

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Signs Into Law Bill Placing Execution Of Festivals And Carnival Under Dept. Of Tourism

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Governor Kenneth Mapp has signed into law a bill that places the execution of the territory's carnival and festivals under the Department of Tourism, a move that represents a sea change moving forward, as the bill defunds the current carnival and festival committees, and creates a new system through which carnival and festivals in the territory should be achieved.

In his remarks accompanying his signature of the measure, Mr. Mapp said, "It is clear that the Legislature and taxpayers want answers on how the public funds donated each year to our carnival and festivals are spent and managed. It is the Senate's hope that this measure will bring some transparency and accountability to our festivals and carnival

operations. I concur with the bill's purpose and hope it accomplishes its objectives."

The Bill, numbered [32-0308](#), was sponsored by Senators Myron Jackson, Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly and Janelle Sarauw. It does the following:

- Establishes the Division of Festivals within the Department of Tourism, whose function is organizing and executing festivals and to re-establish the Virgin Islands Cultural Heritage Institute within the Department of Tourism.
- It charges the Dept. of Tourism commissioner, with the approval of the governor, to appoint a director and three assistant directors: one for each island -- St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John. It says the D.O.T. commissioner must choose a director on the basis of knowledge of and familiarity with coordinating incentives for, and planning and promoting festivals. The director of the Division of Festivals shall serve under the direction and control of the commissioner of Tourism. The law also gives the D.O.T. commissioner leeway to employ other persons as may be necessary to administer the job.
- Execute a timeline and work plan for the management of the festivals and carnival to ensure smooth operation and that deadlines are met.
- Establish a team of volunteers if necessary
- Recruit and supervise staff, interns, and volunteers
- Create and oversee the programming for festival arts and events
- Build and maintain professional relationships with promoters
- Provide for and oversee the coordination of guest artists, including arranging travel and local transportation, and ensure a positive experience for visitors
- Execute fundraising efforts that includes sponsorships, memberships, individual and business donations, ad sales, and fundraising events
- Make contracts and execute all instruments necessary or convenient in the exercise of any of its powers
- Maintain and manage all corporate sponsorships
- Organize and secure the resources necessary for all festival art events
- Develop an overall marketing plan and oversee development of an aggressive marketing campaign
- Work in collaboration with stakeholders in both the public and private sectors to promote festival arts and all other matters pertaining to festival arts
- Perform other duties and responsibilities as it pertains to festival arts

The bill was created based on senators in the 32nd Legislature displeasure with the management of public funds used to put on carnival, and the VI Carnival Committee's (St. Thomas Carnival) clandestine attitude related to how the monies were being spent.

During [an August 2018 Budget hearing in the Committee on Finance](#), senators, irate because of the lack of information that was being provided by the VI Carnival Committee (St. Thomas Carnival), assailed committee members and vowed to change the system. The lambaste came after testifier Halvor Hart, who serves as executive director of the VI Carnival Committee, had initially failed to furnish complete financial records to lawmakers. Instead, Mr. Hart only provided records of the 2018 \$545,000 the committee received from the Government of the Virgin Islands to put on the VI Carnival, even as the VI Carnival Committee's gross total was \$837,369.01 — leaving an unaccounted difference of \$292,369.01.

Mr. Hart immediately came under fire from lawmakers not pleased with the partial information. The senators were even more incensed because it was only June of 2018 that the Committee on Workforce Development, Consumer Affairs and Culture had subpoenaed the carnival committee after it failed to provide detailed accounting information, and the no-show of key carnival committee members.

During the August 2018 budget hearing, however, lawmakers' patience had arrived to a tipping point. "Let me you ask you a question," outgoing Senator Rivera-O'Reilly offered, "if there is nothing to hide, what impedes the committee from sharing information?" The question was directed to Mr. Hart, who responded by stating that information was provided in the documents submitted. But Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly, unsatisfied, pushed back. "That only speaks in detail to the funds that are given to you by the Government of the Virgin Islands. It does not include any detailed information beyond those dollars. Are you aware of this? Yes or no." Mr. Hart said he had provided a profit and loss statement relative to the funds raised outside of the government's \$545,000.

Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly, known for doing her research and digging out information from testifiers, was unsatiated. She told Mr. Hart that just as he had furnished detailed numbers relative to the \$545,000 provided by the government, she needed such detail accounting of the remaining \$292,369.01. "If you have nothing to hide, why is the committee not complying?" she asked.

Mr. Hart said the information relative to sponsors was confidential and could not be provided. But Mr. Rivera-O'Reilly immediately rebuked him: "We are not asking you to tell us who your sponsors are... but how you spend that money is still the business of the people of this territory."

She then charged, "Well, you are rogue."

Taking a break from Mr. Hart, Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly trained her sights on Davidson Charlemagne, chairman of the Crucian Christmas Festival (sometimes called St. Croix Carnival), asking him to respond to allegations of corruption. Mr. Charlemagne told Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly that whatever documents the committee requested would be furnished. "If you want receipts, if you want open books, doesn't make a difference for us. We don't get sponsors besides the Virgin Islands government and we go down to the nail with it."

Senator Kurt Vialet, chairman of the Finance Committee, sensing the path the hearing would take with Mr. Hart not having detailed financial information, told Mr. Hart to go get the documents. But the directive to Mr. Hart was not before Mr. Vialet attempted to satisfy his own bewilderment. "Why would you not submit that?" the senator asked, referring to the VI Carnival Committee's financial records relative to private funding. "I don't understand why you would not submit the details for all the monies received by the committee. Why is the carnival committee putting a cloud over themselves? Why are you not accounting for \$290,000 in detail?" Mr. Vialet asked.

Giving in to pressure, Mr. Hart said he could go to the VI Carnival Committee's office to retrieve the information. "But you were asked to do it. I'm not getting that. You were asked already to do it. That was the whole gist, if I have it right, of the last time you were before this body. Why would you not walk with that information?"

It is not known how the new law will be funded. Every year, the Department of Tourism provides the St. Thomas Carnival and St. Croix and St. John Festival Committees with roughly \$1.7 million in total for the execution of the festivities. But the new law demands much more funding for the new director and three assistance directors, the employees of the director and assistant directors, along with other employees and the marketing efforts of the festivities.

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