

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Human Services Commissioner Says Daycare Vendors To Receive Pay Monday Or Tuesday

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Last week, a frustrated Dept. of Human Services vendor, who runs the La Petite Daycare in Frederiksted, [contacted VI Consortium](#) and revealed that it had been months since the government paid her for her services. And this week, the *VI Consortium* has learned that Human Services Commissioner Christopher E. Finch says the business owner and others like her will be paid for their services, either today or Tuesday.

Carol Donowa said although she needed to pay employees last Friday, she had no idea where the money would come from to do so. Unrelated to *VI Consortium* running Donowa's story, Senator Nellie Rivera-O'Reilly, also hearing from distressed daycare owners, coincidentally wrote a letter to Finch requesting action be taken on the matter.

In the letter, obtained by *VI Consortium*, Rivera-O'Reilly said she had received "a number of calls from day care operators indicating that they have not been paid (some of them since September)." The letter pointed out that many of the daycare facilities employ workers who haven't been paid because payroll hasn't been enough to cover them. It also pointed out that as the holiday season approaches, such discrepancies create



employees and operators of these facilities."

Dept. of Human Services Commissioner

Christopher Finch

O'Reilly's letter speak to the frustration that Donowa has been experiencing with the Dept. of Human Services, something, Donowa says, perplexes her.

"I really don't know what is going on with the Government," Donowa told *VI Consortium* on Friday. "As far as I know, the money that is supposed to be used to pay us on St. Croix, is money that was being sent from Washington every October — that money is supposed to be there to pay us [vendors]."

Donowa said it's not the first time the Government has taken so long to pay, and that other vendors are facing the same frustrations.

"That's not the first time, but right about now, I really cannot bear down with it anymore. I really don't have any way of paying my employees tomorrow. I am tired of it. I have taken enough from my own, [and] I cannot continue doing that," she said.

In his response to Sen. Rivera-O'Reilly's letter, Commissioner Finch said unpaid daycare vendors would be paid early this week with the use of general funds. He said the federal funds that are supposed to cover vendor payments were "just awarded" and employees are currently working on getting the money on to the government's payment-processing system, ERP. Finch did not specify the length of time his department was in possession of the federal funds, however.

"We anticipate the child care providers will be paid on Monday or Tuesday," Finch said. "The payments are being processed now."

He added: "We are using general fund monies from other sources and will reimburse ourselves from the federal funds later. The federal funds were just awarded and we are working on getting them on the ERP, but we do not want the providers to go without payments so we are taking this route. I will keep you updated on progress."

Donowa, for her part, says Finch should not continue to be Commissioner of Human Services because he is "part of the de Jongh people," and that he has failed to do his job. Donowa also explained what she believes has caused the payment problem.

"We used to get our payment on time, but what happened, when de Jongh got into office the second term, that's when he asked the private company that used to issue our payments to transfer the money to the general fund, so that's when the problems started happening," she said.

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