

The Virgin Islands Consortium

D.H.S. Division Of Family Assistance Employees Call For Pay Raise, Better Working Conditions

VIC News / **Published On October 04, 2016 12:05 PM /**

Ernice Gilbert **October 04, 2016**



ST. CROIX -- It was just about noon on Monday when a Consortium reporter saw about 10 Department of Human Services, Division of Family Assistance employees on the outside of the department's Frederiksted complex with picket signs.

They had gathered at the location, they said, to bring to the fore poor working conditions that they've suffered through, and complained that it had been ten years since anyone in the Family Division had received a salary increase.

Hesitant to admit that the action yesterday was a protest (some employees hid behind picket signs), the employees said they simply wanted to capture the attention of the

Mapp administration and D.H.S. Commissioner-Designee Anita Roberts.

"We just want our voices to be heard," said one employee. "It's not a protest, it's not a strike. We need the community to know what's going on. We need the government to know what's going on."

The employees said the department is short-staffed; said their union hadn't received a date to begin negotiations with the Office of Collective Bargaining, headed by Natalie Tang How, and that an employee, who performs critical work, would soon no longer be employed as her contract of more than 20 years will soon expire, but instead of hiring someone to replace the employee, D.H.S. instead wants to spread the workload on other employees, who contend that they're already overworked.

We're burned out," said another employee. "We also don't have any supplies to work with here. The the place is filthy, we don't know who is cleaning it but many times the office needs to be cleaned," yet another employee said.

The employees said they would stage the protest "for as long as it takes," but Ms. Roberts told this publication this morning that the protest was over, and matters of concern had been resolved. She said she would be meeting with the employees today, but that a discussion held yesterday had been productive, and that a summary today's discussion would be provided to The Consortium.

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