

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY GOVERNOR CIRCULAR NO. 3 of 2020

FROM: Deputy Governor

TO: Attorney General
Financial Secretary
Cabinet Secretary
Permanent Secretaries
Heads of Department
All Public Officers

DATE: 18th March, 2020

**SUBJECT: PUBLIC SERVICE CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS
(In Light of the Coronavirus Pandemic)**

Good day public officers,

Your health and safety during this time regarding the Coronavirus remain of the highest priority. I am fully aware that you continue to work diligently notwithstanding personal concerns for your health and that of your families. For this, I commend you and continue to offer support during this period of uncertainty.

As a result of the continued global spread of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus and to support the well-being of public officers, the Cabinet of the Virgin Islands on 18th March, 2020 has decided on the following **Public Service Continuity of Operations Policy**.

1. Offices will remain open, remote functioning will be initiated to ensure no interruption of services and the safety of the population. Remote functioning will be implemented through the use of flexible work arrangements and the ability for the Department of Information Technology to provide the necessary services and resources, and taking into consideration, the current challenges and restrictions with bandwidth, equipment and resources. Departments operating schedules may be adjusted to provide varied hours for client and employee flexibility;
2. Access to the public will be executed in accordance with internationally tested and accepted social distancing guidelines and signage including controlled entry to customers and clients, use of an appointment system, provision of documents electronically and offering special care and attention to the elderly, children and pregnant women;
3. All Public Service ceremonies will be halted at this time. Face to face meetings should have no more than 5 persons in attendance. Remote technology for meetings will be utilised when possible;
4. Public Officers with a medical history of chronic illness should be immediately allowed to work remotely and should immediately make themselves known to the Human Resources Department through their Department Head for formal permission;
5. Public Officers who are generally unwell should not report to work and should follow the normal leave policy and reporting requirements. Where applicable the current health alert procedures issued by the Ministry of Health and Social Development are to be strictly applied;

6. Public Officers who have travelled outside of the Territory must obtain formal clearance to return to work from the public health authorities (Port Health Officers) before returning to the workplace. Additionally, if they have come into contact with persons in their household who have travelled outside the Territory, the public officer before returning to work must complete and submit the Return to Work form (Appendix 1) to the Human Resources Department authorising the officer to return to work before reporting;
7. Government vehicles and offices should be regularly sanitised at the responsibility of the assigned Departments. Vehicles should not carry unauthorised persons at any time;
8. No children (persons under the age of 18) should be allowed in the workplace at any time. Parents with children at home as a result of school closure or illness should first utilise home care resources. If unable to do so, then the parents should try to alternate childcare responsibilities and may be permitted to work remotely (where applicable) through discussion with their Head of Department;
9. Pandemic leave provisions will be considered in a compassionate manner to ensure the continuity of services. This will be offered to persons within the Judiciary, Teaching Service Commission, public officers, contract employees, cadets and interns. Pandemic Leave refers to compassionate leave that is provided during pandemic periods to allow for quarantine and isolation of public officers as well as those who must care for children during mandatory closure of schools;
10. This Policy also applies to Essential Workers through Department Heads application without reducing the provision of needed essential services; and
11. The Employee Assistance Programme will remain accessible to all employees who may require their services.

Please note, in all of the above cases referencing leave, your annual and/or sick leave allotment will not be affected.

In addition, Item #4 of the Policy applies to vulnerable groups including elderly persons (60+), children, pregnant women, disabled persons and persons with underlying and chronic health conditions:

- chronic (long-term) respiratory diseases, such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema or bronchitis, chronic heart disease, such as heart failure, chronic kidney disease, chronic liver disease, such as hepatitis, chronic neurological conditions, such as Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis (MS), cerebral palsy, diabetes, problems with your spleen – for example, sickle cell disease, a weakened immune system as the result of conditions such as HIV and AIDS.

I realise that the following Policy will come with expected questions, I, therefore, invite you to email me directly at DArcher@gov.vg with questions. In addition, tomorrow (Thursday 19th March, 2020) from 12:00 noon to 1:00 p.m., I will host a Question and Answer segment via Facebook live on the Government of the Virgin Islands Facebook page to further explain the policy and answer any questions. Further details on the administration and execution of the above Policy will be coordinated by the Director of Human Resources through upcoming communication.

My hope is built on nothing less than ensuring your health and safety is a priority. Collectively, we will support each other during this period.



David D. Archer, Jr.
Deputy Governor