

35TH LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS



**35TH LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAD SECURITY, JUSTICE, AND PUBLIC SAFETY**

The Honorable Kenneth L. Gittens
Chair of Committee

Testimony Presented By
The Honorable Justa Encarnacion, RN, BSN, MBA/HCM
Commissioner of Health

Status of the Virgin Islands Department of Health's – Environmental Health Divisions' event planning regarding safety and sanitation, including the oversight of food vendor inspections, environmental assessments to monitor waste management, environmental clean-ups, permitting requirements, and collaborative efforts ahead of this year's St. John Celebration

1 Good day, Honorable Senator Kenneth L. Gittens, Chairperson of the Committee on Homeland
2 Security, Justice and Public Safety, Honorable Ray Fonseca, Vice Chair; Committee Members,
3 and all Non-committee members, and the viewing and listening audience. I am Reuben Molloy,
4 Assistant Commissioner of the Virgin Islands Department of Health and I am presenting this
5 testimony on behalf of Commissioner Justa “Tita” Encarnacion. Present with me today in St. John
6 is Dr. Nicole Craigwell-Syms, Assistant Commissioner, and at my side is Wanson Harris, Director
7 of Environmental Health. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the status of the Virgin
8 Islands Department of Health – Environmental Health Division’s event planning regarding safety
9 and sanitation, including the oversight of food vendor inspections, environmental assessments to
10 monitor waste management, environmental clean-ups, permitting requirements, and collaborative
11 efforts ahead of this year’s St. John Celebration. On April 4th, the Virgin Islands Department of
12 Health provided this committee with a similar update ahead of the St. Thomas Carnival.

13 The Virgin Islands Department of Health’s Environmental Health Division maintains a close
14 partnership with the Department of Tourism’s Division of Festivals and the VI Police Department
15 to oversee all aspects pertaining to safety, environmental cleanliness, vendor permitting, and
16 environmental surveillance during carnivals, festivals, celebrations, and similar events. Our
17 collaboration involves weekly meetings inclusive of the Waste Management Authority, and the VI
18 Department of Public Works. These meetings occurred before the 2024 St. Thomas Carnival and
19 continue in our efforts to ensure a safe 4th of July St. John Celebration and remain helpful in
20 troubleshooting and problem-solving at each site/venue to mitigate any emergencies. The most

1 recent meeting, which was held on May 27th, included the booth owners and food safety protocols
2 were discussed.

3 The Department of Tourism's Division of Festivals will provide us with a comprehensive listing
4 of vendors and their respective locations for each event, which will be meticulously recorded in
5 our Health Space database for tracking and medical surveillance purposes.

6 During the celebration, our enforcement officers and inspectors will be diligently covering and
7 monitoring key events such as the Village, J'ouvert, and Parade. Their primary focus will be on
8 ensuring safe food handling, preparation, and compliance with time and temperature control
9 measures.

10 It is imperative to highlight that all food vendors must obtain permits from the Virgin Islands
11 Department of Health to operate any food establishment, whether mobile, stationary, temporary,
12 or permanent. This requirement applies irrespective of whether food consumption occurs on or off
13 the premises and regardless of any associated charges (the Food Donation Act does not apply). To
14 facilitate compliance, each food vendor subject to inspection receives a self-inspection checklist
15 covering essential requirements for operating temporary food establishments, including hygiene
16 practices, food sourcing, storage, contamination prevention, and proper use of utensils.

17 Furthermore, in addition to health permits, all individuals operating within the confines of a
18 Temporary Food Establishment (TFE) are required to possess valid health cards, which must
19 always be displayed. Additionally, individuals must provide laboratory results demonstrating
20 negative tests for parasites. Alternatively, individuals holding a valid ServSafe certificate may
21 submit a copy of their certificate in lieu of laboratory results to the VI Department of Health's

1 Environmental Health's Offices located at the John S. Moorehead Yard in St Thomas, Morris
2 DeCastro Clinic on St. John, and #54 Estate Castle Coakley on St. Croix, so that we can validate
3 said credentials.

4 Department of Health's Division of Environmental Health is committed to ensuring the safety,
5 cleanliness, and regulatory compliance of the upcoming St. John Celebration. Through our
6 collaborative efforts with the Department of Tourism's Division of Festivals and other key
7 stakeholders and with the members of the 35th Legislature, we aim to facilitate an enjoyable and
8 secure experience for all participants and attendees. The Department is committed to reducing
9 health risks, increasing access to quality equitable healthcare, and enforcing health standards.

10 This concludes our testimony. We stand ready to respond to any questions you may have.