

The Virgin Islands Consortium

House Committee Unanimously Backs Plaskett's DiasporaLink Act

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Accra, Ghana. By. GETTY IMAGES

Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett's DiasporaLink Act, known officially as H.R. 3385, has advanced through the House Energy & Commerce Committee with unanimous bipartisan support, Ms. Plaskett's office announced Thursday.

The DiasporaLink Act aims to establish a feasibility study to develop a Trans-Atlantic submarine fiber optic cable connecting the United States' east coast, the United States Virgin Islands, Nigeria, and Ghana. The legislation is set to position the U.S. Virgin Islands as a key node in the global telecommunications network, according to a

statement from the congresswoman.

Speaking on the bill's progression, Ms. Plaskett expressed her gratitude to the Virgin Islands Next Generation Network (viNGN) and its CEO, Stephan Adams, for their visionary ideas. She further emphasized the potential benefits of the initiative, including bolstering the US's economic, defense, communication, and national security interests.

"At present, no direct fiber optic link exists between the U.S. and the continent of Africa," Plaskett stated. This legislation aims to fill that void, mitigating the country's reliance on foreign commercial entities for connectivity with Africa. "The strategic location of the Trans-Atlantic submarine fiber optic cable network makes DiasporaLink a 'Digital Safe Harbor' under the U.S. flag," she added.

If successful, the DiasporaLink Act could provide African and Caribbean submarine operators and Internet Service Providers (ISPs) with a direct connection to U.S. financial and business centers, contributing to a robust global digital economy.

Furthermore, the decision to place the hub in the U.S. Virgin Islands is set to bring a wealth of benefits to the region. Plaskett highlighted how this move could facilitate the islands as a hub for commerce in the digital age, creating high-tech job opportunities for Virgin Islanders and attracting digital users to the territory.

She also expressed her gratitude to Energy & Commerce Ranking Member Frank Pallone from New Jersey, Republican Chairwoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers, and other committee members for their support, particularly Congressman Russ Fulcher (Republican – Idaho), who Plaskett commended for his bipartisan efforts to progress the legislation.

Having secured the committee's unanimous support, the DiasporaLink Act is now heading to the House floor for a full vote. If it secures approval, it will then be passed to the Senate. Should the Senate approve, the final step will see it passed to the president's desk for official ratification.