

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Says He Will Not Punish Education Commissioner For Using Government-Owned Generator Without Permission

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ST. CROIX -- Governor Kenneth Mapp broke his silence on the scandal that has bedeviled his Dept. of Education Commissioner, Sharon McCollum, who the Office of the Inspector General said "acted inappropriately" and used "bad judgment" [when she utilized a government-owned generator at her](#) home following Hurricane Irma, without the consent of the government.

The governor revealed his stance on the issue during a [portrait unveiling ceremony](#) held at Government House here today, an event that was held for Governors Charles W.

Turnbull and Lester R. Schneider.

"The investigation has confirmed that in fact the generator was moved to the commissioner's home shortly after the passage of Hurricane Irma," Inspector General Steven van Beverhoudt wrote in a letter addressed to Governor Kenneth Mapp and Senate President Myron Jackson dated May 29. It has since been relocated to a storage area at the Adelita Canryn Junior High School, according to the Office of the Inspector General report. Ms. McCollum stated that the generator was moved to her residence for security reasons and that her home was utilized at times as a base of operations, and therefore felt that her utilization of the generator was justified.

Mr. Mapp sided with Ms. McCollum, stating emphatically that he did not believe Ms. McCollum's actions merited any disciplinary actions -- far less her resignation.

In framing his statement on the matter, the governor sought to give context in which the commissioner used the generator: against the backdrop of a major storm that had ravaged St. Thomas, leaving the island in a blackout. Hurricane Irma was followed by Maria, exacerbating an already desperate situation.

The governor also said that Ms. McCollum had taken teachers -- and in some instances their elderly parents -- into her home, many of whom had lost their residences as a result of the catastrophic storms.

"If on a normal day any official of this government should remove assets of this government and take them off for their personal use, the response from me as governor without prior proper notification, should be a tough one. It should be clear that the assets of the government of the Virgin Islands must be protected at all costs, and that we must know where our assets and our equipment are all of the time," Mr. Mapp said.

He then spoke of the ruinous events caused by the storms and Ms. McCollum's benevolence in rescuing some teachers and their parents who had lost their homes. The governor said the 16 kilowatt generator could not power a washing machine or dryer, and that the use of the generator by Ms. McCollum at her home, in the context of helping those she had rescued and against the backdrop of a Category 5 storm that had forced a territory-wide blackout, was not inappropriate.

Mr. Mapp said an edict will be forthcoming from his office in conjunction with the Department of Property and Property, that will call for the government to be notified before the government's assets can be mobilized. "But under the circumstances of that disaster and the housing and rescuing of employees of the Department of Education to get shelter, I am not, and I do not see any need to exact punishment or emoluments out of Sharon McCollum for what she did," Mr. Mapp contended.

The territory's leader said he read in its entirety the inspector general's report, which the governor quoted as stating that the generator was brought to Ms. McCollum's home by the government. But that's misleading; the generator was brought by a Department of Education employee, the maintenance director, on the directive of Ms. McCollum, according to the I.G. report. The governor also said the employees who serviced the generator received funds from Ms. McCollum to do so.

Mr. Mapp recalled mobilizing Ms. McCollum and her team all throughout the territory in an attempt to reopen schools within one month of the hurricanes, and therefore, he said, "I will exact no punishment or extract any emoluments from Sharon McCollum for the use of the generator."

The Office of the Inspector General, however, concluded that the generator should not have been moved to the commissioner's home, and more importantly it should not have been connected. The I.G.'s office also concluded that the administration of Ivanna Eurdora Kean High School — where the generator was originally in use — should have been notified of the move; and the generator probably could have been used in some other capacity for the Department of Education or the Government of the Virgin Islands.

The I.G.'s investigation was launched following a rumor that circulated on local radio alleging that Ms. McCollum had taken the generator for use at her home. The generator was taken from the Eudora Kean High School's Talapia Farm and moved to Ms. McCollum's residence by D.O.E.'s assistant director of maintenance. It stayed at Ms. McCollum's home from September 2017 until it was moved to a warehouse at the Addelita Cancryn Junior High School on January 22.

In defending her actions, Ms. McCollum told the I.G. in an initial interview that she took the generator to her home to protect it from being stolen, stating that copper theft at the Eudora Kean High School had influenced her decision. However, the reports of the copper wire theft at the school's gym were made weeks after school started on October 9, and based on the statements of Kean High's principal and the teacher in charge of overseeing the Tilapia Farm, the generator was missing from the Tilapia Farm when they returned to assess Kean High after Hurricane Maria had passed in late September — weeks before the copper theft occurred. According to Mr. van Beverhoudt, Ms. McCollum could not explain this contradiction and maintained her position that the generator was exposed and unprotected at Kean High, so it was moved to her residence to be secured.

In a second interview, the commissioner said she had frequently worked from her home and therefore she believed her utilization of the D.O.E. generator was justified.

According to the report, Ms. McCollum repeatedly denied that she had the generator moved to her residence for the purpose of energizing her home while she was without city power. She stated that the generator was placed in the driveway of her residence in "plain sight" and that there was no attempt to conceal it. She further stated that she possessed two smaller generators for her personal use. However, Ms. McCollum acknowledged that she eventually had the generator connected to her home, but indicated that this was done after the generator was already on her property for a period of time.

"Based upon the results of the investigation, it is our conclusion that the commissioner of Education acted inappropriately when she utilized the generator to energize her personal residence," Mr. van Beverhoudt said. "While we cannot specifically determine whether or not the Commissioner had the generator moved solely for this purpose, we believe that the Commissioner should have used better judgement during the handling of this matter.

"Furthermore, the administrators of Kean High should have been explicitly informed that the generator was moved in an effort to avoid any confusion.

“Although it may not have been powerful enough to provide sufficient electricity for areas of Kean High, we believe that the generator could have been utilized in another capacity to support hurricane recovery efforts within Education or at other government locations,” the inspector general concluded.

[Read the original document](#)

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