

The Virgin Islands Consortium

First It Was Lack Of Power. Now It's 'Issues And Authorization Requirements': Mapp Struggles To Tell Truth About DSNAP Delay

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Ernice Gilbert **October 24, 2017**



ST. CROIX -- Governor Kenneth Mapp and Dept. of Human Services Commissioner Felicia Blyden on Monday changed the reason as to why the Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (DSNAP) has been delayed, which the governor said two Fridays ago would be delayed "two to three weeks" because the territory lacked electricity, and since residents would go purchase items that needed to be refrigerated, he would wait until power was restored to make available the DSNAP.

Mr. Mapp's two to three weeks promise of power restoration and the issuing of DSNAP was contrary to what the governor -- and Virgin Islands Water and Power executives -- have been saying, which is WAPA intends to have 90 percent of the USVI restored with power by Christmas 2017. When pressed on his response to the delay on Wednesday, Mr. Mapp shouted down a Consortium reporter.

But during his Monday press briefing, Mr. Mapp's last for this week (the governor is traveling to the U.S. on Tuesday, though he did not say where and for what reason), Mr. Mapp changed the reason for the DSNAP delay again, stating that the program needs authorization from the Food and Nutrition Service, a division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The governor also invited Ms. Blyden to explain.

She said because the program is federally funded, there are certain criteria that must be met before authorization is given. She then revealed that the Department of Human Services had experienced "some challenges" that created "additional issues." She said the DSNAP requires electronic payments, meaning a card will be used for payments. However, the local D.H.S. had experienced some setbacks because of connectivity. Furthermore, she said, D.H.S. needs to train staff in preparation for the DSNAP issuance, and a call center was being setup where residents could request information. But that process is not yet complete, and Ms. Blyden did not release eligibility requirements.

Ms. Blyden's explanation, and Mr. Mapp's own admittance that D.H.S. had experienced setbacks, stand in stark contrast to what the governor said two weeks ago, when he stated that the program was being delayed because the territory lacked power and that residents would go out to purchase items that needed to be chilled.

Ms. Blyden set a tentative application timeline of next week. Previously, the governor said all that residents would need to become eligible -- aside from identifying information -- was to prove that a homeowner or renter had lost power in their home.