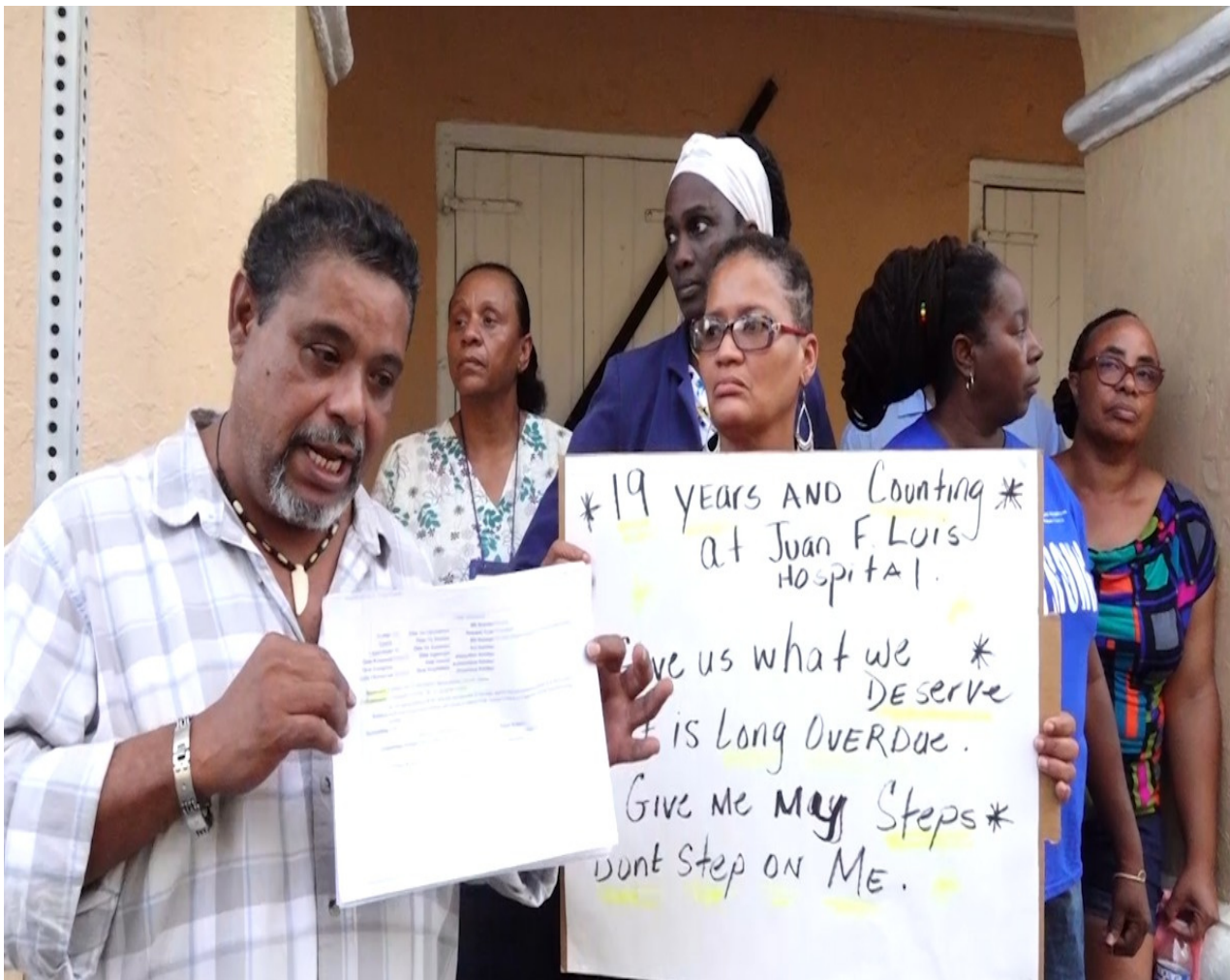


The Virgin Islands Consortium

\$2.8 Million In Raises Approved For JFL And SRMC Employees

VIC News / **Published On September 14, 2019 11:30 AM /**

Shenneth Canegata **September 14, 2019**



Executive board members of the Juan F. Luis Hospital and Medical Center (J.F.L.) and the Schneider Regional Medical Center's territorial board approved \$2.8 million in raises for all contract negotiations that were brought to the board for Fiscal Year 2018-2019. The raises were approved during a board meeting held on St. Croix on Thursday. J.F.L. employees received a total of \$1.1 million in raises and Schneider Regional employees received \$1.6 million.

The funding for the raises was sourced from 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 bulk of the bill's funding to the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority (W.A.P.A.) for payments owed to the authority by both of the territory's hospitals, with very little funding designated to address hospital needs.

In May, frustrated JFL employees expressed anger about the specifics of the bill's funding apportionment and granted the Consortium an exclusive video interview to air their grievances. The video, [posted on the Consortium's Facebook platform](#), was viewed over 48,000 times and received an immediate response from several senators. As a result, Senators Kurt Vialet, Alicia Barnes, Novelle Francis, Javan James and Allison DeGazon met with the employees to listen to their concerns and respond to their questions about how the \$39.5 million in Medicaid reimbursement funds, disbursed to five local medical facilities, would be spent.

The governor's response to the video was that hospital administration had played a part in how the funds would be spent, but during that May meeting between senators, the J.F.L. employees and some of the hospital's top brass, there was no indication that the hospital's leadership had been included in any talks for planned use of the funds.

Consequently, the meeting resulted in the lawmakers agreeing upon and [allocating funding](#) to J.F.L. for salary increases. At the time, Governor Albert Bryan opposed the raises and accused the senators of pandering.

However, Mr. Bryan did promise to address the J.F.L. employees' concerns relative to salary increases. "[We have a commitment](#) to the hardworking employees of JFL and all the government employees. We know they work hard; we have to get them paid but at the same time we have to have a priority," he said.

During a [Rules and Judiciary Committee hearing](#) convened in St. Thomas in June, Senator Kurt Vialet pointed out that the funds were reimbursed because of underpayment to the V.I. government's healthcare sector and felt that because the monies were for healthcare, the legislative body needed to ensure that it would be spent for healthcare.

The fight for funding and approval of raises for the territory's hospital employees has been a long and arduous journey, but the actions of the hospital employees spoke volumes. Their protest and expression of their grievances, in solidarity, resulted in lawmakers taking swift action to address their concerns.

[View the original embedded media](#)

Feature Image: Frustrated JFL employees protest for salary increases at Government House on St. Croix in May. (VI Consortium)