THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
GOVERNMENT HOUSE
Charlotte Amalie, V.I. 00802
340-774-0001

EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 474-2015

GOVERNOR OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS OF THE UNITED STATES

PREPARING THE VIRGIN ISLANDS OF THE UNITED STATES FOR ADAPTING TO THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

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WHEREAS, the impacts of climate change are adversely affecting ecosystems, communities, economies, and public health across the Nation, with the United States Virgin Islands experiencing excessively high temperatures, increasingly severe droughts, and increasing intensity of downpours;

WHEREAS, while it is acknowledged that communities that already face economic or health-related challenges will experience higher levels of disruption from climate change impacts, the United States Virgin Islands, like most small islands, are particularly vulnerable;

WHEREAS, the greater climate vulnerability of the United States Virgin Islands is based primarily on the small size of the islands;

WHEREAS, the small ecosystems, limited freshwater resources, small population, and small economy constrain the ability of the Territory to absorb shocks from storms and other natural disasters;

WHEREAS, the greater vulnerability of the Territory is also based on the concentration of hotels, businesses, critical infrastructure, and residential development in the coastal area, which increases exposure to storm surge and sea level rise;

WHEREAS, assessments of the economic impact of climate change on Caribbean islands indicate that the substantial impact will be from sea level rise, and the areas that will be most impacted are tourism and infrastructure;

WHEREAS, climate change is known to impact human health through three mechanisms: extreme heat, natural disasters, and infections and diseases;

WHEREAS, climate change affects the fundamentals of good human health; clean air, safe drinking water, sufficient food, and secure shelter;

WHEREAS, the population of the United States Virgin Islands is expected to display a relatively high level of vulnerability to the health impacts of climate change due to the fact that it is an aging population that currently experiences a number of health disparities;

WHEREAS, of the five most important health issues in the Territory; diabetes, heart disease, HIV/AIDS, asthma, and hypertension, four will be exacerbated by climate change;

WHEREAS, in order to ensure climate preparedness and build a resilient community, all the social sectors in the United States Virgin Islands must work together to safeguard our natural resource base, social infrastructure, economic base, and communities;

WHEREAS, this requires close cooperation between the Federal Government, Government of the Virgin Islands of the United States, the private sector, the non-profit sector, and other community groups; and

WHEREAS, this Executive Order will provide for coordinated planning by the public agencies and other instrumentalities of the government, and facilitates cooperation between and among the public sector, private sector, non-profit sector, and various stakeholder groups;

NOW, THEREFORE, pursuant to Section 11 of the Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands of the United States of 1954, as amended, which provides that the Governor shall have the power to issue executive orders not in conflict with any applicable law, it is hereby ordered as follows:

Section 1. **Definitions**

As used in this order:

(a) "preparedness" means actions taken to plan, organize, equip, train, and exercise to build, apply, and sustain the capabilities necessary to prevent, protect against, ameliorate the effects of, respond to, and recover from climate change related damages to life, health, property, livelihoods, ecosystems, and national security;

(b) "adaptation" means adjustment in natural or human systems in anticipation of or response to a changing environment in a way that effectively uses beneficial opportunities or reduces negative effects; and

(c) "resilience" means the ability and capacity to anticipate, organize, prepare for, and adapt to changing conditions and withstand, respond to, and recover rapidly from disturbances or disruptions.

Section 2. **Public Sector Planning for Climate Change**

(a) Public Sector Performance. All departments, instrumentalities, and programs of the Government of the United States Virgin Islands shall evaluate the vulnerabilities in, and risk to, their operations and missions. Each agency shall develop and implement Agency Adaptation Plans that, not only address risk reduction, but also integrate climate change adaption considerations into future project and program design and implementation. The first Agency Adaptation Plan shall be completed within 12 months of the date of this Order.

(b) Agency Adaptation Plans. Agency adaptation plans are to be submitted to the Steering Committee of the U.S. Virgin Islands Climate Change Council (Section 4) for review.

(c) Purpose of Agency Adaptation Plans. Each Agency Adaptation Plan shall include:

(i) Identification and evidence-based assessment of climate change related impacts on and risks to the agency's ability to accomplish its missions, operations, and programs;

(ii) A description of programs, policies, and plans the agency has already put in place, as well as additional actions the agency will take to manage climate risks in the near term and build resilience in the near, medium, and long term;

(iii) A description of how any climate change related risk identified pursuant to paragraph (i) of this subsection that is deemed so significant that it impairs the agency's statutory mission or operation will be addressed, including through the agency's existing reporting requirements;

(iv) A description of how the agency will consider the need to improve climate adaptation and resilience, including the costs and benefits of such improvement, with respect to agency suppliers, supply chain, real property investments, and capital equipment purchases such as updating agency policies for leasing, building upgrades, relocation of existing facilities and equipment, and construction of new facilities; and

(v) A description of how the agency will contribute to coordinated efforts to support climate preparedness and resilience, consistent with Section 4 of this Order, and including collaborative efforts to achieve the purpose and intent of this Order.

(d) Agencies shall report annually on progress made on their Adaptation Plans, as well as any updates made to the plans, to the U.S. Virgin Islands Climate Change Council. Agencies shall regularly update their Adaptation Plans, with an update due not later than 1 year after the publication of each quadrennial National Climate Assessment report required by section 106 of the Global Change Research Act of 1990 (15 U.S.C. 2936).

