

More Judicial Nominations Will Come Soon, Bryan Promises, While Acknowledging Need For Legislation To Address Backlogs

With over 12,000 cases pending across the Virgin Islands, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. says additional judicial nominations are imminent, as lawmakers revisit legislation to address chronic vacancies and improve trial efficiency.

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After announcing the [nomination of Magistrate Venetia Velazquez](#) to ascend to the bench of the Superior Court in the District of St. Croix, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. acknowledged that more is needed to assist the judiciary in clearing the huge backlog of cases that have accumulated over the years.

In September, there were [more than 12,000 cases](#) pending in the Virgin Islands courts. At the time, Senator Novelle Francis said that the biggest contributing factor to that backlog was judicial vacancies. Associate Supreme Court Justice Harold L. Willocks warned that a “significant crisis of judicial vacancies” would come before the end of the year unless replacements for jurists at the end of their terms, or those signaling retirement were made in a timely manner.

In mid-October, Governor Bryan [nominated attorney Melanie Turnbull](#) to serve as the Superior Court's Family Division judge in the St. Thomas-St. John district. With Magistrate Velazquez's elevation, two new jurists will soon be on the bench of the Superior Court. However, the extended terms of Hon. Kathleen MacKay and Hon. Douglas Brady will soon come to an end. After next week, they are both expected to conclude their tenure.

Recent legislative attempts to address the judicial vacancy crisis have faltered when they reached Governor Bryan's desk. A bill to allow judges to remain in service until either renominated and confirmed or replaced by a successor, supported by the Bar Association and the Attorney General, was vetoed by the governor, who said it undermined public accountability and would encourage executive inaction.

Instead, he says that more judicial appointments will come soon. “We have four Supreme Court judges in the Virgin Islands for the first time, and we will be nominating a number of other judges before the year is out, or early next year, as judge terms come to an end,” Mr. Bryan said during Monday's press briefing.

He also signaled openness to reconsidering amended legislation that provides more balance of power between branches of government. “I brought some points to [legislators] that they weren't probably thinking of so I think they're reconsidering those measures,” he noted. Governor Bryan also pressed for new legislation mandating the timeline within which court proceedings must be conducted. “We need the Speedy Trial Act implemented,” he declared. “It's been talked about by the Legislature a lot. We're going to try to make another submittal of it.”