GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

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Minister & Permanent Secretary Participate in Regional Social Protection Meeting

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Minister for Health and Social Development, Honourable Vincent O. Wheatley, and Permanent Secretary Ms. Tasha K. Bertie represented the Virgin Islands at the Tenth Meeting of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Council of Ministers: Human and Social Development, held in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. from October 7 to 8, 2026.

The meeting, held under the theme “Advancing Social Protection in the OECS: Policy, Practice and Learning,” brought together regional ministers, senior government officials and development partners to discuss strategies for strengthening social protection systems and improving support for vulnerable populations across Member States.

Discussions focused on key regional priorities, including disability inclusion, child protection, care systems and strengthening the resilience of vulnerable communities. The Council also reviewed progress under the OECS Social Inclusion and Social Protection Strategic Action Plan 2023–2030 and considered recommendations to improve coordination and implementation across Member States.

Minister for Health and Social Development, Honourable Vincent O. Wheatley, said the meeting reinforced the importance of developing social protection systems that respond to the changing needs of communities.

“Social protection is about ensuring that individuals and families, particularly those who are most vulnerable, have access to the support and opportunities they need. As a Territory, we must continue to strengthen our programmes, improve coordination and ensure that our services respond effectively to the needs of the people we serve,” Honourable Wheatley said.

Among the matters considered was the OECS Regional Child Policy and Strategic Plan 2026–2032, which seeks to strengthen child protection systems and promote the well-being of children across the region.

The Council also examined approaches to disability inclusion, the financing of care systems and the development of adaptive social protection measures to help communities respond to economic and environmental challenges.

Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Health and Social Development, Ms. Tasha K. Bertie noted that regional collaboration provides valuable opportunities for the Virgin Islands to exchange knowledge and identify approaches that can strengthen local service delivery.

“Many of the social challenges we face are shared across the region. By exchanging knowledge and examining what works in other jurisdictions, we can identify practical solutions that strengthen our policies and improve the delivery of services here in the Virgin Islands,” she stated.

The meeting further emphasised the importance of strengthening partnerships among Member States and regional development agencies to advance social inclusion, improve access to essential services and build more resilient communities.

The Ministry of Health and Social Development remains committed to advancing policies, programmes and partnerships that promote social inclusion, protect vulnerable populations and improve the social well-being of the people of the Virgin Islands.

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