

In Effort to End Homelessness in USVI, Bryan Reestablishes Inter-agency Council Targeting the Problem

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Governor Albert Bryan, Jr. By. Government House

Governor Albert Bryan on Tuesday hosted an inaugural meeting reestablishing the Virgin Islands Inter-agency Council on Homelessness (VIICH) at Government House on St. Croix. The reestablishment coincided with the National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week, held November 16 – 24.

According to Government House, the council, led by Department of Human Services (DHS) Commissioner Kimberley Causey-Gomez and Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority (VIHFA) Executive Director Daryl Griffith, seeks to establish public/private sector collaboration

to prevent and end homelessness in the Virgin Islands through policy and resource development.

The existing Virgin Islands Continuum of Care on Homelessness (CoC) will work collaboratively with VIICH to implement the Territorial Crisis Response System. The CoC provided data that revealed approximately 200 chronically homeless persons in the territory—defined as a homeless person living on the street for 12 consecutive months or has had four episodes of homelessness in three years, Government House said.

“Re-engaging key stakeholders in the private sector and non profit community is just the first of many important steps in our administration’s efforts to end poverty in the territory,” said Governor Bryan. “Homelessness, is a harsh reality for too many, and often effects our community outside of the health and wellbeing of the individual. We have a real opportunity to make progress in reducing our homelessness by reducing poverty and that is what we intend to do.”

According to Government House, in addition to housing needs to support persons at risk of being homeless and chronically homeless persons, varying levels of support services are required to help people remain in stable housing. Services include substance abuse treatment - both residential and outpatient, mental health services-both residential and outpatient, aftercare, recovery support, Care Navigation Services, drop-in centers, day treatment, education and job training opportunities, etc.

The CoC also reported that subpopulations of homeless persons in the territory include adult domestic violence survivors, persons living with HIV/AIDS, the severely mentally ill, and a significant number suffering from chronic substance abuse.

Mr. Griffith informed the Council on V.I.F.H.A.'s access to funds that address the homeless needs in the territory through its annual allocations of the Emergency Solutions Grant and the Community Development Block Grant. The authority is also in the development stages of the Supportive Housing and Sheltering Program under the Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery.

Ms. Causey-Gomez acknowledged her department’s efforts to meet the demands for the effective implementation of the Council goals.

“Right now, DHS works collaboratively and in partnership with federal agencies, and has established public and private non-profits to assist our clients to the best of our ability, noting the limited housing and support services available in our Virgin Islands community. It is essential that the resources be developed so those affected can get the assistance they need,” she said.

Government House said the goals of the VI Inter-agency Council on Homelessness are to ensure homelessness is a rare experience, a brief experience, and to work toward an end to homelessness in the territory. Through its re-establishment, members of the Council will work in their respective agencies on three major goals. The Council will first increase the capacity to address homeless issues and strengthen homeless prevention practices. Secondly, it will develop policies and procedures to support the implementation of homeless services and the territorial crisis response system. Lastly, the Council will sustain data collection practices for prevention and assessment purposes.

To kick-off the reestablishment of the Council, work groups on housing, prevention, data collection, access to mainstream services, financial support, and media planning were created to develop plans and systems to address the needs of the homeless population.

Members of the Virgin Islands Inter-agency Council on Homelessness represent the Office of the Governor; Department of Human Services; VI Housing Finance Authority; Legislature of the Virgin Islands; Department of Health; Department of Labor; Office of the Attorney General; Schneider Regional Medical Center; Juan F. Luis Hospital; Superior Court of the Virgin Islands;

VI Police Department; Bureau of Corrections; VI Fire Service; Office of Veterans Affairs; STX & STTJ Chambers of Commerce; VI Continuum of Care Council; University of the Virgin Islands; Frederiksted Health Care, Inc.; St. Thomas East End Medical Center; and the St. Croix Mission Outreach, Inc.

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