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## Premium Pay Will Come Directly From Government in Effort to Prevent Fraud, OMB Says; Rollout Starts This Week With Private Healthcare Sector

Coronavirus / **Published On June 14, 2022 05:16 AM /**

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Hospital intensive care coronavirus ward: portrait of tired nurse wearing face mask sitting on the floor. By. GETTY IMAGES

Premium Pay, the one-time stimulus payment being issued to employees who worked throughout the pandemic in approved sectors during the period of March 2020 to March 2021, will be issued directly from the government of the Virgin Islands whether recipients are employed in the private or public sector, Office of Management and Budget Director Jenifer O'Neal revealed Monday.

In response to a Senator Kenneth Gittens inquiry about the program, Ms. O'Neal said that all those who qualify will be receiving payment directly as part of measures to reduce dishonesty in the

system. She also said that Social Security and address of recipients were among the information requested in the application forms.

Payments will start going out this week, in line with what Ms. O'Neal [told the Consortium last month](#).

“The guidance from the governor is that all payments will be issued by the Government of the Virgin Islands to the employees. We will not send the payment to the businesses for the businesses to make the payment to the employees; this is an effort to reduce any potential fraud, etc.,” Ms. O’Neal told members of the Committee on Finance who were receiving testimony from the governor’s financial team on the proposed Fiscal Year 2023 Executive Budget.

“We will be making the payments directly; those payments should begin going out this week and it will be done by sectors. We are beginning with the private sector healthcare workers and then we will go from there,” Ms. O'Neal stated while explaining that private sector healthcare refers to doctors’ offices, labs, and other private healthcare providers.

For the public sector, the payments will be rolled out after the relevant agencies conduct validation. For those who fall above the approved pay grade, required documents will be submitted after the data is analyzed. “We will be prepared to submit once we have seen or analyzed all of the data we have received from each of the departments and agencies and other entities,” Ms. O’Neal told Mr. Gittens who inquired about that category of workers.

Most Virgin Islanders deemed essential during the Covid-19 pandemic in both the private and public sectors will qualify for the Premium Pay stimulus checks totaling \$40 million, according to Governor Albert Bryan. He told the Consortium [earlier this year](#) 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.

After learning that private sector healthcare workers will be the first in line to receive the Premium Pay, Senator Kurt Vialet said he would have preferred for public sector healthcare workers to receive their payment before any other sector.

“I just really wish that we can speed up the hospitals. The hospitals were there on the frontline since the inception taking care of the patients. I think there is going to be a little trouble that we paid doctors' offices and we haven’t taken care of the hospitals and the people who work there. I have custodians who told me 'we clean the Covid rooms on a regular basis,'" he said.

Ms. O’Neal explained that public sector healthcare workers are on the priority list. “We started by asking the private sector to submit. We had over 800 applications to go through. We did ask the departments and agencies; we asked the hospitals to submit. It took a while, but we have everything now and we will be moving forward...they will be included as soon as the validation is done,” she said.

Ms. O'Neal assured the committee that “it’s not like we're going to have to wait another two months or so to get their payments. It's in line...We are starting with healthcare as a sector; we just have the private sector ready to go and the public sector is being validated now.”

Premium Pay is a one-time payment that is based on guidelines established by the U.S. Treasury and is for employees who worked throughout the pandemic.