

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## WAPA Given Authority To Bill Customers For Street Lights

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The Water and Power Authority will soon be able to bill customers for the usage of street lights, after an amendment, sponsored by Senator Clifford Graham of St. Thomas, gave the semi-autonomous entity the power to pass the expense on to customers when the company reduces the LEAC, currently labeled as a fuel surcharge.

Power bills in the [territory are expected to be reduced by 30 percent](#) once WAPA's propane initiative goes online in the first quarter of 2015. Clifford's amendment takes some of the savings away by allowing WAPA to bill street-light usage fees to residents. The amendment essentially takes a government obligation of keeping roadways lit and passes the expense down to customers, who already pay one of the highest energy

costs in the region.

In early September, WAPA Executive Director Hugo Hodge testified before [the senate](#) that the government owed over \$11 million in unpaid street-light bills. The funds currently allocated to paying for street lights, which is taken from property tax revenues, will be restored to the treasury.

At the Tuesday night hearing, where senators were able to narrowly avoid losing health insurance benefits for over 7,000 government employees, some lawmakers expressed their misgivings with the amendment, and St. Croix senator Nereida "Nellie" Rivera-O'Reilly advocated for the measure to be placed in committee for further consideration.

"If this amendment is approved, then the WAPA bills will drastically increase," Rivera-O'Reilly said, adding it should be immediately "taken off the agenda."

Graham countered, reasoning that the territory's roads are dark because the street lights no longer work, and that adding the amendment would not only make the roads safer, but also aid in balancing the budget. The amendment was passed with a majority of eight senators.

Those who voted for and against the amendment are as follows:

1. Senator Craig Barshinger — Yes
2. Senator Judi Buckley — No
3. Senator Diane Capehart — Yes
4. Senator Donald G. Cole — Yes
5. Senator Kenneth Gittens — No
6. Senator Clifford Graham — Yes
7. Senator Alicia "Chucky" Hansen — No
8. Senator Myron Jackson — Yes
9. Senator Shawn-Michael Malone — Yes
10. Senator Terrence "Positive" Nelson — No
11. Senator Nellie Rivera-O'Reilly — No
12. Senator Clarence Payne — Yes
13. Senator Tregenza A. Roach — No
14. Senator Sammuel Sanes — No
15. Senator Janette Millin Young — Yes

The amendment is now part of the V.I. Government's 2015 budget of \$558.1 million and will become law once signed by Governor de Jongh.