

The Virgin Islands Consortium

While St. Johnians Debate Land Swap, Letter is Written to Feds Asking for Takeover of Round Bay

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Round Bay, St. John By. GETTY IMAGES

Amidst heated discussions around a proposed land swap deal between the Virgin Islands government and the federal government, another controversy has been quietly accumulating attention.

The Consortium has learned that Governor Albert Bryan has been inundated with letters urging the federal government to assume control of Round Bay. A primary voice behind this plea is Mary Pergolizzi, associated with [East End Seascapes](#), a vacation rental accommodations business known for its picturesque ocean views. Pergolizzi on July 13

wrote to Dept. of Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, asking for Round Bay to be placed under federal protective custody, according to the letter, which was seen by the Consortium.

Pergolizzi's letter paints a grim picture of what she contends was Round Bay's once vibrant ecosystem being ravaged due to a lack of enforcement by the local V.I. Department of Planning and Natural Resources. She condemned what she described as constant attacks on the coral reefs, seagrass beds, the historic HMS Santa Monica wreck, and the ecosystem as a whole. Pergolizzi also decried what she says is the destructive impact of boat anchors and anchor chains.

She said recreational activities such as jet skiing, tubing, and water skiing are said to disrupt sea turtle habitats and threaten coral reefs. Pergolizzi also accused the local government of being preoccupied with promoting a "blue marine economy", prioritizing revenue over ecological preservation, and thereby enabling charter party vessels to put profits above protection.

Governor Bryan, who is attempting to build the first PreK-12 school on St. John, says while individuals are lobbying to remove Round Bay from the hands of the locals, Virgin Islanders were preoccupied with a land swap agreement that benefits the territory, more pointedly the youth.

"We're fighting against ourselves while larger issues go along without any attention," the governor told the Consortium. He [recently wrote a comprehensive letter](#) to Senate President Novelle Francis Jr., outlining his stance on the proposed land swap deal. His comments clarify his disagreement with using submerged lands for exchange instead of Whistling Cay and argue against the idea of a lease.

Governor Bryan also addressed the proposal of lobbying Congress for the Estate Catherineberg parcel, expressing his skepticism over its feasibility within a reasonable timeframe. He pointed out the U.S.V.I.'s limited lobbying power due to a lack of voting members of Congress and emphasized the necessity of the land exchange for the construction of the new school in the immediate future.

The governor recognized the offer from private citizens to donate lands for the school project but cautioned that switching to this approach at this stage would lead to unacceptable delays. He concluded by reaffirming his belief that the proposed land swap deal is advantageous for the territory and essential for the future of the Virgin Islands, particularly for the children of St. John.

[Last year](#), DPNR acknowledged that Round Bay would benefit greatly from mooring installations and buoy signage to mitigate the impacts of increased boating and maritime activity. However, Commissioner Jean-Pierre Oriol disclosed that nearly half of St. John's waters are already protected. Oriol communicated that the Bryan administration does not aim to declare Round Bay a marine protected area. He added that doing so could prompt similar demands for other bays, an outcome the administration deems unfavorable.