

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bryan Requests Delay of State of the Territory Address From Jan. 10 to Jan. 24, Citing Omicron

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Governor Albert Bryan, Jr. By. THE V.I. LEGISLATURE

Governor Albert Bryan is seeking to delay his fourth State of the Territory Address from January 10 to the 24th of the same month, citing the rapid spread of the Omicron variant of Covid-19 and the disruptions it has caused.

In a letter hand-delivered to the 34th Legislature Tuesday and obtained by the Consortium, Governor Bryan detailed reasons for the request. "The rapid onset of the Omicron variant of the Covid-19 virus has caused us to reconsider our plans related to the delivery of the speech," the governor wrote. "We do not want to be inconsistent with

the urgent public health warnings that we have recently issued to help contain and slow the spread of the virus."

He said the extra two weeks "will allow us time to evaluate the appropriate health protocols for an in-person event such as the delivery of the State of the Territory Address."

Mr. Bryan's third SOTA was delivered [on January 25, 2021](#), his second SOTA was [delivered on January 13, 2020](#), and the governor's first State of the Territory Address was [delivered on January 28, 2019](#).

The V.I. Dept. of Health reported 993 active cases of Covid-19 in the USVI Wednesday, more evidence that the extremely transmissible variant of Covid-19, Omicron, has not only arrived in the territory, but is most likely the dominant strain.

According to [D.O.H. data](#), St. Croix accounted for 491 active cases, followed by St. Thomas with the same amount at 491, and St. John with 11. The latest territorial total is yet another record of active infections in the USVI.

The Health Department does not provide data of infection rates among the vaccinated and unvaccinated, but the Omicron variant is known to easily sicken individuals who are vaccinated along with those who are unvaccinated. Recently, 48 people who [tested positive for the virus on a cruise ship](#) were fully vaccinated.

D.O.H. issued a statement Tuesday calling for residents to follow safety protocols. "With 786 active Covid-19 cases reported and a 7-day positivity average of 14.82%, it is more crucial than ever for Virgin Islanders and visitors to practice social distancing, wash hands frequently, wear a mask, and avoid gatherings. Anyone 5 years old and up can get the COVID-19 vaccine," the health department said.

Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion said Tuesday D.O.H. would work to increase testing capacity, a move, among other goals, aimed at easing pressure off the territory hospitals' emergency departments. Ms. Encarnacion also stated that while D.O.H. hadn't received samples it sent to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to verify the presence of the Omicron strain in the territory, the rapid increase in cases represented a "certainty" of its presence.