GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

STATEMENT

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STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE VINCENT O. WHEATLEY MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AT THE FIFTH SITTING OF THE THIRD SESSION OF THE FIFTH HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS WEDNESDAY, 21ST OCTOBER, 2026

Centenarian Grants Policy

Release Date: 29 October, 2026



Madam Speaker, I rise today to update this Honourable House on The Virgin Islands Centenarian Grants Policy, following its approval by Cabinet. The policy formalises a longstanding Government programme that recognises one of the most remarkable milestones in human life, attaining the age of one hundred years.

Madam Speaker, since 2002, the Government of The Virgin Islands has formally recognised and honoured Virgin Islanders who have reached the age of one hundred years in appreciation of their contributions to the development of our Territory, our communities and our way of life.

Over the years, centenarians have been honoured through official visits by Government representatives, commemorative keepsakes, congratulatory messages from the Monarch of the United Kingdom and financial assistance as a token of the Territory’s gratitude and respect.

Madam Speaker, while this programme has existed for more than two decades, the Cabinet recognised the need to establish a formal policy framework to ensure consistency, transparency, fairness and sustainability. Consequently, Cabinet directed the Ministry of Health and Social Development to develop a comprehensive policy to govern the programme and ensure that future generations of centenarians continue to be honoured in a dignified and meaningful manner.

Today, I am pleased to advise this Honourable House that The Virgin Islands Centenarian Programme Policy establishes a structured framework for recognising persons who attain the age of one hundred years while setting out clear eligibility criteria, benefits, administrative procedures and oversight arrangements for the programme. The policy applies to eligible Virgin Islanders and Belongers and ensures that recognition is provided in a consistent, transparent and dignified manner.

Madam Speaker, one of the most significant enhancements approved by Cabinet is the increase in the Centenarian Grant. Previously, eligible centenarians received a one-time grant of five thousand dollars ($5000). Under the revised policy, eligible Virgin Islanders will now receive a one-time grant of ten thousand dollars ($10,000). This includes eligible Virgin Islanders residing in the Territory, abroad, or in Government-operated facilities. This increase reflects the Government's desire to provide more meaningful recognition of this extraordinary milestone and to ensure that the programme remains relevant and impactful.

In addition to the financial grant, eligible recipients will receive a congratulatory card from His Majesty The King, facilitated through the Governor's Office, together with a commemorative plaque, a gift or fruit basket presented by the Minister responsible for Social Development, and commemorative family photo highlights as a keepsake.

Madam Speaker, the approved policy also provides for the recognition of Belongers who attain one hundred years of age while residing in the Territory. Although Belonger centenarians are not eligible for the financial grant, they will receive a congratulatory card from His Majesty the King together with an official gift or fruit

basket in recognition of their contribution to The Virgin Islands community. The policy also establishes a clear process for identifying and verifying eligible centenarians, ensuring that applications are administered fairly and efficiently through the Social Development Department and the Public Assistance Committee.

To support future planning, the Social Development Department will maintain a confidential register of seniors aged ninety-five years and older, enabling the Ministry and the Governor's Office to prepare in advance for future centenarian celebrations and ensuring that no eligible individual is overlooked.

Madam Speaker, this policy is about much more than financial assistance or ceremonial recognition. It reflects the value we place on those who have dedicated a century of their lives to their families, communities and country. Our centenarians are living links to our history whose experiences, sacrifices and achievements have helped shape The Virgin Islands we know today.

The Virgin Islands Centenarian Programme Policy ensures that these remarkable individuals are recognised in a consistent, dignified and meaningful manner. By formalising this longstanding programme, the Government has created a sustainable framework that will preserve an important tradition while ensuring that future generations of centenarians receive the honour and appreciation they so richly deserve.

As I have highlighted the policy's framework, Madam Speaker, let me also take this opportunity to mention those extraordinary centenarians that are here on the land of the living:

- Mrs. Floresa George who is 103 and celebrates her birthday on 16th April.
- Mrs. Iris Harrigan who is 103 and celebrates her birthday on 4th August.
- Mrs. Christeen Hodge who is 103 and celebrates her birthday on 5th December.

We give God thanks and praise for His merciful kindness towards each of them.

Madam Speaker, as we celebrate those who are still with us, we also pause to remember those whom we have recently lost. I wish to extend sincere condolences

to the families and loved ones of the late Mr. Evelyn Hodge, Mrs. Esmie “Muddy” Stoutt, and Mrs. Enelle Smith, who sadly passed away within the past two months. We honour their lives and the memories they leave behind and pray that their families find comfort and strength during this difficult time.

Madam Speaker, my Ministry also reaffirms our commitment to promoting healthy ageing, enhancing the well-being of older persons, and fostering a society that values and respects the contributions of its senior citizens. The lives of our centenarians remind us that longevity is not simply measured in years, but in the lasting impact we have on our families, our communities, and our nation.

My Ministry remains committed to implementing this policy and continuing to recognise and celebrate the lives and contributions of our centenarians and senior citizens.

I thank this Honourable House for its continued support of initiatives that uphold the dignity of older persons and preserve the rich legacy of those who have contributed so much to the development of the Virgin Islands.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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