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USVI Self Determination and Constitutional Development to Make Progress With \$250,000 Insular Affairs Grant

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USVI flag By. GETTY IMAGES

The University of the Virgin Islands said Wednesday it has received the first installment of a \$500,000 grant approved by the U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Insular Affairs (OIA) to expand its efforts to advance constitutional development and self-determination in the territory.

The OIA Technical Assistance Program (TAP) grant will provide the funds needed to build upon an earlier related project spearheaded by UVI Political Science and History Professor Dr. Malik Sekou and a public education project led by Mr. Sekou and UVI Professor Emeritus Dr. Paul Leary, UVI said. The second installment of \$250,000 is expected in 2022.

“We are very grateful for this award which will allow the University to continue its institutional task of hosting educational campaigns on the subject of self-determination, political status and constitutional development,” said Mr. Sekou. “Historically, UVI has always played this role and it is uniquely positioned to be the mecca of this discussion.”



According to the release, the grant will allow the university to establish an Office of Constitutional Development and Self Determination that will expand the previous public education efforts and create a University curriculum that supports decolonization, self-determination and Virgin Islands cultural development through a new Caribbean Studies initiative. Additionally, the office will provide educational support for the constitutional convention and further development of human resources.

On Nov. 3, 2020, the USVI held a historic referendum on adopting the Revised Organic Act of 1954 (Amended) or portions of it as the basis of a new territorial constitution. The “Yes” vote won by a landslide and this affirmative position, said Mr. Sekou, was a positive byproduct of the previous OIA TAP grant. “Despite the massive destruction by two mega hurricanes in 2017, the previous project was able to create the necessary public support and political consensus and will in the 33rd Legislature to support the referendum and the possibility of a sixth and final constitutional convention,” he said.

Messrs. Sekou and Leary are currently finalizing a project to create an accessible and plain language brochure of the Revised Organic Act of 1954, which comprises the founding documents of the U.S. Virgin Islands, UVI said.

The Revised Organic Act of 1954 declared the Virgin Islands to be an unincorporated territory, and completely reorganized its government, abolishing the two existing municipals with their separate municipal government councils and joint legislative assembly, and creating a single territorial government with a single legislature. This act made comprehensive and complete provisions for the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government, defining their duties and imposing many specific limitations upon them. The Accessible Revised Organic Act of 1954 brochure is expected to be made available to the public this fall.

“We are looking forward to engaging the community on an ongoing basis, to bringing constitutional development front and center and to expanding a political tradition in the Virgin Islands that deals with these issues,” said Mr. Sekou. “This initiative will make a tangible impact on the political maturity and self-determination of the Virgin Islands People.”