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Legislative Silence Enables \$192,088 Salary for Governor, \$95,000 for Senators; Public Questions Motives

The VIPOCC's salary recommendations were approved by default after the 90-day window passed. Francis claimed he never received the report. Governor Bryan confirmed receipt but stayed silent until Gov't House's Sunday press release

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Public concern is growing as questions arise regarding a Government House press release issued late Sunday about significant pay raises reportedly taking effect on January 1, 2025.

In the release, Governor Albert Bryan references a report from the V.I. Public Officials Compensation Commission (VIPOCC), stating that the salary increases have already taken effect

in accordance with the law governing the commission. The VIPOCC report analyzed 41 benchmark positions across government to determine appropriate salary adjustments. These included roles in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, as well as key leadership positions in various departments and agencies.

The commission proposed increasing senators' salaries from the current \$85,000 to \$95,000. Additionally, the VIPOCC introduced longevity pay, granting a 5% annual increase for senators serving four or more terms based on the prevailing base salary. [In October 2020](#), senators' salaries were untethered from the lowest-paid commissioner's, effectively keeping their pay at \$85,000 as the salary of Department of Sports, Parks & Recreation Commissioner Calvert White increased to over \$100,000.

Also at the forefront of the recommendations are significant pay adjustments for the governor and lieutenant governor, with the governor's salary proposed to increase to \$192,088, representing a 21.9% rise from the current \$150,000, and the lieutenant governor's salary set to rise to \$168,231, reflecting a 25.7% increase.

The VIPOCC stated that it emailed the report to Governor Albert Bryan Jr. on August 13 2024, which Mr. Bryan acknowledged receiving. The report was also sent to Senate President Novelle Francis, who was responsible for presenting it to fellow lawmakers for their review, and brought on the floor for a public hearing. However, the Legislature failed to act because senators did not receive the report, with Mr. Francis reportedly claiming he never received the email from the VIPOCC, ultimately allowing the salary increase law to take effect. The Senate was tasked with appointing at least three members to the VIPOCC board. His statement suggests that the VIPOCC did not follow up to confirm his receipt of the report, nor did it provide a hard copy, despite the significant importance of the matter.

Community members have voiced concerns that the negligence exhibited by both Mr. Francis and the VIPOCC may have been intentional. Additionally, Government House, despite Governor Bryan acknowledging receipt of the report, failed to share its findings until Sunday—after the 90-day Senate review period had lapsed without any hearings or decisions.

Even so, the current submission from the VIPOCC failed to comply with the requirements of the law, as the [report](#) was issued two years late, in violation of [Act No. 8384](#), which mandated the first report be [submitted by May 2022](#). This delay raises questions about the validity of the governor's claim that the increases have already taken effect and places additional pressure on lawmakers to address the issue promptly.

According to Government House, the VIPOCC, appointed in November 2021, faced delays due to funding and procurement issues.

Governor Bryan praised the commission's efforts in developing the report. "I want to thank the Virgin Islands Public Officials Compensation Commission for their dedicated work on this comprehensive report," he said. "As part of my commitment to transparency, I am informing the community of these changes, which are the result of legislation enacted by the Virgin Islands Legislature to address the compensation of public officials in a structured and informed manner."

The report highlights that public officials' salaries in the Virgin Islands are competitive within broader markets, averaging:

- 9% above the market 25th percentile.
- 1% above the market median.

- 3% below the market 75th percentile.

Governor Bryan emphasized the importance of these adjustments in supporting public service. "Our public officials serve critical roles in governing a Territory with unique challenges and responsibilities," he said. "The adjustments outlined in this report aim to ensure that public service remains a viable option for attracting and retaining skilled professionals while maintaining fairness and fiscal responsibility."

The study identified several positions that fall significantly below market standards, including:

- Attorney General: -19% below market median.
- Inspector General: -15%.
- Taxicab Commission Executive Director: -29%.

To address these disparities, the report proposed targeted increases, including:

- Commissioner of Labor: An 8.2% raise, bringing the salary to \$136,221.
- Supervisor of Elections: A 13.8% increase, raising the salary to \$127,556.

The VIPOCC recommended a six-grade pay system (E1 to E6) with standardized salary progression. Employees would receive 3% annual increments for years of service, up to the maximum of their pay grade. The plan also includes mechanisms for locality pay adjustments to account for the Virgin Islands' unique labor costs.

Governor Bryan praised the data-driven nature of the report and called the process transparent. "This process reflects the Legislature's intent to establish a data-driven and transparent approach to public officials' compensation," Mr. Bryan said. "I remain committed to keeping the community informed and ensuring that governance in the Virgin Islands operates in an open and accountable manner."

The proposed adjustments align with the average market 50th percentile, according to the report, with payroll costs projected to increase by 1.8% under the preferred Option II. The report also calls for comprehensive salary reviews every 4-5 years and annual or biennial cost-of-living adjustments of 2-3%.

The VIPOCC is composed of nine members, including Dr. Haldane Davies, who serves as Chairman, Ms. Melonie Gomez as Vice Chairwoman, and Ms. Asiah Clendenin-Gumbs as Secretary. Other members include Attorney Joel Holt, Attorney Henry Smock, Kenneth Hermon, Dr. Valdemar Hill Jr., Edward Thomas, and Frank Abednego.