



1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8 **35th LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS**

9 **COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY, JUSTICE, AND PUBLIC SAFETY**

10 **CHAIRPERSON – HONORABLE KENNETH L. GITTEMS**

11 **Fritz E. Lawaetz Legislative Hall, St. Croix**

12 **12 September 2023**

13 **10:00 A.M.**

14 **VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES**

15 **TESTIMONY**

16 **UPDATE ON 2023 HURRICANE SEASON PREPARATIONS**

17 *"Committee is requesting updated testimony from your agency relative to the role*
18 *your department plays in the current 2023 Hurricane Season. Please provide*
19 *information including, but not limited to preparation, shelters across the territory*
20 *and special accommodations for the disabled and elderly member of our*
21 *community."*

22

23

24 **PRESENTED BY DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MIGUEL TRICOCHÉ ON**
25 **BEHALF OF COMMISSIONER KIMBERLY CAUSEY-GOMEZ**

26 Good afternoon, Senator Kenneth L. Gittens, Chairman, Committee on Homeland
27 Security, Justice & Public Safety, other committee members, 35th Legislature staff, my
28 colleagues, and those in the viewing and listening audience.

29 Presenting on behalf of Commissioner Kimberley Causey-Gomez, I am Miguel Tricoche,
30 Deputy Commissioner of Operations for the Virgin Islands Department of Human Services
31 (DHS). With me today is Community Affairs Coordinator and Mass Care Lead, Yvette C.
32 Henry and we are providing an update on the department's preparedness for Hurricane
33 Season 2023.

34 The Virgin Islands Department of Human Services is the **Lead Agency under**
35 **Emergency Support Function 6 (ESF6) – Mass Care, Emergency Assistance,**
36 **Housing and Human Services.** Sheltering is ESF6's most prominent function, however
37 the ESF6 responsibilities also include Individual Assistance-Preliminary Damage
38 Assessment (IA-PDA), Points of Distribution (PODS) for commodities if required and
39 Donations Management.

40 The key support agencies for ESF6 are: American Red Cross (shelter operations), VI
41 Department of Agriculture (pet sheltering), VI Department of Education (shelter site and
42 secondary shelter feeding and nursing support), VI Police Department (shelter and PODS
43 security/law enforcement), VI Department of Sports, Parks, and Recreation (shelter site),
44 VI Department of Public Works - VITRAN Plus (pre-storm transportation of preidentified
45 special populations), VI National Guard (PODS operations), VI Department of Health
46 (medical special needs shelters ESF8), VI Waste Management Authority, VI Fire and
47 Emergency Medical Services, and VITEMA for shelter support and crisis management.

48 Shelter inspections began in January 2023. After shelter inspections, repairs and re-
49 inspections by multiagency teams including American Red Cross, VI Fire and Emergency
50 Medical Services, VITEMA, FEMA, the VI Territorial Americans with Disabilities Act

51 Coordinator, the following are the official primary congregate evacuation shelter
52 locations:

53 **PRIMARY CONGREGATE EVACUATION SHELTERS**

54 **St. Croix**

55 The St. Croix Educational Complex will be utilized and has a total capacity of 2,034,
56 depending on the set-up. The gymnasium bleachers out seating is 800, gymnasium
57 court/floor is 248, cafeteria is 236 and auditorium fixed seating 750. Additionally, there
58 is a quarantine room with a capacity of 16. It is also the approved pet shelter location for
59 St. Croix.

60 The D.C. Canegata Community Center will also be utilized with a capacity of 161 and has
61 a quarantine room set up for 8 individuals, as needed.

62 **St. Thomas**

63 The Lockhart Elementary and Junior High cafeteria has a capacity of 248, with a potential
64 to expand on capacity to selected classrooms. It is the approved Pet Shelter location for
65 St. Thomas.

66 The Ivanna Eudora Kean High School total capacity is currently 460, utilizing the
67 gymnasium. There is a wheel chair access from the rear of the building to accommodate
68 those individuals. The cafeteria was taken off the list due to repairs not being completed
69 in time for the 2023 Hurricane Season and has a capacity of 161.

70 **St. John**

71 The Adrian Senior Center will be utilized with a capacity of 15.

72 DHS is in the final stage of approving a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) which will
73 create an additional congregate shelter location on St. John with a shelter capacity of
74 140.

75

76

77 **DISASTER PREPAREDNESS TRAINING**

78 **Disaster preparedness training** for all areas of ESF6 has been ongoing. The 2023
79 USVI Capstone Initiative for all territory stakeholders was conducted from May 22 - 26,
80 2023. The disaster preparation drills included shelter operations exercises on St. Thomas
81 at Eudora Kean High School and on St. Croix at the St. Croix Educational Complex High
82 School. In addition, on May 25, DHS, VITEMA, and the VI National Guard verified **Points**
83 **of Distribution (POD)** sites for issuing food and water following a storm, and trained
84 individuals, including 77 volunteers, on managing a POD site with the assistance of the
85 Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

86 **All DHS department-wide** mandatory training on Mass Care was conducted on June
87 2, and on Shelter Operations conducted by American Red Cross on June 9, 2023.

88 **Pet Shelter Training** was conducted on Friday, August 18, 2023.

89 From August 28-31, 2023, **Volunteer and Donation Management Training** led by
90 FEMA was held on St. Croix for territory stakeholders.

91 **ELDER, DEPENDENT ADULT AND DISABLED PERSONS DISASTER REGISTRY**

92 Under the authority of Act. No. 8058, DHS established and maintains a registry of persons
93 60 years and older or having a disability and living alone. Currently there are 889
94 individuals listed in the registry. DHS utilizes a mass messaging system to notify
95 registrants of any important information including for any storm related information and
96 support following a disaster. All individuals were personally contacted by DHS over the
97 summer to verify that the information listed on the registry was correct.

98 **CLOSING**

99 DHS would like to assure the community that with the support of VITEMA, our local
100 partner agencies and FEMA, we continue to train and to build capacity to ensure that not
101 only ESF6, but all 15 ESFs and public and private partners can work together to facilitate
102 safe, effective implementation of disaster management plans in the unfortunate event
103 that we might need to execute them.

104 I want to thank Governor Albert Bryan, Jr., and Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach for
105 their continued leadership and guidance. I also want to thank the dedicated and hard-
106 working employees of the Department of Human Services, who go above and beyond,
107 especially in times of disaster.

108 Thank you, Committee Chairman Gittens, for this opportunity to provide testimony on
109 DHS' preparedness for the 2023 Hurricane Season. We are prepared to address any
110 questions you may have at this time.