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At PSC Meeting, Ferry Companies Plead for Financial Help to Stay Afloat

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Varlack Ventures and Transportation Services ferryboat By. VARLACK VENTURES' FACEBOOK PAGE

The St. Thomas-St. John ferryboat operations are facing monumental financial headwinds as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and are seeking government aid to keep daily operations going. The call for help was made during a Public Services Commission meeting Tuesday.

Attorney Maria Hodge, legal counsel for companies Varlack Ventures and Transportation Services, said in a letter addressed to Governor Bryan and read at the meeting that the pandemic had gravely damaged the firms' bottomline. "In the direct wake of the Covid-19 Pandemic and government ordered closures of the non-essential businesses, the economic foundation of the ferry

companies has essentially collapsed," she said.

Ms. Hodge further stated that the loss for the year 2020 appears likely to reach 65 percent of the companies' normal annual revenues and that an inability to meet payroll is looming.

The companies are seeking a meeting with the governor to discuss financial and other forms of assistance.

In other ferryboat matters, the Charlotte Amalie downtown schedule was modified from a 1:00 p.m. departure to a 3:00 p.m. departure, according to the PSC. This change will accommodate the St. Thomas Cyril E. King Airport arrivals which are between 1:00 p.m. and 2:00 p.m.

Financial support from the government to the ferry companies would be additional funding, as the Bryan administration [had already provided](#) funding to the two passenger ferries as part of the government's \$75 million allotment of the \$2.2 trillion CARES Act passed by Congress in March. The funding was provided through a program called "Safe Transit". "One of the things we did early on was try to get the ferries to limit the number of people traveling to and from St. John. That, of course, had an economic result, so we are setting aside funds to give to both passenger ferry companies," said Governor Bryan in April without providing specifics on the cost of the ferry subsidies at the time.