

The Virgin Islands Consortium

35th Legislature to Convene as Governor Declares State of Emergency on St. Croix's Water Crisis

Government Acts as Thousands Face Contaminated Water Supplies

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Amid concerns surrounding the quality of potable water on St. Croix, the 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands is set to convene in a Committee of the Whole hearing. This session, scheduled for Friday, November 3rd at 11:00 am in the Frits E. Lawaetz Legislative Conference Room, will address the pressing issues related to elevated levels of lead and copper in the St. Croix district's water system.

Senate President Francis voiced the urgency, stating, "For months, users of the potable water system have carried the financial burden of buying bottled water. The government must act quickly and responsibly to both protect the impacted community." The sentiment

is clear: the community requires immediate attention to restore not only the water system but also the public's confidence.

Anticipated attendees for the hearing include representatives from the VI Water and Power Authority, the Department of Health, Department of Planning and Natural Resources, VITEMA, the EPA, the Virgin Islands Housing Authority, and various neighborhood and community organizations.

This legislative move follows closely on the heels of Governor Albert Bryan Jr.'s declaration of a [local state of emergency for St. Croix on Monday](#). The governor's decision stands in contrast to his earlier stance, where he [expressed skepticism](#) over the benefits of such a declaration. However, given that approximately 3,800 homes in St. Croix continue to receive water with elevated levels of heavy metals, the declaration is now viewed as a stepping stone toward seeking a national emergency acknowledgment from President Joe Biden.

Governor Bryan, in his Monday press briefing, emphasized the need for immediate solutions, including potential price freezes suggested earlier by Senator-at-Large Angel Bolques. The governor has given directives to WAPA to expedite measures addressing water quality issues, backed by substantial funding commitments, including a recent \$30 million grant.

On the health front, Mr. Bryan has directed the Department of Health to intensify health surveys, particularly for children aged zero to six. To date, no one has currently shown elevated levels of the concerning substances, according to the administration.

WAPA CEO Andrew Smith acknowledged the challenges and expressed his sympathy towards the affected consumers. He stated, "We understand that the challenges being faced are frustrating, and for that, we apologize for the inconvenience this has caused our customers."

With no definitive timeline for a complete solution to St. Croix's compromised water infrastructure, Mr. Bryan estimates a lengthy journey ahead. He believes the national declaration of a state of emergency is crucial, granting the territory additional resources and technical support. The governor candidly shared, "A lot of our money is tied to replacement of the system and replacements of parts. We don't have the resources to really give people free water."

Despite the uncertainties, Governor Bryan's message to residents remains hopeful, assuring, "We will get through this."