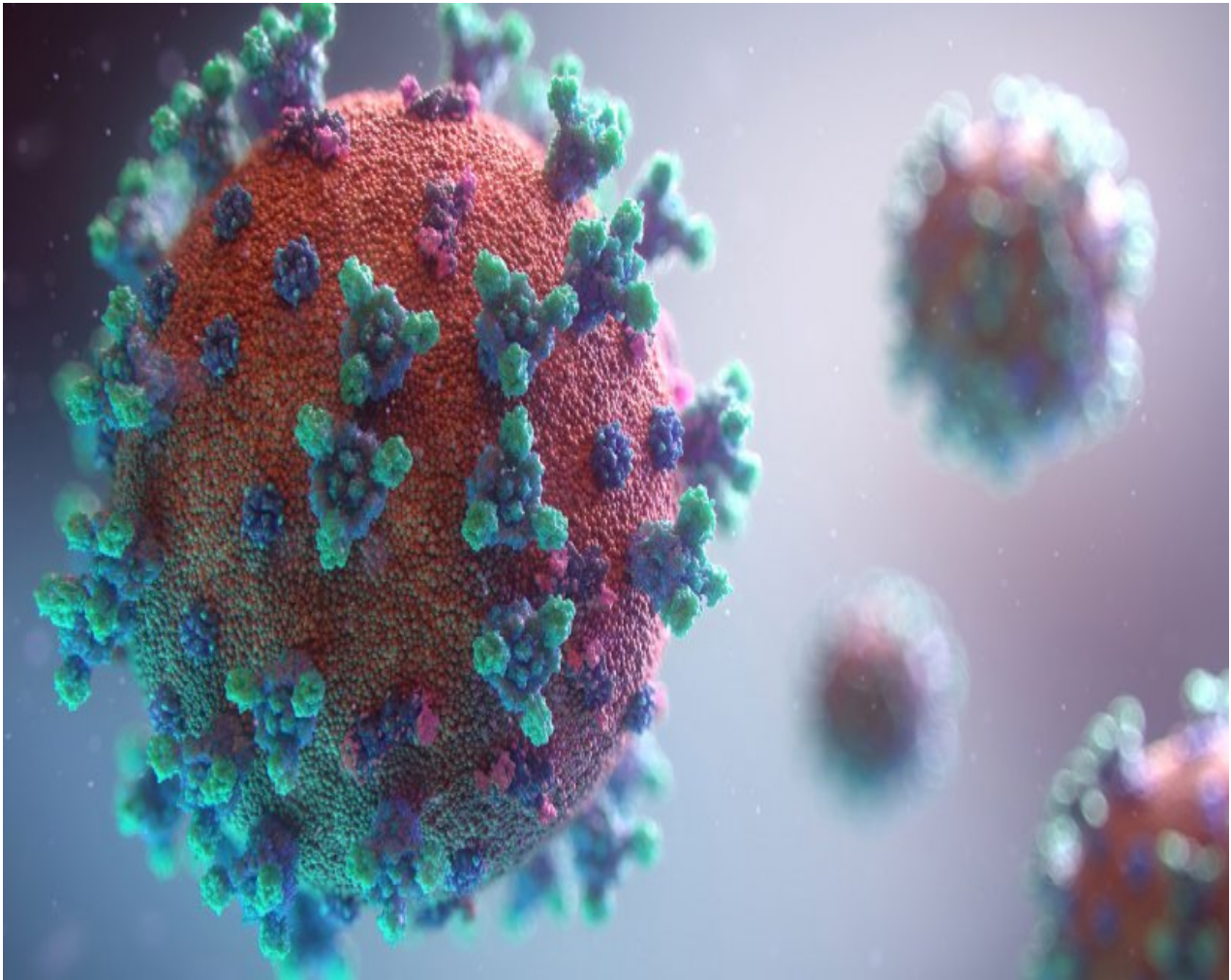


The Virgin Islands Consortium

Lawmakers Approve Bryan's 60-Day State of Emergency Extension Request

Government / **Published On October 07, 2020 04:44 AM /**

Maxiene K. Cabo **October 07, 2020**



The 33rd Legislature convened Tuesday in a Committee of the Whole Hearing and approved 15-0 Governor Bryan's request for a 60-day extension of the state of emergency declaration due to COVID-19. Testifying in support of the extension were Dept. of Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion and VITEMA Director Daryl Jaschen.

The territory has been under a state of emergency declaration since March 13. The declaration gives the governor astonishing power such as activating disaster response plans, ordering evacuations among other measures deemed helpful during a time of disaster. According to the law, for the governor to extend the state of emergency beyond the two 30-day periods, administration officials would have to appear before the Senate

five days before the expiration of the second 30-day period and justify the reason for the extension.

"It is critical for the USVI to maintain an active state of emergency status. It is essential that the Government of the Virgin Islands deploy accompanying emergency authorities and maintain access to federal benefits/assistance that arise from the emergency status," said Ms. Encarnacion during the hearing.

Mr. Jaschen told legislators that extending the state of emergency for an additional 60 days would allow VITEMA to have adequate staff coverage and control measures to continue combating the virus.

While the measure was passed and as result the state of emergency extended, senators voted to amend Bill No. 33-0424 to strike language mentioning hurricane season as one of the reasons for the extension. "You can't include hurricane season. Hurricane season just isn't a state of emergency, so it's really laughable that that language is included. The state of emergency is directly related to the pandemic," said Senator Kurt Violet.

In their testimonies, both government arms outlined several approaches they have taken to combat the virus. D.O.H. said it plans to expand testing, though testing has dropped significantly territory-wide. Currently, the department has 24 Abbott Now machines, which are rapid molecular tests for Covid-19, said Ms. Encarnacion. She said the devices have been strategically placed throughout the USVI to reach vulnerable populations.

D.O.H. has also established a vaccination task force which is presently processing applications for permits to provide Covid-19 vaccinations whenever the CDC develops a safe and effective vaccine, said the commissioner. Along with D.O.H., the VI National Guard has also engaged with CDC and federal partners in Operation Warp Speed — a public-private partnership initiated by the Trump administration to facilitate and accelerate the development, manufacturing, and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.

Along with the health department, VITEMA has increased staffing with the assistance of Pafford Medical Services. Pafford deployed over 50 clinical staff to support the territory's first responders in EMS, Hospitals, Nursing Homes, and Dialysis Centers. VITEMA has also mobilized the Virgin Islands National Guard for compliance monitoring at the airport and seaports. Additionally, VITEMA said it has worked closely with the Department of Tourism on developing a travel declaration website and app where travelers to the territory can input their COVID-19 status.

While the pandemic is continuously developing, Mr. Jaschen said, "Even with the mitigation efforts in place, the USVI cannot predict the epidemiological outcomes as the U.S. mainland numbers continue to fluctuate."

"We anticipate a wave of new cases based on the trends, and we must be prepared to address the wave accordingly," said Mr. Jaschen. VITEMA expects that the increased activity at the seaports and airports in the coming months will lead to more Covid-19 cases in the USVI. "In order to balance the need to secure the health of our community and balance the need to be financially solvent, we must continue our progress toward opening our doors and need the resources to do so," he said.

Ultimately, legislators voted in favor of Bill. No. 33-0424- an Act renewing and extending the state of emergency in the Virgin Islands to facilitate proper planning and response to the COVID Pandemic from October 9, 2020, to December 8, 2020.

As of Tuesday there were 20 Covid-19 related deaths in the USVI, 21,507 tests performed, of which 20,155 were negative and 1,322 positive, 15 of which were active.

© Viconsortium 2026