



Virgin Islands Continuum of Care Council on Homelessness  
Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority, Collaborative Applicant  
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Honorable Marvin A. Blyden, Chair, Committee on Housing, Transportation and Telecommunications  
Legislature of the Virgin Islands  
Capitol Building, P.O. Box 1690  
St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands 00804

**Testimony: VI Continuum of Care Council on Homelessness, Update to the Committee on Housing, Transportation and Telecommunications**

Good day, Honorable Chair Blyden, members of the Committee on Housing, Transportation and Telecommunications, other members of the 36th Legislature, and the listening and viewing audience. My name is Mr. Dan Derima, and I serve as Chair of the Virgin Islands Continuum of Care Council on Homelessness, commonly referred to as the “CoC.” I am joined today by Ms. Andrea Shillingford, Immediate Past Chair of the CoC and an invited testifier representing Catholic Charities of the Virgin Islands. We last testified to this committee on September 30, 2024, and we appreciate the opportunity to update this body on our data and experiences on housing stability, our organization’s health in supporting affected individuals, our collaboration with government agencies, and suggestions for improvement.

For context, a Continuum of Care (CoC) is a regional planning body established under the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to coordinate housing and services for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. The CoC is composed of diverse stakeholders, including nonprofit providers, government agencies, faith-based organizations, and individuals with lived experience and is responsible for operating the CoC, managing the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), implementing a Coordinated Entry System (CES), and overseeing the application process for federal CoC program funds. These funds support a range of housing and service initiatives, including permanent and transitional housing, rapid re-housing, supportive services, and homelessness prevention. There are currently 154 CoC people on our calls, and more than 20 member organizations and we welcome all in the community to join us. Our web address is [www.usvicoc.org](http://www.usvicoc.org) and our email address is [usvicoc@gmail.com](mailto:usvicoc@gmail.com).

The CoC commends Governor Albert Bryan Jr. for reestablishing the Virgin Islands Interagency Council on Homelessness (VIACH) earlier this year through Executive Order. The Interagency Council is intended as a collaborative body bringing together governmental leaders, providers, advocates, and individuals with lived experience to serve as a central planning and advisory body, advising the Governor and Legislature on policies and strategies aimed at preventing and ending homelessness. (This includes recommendations on providing resources and support to communities working to end homelessness) The CoC will have representation on the Council and the first meeting is scheduled for April 22.

The Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority (VIHFA) Federal Programs Division currently serves as the CoC Collaborative Applicant, with responsibility for submitting HUD grant applications and managing CoC Planning Grant funds of \$35,000 a year. A HUD Technical Assistance engagement which was designed to provide the CoC with some of the needed capacity building was unfortunately cancelled due to the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) impacts just one week before it was slated to

begin. While we acknowledge VIHFA's important role in facilitating federal housing resources, there have been some challenges that we are currently working on internally and have scheduled conversations with the HUD Community Planning and Development Representative and VIHFA leadership regarding the timely and effective utilization of CoC Planning Grant funds.

The CoC is still not in compliance with the HUD mandate to implement the CES, and as a result the VI can only renew existing grants and cannot apply for additional, much-needed funding. There are three (3) existing HUD CoC grants, all are managed by Meeting the Needs of Our Community (MTOC):

1. Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) - MTOC is the designated Lead Agency responsible for end-users and the data collected, managed and reported to HUD.
2. MTOC Permanent Supportive Housing 2023: Permanent Supportive Housing (long-term leasing or rental assistance and supportive services to assist households with at least one member with a disability in achieving housing stability); providing rental assistance and case management for four (4) clients.
3. Permanent Supportive Housing – similar to project #2 above; this project was previously administered by the Department of Human Services up until September 2022 when MTOC was selected to continue the services for four clients already enrolled.

The CoC has made some progress since we last testified and is now incorporated as a non-profit. We are working to register with Sam.gov, obtain our Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and establish a bank account. Once this is complete, the CoC can receive the Legislative funding that was appropriated by the 35th Legislature in the miscellaneous section of the Territory's budget. We reestablished the Coordinated Entry System Committee to complete the Coordinated Entry System, where this system standardizes the way individuals and families at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness access, are assessed for, and referred to the housing and services that they need for housing stability. We are working to ensure that all service providers are engaged with the CoC, with their data included in the HMIS. We are improving our outreach and collaboration efforts and supporting our existing partners with enhanced training.

HUD requires each Continuum of Care (CoC) to conduct an annual Point-in-Time (PIT) Count to assess the number of individuals experiencing homelessness on a single night in January. This includes people staying in emergency shelters, transitional housing, and Safe Havens. In odd-numbered years, CoCs are also required to count unsheltered individuals, those sleeping outdoors or in places not meant for human habitation. This data, along with the Housing Inventory Count (HIC), which tracks the number of beds dedicated to serving homeless individuals, is submitted to HUD and used to inform funding levels and service planning.

The most recent PIT Count took place on January 24, 2025, identifying a total of 304 unsheltered individuals across the Territory: 185 in St. Thomas, 98 in St. Croix, and 21 in St. John. This represents an increase from 252 unsheltered persons reported in the 2023 PIT Count. It's important to note that the PIT Count does not account for individuals who are "couch-surfing" or temporarily staying with others, which means the actual number of people experiencing homelessness is likely higher. To gain a more complete picture, we are working to integrate data from the Department of Human Services (DHS) and Department of Health (DOH).

The last Housing Inventory Count was conducted in 2023 and identified the inventory of beds for homeless services during the same timeframe:

- Emergency Shelter Beds – 16
- Transitional Housing Beds – 53
- Permanent Supportive Housing Beds – 23

- Total Number of Beds - 92

The territory faces critical challenges in addressing homelessness, but there are also meaningful opportunities for systemic improvement. We must strengthen cross-agency collaboration to braid funding and expand the availability of emergency, transitional, and permanent supportive housing.

At the same time, the lack of emergency shelter, a two-year public housing waitlist, limited Section 8 availability, and no transitional housing for justice-involved individuals present significant threats. Without housing, employment and reintegration become nearly impossible, increasing the risk of recidivism and impacting public safety.

The absence of adequate behavioral health and substance abuse treatment further exacerbates the issue. Perhaps most critically, the Territory has only 23 permanent supportive housing beds despite a demonstrated need for several hundred. These beds are essential for individuals with complex needs, offering wraparound services like medication management, life-skills training, and support accessing mainstream resources. Without it, people remain stuck in shelters or cycle back into homelessness. Addressing these gaps will require increased funding, stronger interagency coordination, and a sustained effort to ensure individuals receive the support and services they need to achieve long-term housing stability.

In closing, I would like to quote Congressman John Franklin Farnsworth of the 36<sup>th</sup> Congress where he stated in his address to Congress... “The first duty of the Government is to afford protection to its citizens” as this government should, in particular the most vulnerable citizens, and thus, the government must dedicate more resources to funding the critical parts of the infrastructure; emergency, transitional, & most particularly, permanent supportive housing, mental health facilities and services, and also to helping support the providers who are the “boots on the ground” working to end homelessness. Obviously, we are very grateful for the monies appropriated for the CoC; however, there needs to be an understanding that the non-profits cannot shoulder the brunt of the “heavy lift” that is required to effectively address and end homelessness.

Chair Blyden, this concludes my testimony. Thank you for the invitation to provide information on the VI Continuum of Care Council on Homelessness. As you have heard in today’s testimony, together we have a lot of work to do, but we are committed to addressing and ending homelessness in the US Virgin Islands. I thank you for the opportunity to testify before this Committee and welcome any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Mr. Dan Derima  
Chair, VI Continuum of Care Council on Homelessness