

The Virgin Islands Consortium

WAPA Sees 'No Basis' For State of Emergency Declaration, CEO Says In Strongly Worded Response To Delegate Plaskett

WAPA / **Published On September 25, 2019 08:30 AM /**

Staff **September 25, 2019**



WAPA CEO and Executive Director Lawrence Kupfer on Tuesday issued a strongly worded response to recent correspondence from Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett calling for a state of emergency to be declared at WAPA, the authority made known via release. Mr. Kupfer's response came in a letter to Governor Albert Bryan on Tuesday.

In her letter to the governor and Senate President Novelle Francis, Ms. Plaskett said that based on her in-depth conversations with WAPA officials and outside experts, "I believe that the Virgin Islands is suffering an energy crisis." The congresswoman said regular

power outages plaguing the islands are symptoms “ ... of more insidious problems facing the authority.”

She outlined a host of concerns – some widely known problems and some lesser publicized issues – that suggest an emergency declaration and attendant federal assistance are needed.

“WAPA must take radical, extraordinary steps for our people to receive efficient and reliable service in a financially sound utility system,” Ms. Plaskett wrote. “Indeed, WAPA may need to seek federal court intervention as the authority’s operations are under duress by several of its vendor/creditors, creating an unfair advantage and negotiation toward other creditors and the people of the Virgin Islands.”

According to the WAPA release, Mr. Kupfer said Ms. Plaskett’s reference to the problems at the authority being insidious in nature is a slap in the face to the hard working men and women of WAPA who regularly put life and limb on the line to maintain and restore power. The WAPA CEO also maintained that the delegate “ignores WAPA’s plans to address our challenges with the Virgin Islands Public Services Commission, and the transformation plan that we have developed and are executing.” Mr. Kupfer wrote that WAPA sees no basis for the requested state of emergency as many of the initiatives Ms. Plaskett proposed have already been or soon will be taken up by the authority.

With reference to the delegate’s call for “radical reform” that Ms. Plaskett insists must take place to bring in technical and financial assistance from federal agencies, Mr. Kupfer stated that “there is no need, to seek a radical reform in order to gain access to resources that are not only currently available but being utilized daily by the Authority.”

According to the release, the CEO reassured the governor that many of the initiatives suggested by the delegate were long being pursued by WAPA. Among them: technical expertise from the Department of Energy for generation planning; petitioning HUD to reevaluate V.I. allocations in the Bipartisan Budget Act; seeking RUS funding and tapping into additional federal assistance for the Virgin Islands.

The release says WAPA believes the delegate’s letter has been spurred by information that she has received from those that wish to see the authority operating under private ownership or court intervention, and that would receive substantial consulting and legal fees through a reorganization. “We have seen in recent weeks a plethora of so called experts that have taken to social and print media to provide grossly inaccurate and misleading information on authority operations,” Mr. Kupfer said.

He added, “We note that the delegate states in her letter that her conclusions are “the results of a thorough analysis of the root causes of WAPA’s financial insolvency, and operational deficiencies.” To that end, Mr. Kupfer asked the delegate to provide a copy of these root cause studies so that all understand the basis for her conclusions.

“I invite Delegate Plaskett to sit down with WAPA’s leadership and allow us to share accurate information, and discuss ways in which she can assist us and the people of this territory,” Mr. Kupfer said.