

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Health Commissioner Says D.O.H. Aiming for Thursday to Finally Provide all EMTs With Promised Salary Increases

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Ernice Gilbert **September 09, 2020**



Emergency response vehicles parked at the Dept. of Health's Harwood Complex in Christiansted Tuesday, Sept. 8, 2020. By. ERNICE GILBERT FOR VI CONSORTIUM

Department of Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion on Tuesday evening told the Consortium that EMTs territory-wide would most likely see their salary adjustments, promised well over a year ago, on Thursday. The information was part of a brief interview with this publication where the commissioner responded to EMT complaints that only Governor Albert Bryan's brother, Robert Bryan, had received the promised salary

adjustment, retro pay and NOPA.

The commissioner straightway placed this concern to rest. "Not factual," she said. She acknowledged that Robert, a paramedic in the Emergency Medical Services Division, had received his adjustment, but that he was among half of the EMTs who had already been made whole. "Half of the people already got theirs... Several of them got it so now we're looking for everyone to see the realization of it on payday Thursday; we're praying that that happens." Ms. Encarnacion said she wouldn't know for certain until today if the checks would be available in time for distribution on Thursday, at which point she would provide more detailed information on the number of EMTs who had seen their adjustments and those still needing to be made whole. She did say that the adjustments had already been completed electronically, so it was a matter of whether payment would be ready in time for Thursday.

The commissioner in a separate confirmation told the Consortium that the EMTs who had received their salary increase were from both districts. "We work as a territory, so all," she said.

The salary increase has been a long time coming. The negotiations had taken place well over a year ago and the adjustment was promised for last July. But the promised raises never came, and [on Tuesday, Oct. 1st 2019](#), EMTs in both districts staged a sick-out. At the time two EMTs — both of whom requested anonymity — told this publication that the sick-out, which saw roughly 15 EMTs in St. Croix and about 16 in St. Thomas deciding not to show up to work, was a coordinated effort to get the Department of Health and other stakeholders to make good on their promise of effectuating long-promised wage increases.

"It's about broken promises. For the last two months we have been hearing every payday that we're getting our money, and the merge was supposed to be effective October 1 and we were told that we were going to get our money before October 1," said one of the two EMTs. "Payday came, today is Tuesday, and up to now nobody has come and addressed the problem." The merge the EMT was referring to was the effort to unite EMTs and the Fire Service into one unit.

At the time, Ms. Encarnacion had told the Consortium D.O.H. was able deduce the reason for the action. "You are correct. The EMTs in both districts have called out sick. Besides a "sick" call there have been no specific reason for the action. However, we have deduced the cause to be wage-increase related as a result of discussions had between EMTs, HR and D.O.H. leadership," she said.

On Wednesday, Oct 3rd 2019, Superior Court Judge Harold Willocks [ordered the EMTs back to work](#) after granting D.O.H. a temporary retraining order against the EMTs through their respective unions, according to the order which was reviewed by the Consortium.

Asked Tuesday why the adjustments had not been made earlier after being promised for well over a year, the commissioner said it had a lot to do with the processes in the last six months, with the major setback being the Covid-19 pandemic.