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Popular Directed to Reimburse St. Johnians for ATM Fees; Banking Board Approves \$4 Per ATM Transaction Fee for Non-USVI Banks

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The USVI Banking Board on Tuesday approved a motion directing Banco Popular to start the process of reimbursing its St. John customers who are currently using non-Banco Popular ATMs for transactions. The action was needed because Banco Popular was no longer at its prior location on the island, which has forced the bank's customers to use other ATM machines where fees are assessed.

The board also approved a motion to allow non-bank ATM providers in the territory to charge up to \$4 per terminal transaction for customers of non-USVI financial institutions.

Oran Roebuck, senior vice president of Popular's Virgin Islands Region, said the lease of the prior location expired. "After that expiration we have moved forward to identify an alternative location," adding that "Banco Popular has every intention to continue to provide ATM services on the island of St. John."

Ms. Roebuck said during the meeting that the bank has a "gentlemen's agreement" with a potential landlord for a new location but did not disclose that location as the lease was still being finalized. She expressed hope that in "another 30-60 days maximum we will be able to restore ATM services on St. John."

Ms. Roebuck said the new location would not be within walking distance of the ATM in Cruz Bay, however it would still be accessible as the new location has parking, handicap accessibility and is on the public transportation route. The new ATM will be indoor and sheltered, she stated.

Bosede Bruce, Dept. of Finance commissioner nominee, said, "If they can't walk to the ATM outside of Cruz Bay you can write that as inaccessible to the bulk of the community." Ms. Roebuck clarified that the ATM will be in Cruz Bay, just not the downtown section of Cruz Bay.

To receive a reimbursement, Banco Popular clients in St. John must make the claim while the ATM remains unavailable for use. Ms. Bruce urged Ms. Roebuck to set up a process that would make it easier, while engaging an awareness campaign to inform clients.

Tregenza Roach, Lt. governor and chairman of the Banking Board, appeared to be displeased by the timeline of securing a new Banco Popular ATM in St. John. "If we are talking about sixty days from today we are probably looking at May, June, July, August — maybe more than four months that customers have been without access to a bank ATM."

Relative to making it easier for customers to recover assessed ATM fees, Ms. Roebuck said, "We do not have any means to segregate St. John clients to be able to assume cost; we wouldn't know how to assume a cost. If a client makes a claim we can reimburse the cost. We have no way to segregate and identify and isolate St. John clients."

Earlier in the meeting Ms. Roebuck said the bank had not received any requests for reimbursement, which led to the approval of the motion directing the bank to reimburse its St. John customers. The motion also says the reimbursement process "will continue until services are resumed."

In a press release from the Lieutenant Governor's Office, Mr. Roach said, "As it pertains to Banco Popular, we have been in receipt of a number of complaints from St. John residents regarding access to the bank's ATM services and other inconveniences, particularly from our elderly population who are already forced to travel to St. Thomas for basic banking services."

Mr. Roach added, "Now, that is compounded by fees from non-Banco Popular ATMs, which have been incurred by St. John residents since April, when Banco Popular stopped providing ATM services. These concerns were shared with senior officials of Banco Popular and questions were raised regarding when ATM services would resume on St. John."

In the same release, the lieutenant governor spoke on the increased fees for non-bank ATM service providers. "Board members also voted unanimously to allow non-bank ATM providers in the territory to charge up to \$4 per terminal transaction for customers of non-USVI financial institutions. It is important to note that local residents who use local banks are excluded from being charged the approved fee increase for their transactions. The increase will not impact USVI

residents who are customers of USVI banks."

The new \$4 fee decision was made after Edward Forestel, who owns multiple non-bank ATMs in the USVI proposed the change. Tuesday's approved motion was the first increase in fees for non-bank ATMs since 2016.

In simple terms, if you're banking with a local bank, the \$4 fee won't be assessed. However, whether you are a local or visitor, once your banking institution is not USVI-based (FirstBank, Popular, Oriental, etc.) you will be assessed the new \$4 fee.

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