

The Virgin Islands Consortium

60 Percent Of VI National Guard Soldiers Have Received Their Pay, Mapp Says; V.I.P.D. Making Progress With Overtime

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Virgin Islands National Guard (V.I.N.G.) Adjutant General Deborah Howell and Governor Kenneth Mapp said during the governor's Monday hurricane recovery press briefing that 60 percent of V.I.N.G. soldiers had received their pay for service rendered during Hurricanes Irma and Maria, while 40 percent were still waiting to be paid. The information was released following grumbling in the community that General Howell's statement weeks ago that soldiers were receiving their pay when most of them had not, was misleading.

General Howell, speaking with The Consortium following the briefing, explained the procedure that takes place when V.I.N.G. soldiers are called to duty, which includes steps that see soldiers being placed into the government's system as new employees, which she said could slow the process of payment. General Howell also mentioned additional compounding caused by the hurricanes, which affected the government's ERP payment system.

"The Guard are contract employees; there's no budget for the Guard. Once you call us out, we start then. So that's when you put in their paperwork... they're like brand new employees. Folks are being paid," she said.

Along with General Howell, V.I.P.D. Commissioner Delroy Richards, who also spoke with this publication following the briefing, revealed that the Department of Finance (D.O.F.) had only two employees working even on weekends to assure that checks were being printed, and that direct deposits were being made.

Mr. Richards stressed that there was no scheme to try and defraud officers. He said he signed off on the overtime pay, and assigned an individual to transport the documents to the Seaborne Airlines seaplane terminal on St. Croix, to be delivered to the D.O.F. in St. Thomas so they could be processed. And for officers concerned about not receiving a history of their salary through a stub, the commissioner said the V.I.P.D. intends to make available spreadsheets with the information until the issue is rectified.

"We know that it is money that they deserve," Mr. Richards said. "Nobody is saying that we're not going to pay them." The commissioner said he looked at the contract and noticed an issue that saw officers being paid time and a half when they were supposed to be paid double time. He said he immediately moved to rectify the error. "This is what the contract says and we have to do it that way regardless of what the cost is," Mr. Richards said.

In an effort to put the territory's current situation into perspective, Mr. Mapp reminded the community, including government employees working long hours, that the USVI was struck by two Category 5 storms in two weeks -- both during the month of September.

"We're working to make sure that our hardworking employees are paid and compensated," Mr. Mapp said. At the same time, he added, "We want to taper the expectations [because] we didn't get hit by a single hurricane; we had two and both were Cat 5 -- one on the north and one on the south."

Feature Image: V.I.P.D. officer directing traffic at Sunny Isle traffic lights intersection. (Ernice Gilbert, VIC)