

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## Mapp Announces Pay Increases For Dept. Of Education, Bureau Of Corrections, Human Services And Lt. Governor's Office

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Ernice Gilbert **January 26, 2016**



ST. THOMAS -- Before Governor Kenneth Mapp made his way into the Earl B. Ottley Legislative chamber on Monday night, he was briefly interrupted by residents here who descended on the building in protest. Many were teachers who were dismayed that the governor had not announced pay increases for the territory's educators [at a recent press conference](#). However, unbeknownst to the demonstrators, the territory's leader had already planned on satisfying their desire at last night's State of the Territory Address, where he announced pay increases for the Department of Education, Bureau of Corrections, the Lieutenant Governor's Office and the Department of Human Services.

"Tonight, I am announcing that increases for employees of the Bureau of Corrections, the Department of Education, the Office of the Lt. Governor and the Department of Human Services have been reconciled and we are now authorizing the implementation of those increases," the governor said.

"About 3,431 employees in twelve agencies will receive approximately \$21 million in long overdue raises. We will continue to work to reconcile the remaining departments as well as quantify step increases for non-unionized classified employees. The Director of Personnel has assembled a task force to implement these personnel changes and ensure that all increases be effective January 1, 2016," he added.

The governor continued: "For a moment of clarity, we are working to provide some level of salary increase to all of our active employees, however in this first round of increases, all employees will not receive all that is owed to them. Given the multiple of bargaining units, employees are owed varying levels of step increases. Some have been fully paid, some are owed one step and others are owed multiple steps. After completing this first round, there will be bargaining units that will have remaining steps unpaid. However we want to ensure that as many employees as possible see some upward movement in their take home pay."

Mr. Mapp had made clear at the press conference where raises were disclosed, that more departments would be announced. He also reminded that the pay increases are not connected to retroactive pay owed to employees.

"We're trying to bring employees current and provide, after almost ten years of no salary increases in some instances — some facing layoffs because of lack of government revenues, others experiencing up to two years in salary reductions in the amount of 8 percent for each of those years, and the Legislature having restored those 8 percent reductions — we're now going to advance and payout what is owed under the contractual agreements," he said.

Asked by The Consortium how would the administration sustain the salary increases, the governor said there were new sources of revenue coming online, although he didn't identify any, and added that his administration would increase the budget to some degree.

"[The pay raises] are sustainable because a number of these raises are going to be shared by federal dollars because some of these will include federal employees," he said, adding that there was growth in the government's revenue stream, and monies owed were being paid. "And we believe that we can, to a certain level, allow an increase to the budget of the Virgin Islands without busting the budget," the governor said.

The news comes as a welcomed relief to teachers, many who joined their colleagues for a protest at the front of Government House in Christiansted on [December 8, 2015](#). There, teachers not only called for pay increases, but also for better working conditions.

"The governor doesn't want to be around mold; why should our children suffer mold," said one protester. Another, educator Doneel Meikle, special education resource teacher at the Pearl B. Larson Elementary School, who has a bachelors in business administration, a master's degree in special education, and is currently working on her doctorate in

administration and supervision, said she joined the effort yesterday in support of a new contract to include fair salary increases that would overtime compete with leading jurisdictions.

“I feel that teachers now deserve a new contract. I know that we have a new governor; things are fresh and new, and this is a good time to sit at the bargaining table,” Ms. Meikle said. “I think we need to be at the bargaining table and assure that teachers get a new contract, and that’s one of my biggest concerns.”

Mrs. Rosa Soto-Thomas, president of AFT, echoed Ms. Meikle’s stance. She said Mr. Mapp needed to appoint a chief negotiator and get back to the bargaining table with the Federation.

The governor [has since appointed a chief labor negotiator](#), Mrs. Natalie Nelson Tang How, to negotiate with the unions and encourage them to enter into a stipulation that would come into alignment with the government’s method of paying by departments.