

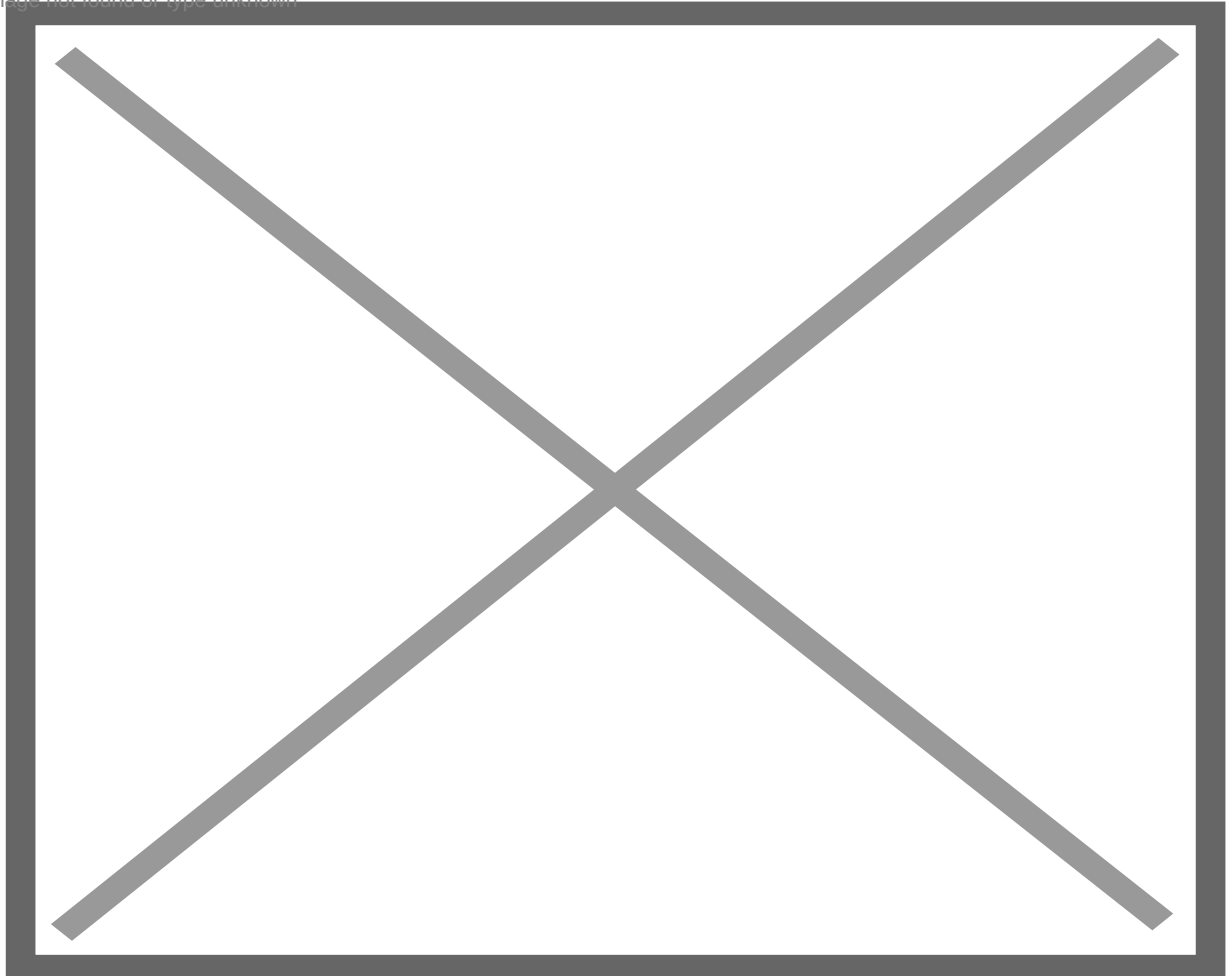
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Ohio 911 Operators Travel to USVI to Assist as 90 Percent of Local Dispatchers Out Sick With Covid-19

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Ernice Gilbert **January 10, 2022**

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Ten 911 operators from the state of Ohio last week dispatched to the U.S. Virgin Islands to supplement the territory's emergency call centers as a number of local employees have tested positive for Covid-19.

With Omicron resulting in the highest infection rate in the USVI since the start of the pandemic, leading to 3,882 active infections as of Saturday, the rapid spread has affected businesses and public services.

"Most of the [USVI] 911 operators are out with the virus, effectively losing their ability to dispatch emergency services," according to [News 5 Cleveland](#), which reported on the matter and interviewed Ohio 911 operators who have been dispatched to the territory.

"[Covid-19] wiped out about 90 percent of their dispatchers, so we still need somebody there to answer the call for everyday emergencies that don't stop," said Matthew Reinke from Ohio's Chagrin Valley Dispatch who spoke from a call center in the USVI.

According to News 5 Cleveland, the Virgin Islands requested and received help from the Chagrin Valley Dispatch Call Center, whose work includes taking emergency calls for the next two weeks. "We're doing 12-hour shifts, so we have 12 [hours] on, 12 [hours] off. We're working 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. We're certainly not on a vacation; we're working hard," said Mr. Reinke.

The Ohio group is part of a Telecommunicator Emergency Response Task Force, known as TERT, and it was the first time that Ohio dispatched a TERT team to help with a far-away crisis, according to News 5 Cleveland.

The USVI will reimburse the costs for the dispatchers' travel to the USVI as well as their work in the territory, according to News 5 Cleveland.

"We're taking every precaution we can, wearing masks, wiping down our workstations," said Mr. Reinke. "We're doing our absolute best to socially distance, so we're definitely taking it very seriously."

The V.I. Territorial Emergency Management Agency, whose purview the 911 Call Centers fall under, did not issue a release making the territory aware of the dispatchers' presence.