

Support For Federal Emergency Unemployment Compensation Program

January 1, 2014

Commissioner Albert Bryan, Jr. said today that even though Federal Emergency Unemployment Compensation (EUC) Program payments came to an end on December 28, 2013 we still are advocating for the approval of another year of Emergency Unemployment compensation.

Emergency Unemployment Compensation (EUC) is a temporary federal program that provides additional unemployment benefits to claimants who qualify. Over the last 4 years we have added up to an additional 46 weeks of compensation due to this program. The benefit of these funds are multiple but most importantly they provide lifeblood to many Virgin Islands families that are struggling to make ends meet. Last year alone the territory received over \$20 million in EUC. The end of the benefits will directly affect over 1,700 households in the territory. These funds are federal dollars that are in addition to the \$22 million that was paid out of the territory's Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund.

According to the latest Unemployment Insurance Data Summary the 57% of Virgin Islanders that start regular unemployment insurance benefits use all 26 weeks and continue on to EUC. This is compared to pre-recession levels that shows only 35%- 38% of these claimants exhausting all 26 weeks indicating that it is taking Virgin Islanders longer to find new employment. This is a trend that we are finding nationally as employment opportunities have moved toward the service sector, which require more education and specificity in skill sets.

“While our economy is showing the first buds of recovery, our people still continue to battle the hardships of the weak job market. Job seekers have 78% less jobs available that they did pre-recession. When you look at our total wages for the Territory they are down sharply from \$1.6 billion to \$1.4 billion. That's over \$200 million in revenue that is absent from our economy it effects households, taxes and every aspect of our economy. These benefits are essential to our continued march forward, we will continue to lobby for their renewal,” Bryan said.

Governor John P. de Jongh Jr. has joined forces with other governors and Delegate Congress, Donna Christensen, in addressing the importance to of an extension of Unemployment Benefits in a plea to Congress. “Extending Unemployment insurance benefits is critical in our continuous efforts to stimulate the local economy, as these funds are immediately injected back into the economy.

Individuals who are laid off through no fault of their own rely heavily on these funds to support their families. I continue to encourage claimants to take advantage of the additional programs and services available through the Department of Labor to enhance their current skills as we are unsure what action may be taken by Congress,” deJongh said