

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Waste Management Under Fire For Delay In Paying St. Thomas-St. John Trash Haulers

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ST. THOMAS -- The Senate majority caucus on Wednesday expressed its disappointment and concern to the Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority (WMA) after receiving multiple inquiries from St. Thomas and St. John trash haulers that the agency had yet to pay contractors for months of hurricane debris removal.

In their response to contractors, the senators highlighted what they said was WMA's unfair treatment to the local waste removal businesses whose services continue to ensure the health and environmental safety of the community, considering the enormous challenge they faced following Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

Senate Majority Leader, Neville James, criticized the agency on the administrative bureaucracy which he believes is causing the delay of payments.

"It should not be this difficult for contractors to get paid when they are providing a necessary service to a community who is trying their utmost to recover and rebuild following these two devastating hurricanes," Mr. James said. "They are some of the many hometown heroes who are working long arduous hours to get America's Paradise back to normal and should be treated with that respect."

Senator Marvin Blyden, who will be holding a Committee on Housing, Public Works, Waste Management and Planning hearing regarding the issue among others on February 7, also called out WMA.

"I am very concerned that our local contractors who have been carrying the Waste Management Authority throughout the years have not been paid since the hurricanes. This is disturbing and unacceptable for this type of behavior to continue," he said.

Senator Kurt Vialet joined his colleagues in urging WMA to remedy the issue which the majority believes has demonstrated a disregard for the commitment of the trash haulers to the recovery of the territory.

"All contractors who are tasked with the clean-up process should be paid timely. It is ludicrous to have contractors on the job from the inception of the storm performing garbage collection and disposal who have not received a single check. It is imperative that this be remedied immediately," Mr. Vialet said.

And Senator Janelle Sarauw denounced WMA for committing what she deemed a disservice to these local contractors who have also been personally impacted by the storms.

"Our local contractors who stepped up for the recovery after the record setting hurricanes even when they themselves suffered losses during the storms, deserve to be paid for their work, their service," Ms. Sarauw said. "It has been four months and it is unconscionable that we have not taken care of our own. These people have families and businesses to maintain."

Mr. James also indicated that majority members were not made aware of the issue occurring in the St. Croix district, but emphasized that a standard of consistency and accountability should be expected across the board when it comes to the timely compensation of local contractors regardless of what island they operate on.

"Senators are in contact with the powers that be to assist in expediting payments to the haulers who have not yet been compensated," he said. "There's a need for open lines of communication between the executive branch, the legislative branch and semi-autonomous agencies during this time of recovery and restoration as it relates to normalcy being reestablished in the territory."