Section 3. **Development of Decision Support Systems for Climate Change Adaptation**

(a) Planning and decision making for climate change adaptation requires the availability of sound data, easily available to the public, private, and civil society sectors. Institutions participating in the U.S. Virgin Islands Climate Change Council, and any other national, regional, or local institutions recommended by the Council, shall work together to develop and provide authoritative, easily accessible, usable, and timely data, information, and decision-support tools on climate preparedness and resilience.

(b) The U.S. Virgin Islands Climate Change Council shall designate a public institution, or network of institutions as necessary, to host and manage the data and tools required for public information and climate adaptation decision making. The Council shall make provisions for the establishment of a web-based portal to support integration of the data and tools to be used in climate adaptation decision making, as well as to enable easy access to the data.

Section 4. **U.S. Virgin Islands Climate Change Council**

(a) Establishment. There is established the U.S. Virgin Islands Climate Change Council (hereinafter referred to as the Council).

(b) Membership. The Council shall be chaired by the Office of the Governor of the U.S. Virgin Islands. The Council shall include senior officials (agency head or deputy) as follows:

(i) Department of Planning and Natural Resources;
(ii) Virgin Islands Department of Health;
(iii) Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency;
(iv) University of the Virgin Islands;
(v) Foundation for Development Planning, Inc.;
(vi) U.S. Virgin Islands Hotel & Tourism Association;
(vii) Virgin Islands Department of Education;
(viii) Virgin Islands Department of Public Works;
(ix) Virgin Islands Water & Power Authority;
(x) Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture;
(xi) Virgin Islands Department of Justice;
(xii) Virgin Islands Port Authority;
(xiii) The Nature Conservancy;
(xiv) Virgin Islands Conservation Society;
(xv) St. Thomas-St. John Chamber of Commerce;
(xvi) St. Croix Chamber of Commerce;
(xvii) Virgin Islands Bureau of Economic Research;
(xviii) St. Croix Foundation;
(xix) Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands;

(xx) Virgin Islands Public Television;
(xxi) Virgin Islands Economic Development Authority;
(xxii) St. John Community Foundation;
(xxiii) Virgin Islands Inter-Faith Coalition;
(xxiv) Virgin Islands Department of Tourism;
(xxv) American Red Cross of the Virgin Islands;
(xxvi) AARP Virgin Islands; and
(xxvii) United Way of the U.S. Virgin Islands, Inc.

(c) Administration. The Office of the Governor shall provide administrative support and additional resources for the operations of the Council. Council members shall assist and provide information to the Council, consistent with applicable law, as may be necessary to carry out its functions. Each member institution shall bear its own expenses for participating in the Council, except for instances where meetings of the Council are held outside the District where the institution is domiciled, or when the member is asked to undertake a task or initiative that is the responsibility of the Council under this Order.

(d) Council Structure. The work of the Council shall be guided by a Steering Committee, which shall help determine priorities and strategic direction for the Council. The Steering Committee may establish time-limited working groups as needed, and such working groups may, where appropriate, include institutions not represented on the Council. The Steering Committee shall be comprised of the Office of the Governor and eight other members elected by the Virgin Islands Climate Change Council from among its membership.

(e) Mission and Function of the Council. The Council is an institutional space established to facilitate the development of a cohesive framework and strategy to prepare for climate change impacts on the Territory. In furtherance of that goal, the Council shall function as a coordinating mechanism, receiving the full cooperation of all public sector institutions and instrumentalities, and shall work with Federal and local agencies, academic and research institutions, and the private and non-profit sectors to:

(i) Develop, and present to the Governor of the U.S. Virgin Islands by September 30, 2016, a U.S. Virgin Islands policy for climate change adaptation;

(ii) Prepare by March 30, 2016, and subsequently coordinate implementation of, a public engagement strategy, the purpose of which is to inform the public about climate change issues, enhance the public's understanding of possible actions at personal and societal levels, and encourage full community participation in climate change adaptation initiatives;

(iii) Prepare a Climate Change Adaptation Strategy for the U.S. Virgin Islands. The climate change adaptation strategy shall be based on assessment of vulnerability and risk for critical sectors of the local economy, including, but not limited to, human health, agriculture, infrastructure, tourism, and natural resources. The draft strategy shall be presented to the Governor by September 30, 2017;

(iv) Facilitate the integration of climate change adaptation programs and projects by the public, private, and non-profit sectors, particularly in implementation of the U.S. Virgin Islands Climate Change Adaptation Strategy;

(v) Track implementation of priority Federal Government actions related to climate preparedness and resilience, including identification of opportunities and sources for funding local and regionally-coordinated actions;

(vi) Facilitate the integration of climate science in policies and planning of government agencies and the private sector, including by promoting the development of innovative, actionable, and accessible climate change related information, data, and tools at appropriate scales for decision makers, and deployment of this information through a web-based portal, as described in Section 3 of this Order; and

(vii) Such other functions as may be necessary for effective implementation of this Order, as agreed by the Council.

(f) Community involvement in the work of the Council. In addition to the community engagement activities conducted as part of the public engagement strategy (Section 4(e)(ii), the Council shall ensure that deliberations of the full Council incorporate inputs by the community to the greatest extent practicable.

Section 5. **Effective Date, Duration and General Provisions**

(a) This Executive Order shall become effective immediately and shall remain in effect until terminated by further Order.

(b) This Executive Order does not affect the authority granted by law to departments and agencies of government, nor the head of those departments.

(c) This Executive Order shall be implemented in alignment with all applicable laws, and be considered a priority program for appropriation of funds where applicable.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the great Seal of the Government of the Virgin Islands of the United States to be affixed at Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, this 15th day of October, 2015 A.D.

Kenneth E. Mapp
Governor

ATTEST:

Osbert E. Potter
Lieutenant Governor