

Virgin Islands Students Honored in 2025 Hurricane Preparedness Essay Competition

VIRGIN ISLANDS, U.S., August 18, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As the new school year begins, four students have been recognized as winners of the 2025 Hurricane Preparedness Essay Competition, showcasing the creativity, resilience and insight of youth in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Winning essays include:

Elementary School: "Pets are Important Too" — Chasidy Pickering

Junior High School: "Strong Storms, Stronger Youth: Coping with the USVI" — Patricia Daytic

High School: "The Quiet Storm" — Alana Ferris

University of the Virgin Islands: "Assisting Vulnerable Communities During Hurricane Season" — Leah Gottlieb



Launched in June at the start of the 2025 Atlantic Hurricane Season, the competition invited students from elementary through university to respond to one of 10 prompts on hurricane readiness. Topics ranged from family preparedness and personal safety to youth leadership, forecast literacy, and protecting vulnerable populations such as the elderly, people with disabilities, and pets.

The contest, organized by Teri Helenese, Director of State-Federal Relations and Washington Representative for the U.S. Virgin Islands, sought to sharpen students' writing skills while generating fresh ideas on readiness and resilience for the wider community. "It is encouraging to see our students leading the way in preparedness and compassion," said Helenese.

"Their voices remind us that readiness is not just about supplies and plans, but about the strength, empathy and leadership we build in our young people."

A review panel of preparedness experts, including Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA) Director Daryl Jaschen, development entrepreneur Lelei LeLaulu,

and Julien E. Henley, Sr., ADA Coordinator in the Office of the Governor, selected the winners. Janis Esannason, former professor at the University of the Virgin Islands' Albert A. Sheen Campus on St. Croix, served as an alternate judge.

Each will receive a hurricane preparedness kit and a cash prize — \$1,000 for the UVI and high school winners, \$500 for junior high, and \$200 for elementary school. They will also be recognized at Back-to-School events on St. Thomas and St. Croix next month.

Beyond individual awards, the initiative underscores the importance of intergenerational care and community involvement. This year's essays addressed topics such as stress management during emergencies, local flood risks, and interpreting official weather alerts.

As the Virgin Islands looks ahead to the peak of hurricane season, these student voices serve as a timely reminder that resilience begins with awareness, planning, and a shared commitment to protect one another.

About Teri Helenese

As the Director of State-Federal Relations and Washington Representative for the Governor of the United States Virgin Islands, Teri Helenese plays a pivotal role in policy development and advocacy. She skillfully champions Governor Albert Bryan Jr.'s priorities, leveraging her deep understanding of policy formulation, powerful advocacy, and wide-reaching collaborations to drive meaningful change. From securing significant funding to pioneering initiatives for student support, affordable housing and economic development, her work spans a wide array of critical areas, contributing to the prosperity of the Virgin Islands.

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