

Virgin Islands Fire and Emergency Medical Services

Committee on Homeland Security, Justice, and Public Safety

35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands



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Presented By: Antonio Stevens, Acting Director

Good morning, Honorable Senator Kenneth L. Gittens, Chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety, other distinguished Committee members, and the listening and viewing audience.

I am Antonio Stevens, Acting Director of the Virgin Islands Fire and Emergency Medical Services (VIFEMS). Appearing with me are Mr. Clarence Stephenson, Fire Chief for the St. Thomas/St. John District, Mr. Magabe Calixte, Deputy Chief of Operations for St. John, and Mr. Victor Adams, EMS Chief for the St. Thomas/St. John District.

Thank you for the opportunity to update this Committee on our facilities and services on St. John. I will provide testimony on behalf of VIFEMS, and the Chiefs will join me in answering any questions you may have.

On the island of St. John, VIFEMS provides emergency response from three facilities: the Robert O'Connor Fire Station in Cruz Bay, the Coral Bay Fire Station and the Morris DeCastro Clinic. We provide a medical response from the clinic and an all-hazard response, which includes fire and EMS, from the fire stations.

Facilities

VIFEMS operates both stations and a modular facility that houses our administrative and Prevention offices on St. John.

The Robert O'Connor Fire Station was severely damaged during the 2017 hurricanes and is slated to be replaced with funding from FEMA's Public Assistance program. Funding has been obligated, and the project is currently in the design phase. The station is presently housed in a modular facility installed after the storms.

The Coral Bay Fire Station has been repaired since the hurricanes, and shutters will be installed to further harden the structure.

The modular in which our administrative and Prevention offices are located was recently replaced and is currently in good condition.

Services

Our operations on St. John mirror those on St. Croix and St. Thomas. Fire and EMS personnel and resources are assigned to and deployed from strategically located facilities to ensure timely response. With ambulances and fire apparatus

stationed in both Cruz Bay and Coral Bay, we can provide prompt response to fire and EMS calls on both sides of the island.

Recent upgrades to our fleet have enhanced our response capabilities on St. John. With the assistance of this body, we were able to procure new apparatus, several of which are in service on the island. Two of our newest fire trucks were specifically designed to navigate St. John's terrain and have proven to be an asset to our operations. Fire personnel responding to a recent fire found it less challenging to traverse narrow roadways and gain access to the fire scene.

The expansion of our marine fleet is also expected to yield benefits for the island of St. John. Our fire boat is currently in construction and is expected to be completed this year. Although its primary use will be for marine firefighting and rescue operations, it may also be used to transport a patient in the event the Star of Life, our EMS vessel, is unavailable. As there is no hospital on St. John, we provide transport to St. Thomas for EMS and non-EMS patients requiring hospital care.

Other operational improvements are expected on St. John as several of our personnel work to complete EMS training and licensure. Through a partnership with Love City Strong, two of our employees traveled to the mainland to attend Howard County Fire Rescue's Paramedic Program. They are excelling in their studies and are expected to graduate in the summer.

The Virgin Islands Fire and Emergency Medical Services remains committed to improving the service we provide to the territory's citizens and visitors and that includes the residents and visitors of St. John.

I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. The Chiefs and I are available to answer any questions you may have.