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THE VIRGIN ISLANDS OF THE UNITED STATES**

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PRESS RELEASE

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VIDOH Applauds VIWMA in their COVID-19 Wastewater Testing - Another Successful Surveillance Mechanism to Detect COVID-19 Surges

US Virgin Islands — The Virgin Islands Department of Health (VIDOH) DOH would like to inform the community that it is working collaboratively with the VI Waste Management Authority (VIWMA) to compare results from wastewater testing that has been ongoing at the VIWMA wastewater facilities since February 2021 to DOH human surveillance data. Both surveillance platforms confirm there is a COVID-19 surge.

VIWMA is partnering with Biobot Analytics, of Cambridge, MA, to test and analyze these wastewater samples. The VIWMA testing takes place at 5 wastewater treatment facilities: two on St. Thomas (Mangrove and Redpoint), two on St. Croix (Anguilla and Fig Tree) and one on St. John (Cruz Bay) once a week. Additionally, in October and November 2021, VIWMA also ran a pilot program at seven Territorial elementary schools. The program ran for 6 weeks utilizing Biobot Analytics (www.biobot.io) to test wastewater to track COVID-19's presence on a broader level in the territory. VIWMA hopes to resume that school-based testing program shortly.

Biobot Analytics is a wastewater epidemiology company that analyzes sewage to provide public health analytics. This technology allows for studies to be conducted in a non-invasive, anonymous way. The wastewater data reports also include genomic sequencing to help identify and monitor variants including Omicron and future ones. Of note, the Biobot Analytic data showed the presence of the Omicron variant on November 21, 2021 in the U.S. prior to the first clinical case reports in South Africa.

“By doing wastewater surveillance we can combine efforts and compare results with the individual human sampling (COVID-19 antigen and PCR testing) that VIDOH regularly does with the

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Page 2

findings from the VIWMA wastewater results,” said Alice Krall, Special Assistant to the VIWMA’s Executive Director Roger E. Merritt, Jr. “The agreement or alignment of these two sets of data further confirms the COVID trends that are being seen. The testing done by VIWMA is yet another analytic tool that can serve as an early warning system to allow the VI to detect surges of COVID-19,” said Dr. Esther Ellis VIDOH Territorial Epidemiologist.

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