

The Virgin Islands Consortium

AECOM Received \$17 Million On Thursday As Bryan Administration Works To Speedup Payment Process For Home Repair Program

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AECOM, the prime contractor hired by the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority (VIHFA) to execute the Sheltering and Temporary Essential Power (STEP) program, known locally as Emergency Home Repair VI (EHRVI) Program, on Thursday received a payment of \$17 million from VIHFA, a source with firsthand knowledge of the payment has confirmed to The Consortium. The source said Governor Albert Bryan and his team were working overtime to see that monies owed to contractors and subcontractors working in the program get paid. The \$17 million was received in two payments, this person said, \$10 millions and \$7 million.

The funds will be used by AECOM to pay its contractors, who in turn are supposed to pay their subcontractors. A plethora of off-island men working on various FEMA-related disaster recovery programs in the territory have been complaining of egregious treatment from their contractors, who they accuse of leaving them stranded without pay in the territory. On Friday, Uniify, a Louisiana-based firm along with its subsidiary Uniify of Puerto Rico, filed suit against a string of contractors in District Court, claiming lack of payment totaling more than \$1.4 million. There was also a job action earlier this week in St. Thomas by off-island men working on the home repair program. The men, who contacted The Consortium, said they were protesting nonpayment and inhumane treatment from subcontractors.

Between late October and early November of 2018, a Consortium investigation of a company named Campbell Development, whose treatment of workers on St. Croix was appalling, [led to a raid of the company's offices](#) by Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Police and the Department of Homeland Security, Office of the Inspector General and other federal enforcement arms.

In a release issued Wednesday, the VIHFA said it along with the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency and FEMA, were working to expedite outstanding payment to AECOM.

The authority described the approval process for invoices submitted by the program's prime contractor, AECOM, as "complicated," stating that the process involves multiple federal and local agencies. According to the authority, FEMA releases funds through its local agency counterpart, VITEMA, where invoices must go through an audited approval process. Thereafter, the Virgin Islands Department of Finance must approve payments for the program before they are released to VIHFA.

"To date, AECOM has been paid \$112 million for the work done in the program," said Daryl Griffith, VIHFA's executive director. "FEMA will not make any payments until repairs have passed inspection. Payments to the prime contractor can be delayed because the repairs on some homes have not passed inspection."

He added, "Presently, VIHFA is awaiting the release of a \$5.7 million payment this week and a \$20 million payment within two weeks. We will then immediately pay AECOM which in turn is responsible for paying its subcontractors."

According the Housing Finance Authority's release, EHRVI is a FEMA reimbursement program. Phase 1 was initially approved to perform minor emergency repairs in single-family, owner-occupied homes. Approximately 5,500 homes have been repaired through the EHRVI Phase 1 program while in EHRVI Phase 2, permanent code compliant roof repairs have been completed on 841 homes, the release said. The program is actively working on 436 home roofs and will begin shortly working on an additional 617 roofs. The EHRVI program will have completed permanent code compliant roof repairs on over 1800 homes in under 8 months.