

WICO Continues Push for Senate Approval to Forgive \$10 Million Debt

Despite previous rejection from lawmakers, WICO is again seeking forgiveness for its \$10 million PILOT debt. CEO Anthony Ottley has requested meetings with Senate leadership to propose a revised payment structure, advocating for a percentage-based formula

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The WICO Dock in St. Thomas, USVI. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM

While the West Indian Company has been reporting [improving finances](#) over the past fiscal year, a major challenge to revenue – and thus profitability – remains.

“The company is still hampered by a \$700,00 PILOT, which is Payment in Lieu of Taxes payment,” said Anthony Ottley, WICO's chief executive officer, during a Public Finance Authority board meeting last week.

Failure to remit the annual PILOT payment over the years has resulted in over \$10 million in arrears owed by WICO. An attempt last year to have that debt forgiven [was rebuffed](#) by the 35th Legislature, but Mr. Ottley says that WICO will try again with the 36th iteration of the territory's lawmaking body.

“We will try to work with the legislative branch on a reduction of the payment amount and forgiveness of the current balance,” Mr. Ottley said. “We have provided draft legislation in the past and have requested a meeting with the 36th Legislature's leadership to restart discussions.” WICO officials have requested meetings with Senate President Milton Potter, Majority Leader Senator Kurt Vialet, and Finance Committee Chair Senator Novelle Francis.

According to the WICO CEO, the amount due should be a percentage of annual revenue rather than the fixed \$700,000. Calculating the PILOT in this manner “would be more equitable and would allow WICO to meet our obligation to the Government of the Virgin Islands and to improve the company's credit rating, putting us on a better financial footing,” Mr. Ottley said.

During the December 2024 Senate hearing, former Senator Donna Frett-Gregory pushed back on against WICO, which at the time sought to have the debt be forgiven. “This is a hard one for me,” admitted Frett-Gregory. After reviewing WICO's finances, she indicated, “I'm still not understanding why WICO is unable to pay its PILOT to the people of the Virgin Islands.” By her interpretation, WICO maintains \$3.5 million in annual profits from which a portion could be used to pay the PILOT. “You all can pay this bill with your eyes closed,” she asserted.

Senator Novelle Francis seemed bewildered by WICO's suggestion. “There's not even room for negotiation here. You're simply saying just obliterate or defer the total amount,” he said at the time. With the Office of the Governor covering a portion of WICO's expenses for Estate Catherineberg, Francis argued that WICO should be able to pay at least some of the PILOT.

“Our intent is to pay, but we first need to be able to make the money and be able to have the funding to pay it,” Mr. Ottley told lawmakers. Frett-Gregory remained unmoved. “We expect to get a check for 2024,” she told Mr. Ottley. Y'all need to send a check down to the Department of Finance. Vendors are not being paid in this territory.”