



PRESS RELEASE

Department of Human Services Secures more than \$42 Million in Grant Funding For Major Head Start Construction Projects

For Immediate Release: September 2, 2021 (Photo Included)

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS - The Virgin Islands Department of Human Services (DHS), today announced that they have received official notification that their **Head Start Program has been awarded an unprecedented \$42,453,995.00 in construction grants with zero local match.** The Head Start Program applied for the grants in September 2020 and has been working with the US Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Office of Head Start to fulfill all requirements for approval to give the Virgin Islands this extraordinary and unparalleled opportunity to rebuild the territory's Head Start infrastructure with 100% federal funding. The team is also awaiting decisions on two more grants that would increase the current construction total.

The award notably includes funds to:

- Construct a state-of-the-art Head Start mega multi-classroom center at the currently shuttered Charles H. Emmanuel Elementary School site
- Demolish and rebuild the Concordia Head Start
- Construct a Head Start center at the long, unutilized DHS Bolongo property
- Construct a mega center at the Tabor and Harmony site

The award will also include other significant upgrades territory-wide.

These grants were complicated and detailed in nature, but the Head Start team fought to secure the resources that will tremendously benefit the Territory's youngest learners for generations to come.

"I am very proud of the Head Start Team that worked tirelessly to achieve the dream of building state of the art learning environments for our children. These federal awards will support our children's health and wellbeing in the Virgin Islands and will be supported by this Administration's

ongoing rebuilding efforts to make the Virgin Islands whole again,” said Commissioner Kimberley Causey-Gomez. “Our DHS Head Start program provides family-centered services for low-income families with very young children. It is designed to promote the comprehensive development of three to five-year-olds, and to enable their parents to fulfill their roles of moving towards self-sufficiency. Head Start emphasizes the role of parents as their child's first and most important teacher. While we will have our work cut out for us, Assistant Commissioner Carla Benjamin, Head Start Administrator Masika Lewis, Head Start Assistant Administrator Michael Richards and their team are up to the challenge and will have the full support of the DHS leadership and the Office of the Governor,” the Commissioner stated.

The Department of Human Services just this year successfully applied for and received a new 5-year grant to continue to operate the mostly federal funded Head Start program in the territory. The program also recently received \$1,297,449.00 in American Rescue Plan Act funding.

The Office of the Governor expressed their excitement about the announcement with Governor Albert Bryan saying, “This is fantastic news and is of great importance to the community and our future as a Territory. I am proud of the DHS Head Start team’s diligent efforts to ensure the best resources are secured for those who need them most. Giving children the tools, they need to succeed in life is crucial for their wellbeing and is a priority of my Administration.” He went on to state, “With these federal funds, we not only lay a foundation for future success in life and the workforce, but we have secured a tremendous win for the USVI economy and the jobs that will be created through these multiple construction projects.”

Head Start is a nationally recognized, Best in Class program that has been providing comprehensive early childhood education, health, nutrition, and parent involvement services to low-income children ages three to five and families since 1966. Head Start’s program design, services and resources have been uniquely designed to foster stable family relationships, enhance children's physical and emotional well-being, and establish an environment to develop strong cognitive skills.

“Transitioning from preschool to elementary school imposes diverse developmental challenges that include requiring the children to engage successfully with their peers outside the family network, adjust to the space of a classroom, and meet the expectations the school setting provides,” explained Assistant Commissioner and Licensed Certified Social Worker Carla Benjamin. “The proposed new facilities, that we will now have the funding to construct, will be designed to address and facilitate these necessary developmental milestones. My team’s passion, hard work and dedication is being rewarded in this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to design and build creative, safe and top-rated spaces to nurture and give the best start to our kids here in the Territory,” she continued.

The grant applications included the conceptual design phase for the new builds and upgrades. With the approval of the grants, the Head Start Team is now moving into the Architectural and Engineering phase. Additional details will be released as the team continues to work closely with the Department of Property and Procurement and the Department of Public works.

DHS Head Start Registration

- The DHS-Head Start Program registration process is on-going throughout the year.
- Children must be three years old by December 31st. Parents must bring the child's birth certificate and proof of income that shows the family meets the federal guideline for income eligibility.
- Adults who are guardians must provide evidence of guardianship such as a court order.
- *Parents of children with disabilities are especially encouraged to apply for enrollment.*

Contact Information and Registration Portal

- Feel free to create an account, if you have not already, and apply through Head Start's online portal (COPA) at <https://vihs.mycopa.com/familyPortal/childCare.epl>
- Questions for the Head Start office can be addressed at (340)773-1972 on St. Croix or (340)774-0930 ext. 4200 on St. Thomas.
- Families may also email Masikia.lewis@dhs.vi.gov and Michael.richards@dhs.vi.gov.

For general information, please visit the Department of Human Services website, www.dhs.gov.vi or on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/usvidhs>) at US Virgin Islands Department of Human Services.

If you are experiencing any of the coronavirus symptoms listed on the Department of Health website (listed below), self-quarantine and immediately contact the Department of Health:

- V.I. DOH website: <https://doh.vi.gov/>
- COVID-19 Hotline: (340) 712-6299 or (340) 776-1519

For general information, please visit the Department of Human Services website, www.dhs.gov.vi or on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/usvidhs>) at US Virgin Islands Department of Human Services.

For more information on Covid19, the new strain of coronavirus, please visit the USVI Department of Health's website, www.doh.vi.gov/coronavirus or text COVID19USVI to 888777. #COVID19USVI

The Department of Human Services (VIDHS) exists to provide social services to members in our community with diverse needs. In times of national uncertainty and hardship we act as a safety-net and exist to inspire hope and empower change through non-judgmental, quality delivery of needed services and resources. Please visit the Department of Human Services website, www.dhs.gov.vi for more information.



Commissioner Causey-Gomez Pictured above during address about Head Start.

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