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## Protesters Pile Pressure on WAPA: No Raises for WAPA Executives

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Ernice Gilbert **June 25, 2020**

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**Protesters on St. Croix call for change at WAPA on Wednesday, June 24, 2020. By. ERNICE GILBERT FOR VI CONSORTIUM**

After starting a grassroots movement that ultimately led to a top WAPA attorney being let go for racially charged comments the attorney, Mark Kragel, made on Facebook, where he wrote, "F\*ck Black Lives Matter" and called the organization — [credited for sustaining the wave of protests that is leading to police reform in America](#) — "a domestic terrorist organization," the individuals who sounded the alarm on social media are continuing to pile pressure on WAPA, this time calling for the authority's governing board not to approve pay raises for WAPA executives.

Among other items on the board's agenda today, is [consideration for salary increases](#) for "executive management and confidential" staff of the authority.

But protesters on St. Croix decried the consideration, standing on the side of the road near WAPA's Office in Sunny Isle on Wednesday calling for change. They also called for broader reforms, and protests are set to continue.

Ineke Hodge, one of the individuals who took the firestorm from social media and onto the streets through protests, on Wednesday led a passionate call for change, using a mic and speaker to speak on a broad range of issues — all while streaming the protest action on the very platform where it all started: Facebook.

On the live feed were hundreds of individuals who commented as furiously as Ms. Hodge spoke.

On Thursday morning, she told the Consortium that change is needed on WAPA's board. "Considering how much the community has endured from WAPA already, we cannot afford to have decision-makers on the board that do not have the community's best interest at heart. Their actions create distrust and with so many issues concerning WAPA, we need trust worthy individuals on the board," she said.

Ms. Hodge said she joined others in taking to the streets following WAPA's hour-long board meeting that concluded with the board stating [it couldn't take action against Mr. Kragel](#).

Ms. Hodge said WAPA's subpar service and exorbitant rates have prevented Virgin Islanders with the skillset to lift the community from returning home. "We hope to inspire a change in the community that will create an environment for growth in our community. Many talented, gifted and qualified Virgin Islanders would like to come home but the conditions with WAPA make it difficult for them to bring what they have to offer back to our islands," she said.

She added, "As Virgin Islanders, and as a community we disagree on a lot of social issues. This is one thing that we all agree on. WAPA in a problem. I even mentioned that we should possibly look into renaming it. The authorities given to them seem to be too much. The people are ready to reclaim their authority of these three islands and create a wave of change!! Its long overdue! We should rename it and revamp the entire entity altogether."

Ms. Hodge along with Ce-Ce Mari Sanes have started an organization named [Flip the Script VI](#). "We're slowly building a team to make sure that we keep this as organized and structured as possible," Ms. Hodge said.

Senator Kurt Vialet on Facebook called for the protesters to [keep the pressure on](#). "Raises for WAPA management should not even be a discussion. Yesterday the board made the right decision with the termination, let's continue the streak and say no to the raises," he said Wednesday.

Senator Kenneth Gittens also expressed displeasure. "I am totally outraged by the discussions of the WAPA board to even consider raises for its executive team knowing their near total failure as leaders of that agency and given the territory's current economic crisis," he said.

The St. Croix senator added, "If this action were to take place, it would certainly work to disenfranchise the hardworking employees of WAPA and the ratepayers. This would be an absolute slap in the face given that we cannot see reduced rates nor see any stability in service. Salaries for WAPA's executives should be tied to performance and decreased until such time when there is reliable service, reduced rates and some level of actual accountability."

Mr. Gittens said he has asked Senate President Novelle Francis to bring WAPA back before the body senators could receive updates on several issues and resume formal discussions of proposed reforms. "I am, most frankly, disgusted that raises are even on the table at this juncture. It should be noted that, despite their many failures, the salaries for WAPA's management are already higher on average than those of any other government agency."

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