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Territory Receives \$12 Million to Help Virgin Islanders With Rent Payments; Blyden Calls on Bryan to Act Immediately

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The U.S. Virgin Islands has received about \$12 million from the Covid-19 aid bill passed by Congress in December to aid the territory's residents with rent payments, announced Senator Marvin Blyden, who chairs the 34th Legislature's Committee on Housing, Transportation & Telecommunications.

In a release issued Thursday, Mr. Blyden called on Governor Albert Bryan to take swift action to implement a program of financial assistance to renters and mortgage payers in the territory who have fallen behind due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Mr. Blyden said such a program "is absolutely necessary to avoid an unprecedented housing crisis in the territory."

"Under the latest round of COVID-19 relief enacted by Congress at the end of last year, nearly \$12 million was allocated to the Virgin Islands for Emergency Rental Assistance," Mr. Blyden said. "It is absolutely necessary that we get those monies in the hands of our residents. While the moratoriums on evictions are certainly a lifesaver, they are not enough by themselves. Many people, through no fault of their own, are many months behind in their rental obligations, and they need assistance in order to remain in their residences and homes when the moratoriums end."

According to the release, the veteran lawmaker noted that providing the rental assistance immediately is not only critically important to tenants, but to their landlords as well.

"When we enable tenants to pay their rent, we also provide a lifeline to many homeowners, who depend on rental income to assist them in paying their mortgage and other obligations," Mr. Blyden said. "As such, it is simply impossible to overstate the importance of moving on this immediately. I have spoken to the governor before on this issue, and it is time now to get the ball rolling and to get this money to our people who need it so desperately. I have submitted draft legislation on this matter, but based on what I have learned, there is no legislative action necessary. What we need is creative and energetic action on the part of the administration, and I stand ready to lend whatever support is necessary to make this happen."

The senator noted that this matter will be a major subject of inquiry at the March 3, 2021 hearing of the Committee on Housing, Transportation and Telecommunications, and that he fervently hopes that more concrete developments will have occurred by then.

"The need is too great, and too urgent, to allow further delay," he concluded.