

The Virgin Islands Consortium

G.E.R.S. Slow To Issue Retirees Loan Refunds, Other Benefits; Blames \$11 Million Software

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Handcuffs with dollar banknotes on a black glass

ST. CROIX -- The Office of Senator Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly since October 2014, [wrote](#) leadership at the Government Employees Retirement System (G.E.R.S.) requesting that the pension system accelerate the process of making loan refunds to over 50 members. The system also owes death benefits to survivors for a number of years, according to Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly, and a large amount of first-time retirees had yet to receive -- in 2014 and 2015 -- their first retirement checks.

In an email sent to this publication late Tuesday, Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly revealed that those issues still persist today.

"While retirees wait, they fall behind on their financial obligations and many experience health issues and even foreclosure. In the interim, every inquiry made of you during Senate hearings is met with the same nonchalant response," Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly said in the letter.

G.E.R.S. has blamed the nonpayments on software complications, and promised that issues with [VITech](#), the software provider, would be rectified so that outstanding payments could be processed.

G.E.R.S. has paid VITech over \$11 million for the software, which Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly has said "clearly doesn't work."

"Despite the astronomical investment, your office continues to rely on the old system. It is clear that VITech has not performed. The change control and change orders since initial implementation have only resulted in additional expense," she wrote.

Two years later and Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly said she remains disappointed in G.E.R.S.'s lack of responsiveness, as relayed in the 2014 letter. "The members affected deserve at the very least an explanation that is conveyed with compassion," she said.

The senator asked G.E.R.S. to keep in mind the negative impact the delays has had on its own staff members, who Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly says have to deal with, almost on a daily basis, the complaints of system members distraught by G.E.R.S.'s lack of responsiveness on attempting to assuage the situation.

"Their inability to respond and assist creates a poor working environment and further erodes employee morale," wrote the senator, highlighting a walk-out staged by St. Croix G.E.R.S. employees in 2014 as indicative of the deflated team spirit that existed at the pension system.

"There is a lack of urgency within the G.E.R.S.'s leadership to address the problems swiftly and to improve the quality of services it provides to members," Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly wrote. The G.E.R.S. has had ample time to resolve the software issues."

She said there must be accountability relative to this situation, and called for the system to produce "credible evidence that due diligence was conducted in the selection of VITech, and that the existing agreement contains provisions to protect G.E.R.S. from nonperformance by the contractor."

G.E.R.S.'s Board of Trustees will meet on Thursday for its regular meeting.