

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bill Creating Commission To Set Pay Of Public Officials Clears First Hurdle

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ST. THOMAS -- Senators who make up the Committee on Government Affairs, Consumers and Veterans Affairs on Wednesday approved a bill dubbed the [Public Officials Compensation Act](#) that seeks to create a compensation commission with the goal of setting salaries of public officials every four years.

The commission would take effect on January 15, 2017 and would be comprised of three members appointed by the Senate president, three by the sitting governor and three by the Virgin Islands Supreme Court's chief justice. Once the commission completes its work of setting salary increases, it would be disbanded and reformed four years later.

Those who stand to be affected include the governor, members of the governor's cabinet -- including all commissioners and directors of government agencies, the lieutenant governor, the attorney general, judicial officer, senators and all elected officials in the territory who receive remuneration.

"This bill addresses attempts to depoliticize the issue of compensation for public officials," said Senator Positive Nelson, the bill's chief sponsor. "The truth of the matter is, it really doesn't matter whether you're trying to increase your salary by five cents or five thousand dollars, there is always going to be a concern of an appearance of conflict."

The bill's easy passage out of the committee follows [contention last year](#) between the Mapp administration and 31st Legislature senators, after Governor Kenneth Mapp unilaterally raised the salaries of all his cabinet members, including that of then-Finance Commissioner nominee Valdamier Collens by \$28,000. The matter was later settled when the governor [agreed to cap](#) all cabinet members' salaries at \$105,000.

The measure, along with a Senator Sammuel Sanes-sponsored bill that allocates funds derived from traffic fines directly to the Virgin Islands Police Department instead of the government's general fund, was approved without opposition.