

# Senator Barnes Calls on WAPA Board to Immediately Suspend Disconnection Policy, Saying Coronavirus Has Strained Finances of Virgin Islanders

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Senator Alicia Barnes today implored the Governing Board of the Water and Power Authority to immediately suspend its policy of disconnections to all customers, and called on the authority to immediately reconnect any customer it recently disconnected on the premise of Governor Albert Bryan's March 13 state of emergency declaration.

Citing the Energy and Policy Institute, Ms. Barnes contended that most major utility companies have indicated that they will suspend disconnection during the COVID-19 crisis. "This is a matter of saving lives," she said. "Nationally we already are aware of over 20 states that have taken some type of action to suspend disconnections. We must adopt this same mindset in the Virgin Islands."

Senator Barnes further informed the Governing Board that on March 20 sixteen Democratic U.S. Senators wrote to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer urging them to adopt a nationwide suspension of all utility disconnections, as part of the third COVID-19 relief package. Ms. Barnes stated that as a government, WAPA recently received assistance when it requested and needed it most. Now, the people of the Virgin Islands need WAPA to do what is right and suspend disconnections.

“We must work together collaboratively to combat the spread of COVID-19 in the territory,” she said.

The first-term Democrat asked all customers that are able to pay their utility bill to continue to do so. “I recognize that the authority needs to collect revenues to meet operating expenses. However, we must balance the needs of the Authority with the needs of the people during this crisis. I also know that those customers who can pay, will continue to pay, and I thank them in advance. However, we are all aware that many in our community will begin to experience economic hardship as a result of the measures taken to stop the spread of COVID-19, and we must help those individuals,” she said.

Ms. Barnes has also implored Governor Albert A. Bryan to support her stance to have all disconnections of water and electrical services suspended for a 60-day period.