



GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

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DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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Office of the Commissioner

March 20, 2023

Marise C. James, Esq.
Chair
Committee on Education and Workforce Development
35th Legislature of the United States Virgin Islands

Re: **Status Update on Libraries Across the Territory**

Good afternoon Senator Marise James, Esq., other members of the 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands Committee on Education and Workforce Development, non-committee members and legislative staff present, and members of the viewing and listening public, I am Jean-Pierre Oriol, Commissioner of the Department of Planning and Natural Resources. We are here today to provide testimony on the status of the libraries across the Territory.

Currently there are two library facilities open to the public – the Charles W. Turnbull Regional Public Library in St. Thomas and the Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Challenged in St. Croix. The Turnbull Library is open Tuesday thru Friday from 9:30 am to 7:00 pm, and Saturdays from 9:00 am to 6:00 pm; areas available to the public are the general circulation area and the children’s room; the classroom and the theater are available for use via reservations. On St. Croix, the Regional Library is open Monday thru Friday from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. This facility holds our audio book collection, and is where we hold our monthly book club “Talking Books with Nina Garcia.”

Two of our libraries are currently under repairs – the Elaine Ione Sprauve Library on St. John and the Florence Williams Library in St. Croix. Repairs to Sprauve are concluding and we will be doing a ribbon cutting for the opening of the facility on April 14, 2023. The repairs to Williams will continue through June; it is our goal to have the facility open in the summer to partner with summer programs for our youth. The Athalie McFarland Petersen Library is not currently under construction; however, we have concluded the solicitation process for the repairs. The Contractor presently working on the Williams library has been deemed the most responsive bidder and is currently in contract negotiations through the Department of Property and Procurement (DPP) to finalize the agreement for the repairs. We anticipate repairs beginning on Petersen in June 2023. It is important to note here that the Turnbull Library will be closing for capital repairs in the next several months. The public solicitation for the repairs was conducted in 2022 and there were two responsive bidders. Both estimates received exceeded funds available at the time, and therefore DPNR had to request assistance elsewhere. We were successful in our application for American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding, which has been documented to DPP. As such, contract negotiations are on-going with the contractors and we hope to finalize the contracts and get to construction by May 2023.

Although the issues with our facilities affect our availability to the public, we are in the process of increasing our services. We have been working closely with the Department of Public Works to restore function to our Bookmobiles. The St. Croix Bookmobile became operational in February and we have been taking it to the different elementary schools in the recent weeks. Each child is being sent home with an application for a library card.

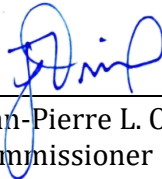
While we were fortunate to get the Bookmobile on STX operational, we have not had the same success with the buses on the island of St. Thomas. The broken windshields were finally replaced between December and January. We are currently working with DPW and an outside mechanic to have the buses operational. As we anticipate the closure of the Turnbull Library, it is our goal to fill some of the void with having the bookmobiles in service.

In addition to the bookmobiles, we are also seeking to launch our online library program Hoopla. Hoopla is a web and mobile library media platform that provides library patrons with access to thousands of e-books, movies, audio books, comics, games, and a whole host more. Anyone with a valid US Virgin Islands library card will be able to access content on Hoopla.

Lastly, I will just say that the operation of multiple library facilities requires a significant budget to properly staff and operate them. Libraries are not largely revenue generating facilities and as most of ours are historic buildings, they require significant maintenance and upkeep. I would like to selfishly plug that the 35th Legislature keep this in mind as we approach the upcoming budget season.

This concludes my testimony on the status update of the USVI Libraries.. I am here to answer any questions you may have to the best of my abilities.

Submitted by:



20-Mar-2023

Jean-Pierre L. Oriol
Commissioner

date