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Overtime Compensation Does Not Affect Premium Pay Stimulus Checks, Bryan Says, Providing Clarity to \$70,000 Salary Limit

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Most Virgin Islanders deemed essential during the Covid-19 pandemic in both the private and public sectors will qualify for the soon-to-be-released Premium Pay stimulus checks totaling \$40 million, according to Governor Albert Bryan, who on Sunday told the Consortium during an interview that the \$70,000 salary limit established locally to follow the U.S. Treasury's guidelines was a base pay limit that does not include other compensation such as overtime.

"Remember it's your base pay, it's not your overtime. It's not how much money you made in overtime, it's your base pay, they are very specific about that," Mr. Bryan said. "So even if you make \$200,000 but your base pay is \$50,000 you still qualify."

He added, "If you're making \$71,000 base pay, that's good pay."

Senator Kenneth Gittens, reading a portion of the U.S. Treasury rules during a recent Senate hearing on how the funds should be used, said, "if the Premium Pay would increase a worker's total pay above 150 percent or greater, or the state of the country's average annual wage, it simply requires justification, specific justification for how it responds to the needs of these workers."

Governor Bryan said Sunday, "That's what it's based on, [above] 150 percent [or greater] of the median income, that covers a lot of people. Overtime don't count, you worked [hard] for that."

The governor was certain that the \$70,000 salary limit stated by V.I. Office of Management and Budget Director, Jenifer O'Neal, was the accurate reading of the federal rules. "That's what it is, that's what the regulations say. There is an option to write for a waiver of that rules and ask for more just like we do for housing, etc., but my thing is the one thing we have to recognize is no matter how high we raise, it's going to have people" who don't qualify, Mr. Bryan said. "We do need to pick some type of cutoff point."

Each U.S. state, territory and tribal government will receive their portion of the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act, or ARPA, which includes an amount for Premium Pay stimulus checks. The U.S. Virgin Islands was allocated \$547.1 million from ARPA, and as of last month the territory was in receipt of \$531 million. For the Premium Pay program, \$40 million was set aside for Virgin Islands private and public sector employees who qualify for the one-time payment.

Governor Bryan first spoke to the Consortium about the Premium Pay stimulus early January. "We have prioritized money to make direct payments to people because we know people in the community have been adversely impacted by Covid," [he said](#). "It's actually for people that have worked directly with the public."

Mr. Bryan mentioned payments he said [were being issued 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.

Information was also provided relative to a timeline for the funds' release. "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 during a recent Senate hearing while explaining that payments for private sector employees will be released 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'Neal. 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," she 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.

