

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Three Months After Hurricanes Irma And Maria, V.I. National Guard Soldiers Have Yet To Receive Full Pay

VIC News / **Published On December 20, 2017 10:53 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert **December 20, 2017**



ST. CROIX -- One soldier estimates he is owed \$10,000 by the V.I. National Guard since Hurricanes Irma and Maria, but had only received just over \$1,000 as of Tuesday. Another said he would soon "end up in The Consortium," if the nonpayments continued, halfway joking that he'd wind up doing something stupid out of frustration.

There has been loose talk among soldiers that the Guard is waiting on the government to first get its finances together before full payment is released, but aside from assuring its employees that they would eventually get paid for their tireless first responder work during the storms, over three months later, V.I. National Guard soldiers have yet to receive their full pay for their hurricane-related efforts.

They've received checks, but some as low as \$100. And now, these soldiers are wondering whether the Christmas season will pass before they receive what is owed to them.

"It's absolutely ridiculous," said a guardsman to The Consortium two weeks ago. Though not funny, the issue has become a running joke among soldiers, many of whom are in disbelief that over 100 days since Irma struck St. Thomas on September 6, and they had yet to be fully compensated.

During one of Governor Kenneth Mapp's hurricane recovery press briefings in Oct, V.I.N.G. Adjutant General Deborah Howell and the governor said 60 percent of V.I.N.G. soldiers had received their pay for services 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 prior that soldiers were receiving their pay when most of them had not, was misleading.

The latest information, however, casts even more doubt on the accuracy of General Howell's words. Because while soldiers were being paid, those payments have been only partial. The general defended the situation by telling The Consortium in Oct. that "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.

General Howell had explained a procedure that initiates 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. The general also mentioned additional compounding caused by the hurricanes, which affected the government's ERP payment system.

But the ERP system has been up for sometime, and other government employees have been receiving their pay. Soldiers have contended that after leaving their families behind -- many of whom were affected by the storms -- to help with first responder efforts, they are now left without monies due to them, and what's worse, they said, no timeline has been given as to when they would receive their full pay.

The Government of the Virgin Islands, under financial pressure even before Hurricanes Irma and Maria, has found itself in a worse position following the storms, forcing the government to agree to [a federal community disaster loan that not only breaks the government's covenant with its current bondholders](#), but weakens an already frail position in the bond market.

Compounding the matter is a 2018 budget deficit projected to be around \$250 million. How the gap will be bridged remains to be seen. But the government's inability to pay National Guard soldiers well over three months after the storms, may serve as a precursor of the difficult days ahead for the territory.

Feature Image: National Guard troops of Puerto Rico and the U.S Virgin Islands distribute food and water to the residents of Saint Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, Sept. 24, 2017. The Department of Defense conducts Defense Support of Civil Authorities

operations to assist civilian responders in saving lives, relieving human suffering and mitigating property damage in response to a catastrophic disaster. (U.S. Army photo by Pvt. Alleea Oliver)

© Viconsortium 2026