

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Plaskett Announces FEMA Grant of \$209 Million to the Dept. of Education to Rebuild Arthur A. Richards Junior High School

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The Arthur A. Richards Junior High School was badly damaged during Hurricane Maria in 2017. By. THE V.I. OFFICE OF DISASTER RECOVERY.

Delegate to Congress Stacey E. Plaskett announced Thursday that the Federal Emergency Management Agency has awarded the V.I. Dept. of Education a \$209,285,548.20 grant to rebuild the Arthur A. Richards Junior High School.

"I am happy to announce that FEMA has awarded a grant totaling \$209,285,548.20. This much needed funding will go toward to the U.S. Virgin Island Department of Education for

the replacement of Arthur Richard Junior High School, including educational buildings, grounds, and infrastructure damaged as a result of Hurricane Maria. The Arthur A. Richards Junior High School and grounds were destroyed by Hurricane Maria," Ms. Plaskett said.

She added, "There has been tremendous effort to come to this place. My office has been honored to work with the Government of the Virgin Islands, the Biden Administration leadership team at FEMA along with the professional staff at the Appropriations Committee under the leadership of Subcommittee Chairwoman Lucille Roybal-Allard."

Ms. Plaskett thanked FEMA for reevaluating the cost of rebuilding the school. "FEMA had originally offered \$148 million to rebuild the school, which was not consistent with the needs of the Virgin Islands and what the territory is entitled to under federal law," she said. The congresswoman added that the Office of Disaster Recovery along with the VI Government's consultants at Witt Obrien insisted that FEMA was not using the correct formula to evaluate the cost to rebuild our critical infrastructure.

"My office pressed and organized a summit between FEMA, the Virgin Islands government, and the appropriate professional staff in Congress to have FEMA re-evaluate the figures for rebuilding our critical infrastructure," Ms. Plaskett said. "That all-day summit allowed FEMA to hear from the individuals working on the ground and have validation on the intent of the formula for rebuilding from the staff in Congress who wrote the language under the law for our rebuilding funding."

She added, "I am pleased that because of the summit, FEMA has come to a \$61.2 million higher figure that is appropriate for the children of the Virgin Islands. This estimate represents a final acknowledgement by FEMA that the Prudent Replacement standard should be used for vital infrastructure. This, I believe, demonstrates that we must not accept substandard or less than what is rightfully ours. By working together – both local and federal officials – our children will have a brighter future," the congresswoman said.

Ms. Plaskett said Hurricanes Irma and Maria caused significant damage to the Virgin Islands and severely exacerbated the already deteriorating conditions within the islands' infrastructure. "These funds are to help build our facilities and infrastructure back better by incorporating resilient design and features," she said. "The acknowledgement of that standard is a watershed event and will be greater resources for us all. I am hopeful that these grants will be utilized to harden the infrastructure in our territory. We must be prepared and continue to build our resiliency against disaster. The funding provided by FEMA will provide [the V.I. Dept. of Education] with the resources they need to help fulfill their mission in the event of future emergencies."