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Plaskett Hails FEMA's \$75 Million Grant to Dept. of Education for Rebuild of Jane Tuitt Elementary School, Challenges FEMA to Move Faster

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Jane E. Tuitt Elementary School By. THE V.I. DEPT. OF EDUCATION

Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett this week announced that the Federal Emergency Management Agency has provided the V.I. Dept. of Education with a \$75 million grant to rebuild the Jane Tuitt Elementary School, located in St. Thomas.

In a press statement Wednesday, the congresswoman said, “I am very pleased to announce that FEMA has awarded a grant totaling \$75,565,781.07 in federal funding to the V.I. Department of Education (VIDE) - Jane Tuitt Elementary School replacement as a result of the damages done by Hurricane Maria. This funding is authorized under Section 406 of the Robert T. Stafford Act. I

fought to make sure that for the first time FEMA would utilize the prudent replacement standard for Virgin Islands hurricane recovery projects, meaning that this school will be built back not as it was before the storm but in a resilient manner with current industry standards."

Ms. Plaskett said that the Prudent Replacement Standard (PRS) from the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018, includes a specific provision requiring FEMA to use "prudence" instead of its standard 50 percent rule to approve replacement of badly damaged facilities in the BBA critical services sectors. Even so, she said, the federal agency has only completed one PRS, which she appeared to deem as inadequate.

"Despite issuing a BBA Implementation Policy on September 11, 2020, which includes the following Prudent Replacement guidance, FEMA has only completed a Prudent Replacement Evaluation of 1 (one) facility – Arthur A. Richards Junior High School (AAJHS) – in the past 15-months and zero (0) in the last eight months since the approval of AAJHS in April of 2020," she said. "As of mid-December 2020, FEMA has a backlog of more than 60 additional Prudent Replacements under consideration, including schools, hospitals and homes for the aged."

While Ms. Plaskett said she was pleased that the appropriated funds are going toward rebuilding institutions either badly damaged or destroyed during the storms of 2017, "there is still more work to be done. We are proud of the work of the Office of Disaster Recovery and the V.I. Department of Education for obtaining the funding and look forward to working with them to ensure the funds are fully utilized," she concluded.