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Plaskett Offers Federal Insight on St. John Land Swap Proposal

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Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett.

Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett on Tuesday issued a clarifying statement regarding the proposed St. John land exchange. The land exchange, a major point of interest within the community, would facilitate the construction of a Kindergarten through 12th grade school on St. John.

"I acknowledge the tough decisions our local government faces with regards to the proposed Government of the Virgin Islands – National Park Service (NPS) St. John Land Exchange," said Plaskett. "While my office strongly advocates for the people of the Virgin Islands, we are not directly involved in the agreement."

Plaskett's office has hosted community meetings throughout the year to ensure the voices of Virgin Islanders are heard by the Department of the Interior, the NPS, and the local government. She noted that her office had learnt of difficulties in submitting comments during the final public comment period, and successfully advocated for a one-month extension.

Plaskett also addressed past legislation introduced by her predecessor, Congresswoman Donna Christensen, in the 110th Congress nearly two decades ago. The Virgin Islands National Park Lease Act, H.R. 53, intended to lease land on St. John to the U.S. Virgin Islands government to establish a school. Despite its passage in the House of Representatives, the bill failed to make it out of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and was not reintroduced by Christensen.

"Not only does the NPS oppose such legislation," Plaskett said, "but our office has been informed that it would not gain support or pass in the U.S. Senate. The same applies to calls for Congress to direct the Department of the Interior to convey land to the Government of the Virgin Islands. These are not viable options."

Plaskett debunked false equivalences drawn between the St. John land exchange and the Acadia National Park case, wherein the NPS was directed in 1986 to convey land for a solid waste transfer station that was never established.

She cautioned against misinformation, urging a pragmatic approach and focusing on achievable goals. "Our approach must be pragmatic, and our focus must remain on developing and implementing specific, achievable goals."

The congresswoman expressed her appreciation for the active engagement of the Virgin Islands community, emphasizing the importance of timely decision-making. "The Virgin Islands is quickly approaching its deadline for using federal funding to rebuild schools. As we all know, NPS processes take time, and that is a luxury which we – and the children of the Virgin Islands – cannot afford."