

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Christensen On Crime, Governor Mapp And Changes To EDA Residency Requirement

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Former Delegate to Congress Donna M. Christensen has [retired from office](#), but, according to her, her concern for the territory remains as alive as it's ever been, as she has kept up with the issues, remained active in the Democratic party, and continues to lend her voice to matters concerning Virgin Islands' politics.

In fact, Christensen told *VI Consortium* it was she who got the wheels turning with the recent revelation by Gov. Kenneth Mapp that the residency requirement of Economic Development Authority (EDA) beneficiaries has been reduced from 183 to 153 days.

"After many other efforts alone or in coordination with EDA or prior administrations, in mid 2013, I wrote to the Treasury Secretary asking about the status of changes to EDA regulations that had been discussed. I don't believe I ever got an answer. So, late 2013 or early in 2014, I spoke with Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew about needing to have some follow up on the issue. He made the relevant staff available and we had a telephone meeting. Before the meeting I consulted with the governor [de Jongh] attorneys in D.C.," Christensen revealed.

Governor Mapp, while giving the keynote at a St. Croix Chamber of Commerce meeting earlier this month, said he was pleased to announce that the U.S. Treasury had decided to lower the EDA residency requirement, and although his administration played no role in bringing the changes to fruition, he was pleased, nonetheless, [to share the news](#).

Christensen continued: "We focused on the fact that there had been a proposal that a prior assistant secretary had planned to implement and we wanted them to follow through on it. It was a decision to relax the residency requirements by adding another 30 days of flexibility for travel outside of the territory. While they were supportive of our request and had reviewed the case in preparation for the meeting, they told us that the reason the regulation was not changed was because they did not feel the information from the Virgin Islands in support was adequate.

"And so, we called the [former] governor's people and explained what Treasury told us they needed. Around September or October, we received word from Treasury that it had been approved but that we should not make the decision widely public back then, and that it would take until around April [2015] to develop the regulations and make a formal announcement.

"At the State of the Territory Governor Mapp listed the relaxation of residency rules as one of his priorities. I remarked then that he would be happy to know that this issue would be an easy one for him because it was already done," Christensen said.

"The relaxation of the residency rules are the result of my efforts to reopen and pursue the issue, and Governor John P. de Jongh's administration's follow through," she added.

VI Consortium asked Christensen for her thoughts on the [recent report](#) from the Inspector General's Office detailing a myriad of non-compliance issues and inefficiencies with the EDA's implementation of the territory's economic development program.

"On the EDA report, I believe that some of the deficiencies in that period have been addressed, particularly quantifying the impact better, but it reflects a pervasive problem in the VI - monitoring and regulating anything," Christensen said. "Also, I am sure this is not the only place where regulations are not consistent with VI law, either. When I saw the recent legislation, I was also concerned and not supportive of the 100 percent tax benefits and length of the benefit period. We need the revenue, not just the jobs.

"It is a key program for bringing in revenue needed to jump start our economy in the shorter and medium term, as well as support for local new and already-existing businesses of all kinds, and so the administration and the Legislature need to make sure that we are doing all we can to ensure that we bring in companies compatible with our vision for the VI and to maximize the positive impacts of the program. Current evidence is

that they know and plan this," Christensen said.

Asked about governor Mapp's performance so far, Christensen said it would be unwise to judge him so early in his tenure.

"I don't think that it serves any useful purpose for me as Governor Mapp's former opponent to critique the administration, especially this early in their tenure. The people will be the best judge. If you want a reference, my [Economic Address in October](#) laid out Basil Ottley's and my plans," she said.

Crime has been an ongoing problem in the territory, and this year has seen a spike in gun deaths with more than 12 homicides recorded for 2015. Christensen agrees with Mapp's plan to seek help from the federal government, and stressed the importance of understanding the causes for violent crime that would inform effective preventive measures.

"The crime situation is unsustainable, destabilizing, frightening and heartbreaking," Christensen said. "I am not sure of all that is being done. I definitely agree with seeking further engagement from the Feds in support of our VIPD. Understanding the causes, addressing them, implementing prevention on all levels and improving police capacity to monitor what is happening across the territory, and to investigate and solve the crimes needs to be the highest priority. It needs to have a comprehensive approach that brings in all relevant agencies, and really, the entire community."

The former congresswoman also highlighted her past efforts in battling crime, as well as preventing it.

"In the past, I have brought in experts on adolescent violence prevention, USDOJ experts to advise and assist, the American Crime Prevention Council for town halls on every island, increased Customs and Border Protection and Coast Guard presence, funds for policing technologies, helped to bring back the postal inspector, and to release held-up LEPC funding and worked with different coalitions among other efforts," she said.

"This needs an all-hands-on-deck approach, and that is what I am hearing is supposed to happen," Christensen said.

In a previous interview, Christensen told *VI Consortium* she would reside in Washington, D.C., because, "My children and grandchildren are over there and I usually miss all the birthdays, so I'm going to try to stick around D.C. for a couple of years before I actually come home and retire."

Christensen did stress, however, that her visits to the territory will be frequent. "I will be back and forth," she said.

Her next trip to the territory will be in early April for Transfer Day celebrations.

Feature Image: Former congresswoman and V.I. gubernatorial candidate, Donna M. Christensen, speaks with Ernice Gilbert at the Frederiksted waterfront during the 2014 election cycle.

