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St. Croix Administrator Seeks to Rescind New Trash Law Fines for Christiansted Business Owners: 'Let's Start Over'

In response to unexpected trash law citations, Samuel Sanes advocates for the cancellation of charges and proposes an educational campaign on waste disposal regulations

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Downtown Christiansted, St. Croix is a bustling business zone with everything from restaurants to jewelry stores. By. GETTY IMAGES

Following reports from the Consortium that business owners in the town of Christiansted [received citations and hefty fines](#) for violating a trash law they say they were never made aware of, St. Croix Administrator Samuel Sanes says he is trying to have the charges dropped. Mr. Sanes also

wants to have dialogue with V.I. Waste Management Authority officials about adjustments to their enforcement of the trash statute.

On May 23rd, WMA enforcement officers confronted Christiansted business owners about how they dispose of their business waste. Once the owners admitted to using public receptacles for the waste, they were given citations for violating VI Code Title 19, subsection 1563, which mandates that businesses utilize the Anguilla Landfill or engage the services of a business trash hauler. Many local business owners described the confrontation as distressing and overwhelming, including Maria Banwaree, owner of Unique by Maria Banwaree Art Studio and Boutique. Ms. Banwaree told Consortium journalists that she received no warning after learning she had been violating the law. After being threatened with arrest, the business owner said that she felt coerced into signing the citations. A week later, according to Ms. Banwaree, Mr. Sanes was at her establishment to personally apologize for the confrontation.

“He said in the name of the VI government he wants to apologize. He said that a couple of times. He says he feels so bad because we the people in Christiansted don't need this,” Ms. Banwaree told this reporter, describing her interaction with Mr. Sanes. According to Ms. Banwaree, Mr. Sanes approached her following a meeting with the Executive Director of WMA, Roger Merritt.

“I've spoken numerous times to the executive director for Waste Management basically asking him to see if the charges can be dropped. I truly believe that a more comprehensive approach should have taken place. In other words, advise the business owners on the rules and regulations,” Mr. Sanes said.

He noted that given the conflicting stories— one from business owners who say they were never made aware of the law, and the other from WMA who claim that there was a town hall meeting informing business, as well as other warnings— he recommended to Mr. Merritt that all citations and fines be dropped, followed by a months long territory-wide informational campaign to ensure that local businesses are aware of the law.

While Mr. Sanes recommended adjustments to the enforcement of the law, he also expressed skepticism about the usefulness of the law itself, especially the application of the law for very small businesses, such as vendors on the Boardwalk, who produce very little trash. “Are we going to demand that one vendor, which is a table, actually get a hauler, a trash hauler? For what, the possibility of a small bag of trash?” Mr. Sanes queried. “It's something that we really need to go back and explore.”

The St. Croix administrator believes that the law should be further reconsidered given the financial struggles Christiansted businesses have faced due to months of road repairs and closures. “It is a hardship for many small businesses at this time. So that's one of the reasons why I approached Waste Management and I told them, let's start all over again,” Mr. Sanes said.

Meanwhile, after the talk with Mr. Sanes, Ms. Banwaree said she decided to team up with other nearby businesses to collectively engage the services of a trash hauler. “We are organizing ourselves in advance, because we understand if we have information that we need to follow the law and follow the rules. But the thing is, they come before saying anything to us, just with the fine.” She nevertheless looked forward to the possibility of having that original fine reversed. “I hope that Mr. Sanes says the truth and I hope that the government really take actions,” Ms. Banwaree said.

Unlike Ms. Banwaree's relatively positive experience, another business owner who also received a citation and fine, said she was unaware of any action from Mr. Sanes to drop the fines or any other updates on the issue. Nevertheless Jan Mitchell of Mitchell Larsen Studio, had decided to take things in stride. "Maybe the whole thing will just pass and it'll be fine with me. I hate making waves, I'm just not that kind of person, but I'm not going to not do anything if it calls for it. So we'll see— it'll play out," she said.?

As of press time, Mr. Merritt has not responded to numerous requests for comment from the Consortium, nor has WMA issued an official statement on the matter.

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