

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Must Determine Whether To Use Taxpayers Money To Buy Limousines; Violet Says

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ST. CROIX -- A firestorm was [ignited](#) when residents learned that a bill intended to buy emergency vehicles for various government departments and agencies, included some \$350,000 to purchase "ceremonial vehicles" for the executive branch. Because of the controversy surrounding the measure, the bill was tabled twice, but during a Monday Committee on Finance meeting, Senator Kurt Violet, after amending the measure to change the controversial language, brought the bill to the Senate floor and received the support of his colleagues, who favorably forwarded the legislation the full body.

Bill No. 31-0224, which was [originally proposed](#) by Sen. Neville James on the request of the governor, changed language that said "ceremonial vehicles", and replaced it with

“vehicles for the Government of the Virgin Islands”. It also removed language that said “Office of the Governor and Office of the Lieutenant Governor”, and replaced it with “Government of the Virgin Islands”.

“After inquisition by legal counsel and speaking to Government House, and speaking also with the P.F.A. (Public Finance Authority), I’m offering an amendment that is going to establish a revolving credit facility that will take care of all of our emergency vehicles, and the credit facility will not exceed an initial term of 5 years with a renewal period of three years, and will raise the amount from \$8 million to \$10 million,” Mr. Violet said.

The measure essential gives the Mapp administration and Public Finance Authority a \$10 million line of credit to buy vehicles for the first responder and law enforcement agencies. It also includes funds for road-paving equipment to be utilized by the Department of Public Works, and for 50 additional employees at said department to maintain the territory’s roads, which will be bolstered by federal funding. The \$10 million will also include funds for new video surveillance equipment at the Bureau of Corrections, as well as new equipment for the Virgin Islands Fire Service.

But the bill’s nature is open-ended, meaning it puts the onus on Governor Kenneth Mapp to use as he sees fit, including to purchase three limousines that the administration had so ardently requested.

In making his case for the new limousines, Governor Mapp said in August 2015 that the current fleet had aged, and maintenance cost had gone up significantly.

“The Governor’s official vehicles were purchased back in 2005; they are in constant need of repair and are an embarrassment to the territory,” Mr. Mapp said. “During my inauguration on January 5, my official vehicle collapsed at Emancipation Garden and I had to be transported to the next inaugural event via police transport. I suppose this was symbolic of the state of the government I was inheriting. Currently the Lieutenant Governor travels via police vehicles because he has no functioning official vehicle.”

The story invited the ire of residents, who complained, on The Consortium’s [website](#) and [Facebook platform](#), that such a move was careless, prompting Mr. Violet to respond. The senator said his intention was to make available funds to government departments and agencies in dire need of new vehicles. And while the legislation does make available the funding for the governor to buy the ceremonial vehicles, Mr. Violet [said he was not in support](#) of Mr. Mapp’s insistence that the new limousines be purchased at this time.

“During the past few weeks numerous departments have requested vehicles to include D.O.E. (Department of Education), Y.R.C. (Youth Rehabilitation Center) and The Taxicab Commission. The language allows the Government of the Virgin Islands to have flexibility to meet the needs of the people,” Mr. Violet wrote. “I do agree that ceremonial cars should not be purchased and hope that Governor Mapp listens to the cry of the people. However, that is a decision that he must make and the electorate need to effectively let him know their concerns.”

Mr. Violet later told The Consortium that the Y.R.C. vehicles request was not included in the measure because he thought the rehabilitation program was overseen by the Bureau of Corrections; which is already covered under the current bill. Y.R.C. falls under the

purview of the Department of Human Services.

"The governor should use the extra funds to purchase the vehicles for Y.R.C., not ceremonial vehicles," Mr. Violet said.

It remains unknown whether the governor will heed the people's concern, or if he will move ahead and buy the ceremonial vehicles. It's also not clear if amendments will be added to the bill by the time it arrives to the full body, that would specifically require the governor not to purchase the limousines at this time.

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