

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Capehart: Street Light Usage Charge To Residents Is The "Least Painful Solution"

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Responding to backlash stemming from her infamous "yes" vote on what *VI Consortium* is now calling "Streetlightgate," Senator Diane Capehart, on Monday, said in a press release that while she understands the push back against the measure giving WAPA the authority to bill customers for street lights usage, she finds it was the "least painful decision."

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"I have heard the criticism, and I want to explain why I support this amendment," Capehart said.

"The cost of lighting the streets in our territory have always been paid by tax payers. But under the current law, not all taxpayers pay that cost, making the way we currently fund street lighting not only unfair to those who are paying, but ineffective, as evidenced by our dark roadways and poorly lit areas in our town," she added.

Currently 4 percent of all property tax collected by the Virgin Islands Government is allocated to street light payments. According to Capehart, since not all Virgin Islanders own property, the current structure is unfair to residents paying the streetlights bill. Capehart did not, however, address whether all the property tax money allocated for street lighting was being used for that purpose.

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Late last Tuesday night in St. Thomas, the 30th Legislature met to [avert a looming insurance crisis for government employees](#), and to ratify the government's fiscal year 2015 budget -- adding, subtracting and amending measures. [It was there](#) that Senator Clifford Graham crafted the 'streetlights bill', which narrowly passed by a 8-7 vote count.

"If this amendment is approved, then the WAPA bills will drastically increase," St. Croix Sen. Nereida "Nellie" Rivera-O'Reilly said, advocating for the bill to be immediately "taken off the agenda."

O'Reilly's calls for prudence, however, were neglected.

Senators who voted for and against the measure last Tuesday night are as follows: