

The Virgin Islands Consortium

WAPA Receives \$22.9 Million Of \$39.5 Million Medicaid Payout In New Bill; JFL Receives Funding For Raises

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The Rules and Judiciary Committee convened in St. Thomas on Monday to hear testimony pertaining to Bill 33-0101, originally 33-0072, an Act appropriating \$39,467,909 that was awarded to the V.I. Medical Assistance Program as a result of a multi-year account reconciliation and review of the territory's health care and government entities. The legislative body re-appropriated the bill's funding with the bulk of the money, \$22.9 million, going to the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority (W.A.P.A.).

The measure was initially held in committee because senators decided that it needed [further vetting and that stakeholders'](#) input needed to be heard. The opportunity was provided during a recent Committee of the Whole hearing.

WAPA had called a meeting with senators last Wednesday to relay the authority's desperate need of the cash. It said Vitol, which supplies the authority with propane, had threatened to cut off supply if payments were not furnished. And WAPA contended that the \$22.9 million it's asking for are funds owed to it by the territory's two hospitals.

In Monday's meeting, Senator Donna Frett-Gregory stated that the Senate received correspondence from Vitol demanding payment, but expressed concern that Vitol was the only firm of the multiple WAPA contractors to do so. "It seems like Vitol has inside intel," she said. Mrs. Frett-Gregory asked that once W.A.P.A. received the \$22.9 million, that it reports to the Senate what vendors were paid and how much. "I hope the vendor uses the money for the reason it was requested. The body wants proof of that."

Senator Steven Payne said he and his colleagues realized that the bill could not address every ill the territory is facing. However, he said, senators spent a lot of time deliberating on it to ensure that the agencies and stakeholders involved got the "biggest bang for their buck."

"Even though a large percentage is actually going to W.A.P.A., all of the agencies will receive most of the funding they actually requested," Mr. Payne said. He added that lawmakers would deal with W.A.P.A. at the appropriate time so that government offices are not held hostage by the astronomical rates that they now pay.

Funds were also allocated to the Juan F. Luis Hospital for salary increases. The inclusion of the funding was agreed upon by Senators Kurt Vialet, Alicia Barnes, Javan James, Novelle Francis, and Allison DeGazon during a meeting with JFL employees in May. Governor Albert Bryan [opposed the raises at the time](#), and it remains to be seen if he will line-item veto the funding -- approximately \$1.1 million -- when the bill arrives at his desk.

The Department of Health (D.O.H.) received over \$3 million which will be released when the department provides a copy of a comprehensive plan to service the needs of the territory's most severe mental health patients. Human Services received funding for its "Meals on Wheels" program, and additional funds were allocated for Schneider Regional Medical Center's (S.R.M.C.) operating room and for J.F.L.'s cardiac services.

Senate President Novelle Francis said, "We have issues and concerns about W.A.P.A. management and it is something that we have to address holistically." Mr. Francis expressed that several reiterations and attempts have been made by the Senate to fittingly appropriate the funds.

Senator Kurt Vialet pointed out that the funds were reimbursed because of underpayment to the V.I. government's healthcare sector and felt that overall the bill is one that addresses healthcare. "The monies were for healthcare and we needed to make sure that the monies were going to be spent for healthcare," he said. In his words, "The W.A.P.A. debt has been a noose around J.F.L. and S.R.M.C.'s neck," and now they will have a zero balance.

Senator Alicia Barnes called the bill the "most prudent compromise" used to be able to satisfy the needs of the entities from which the funds are generated and due while satisfying some longstanding financial obligations. "We have had the opportunity to

correct the errors made with the attempts to appropriate these monies,” Ms. Barnes said.

Senator Janelle Serauw acknowledged that the bill is not perfect, and that while the government entities were not receiving all they had requested, there were critical needs that needed to be addressed. “We have a broken healthcare system,” she said. “We need to do more fiscally to invest in it and make pertinent changes.”

Bill 33-0101 disbursements are as follows:

- W.A.P.A. \$22.9 million
- V.I. Waste Management \$3.0 million
- Frederiksted Health Care, Inc. \$2.5 million
- St. Thomas East End Medical \$1.8 million
- Department of Health \$3.1 million
- J.F.L. (Salary increases) \$1.1 million
- J.F.L. (Vendor/repair/equipment) \$1.4 million
- S.R.M.C. (Salary increases) \$1.6 million
- S.R.M.C. (Vendor/repair/equipment) \$1.4 million
- D.O.H. \$750,000.00

Dept. of Health Disbursements

D.O.H. funding is for the care of mentally ill persons on the territory’s roads and public spaces; the Meals on Wheels programs; the purchase of an ADA accessible bus for the Estate Richmond Community Center in St. Croix; construction of shower facilities at the Estate Richmond Community Center in St. Croix; repairs and maintenance at the Queen Louise Home for the Aged in St. Croix; purchase of an ADA accessible bus for the Queen Louise Home for the Aged in St. Croix; and purchase of an ADA accessible bus for the Eldra Schullerbrandt Residential Facility in St. Thomas.

The legislative body worked together to come to a consensus and finalizing disbursement of funding for Bill 33-0101. Senator Javan James described it best when he said, “The word of the day is “we” not “I.” He expressed that he felt the body had done a good job of coming together to resolve the issue at hand.

Bill 33-0101 was approved by the committee and forwarded to the full body for further consideration.