

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Vetoes Measure Allowing Retailers To Use Plastic Bags Until August

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ST. THOMAS -- Governor Kenneth Mapp has vetoed [an attempt](#) by the Legislature to postpone the effective date of the plastic bag ban, a move made by the Senate following lobbying by grocers who said they needed additional time to use plastics bags that had been purchased before the law took effect. The plastic bag ban law [took effect in October 2016](#) and called for the end of plastic bag use in most cases by businesses in the territory on April 1, 2017.

In a letter to Senate President Myron Jackson explaining reasons for his actions on a section of Bill No. 32-0040, the governor said more should be done to protect the environment, not less.

“Change requires courage,” Mr. Mapp wrote. “Many retailers and consumers have greeted the ban on plastic bags well. They prepared themselves, spent thousands of dollars on brown bags and reusable shopping bags. Many businesses have purchased large orders of bags in compliance with the new law. For whom and why are we retreating to re-allow plastic bags bag into the market place?”

Mr. Mapp cited the Federal Aviation Administration’s concerns, just recently expressed, over the future of St. Croix’s Anguilla Landfill. The vetoed section also would have required that anyone fined for violating the plastics ban be refunded.

“Repealing the ban on plastic bags while the community has accepted the change is a step in the wrong direction,” he stated.

During a whirlwind Senate session last month, the amendment's sponsor, Senator Kurt Vialet, said store owners who had purchased shipments of bags should be allowed to use them. “There were store owners in the Virgin Islands — both St. Croix, St. Thomas and also St. John — that purchased trailer loads of bags before we were able to implement the bill,” Mr. Vialet said. “The shipments arrived on island a month before the bill was enacted and those establishments now have trailers full of bags.” The second-term Democrat said instead of having the stores dump the bags in landfills, the amendment would allow them to exhaust the inventory.

The measure had also put in place criteria that businesses were to meet to be in compliance with the amendment. They included providing an invoice, bill of lading, bank statement or documents similar to either of the aforelisted, proving that the bags were purchased before October 7, which is when the law took effect. If the store can provide such proof, W.M.A. would be mandated to refund any plastic bag ban law-related violations, according to Mr. Vialet.

It remains to be seen whether the Legislature will override the governor's veto; the amendment received strong support from lawmakers.