

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Plaskett Reports Fruitful Meeting with Governor Bryan in DC, Announces \$16M FEMA Grant for Dept. of Education

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Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett, left, and Governor Albert Bryan, Jr. in Washington D.C. on Feb. 7, 2023. By. OFFICE OF DELEGATE TO CONGRESS STACEY PLASKETT

The planned meeting between USVI Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett and Governor Albert Bryan Jr. during the latter's [visit to Washington D.C](#) was a fruitful one, according to a readout issued by the Ms. Plaskett's press secretary on Tuesday.

The pair, according to the release, "had several robust discussions on Virgin Islands issues including healthcare, our post-hurricane recovery process, taxes, and effective

utilization of federal funding on the ground."

While the short press release did not address the topic directly, one shared pain point between the two is the current shortfall in rum cover over remittances. In August 2022, just over \$226 million was approved by the U.S. Department of the Interior's Office of Insular Affairs for the U.S. Virgin Islands, an estimate of the 2023 rum cover over payments. But that sum was calculated at the base rate of \$10.50 instead of the higher \$13.25 rate that has been achieved in years past using so-called "tax-extendors".

The recent landmark securitization deal meant to keep the Government Employees Retirement System solvent relies on the rum cover over revenues calculated at \$13.25 of tax collection per proof gallon of rum made in the USVI and sold on the U.S. mainland. As a result of the reversion to \$10.50, the first allocation for GERS under the new framework is expected to be \$59.2 million short. During an interview with Consortium publisher Ernice Gilbert last month, Mr. Bryan referred to the issue as [a "big problem."](#)

In August 2022, Ms. Plaskett had anticipated the matter would be resolved by the end of that year, however the extender was not attached to Congress's \$1.65 trillion Omnibus Bill, making the issue a top priority this year for the USVI's voice on Capitol Hill.

Ms. Plaskett expressed gratitude for the work she and the governor have been able to achieve together, and her commitment to continuing to advocate for Virgin Islanders in tandem with Mr. Bryan.

In a separate statement sent hours later, Ms. Plasket informed of a new grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for repairs to infrastructure damaged by Hurricane Maria.

The approximately \$16 million grant was awarded to the Department of Education, "for the Evelyn Marcelli and Jarvis Annexes on St. Thomas which were both Elementary Schools prior to being damaged....These funds will go toward permanent repairs to the buildings at the above-stated locations and will be integral for developing our preparedness and resiliency against natural disasters," the statement read.