

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Says 2016 Budget Puts Administration On Path To Hire Promised 1,000 Employees

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ST. CROIX -- Governor Kenneth Mapp took action on multiple bills earlier this week, approving most while vetoing a few -- among them the [error-filled](#) GERS bill.

But the most significant of them, the governor says, is the fiscal year 2016 budget bill that keeps the government operational from October 1, 2015 to September 30, 2016. Mapp, who is eight months into his governorship, says the budget bill puts his administration on path to hiring the campaign promise of 1,000 employees. And at the launch event of the VI/PR Friendship celebrations on Friday night, the governor said pay increases to all government employees would soon be realized, albeit not all at once.

"Bill No. 31-0190 -- now Act 7758, making appropriations for the operations of the Government of the Virgin Islands, contains the funded vacancies that will put us on the path to hiring 1,000 new government employees," Mapp wrote in a transmittal letter to Senate President Neville James.

The governor then listed the government agencies and departments where he says new employment will be realized and, in some cases, salaries increased.

The Bureau of Corrections saw an increase in additional funding of \$1.9 million that will be used to hire new correction officers, support staff and provide pay increases; \$2 million in additional funding was secured for the Fire Service to hire new firefighters, support staff and pay increases as well; \$1 million in additional monies was set aside for the Dept. of Health for the hiring of more clinicians, environmental officers, administrative professionals and support staff. The additional funding will also provide pay increases to DOH employees, according to the governor.

The VIPD also saw an increase \$700,000 in its budget to be used for overtime and the hiring of 125 police officers, Mapp says, and \$600,000 for the Bureau of Internal Revenue to hire new officers. Additionally, \$5 million was secured for the Dept. of Education to hire more than 150 new teachers, support staff and to begin pay increases; \$500,000 for the Dept. of Public Works to expand staff and operations of the VITRAN system; \$1 million in additional funding for the Dept. of Sports, Parks and Recreation for the hiring of additional staff, pay increases and to provide more fun activities for the territory's youth; and over \$1 million for the Dept. of Agriculture to begin the "farmer's cooperative" for the Farm to Table school lunch program, as well as hire additional staff for DOA.

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"In several weeks, my administration will launch a major ad campaign advertising the many vacancies, qualifications and compensation benefits associated with these vacant, funded positions," Mapp said. "I will convene a meeting with the VI Hospital Health Facilities Corporation to effect a plan to move the hospitals' contract and per diem employees on the government payroll where they belong," he added.

The governor said he also realizes that many of the vacant positions are too low to attract qualified applicants, and has therefore directed the Director of Personnel to conduct classification reviews, desk audits and position upgrades.

"As decisions are made to upgrade these positions, we will advise the Senate and members of the public of the increased compensation associated with each position," Mapp continued. The vacancies will also be promoted to diasporas in New York, Atlanta, Florida and Maryland, representing US states where many Virgin Islanders reside.

The announcement comes as many in the community have been expressing disappointment in the Mapp administration, deriding the governor for what has been deemed as uncontrolled spending at a time when most in the community have been struggling to make ends meet. The administration is hoping that the new job opportunities will stem the tide of bad press, help decrease unemployment and start an economic revival in the islands, more pointedly St. Croix, whose economy has been the hardest hit

because of HOVENSA's closure.

But other problems persists. The territory continues to experience what's referred to as "brain drain", where skilled people leave their homeland for opportunities elsewhere, and the middle class continues to shrink, according to [data provided](#) by the Virgin Islands Bureau of Economic Research.

Even so, the governor said the FY2016 budget sets forth many of his administration's priorities, hence representing the first true picture of how he intends to move the territory forward.

"I note for the record that this is the first budget for the Mapp-Potter administration," Mapp said. "This budget sets forth many of our priorities."

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