

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Vetoes Controversial Legislative Investment Fund Bill

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ST. THOMAS -- According to a press release issued late Sunday, Governor Kenneth Mapp on Thursday vetoed the Legislative Reinvestment Initiative Fund bill, a measure that has caused major controversy in the territory as accusations piled up that the bill's \$1.5 million would not be used for local, nonprofit initiatives, but rather to help fund senators' upcoming campaigns. There were also claims that the bill was to repay senators for supporting the ArcLight/GVI agreement.

In light of the contention, Senate President Neville James petitioned Mr. Mapp to veto the measure, and the governor agreed, stating that while he favored greater support of the territory's non-profit organizations, the bill as written was problematic.

“I received correspondence from the Senate President requesting that I veto the bill and we consulted on this matter before I took action,” Governor Mapp said.

According to a press release Mr. James issued earlier this month, the senator said he made the request not because of the controversy, but after having several conversations with Mr. Mapp about bill no. 31-0299 — an act amending Title 33 Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 11 pertaining to government funds — which would allocate \$1.5 million to senators of the Legislature to use as philanthropic donations to community organizations in need of financial assistance.

The separation of powers doctrine, the release stated, requires that a government be divided into independent, but equal, branches of power. This allows each branch to avoid operational conflicts, but also prevent one from becoming more powerful than the others.

“This is an influential piece of legislation, but the ability for our government to perform proper checks and balances are also a vital part of efficient operation. It behooves this Body to assure that the separation of powers between government branches is recognized,” Mr. James said. “This veto will allow the Body to relanguage the measure in accordance with all federal and local laws.”

The senator added that there are numerous organizations who reach out to members of the Legislature for financial assistance and the positive effect the fund would have on the community would be significant.

“As I've stated before, this legislation would offer an opportunity for relief to the many impactful nonprofit entities in our community who might need assistance for their vital operations, and in order for the bill to be implemented properly we must assure that its language is sound in nature,” Mr. James concluded.