

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Extends State Of Emergency To September 1

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Governor Kenneth Mapp has signed an order renewing the Virgin Islands state of emergency declaration through September 1, 2018, Government House announced Wednesday.

"As the territory of the Virgin Islands of the United States has suffered an emergency and a major disaster due to Hurricanes Irma and Maria, the need for a state of emergency continues to exist in the territory," the order states.

The governor recently came under pressure for the declarations, the latest being the seventh. [Congressmen have questioned](#) its continued use and recently Senator Tregenza Roach sponsored legislation that was supported by a bipartisan cast of

lawmakers, with an aim to limit how many times a governor could declare a state of emergency without Senate approval.

According to the bill, once the governor has twice called for a state of emergency, each lasting 30 days, “the governor shall submit legislation to the Legislature requesting an extension of the state of emergency. The request must include the specific reasons for the extension, the time-period of the extension, and a plan of action to address the conditions that necessitate the extension of the state of emergency. All subsequent requests for an extension must be submitted to the Legislature before the expiration of the extension that is in effect. The Legislature shall consider a request for an extension of the state of emergency not later than five days after its receipt. If the Legislature fails to consider the request within the five-day period, the state of emergency is automatically extended for an additional 30 days.”

“I know my colleagues have encountered the reality when our constituents ask why are we’re still under a state of emergency,” said Mr. Roach [while introducing the bill](#). “Why in a new hurricane season, why 10 months or more after [Hurricanes Irma and Maria] have passed are we still in a state of emergency? I don’t generally have an answer; I don’t know what you all tell them.”

“The idea behind the bill is that it gives the legislature an opportunity to have the governor or his representatives say to the body what has occurred during the state of emergency, the actions that have been taken, and the actions that remain to be done which requires an extension of the state of emergency,” Mr. Roach added. “This is about us, this is about the body. This is about the role of the Legislature and even in regards to the representatives of the governor when they tell us pointblank that they’re not coming to hearings. And there are actions that are taken that continue to undermine the role of this body.”

Mr. Roach stressed that the bill does not intend to take away the governor’s authority of declaring a state of emergency. “I think it’s very important to say that that authority remains intact, the renewal of a state of emergency remains intact that he can do it,” he said. “But any where after a period of two months of whatever event that triggered that state of emergency, the governor must present a case to the Legislature why this must be so.”

Testimony provided by the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency Director Mona Barnes, read by V.I.T.E.M.A. Deputy Director of Planning & Preparedness Denise Lewis, as Ms. Barnes was off-island, vehemently opposed the measure.

“V.I.T.E.M.A. strongly opposes Bill No. 32-0185. This bill may unintentionally have an adverse effect on response efforts during an emergency. It is the agency’s position that placing another level of approval to extend a state of emergency during a time of crisis may delay the ability to make extremely critical decisions on behalf of the residents of the U.S. Virgin Islands,” reads the testimony.

Senator Marvin Blyden, a co-sponsor of the measure, said the bill seeks to give the Legislature a say in matters of the territory during disasters. “This bill is not about power, it is not about this governor in particular. It is about our role as legislators and this body as a whole when it comes to the state of the territory and emergencies,” he said.

Senator Janette Millin Young said members of the community were questioning whether corruption influenced the declarations. “They’re starting to question whether there may be instances of corruption. I don’t want to believe that there is any corruption. But who am I — speaking from the outside just like the general public — to say whether anything funny is going on,” she said.

Myron Jackson, another sponsor of the measure, highlighted the bipartisan support the measure enjoyed as a sign of its necessity and the consensus on the matter. “The Legislature sees wisdom in this piece of legislation,” he said.