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Where is the Compassion for Struggling Virgin Islanders?

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Labor Commissioner Gary Molloy has directed his employees not to attend to Virgin Islanders who visit the department, citing Covid-19. By. VI LEGISLATURE

Labor Commissioner Gary Molloy won't allow employees to go outside to address burdened and struggling unemployed Virgin Islanders, some of whom for months haven't received a dime of unemployment benefits. His reason? Covid-19, of course.

The commissioner told the Consortium's Ernice Gilbert on Tuesday, "I know firsthand what it is like to be unemployed and not know how the bills would be paid. I was fortunate however, to know that I would eat even if it was one meal a day."

Yet Virgin Islanders stand in the hot sun outside the Labor department's offices, tired, broke and frustrated because they are not receiving answers when they call the phone, and employees can't attend to them because the commissioner has explicitly directed against it. In fact you could be written up for disregarding the directive, according to an employee of the department, speaking to VIC on the condition of anonymity Tuesday, fearing backlash.

Where is the compassion? Where is the "I-know-first-hand-what-it-is-like" consideration? Missing. How about erecting a tent outside and placing at least two employees whose job would be to address concerns? These employees would wear masks and residents would also be required to wear masks. Every department needs to go the extra mile in these difficult times.

For months, Virgin Islanders have been calling this publication with complaints. These Virgin Islanders, who have earned their unemployment benefits after working sometimes years without pause, need better treatment.

The department said it received 232,000 phone calls between July and Sept. 18. Yet, Molloy has failed to hire the employees necessary to meet demand. Instead, he complains: "There's nothing that we can do in moving it faster," he told Mr. Gilbert.

There are many things you can do to improve the department's service to the people, commissioner. Start by hiring many, many more employees to handle the inundation of claims.

On Wednesday, a senior citizen called the Consortium seeking help. She said she went to a FirstBank branch to use the bank's phone, as her own phone, she said, was cut because she didn't have funds to pay the bill. Impacted by the pandemic, she sought to learn when would 2018 tax refunds be paid.

This senior citizen is one of many Virgin Islanders young and old struggling during these trying times. And the role of the government is to help minimize the impact as much as possible, not add to the stress.