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## Crucian Festival Vendors Await Payment Months Later, Prompting Legislative Outcry

**A St. Croix equipment supplier is owed \$65,000 as delays persist. With St. Thomas Carnival's \$2.8M budget and new sponsors secured, lawmakers call for fair, timely payment of local vendors and entertainers.**

Carnival / **Published On March 25, 2025 05:53 AM /**

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**St. Thomas Carnival Village 2016. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM**

Even as the V.I. Department of Tourism, carnival bands, musicians, vendors, and revelers alike are all gearing up for the 73rd St. Thomas Carnival, the excitement associated with the festivities is being overshadowed by bitter complaints over unpaid vendor invoices from December's Crucian Christmas Festival.

Senator Franklin Johnson first broached the subject during Monday's meeting of the Committee Government Operations, Veterans Affairs and Consumer Protection. "What's the status on the payment of the vendors on St. Croix," he asked Department of Tourism officials. Ian Turnbull, director of the Division of Festivals, revealed that some vendor payments are indeed unpaid. "We are working to get that completed before, hopefully, before April is out," Mr. Turnbull said.

Counting the months that have elapsed since the Crucian Christmas Festival, Johnson grew increasingly displeased. He lamented that international artists had long been paid in full. "This isn't fair what we do to our local entertainers or local vendors... That's their livelihood. They do nothing but entertainment... You think they could go to the grocery store and say, 'let me get this credit'? That ain't gonna happen."

The lawmaker disclosed that one St. Croix equipment supplier is owed up to \$65,000 in approximately a two-year span... "Who could survive being owed \$65,000? How do we intend to continue building Festival, making it stronger, but the people, the backbone of it continue to get cut short and have to wait years for payment?"

He urged the Department of Tourism to "be aggressive in paying our local entertainers."

The department has earmarked \$2.8 million to stage St. Thomas Carnival. In 2024, the Crucian Christmas Festival received a budget of \$2.2 million while St. John Celebration was funded to the tune of \$1.5 million. "When carnival done, I expect everybody in carnival to get paid, the same with Festival and the same with celebration," Mr. Johnson demanded.

DOT has employed the services of a third-party fiduciary to the tune of \$90,000 to ensure these payments are processed promptly, prompting committee chair Senator Avery Lewis to ask why payments were outstanding after four months.

"Where we usually have lag [is] people that provide services, invoices that we had to go over, clarify, make sure that all the work was done, or edit to include additional work," explained Alani Henneman, the department's assistant commissioner. "The last batch of those payments are going down to [the Department of Property and Procurement] to be justified, to make sure that we can close out St. Croix festival."

"Four months is an extremely long time, especially for these individuals. We know that sometimes this is the only gig that they have," added Senator Novelle Francis. Entertainment is what keeps them going and I think it's important that we're able to pay them." Francis indicated his intention to draft legislation that would earmark a portion of the budget to secure "local entertainment... because we just can't keep exporting all of the money."

Sen. Hubert Frederick also suggested that the Department of Tourism should review the amount paid to local entertainers, indicating that "their compensation is just not anywhere near where they think it should be... They're the ones who pay the taxes for us to have this opportunity."

Lawmakers are hoping that there will be no issues in paying vendors this time around, having learned that a host of major corporate partners have come on board as sponsors. Banco Popular, Southland Gaming, CC-1, and Cape Air will all contribute to the success of St. Thomas Carnival. Based on previous estimations, St. Thomas Carnival is expected to generate \$6-\$7 million dollars for the local economy, according to Turnbull.

This year, St. Thomas Carnival is scheduled for April 27 to May 3, 2025. Like previous years, it will feature the prince and princess show, the queen show, panorama, boat race, jouvert and the highly anticipated children's and adults' parades.

