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\$40 Million in Stimulus Checks Projected to Go Out in February For Public Sector, March For Private; Persons Making Over \$70,000 Not Qualified

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Essential public sector workers as well as those in the private sector who earn more than \$70,000 per year will not qualify for the one-time stimulus payment that will be provided to those who had to continue working despite the Covid-19 pandemic.

“For the public sector employees and actually private sector as well, the Premium Pay is a one-time payment that is based on guidelines established by Treasury; you cannot go over a certain amount. If you make more than \$70,000 you cannot qualify to receive any Premium Pay at all,” said Jenifer O’Neal, director of the V.I. Office of Management and Budget during a hearing in the Committee on Disaster Recovery and Infrastructure Wednesday. Ms. O’Neal was responding to a question posed by Senator Kenneth Gittens regarding the number of people who are expected to

benefit from the \$40 million payouts.

"There are some salary guidelines that we have to bear in mind and it is a one-time payment that will be done. We will provide the plan once it is complete to this body but we do have specific guidelines that we have to follow [once it is Premium Pay](#), and we will continue to read through the 437-page rule document to make sure that we stay in compliance with Treasury," she said.

Governor Albert Bryan [spoke about the stimulus](#) to the Consortium during a Monday interview. "We have prioritized money to make direct payments to people because we know people in the community have been adversely impacted by Covid," the governor said. "It's actually for people that have worked directly with the public."

Mr. Bryan mentioned funding [going out at the end of January](#) to school lunch employees as an example of what to expect.

"All those people in our community like tellers, grocery store workers, restaurant workers — all the people who couldn't stay home during the pandemic — police officers, nurses. Of course there are guidelines on how we distribute any compensation, but those people who had to go out and work when everybody else stayed home, we're looking to see how we could reward those people," he said.

Ms. O'Neal said that because there are limitations, the amounts tallied by various entities may need to be scaled back to meet the guidelines of the U.S. Treasury and its 437-page rules document on how the \$547 million in coronavirus relief aid provided to the territory can be spent.

"So, even if the hospitals may have come up with \$20 million, that does not mean that they will get \$20 million or that all of those people will qualify because there are some income limitations," Ms. O'Neale explained while providing the committee with an overview and a [detailed update](#) on the proposed plan submitted for federal funding under the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act, or ARPA. The USVI has been allocated \$547,176,884 and as of Wednesday was in receipt of \$531,260,477.

Speaking about healthcare workers, Mr. Gittens said, "I am truly concerned about them and we cannot continue to be saying next month, next month, next month. This is why people are upset and feel as if these things have become like an election ploy because all the money will start running as we get closer to the election. Let's not do that," he said.

When questioned by Senator Alma Francis-Heyliger about the realistic timeline for the payments, Ms. O'Neale projected February 2022.

"The realistic time for at least the public sector workers will be around sometime in February. Private sector workers will be a little bit longer because we do need to collect the information from the private sector in order to have that information to provide the funding," Ms. O'Neal said while explaining that payments for private sector employees will be around March.

Mr. Gittens wanted to know which agency or entity was responsible for each sector.

"The Office of Management and Budget will be responsible for public sector workers," said Ms. O'Neale. OMB is expected to work with the Division of Personnel on the effort. For the private sector, she said a contract was awarded to an accounting firm.

“We will be having a contract with Ernst & Young who will assist us in getting the information from the private sector,” Ms. O’Neal made known. Ernst & Young won a \$900,000 contract to ensure sound fiscal management and oversight of the ARPA funds made available to the USVI.

Senator Carla Joseph requested that the terms and conditions of the contract be submitted to the Legislature.

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