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In First Batch of 2,595 Stimulus Checks Released This Week, Over 2,200 Went to St. Thomas. B.I.R., Finance Intends to Rectify Distribution.

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Senators who make up the 33rd Legislature on Wednesday pressured Bryan administration officials with the V.I. Bureau of Internal Revenue and the Department of Finance to ramp up the release of stimulus check payments from the prior goal of \$5 million a week to substantially more, in an effort to bring some financial relief to Virgin Islanders.

The matter was brought to the fore following a Consortium article [that highlighted](#) B.I.R. Director Joel Lee's comments, who had said the funds would start rolling out next month, and that it would take up to four months to issue the bulk of the checks.

As of Wednesday, \$3.9 million in checks had been issued, Mr. Lee told lawmakers. Senator Donna Frett-Gregory, as did many other lawmakers, was not satisfied with that amount, and asked when would the department hasten delivery. The senator sought specific dates as well. "It's probably going to be within a couple of weeks," Mr. Lee said, a response that proved unsatisfactory to Ms. Frett-Gregory.

"Director Lee I need you to be specific. Today is May 13, what is that date?" she pressured. Mr. Lee deferred to Dept. of Finance Commissioner Kirk Callwood, stating that D.O.F. cuts the checks and B.I.R. simply provides the information.

"This is exactly the problem that I have. We have an administration where we have a commissioner of the Department of Finance and we have the IRB Director. Either one of those directors should be able to answer that question," Ms. Frett-Gregory said, "because there should have been some collaboration by now to establish whether the end of June will be the last payment, [or] the 1st of July is going to be the last payment — that's all I'm asking and now I'm down to 30 seconds because I cannot get a straight answer. What is the answer?"

Mr. Callwood then said, "From our projections we plan to do \$10 million a week." Mr. Callwood later told Senator Kurt Vialet that Finance intends on cutting an additional \$6.1 million worth of checks to bring the week's total to \$10 million.

But of the 2,595 checks issued so far this week, most of the payments — over 2,200 checks — went to St. Thomas residents. Mr. Callwood said, "It's overwhelmingly St. Thomas." Mr. Lee said, "I think the first one was mostly St. Thomas," referring to the stimulus payments.

The matter was highlighted by Mr. Vialet. "The information being provided to us is that over 2,200 of those checks were given to the St. Thomas District and less than 300 checks to St. Croix," he said. Mr. Vialet, who stressed his support for the entire territory, called for parity.

The problem "needs to be rectified this week with the \$6.1 million, so when the \$6.1 million is coming out, the bulk can't go St. Thomas again [because] we have individuals in St. Croix that also need these stimulus monies," Mr. Vialet said.

Mr. Lee also stated that about \$50 million in checks would be issued. If \$10 million is released each week, it would take five weeks to release the bulk of the funding available. Governor Albert Bryan told the Consortium Wednesday that the U.S. Treasury advanced \$60 million to the territory, but \$84.7 million — [as originally stated by the governor](#) — remains available. Mr. Vialet said the amount as it stood Wednesday was below \$50 million, but that the number could increase as B.I.R. continues to work through tax filings.

Correction: May 15, 2020

Senator Vialet notified the Consortium today that though he initially said the total number of checks distributed was 2,995, he later corrected himself to state that 2,595 checks were distributed — 2,300 of which went to St. Thomas, and less than 300 to St. Croix. The story has been updated to reflect the correct information.