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OECS Nations Join Governor Bryan Calling on Florida Governor to Remove Ban on Cruise Ships That Require Proof of Vaccination

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Dominica Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit, in his role as chairman of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (O.E.C.S.), thanked Governor Albert Bryan in a letter for his "proactive initiative in writing to Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and asking Governor DeSantis to reconsider his ban on cruise ships embarking from Florida requiring proof of vaccination against Covid-19," Gov't House announced Thursday.

According to the release, Mr. Skerrit sent the letter to Mr. Bryan on behalf of Anguilla Premier Ellis Webster; Antigua and Barbuda Prime Minister Gaston Browne; BVI Premier Andrew Fahie; Grenada Prime Minister Keith Mitchell; Guadeloupe Regional Council President Ary Chalus; Martinique Executive Council President Alfred Marie-Jean; Montserrat Premier Joseph E. Farrell;

St. Kitts and Nevis Prime Minister Timothy Harris; St. Lucia Prime Minister Allen Chastanet; St. Vincent and the Grenadines Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves; and Organization of Eastern Caribbean States Director General Didacus Jules.

“We are deeply concerned – as you are – with the grave inherent difficulties for our effort to safeguard lives and to reignite livelihoods as we are among the most tourism-dependent economies of the world,” stated the Dominica prime minister in the letter. “While the new law is not specific to the cruise business, it will potentially have a huge deleterious effect on it because almost all cruise ships (especially to the Caribbean) originate from ports within the state of Florida.”

Governor Bryan sent a letter last week to Governor DeSantis asking him to reconsider legislation the Florida governor approved that bans cruise ships embarking from Florida ports from requesting proof of vaccination. Mr. Bryan said such an action contradicts the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s guidelines and could endanger the population of the Caribbean islands visited by such ships and potentially heavily impact the limited healthcare resources in the region.

Mr. DeSantis in a press release issued last week blasted the CDC for its cruise ship policies, calling the federal agency a “bureaucratic virus against science-based governance,” while accusing it of “discriminating against children.”

The Florida governor's stance is the latest in a strained relationship with the CDC. In April, [Florida sued](#) the CDC to restart cruise travel, calling the action of mothballing cruise ship activity for over a year a "stringent and reckless stance against the industry." Florida is a major cruise ship hub and the largest in the U.S.

Mr. DeSantis's position has also led to a tense relationship with cruise lines whose home port is Florida, as they have acceded to the CDC's requirement that 98 percent of a ship's crew and 95 percent of its passengers be vaccinated as a precondition to set sail. The cruise lines' decision to follow the CDC flouts a Florida law that prohibits the use of so-called vaccine passports for cruising from Florida.

In his letter to Mr. Bryan, Mr. Skerrit said the O.E.C.S. will advance those arguments in support of the advocacy that Governor Bryan already has undertaken and will urge their partners in the cruise and land-based tourism industries to add their voices in appeal to Governor DeSantis.

“For us as Small Island Developing States whose economies are largely fueled by tourism, the vaccination status of industry players (both visitors and industry workers – whether cruise or land-based) is essential to our strategy in the OECS to safeguard the lives of both our people and visitors and restore our economies,” the letter said.