

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bill Codifying Mapp's Minimum Wage And Base Pay Increases Among 12 Measures Signed Into Law By Governor

VIC News / **Published On September 27, 2018 10:08 AM /**

Staff **September 27, 2018**



A measure that extends Governor Kenneth Mapp's increased minimum wage for executive branch employees to those working for the Legislature, Judiciary and all semi-autonomous agencies and independent instrumentalities -- as well as codifying the July 30th executive order raising base wages for government workers -- was among 11 others signed into law by the territory's leader on Tuesday, Government House has made known.

Mr. Mapp praised the Legislature for the action. "I commend the members of the Legislature who voted on this measure to provide living wages for government employees," Mr. Mapp wrote in his transmittal letter to Senate President Myron Jackson.

The governor also approved a bill allowing greater use of property tax credits to reduce the tax obligations of homeowners given damages sustained by the 2017 hurricanes. However, he urged the senators to adopt additional language limiting the use of credits to two years.

"Not providing a cut-off date for the reduction will result in a perpetual loss of revenues of approximating \$1.7 million annually," he wrote. "I concur that seniors, veterans and those with disabilities should be excluded from the limitation of applying exemptions."

Mr. Mapp expressed concern over senators' efforts to eliminate gross receipts taxes for health care providers who receive Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements. He vetoed Bill 32-0244, saying it would mean a \$7 million loss to the territory and could negatively affect access to federal Community Disaster Loans. The same bill includes a section reducing additional staffing funds for the Herbert Grigg Home for the Aged from \$500,000 to \$350,000.

"As you are aware, the care given to residents of the Herbert Grigg Home is critical and would be jeopardized by this reduction. The Department of Human Services has relied on these funds and is currently increasing staffing to accommodate 12 additional patients. Why pull the rug from under the Department now and force it to deny families the help they need?" the governor wrote.

He vetoed a bill seeking to curtail the ability of any governor to extend a state of emergency following a natural disaster.

"This measure is irresponsible; it reeks of politics," he wrote. "The Virgin Islands of the United States remains under a Presidential State of Emergency. The Presidential State of Emergency exists so federal agencies can respond and assist the people of the Virgin Islands in a more responsive and timely manner. The Virgin Islands' State of Emergency exists so that we can expedite the procurement process and response to federal imposed cost share deadlines. While I understand the need of some Members of the Legislature to ask for a 'go slow' process, this adds no benefit to the recovery of the Territory ... this measure will only result in delaying the Executive Branch's immediate response to disasters and increase the territorial cost as we rebuild."

Government House said the governor was pleased to approve several Coastal Zone Management permits he had previously sent down to the Legislature, to include:

- Minor Coastal Zone Permit No. CZJ-29-16(W) for Low Key Watersports.
- Minor Coastal Zone Permit No. CZJ-14-16(W) to the Brent Squires Revocable Trust.
- Minor Coastal Zone Permit No. CMJ-2-14(W) to the Joseph John Marcus Trust.
- Minor Coastal Zone Permit No. CMJ-24-17(W) issued to Pillsbury Sound Land Company.

He also acknowledged a resolution honoring and commending the Family Resource Center for its services to victims and families in the U.S. Virgin Islands over the past 32

years.

Since opening its doors in 1986, as an emergency shelter for women and children, the Family Resource Center (formally the Women's Resource Center) has grown into an organization providing safe housing, crisis intervention, counseling and numerous services for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault.

"Accordingly, on behalf of a grateful Territory, it is fitting that the Family Resource Center, Inc. be commended for its contributions to the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands," Governor Mapp concluded.

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