The Virgin Islands Consortium

Payments to Landlords For Rent Finally Going Out This Month; RFP to Repair 200 Homes Through EnVision Tomorrow Program Issued

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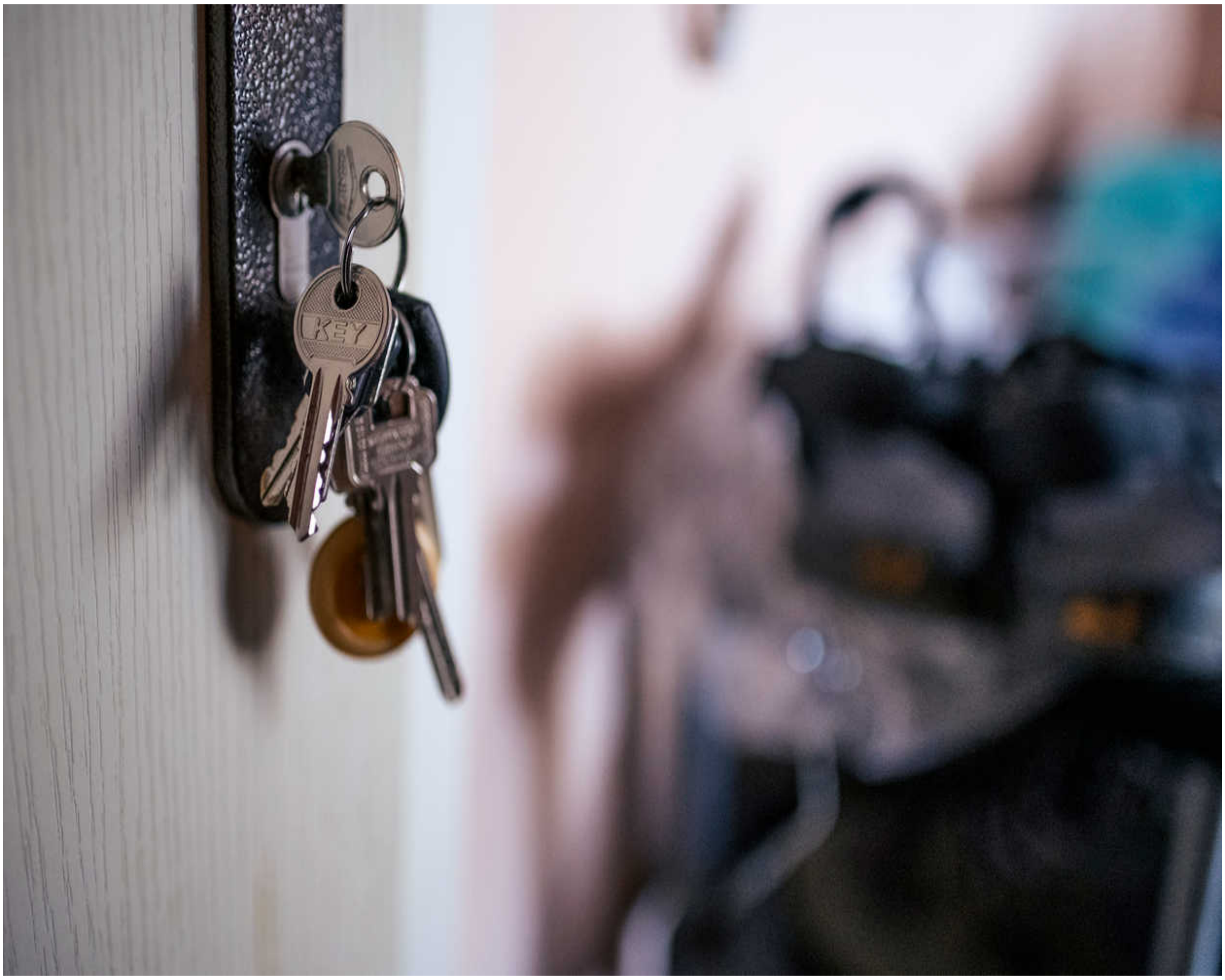

The V.I. Housing Finance Authority said Tuesday landlords will start receiving checks this month through the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP). The authority also said the deadline for contractors to bid on 200 homes that qualify for the EnVision Tomorrow program is the end of August, and it provided an update relative to the Community Block Development Grant-Disaster Recovery (CBDG-DR) funds.

The details were provided by V.I.H.F.A. Executive Director Daryl Griffith during the Office of Management and Budget's Revenue Estimating Conference.

Regarding the ERAP, the territory was allocated $21.3 million initially and later received an additional $18.3 million. Mr. Griffith said ERAP funds would start going out this month, “so people will actually start getting checks in the mail.”

While 500 applications have been received, Mr. Griffith did not state how many checks would be issued in August. The program makes payments directly to landlords and utility companies on behalf of eligible residents and customers who have fallen behind in their ability to pay monthly rent or utility bills, said V.I.H.FA.

In responding to questions from Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach, Mr. Griffith also revealed that to date only $167,000 has been expended from the ERAP program, and he expressed concern "with the rules that are in place" regarding whether there were enough residents in the territory in need of those funds to expend all of it.

Mr. Roach asked whether there was any flexibility in what the funds could be used for if not fully expended through ERAP. Mr. Griffith said, “Not yet,” adding, "the question that's on everyone’s lips is what would they allow us to do with these funds because no state right now across the entire United States expects to spend all the money that they received with this program.”

Governor Albert Bryan said, “We have to be creative on how we spend that money.” He said the first $28 million received for the program was enough to cover 2,600 months collectively at rent cost of $800 monthly. He then spoke of the additional $18 million received and conceded "we will never be able to spend that given the federal guidelines that we have."

V.I.H.F.A. revealed that it's working on 37 projects: seventeen related to housing, five to economic revitalization, three to public service and facilities, and twelve to infrastructure.

Mr. Griffith said EnVision Tomorrow — the beleaguered program whose aim is to repair homes damaged by the storms of 2017 — was the authority's largest.

Mr. Bryan asked for an update on the program which he said “has been a bane of much pain.”

Mr. Griffith spoke of a request for proposal out for contractors to build 200 homes. "We have given them the full work, the full damage of all those homes, so we expect contractors to come and give us a price on that so we can start repairing those 200 homes. He also revealed that as of Tuesday, just under 100 homes were already in the repair phase.

Mr. Griffith further stated that Tranche 4 of the CDBG-DR funds, which is a grant of $774 million, was approved by FEMA. He expects the funds to be available in the USVI at the beginning of 2022.

The executive director also detailed how the funds — good through 2033 — will be used:

- $315.7 Million for Resilient, Critical and Natural Infrastructure

- $102.5 million for Multi-Familiy Housing
- $102.5 Million for Community Resilience and Public Facilities
- $61.5 Million for New Home Construction
- $41 Million for Commercial Hardening and Financing
- $38.7 Million for Administration
- $35.8 for Small Business Mitigation
- $32.4 Million for Planning
- $23.6 Million for Homeless Housing Initiatives
- $15.4 Million for Public Services
- $5.1 Million for Initiative Resilient Housing

Of the first $242 million received in the first three tranches of the CBDG-DR funding, just over $91 million has been expended according to the executive director. His estimates project costs in Fiscal Year 2022 to be $246 million, and $285 million in Fiscal Year 2023.