

Waste Haulers Close to Finally Seeing Payday as Bill Providing \$15 Million to Satisfy Long Overdue Garbage Collection and Disposal Services Debt Moves Forward

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After years of not being paid for the important work of waste collection across the territory, a bill sponsored by Senators Donna Frett-Gregory and Kurt Vialet, which provides \$15 million in long overdue payments to waste haulers and landfill operators, was approved in the Committee on Finance on Thursday, and is expected to easily pass the Committee on Rules and Judiciary and breeze through the Committee of the Whole.

The payments, long overdue, will come as music to the ears of the waste hauling companies and landfill operators, who are part of solid waste service providers owed an accumulated \$29.9 million as of July, according to Jenifer O'Neal, director of the Office of Management and Budget. In fact, according to Ms. O'Neal, the government's total outstanding payment to vendors as of July

was \$47 million, meaning the bulk of the owed funds — a staggering 64 percent — are for solid waste service providers, which includes waste haulers and landfill operators.

The Bryan administration has made small payments on the debt on a number of occasions to stave off an environmental disaster. In June, a [planned work stoppage](#) was [scrapped](#) after the government made payments of \$2 million to \$3 million. On July 19, trash began overflowing at many sites on the island as the company contracted to collect the waste [refused to do so without payment](#).

According to the bill, "Not later than 10 days after enactment of this act, the Waste Management Authority shall submit a list of all waste haulers owed outstanding vendor payments along with the debt amount for each hauler to the Office of Management and Budget." The measure further states, "Not later than 30 days after the funds appropriated in section 2 have been allotted, the Waste Management Authority shall provide a report to the Legislature documenting the payments to waste haulers."

Ms. O'Neal has stated during several Senate hearings that the government's revenue collection has been outpacing expenditures. This has provided an opportunity for the government to make good on outstanding payments to vendors, with Mr. Violet seeing the additional revenue generated by the government as an opportunity to do just that.

The OMB director cautioned, however, that while the additional funding is available, lawmakers should be cautious and seek to limit spending. "I continue to reiterate that the appearance of a surplus must be viewed cautiously as there will be year end spending and other obligations that have not yet been posted in the Government's accounting system," she said during her testimony. Ms. O'Neal had initially committed the OMB to making payments of \$10 million as it was unclear the exact amount owed to waste haulers and landfill operators. However, she later committed to "up to \$15 million" with the funding authorization remaining available until expended.

"Waste haulers need to be paid, there's no discussion or dispute on that," said Senator Janelle Sarauw before chastising Virgin Islanders for the state of the territory relative to cleanliness.

"There is no question regarding the need to pay our trash haulers," said Senator Myron Jackson, sentiments echoed throughout the hearing.

A number of senators, including Mr. Jackson, joined Ms. Sarauw in expressing disappointment with the level of littering in the territory. "We've inherited a beautiful landscape, a beautiful environment compared to other places in the world, and we have allowed the worst to be the practice of the day," said Mr. Jackson.

Waste Management Executive Director, Roger E. Merritt, Jr., also expressed support for the measure, deeming the work provided by solid waste service providers as invaluable and essential.

A number of other lawmakers joined as bill sponsors, among them Ms. Sarauw, Novelle Francis, Alicia Barnes, Oakland Benta, Marvin Blyden, Dwayne DeGraff, Athneil Thomas and Allison DeGazon.