



**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 V.I. Department of Health's- Environmental Health Divisions' event planning regarding safety, environmental clean-ups, permitting requirements, other operational plans, and collaborative efforts ahead of the year's St. Thomas Carnival

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 Justa “Tita”
4 Encarnacion, Commissioner for the Virgin Islands Department of Health. Present with me today
5 in St. Croix Reuben D. Molloy, Assistant Commissioner; and here on St. Thomas, Dr. Nicole
6 Craigwell-Syms, Assistant Commissioner and Wanson Harris, Director of Environmental Health.
7 Before I continue with the testimony, I would like to take the opportunity to wish our Department
8 of Health’s Family a very Happy Public Health Week!

9 Public health is more than just health care. It's the steps we take to make sure our
10 neighborhoods and environment are free from pollution. It's making sure our food and
11 water are safe to eat and drink. It's also the relationships we foster in our communities.
12 We're all interconnected. When we all come together to support public health, all of us —
13 individuals, families, communities, and the public health field — we can achieve the goals
14 of public health. [nphw.org](https://www.cdc.gov/nphw/)

15 I am truly proud to be a part of the family.

16 The Division of Environmental Health maintains a close partnership with the Division of Festivals
17 to oversee all aspects pertaining to safety, environmental cleanliness, vendor permitting, and
18 environmental surveillance during carnivals, festivals, celebrations, and similar events. Our
19 collaboration involves weekly meetings held at least 90 days prior to such events, allowing for the
20 sharing of updates and proactive resolution of any emerging concerns. The weekly meetings began
21 in January and have been consistently held.

1 Specifically, on April 3, we convened with all vendors participating in this year's carnival to discuss
2 the regulatory requirements necessary for operating their Temporary Food Establishments (TFEs).
3 These discussions will encompass timelines for obtaining health permits and adherence to relevant
4 health and safety protocols. The Division of Festivals will provide us with a comprehensive listing
5 of vendors and their respective locations for each event, which will be meticulously recorded in
6 our health space database for tracking and medical surveillance purposes.

7 During the carnival festivities, our Enforcement Officers and Inspectors will be diligently covering
8 and monitoring key events such as the Boat Parade, Carnival Village, Food Fair, J'ouvert, and
9 Adults and Children Parade. Their primary focus will be on ensuring safe food handling,
10 preparation, and compliance with time and temperature control measures.

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

18 Furthermore, in addition to health permits, all individuals operating within the confines of a
19 Temporary Food Establishment (TFE) are required to possess valid health cards, which must be
20 displayed at all times. Additionally, individuals must provide laboratory results demonstrating
21 negative tests for parasites. Alternatively, individuals holding a valid ServSafe certificate may

1 submit a copy of their certificate in lieu of laboratory results at the VI Department of Health's
2 Environmental Health's Office located at the John S. Moorehead Yard in St Thomas or at the Castle
3 Coakley Building in St. Croix so that we can validate said credentials.

4 The Division of Environmental Health is committed to ensuring the safety, cleanliness, and
5 regulatory compliance of the upcoming St. Thomas carnival. Through our collaborative efforts
6 with the Division of Festivals and stringent enforcement of health and safety protocols, we aim to
7 facilitate an enjoyable and secure experience for all participants and attendees. The Department is
8 committed to reducing health risks, increasing access to quality equitable healthcare, and enforcing
9 health standards. Again, team, Happy Public Health Week! The Department continues
10 collaborative efforts with the members of the 35th Legislature. We stand ready to respond to any
11 questions you may have.