



**THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
GOVERNMENT HOUSE**

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**Administration Launches HUD-Funded Envision Tomorrow Housing and Rental
Recovery Program for Virgin Islands Residents**
*Emphasizes Selection of Local General Contractors
to Complete Reconstruction and Rehabilitation of Eligible Homes*

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS— In a joint press conference at Government House, Governor Albert Bryan Jr, Office of Disaster Recovery (ODR) Director Adrienne Williams-Octalien and Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority (VIHFA) Executive Director Daryl Griffith announced the selection of 29 local general contractors who will be part of the Envision Tomorrow Homeowner and Rental Reconstruction and Rehabilitation program, which is designed to assist homeowners and landlords whose properties were damaged by the hurricanes Irma and María in 2017.

“I think today is very significant for a lot of reasons, this week we [marked] the 30th anniversary of Hugo and many would argue that St. Croix still has not gotten back to the place it once was, before that dreadful day in 1989,” said Governor Bryan. “As a youngster then and as governor now I have experienced how long it takes for recovery to happen. Thirty years later, we still don’t have the hotel rooms we had, and we still don’t have the airlift we had, we still don’t have the cruise ships we had, we still don’t have the vibrant economy we once had.”

“I would like the public to know that today my heart feels a little good because I know the 1,400 people that go without roofs in the Virgin Islands, that are going to benefit from these programs, are going to get a little closer to getting their homes back and getting their lives back,” the governor said. “Today, we launch a roofing program that we intend to finally take out those blues roofs from our landscape, to finally put people back to being 100 percent and being whole.”

During the press conference the Governor and the ODR and VIHFA Directors touched upon the timeline of the construction phase of the Envision Tomorrow program, outlined who qualifies for the new HUD-funded program and how this program differs from the FEMA-funded Emergency Home Repair Virgin Islands (EHRVI) program which made temporary repairs to over 8,000 homes in the Territory during the aftermath of the twin hurricanes.

About a dozen representatives of local construction firms stood behind the Governor, ODR Director Williams-Octalien and VIHFA Executive Director Griffith, as Griffith emphasized that the new HUD program differs in structure than the FEMA emergency recovery program, EHRVI, on how contractors are paid.

“The beauty of the HUD program is that the funds are available right now. Contractor invoices are paid upon approval,” said Griffith.



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Unlike the FEMA program, which is designed as a reimbursement program to local governments and can cause delays in payments to contractors, HUD payments are expedited more quickly because they are paid soon after the invoices are submitted.

Griffith also encouraged more residents to apply for assistance in the Envision Tomorrow program via the 800 number, the Envision Tomorrow website or mobile app, or walk-in centers. He also requests that more local contractors submit their qualifications to VIHFA to help rebuild Virgin Islands homes.

So far, approximately 1,400 homeowner applicants have applied either via the program's website or with caseworkers at the centers located in St Thomas and St Croix. In the rental program, there have been 99 applicants representing approximately 150 units.

Governor Bryan stressed, "If you are not sure if you qualify, It doesn't cost you a dime to apply, so apply to the program and let them tell you if you are qualified. Also, there is a lot of employment being created by this program, so this is a great opportunity for Virgin islanders to get work."

The launch was indicative of Governor Bryan's directive to ODR and VIHFA to ensure the recovery is ongoing, to help stabilize the economy and to build economic development here in the Territory.

"That's the message we want to send that the recovery is alive and well and that we are moving expeditiously to bring relief to the residents of the Territory, said Williams-Octalien.

The Envision Tomorrow Program is funded by an initial \$60 million grant from HUD's Community Block Development Grant Disaster Recovery, and the funding may expand to \$200 million. Eligible homeowners can receive up to \$250,000 in construction costs. To qualify an applicant's home must be the primary residence, and the damage must be storm-related.

The program for landlords of rental units can receive up to \$50,000 loan per unit. The loans may be forgiven in 10 - 15 years depending upon the number of their units.

The beginning of the construction phase of the Envision Tomorrow program should start within the next few weeks after property inspections begin, applicants' eligibility is determined, and the scope-of-work for each property is completed. Griffith said, "Unfortunately, a major disaster is overnight, but a recovery takes years. But we will be with you every step of the way until every Virgin Islander has a comfortable and safe place to live."

The Governor re-emphasized, "We are committed to making everyone in the Virgin Islands whole...and that the money we receive from the federal government is spent and spent properly."

There is still time to apply for homeowners and landlords to apply to the Envision Tomorrow program by visiting the website www.vistormrecovery.com or call 888-239-3387. Local contractors can submit their qualifications to work in the Envision Tomorrow program on the VIHFA website at www.vihfa.gov .

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