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USVI Still Pursuing Caribbean Visa Waiver Program; PFA Authorizes Firm to Assist WAPA With Vitol Negotiations

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LIAT. If approved in Congress, the Caribbean Visa Waiver program would allow Caribbean nationals to travel to the U.S. Virgin Islands without a visa for temporary stays.

The Board of Directors on the V.I. Public Finance Authority has approved an engagement for Squire Patton Boggs to assist the V.I. Water and Power Authority with negotiating the resumption of propane delivery from VITOL. The board also discussed plans for a visa waiver program allowing Caribbean nationals to visit the territory without a visa.

Squire Patton provides the government with lobbying services that span legal, government relations and other professional services.

The propane supplier had [suspended fuel deliveries to WAPA over a \\$150 million debt](#). And although both parties have come to a temporary agreement so that the territory would not be without electricity, they still have to deal with the debt amount which WAPA continues to contest.

The vote followed an executive session during the PFA's final meeting for 2022, chaired by Governor Albert Bryan, Jr.

Discussions also involved other initiatives from Squire Patton Boggs like its efforts in obtaining a permanent extension of the rum cover-over funds; meetings with the U.S. Department of State regarding the V.I. government's endeavor to become an Associate Member of the CARICOM; providing support to Virgin Islands Next Generation Network (viNGN) to secure further federal funding for broadband availability throughout the territory; and assisting Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett with the bipartisan effort for a visa waiver amendment in the House of Representatives.

Called the Virgin Islands Visa Waiver Act (H.R. 5460, the visa waiver measure being championed by Ms. Plaskett, would allow the Department of Homeland Security to consider approving non-immigrant visitor visa waivers for entry into the U.S. Virgin Islands for up to 45 days (primarily for residents of neighboring Caribbean countries). Ms. Plaskett said a similar non-immigrant visitor visa waiver program is already being utilized successfully in both Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands for nationals of other countries.

"This legislation would extend this same program to the U.S. Virgin Islands. This limited visa waiver program would better enable the Virgin Islands to compete economically with other islands and nations in the Caribbean community," Ms. Plaskett [said in April 2022](#). She said a nationwide U.S. Visa Waiver Program already allows nationals of certain countries to travel to the United States for up to 90 days without obtaining a visa. The bill would apply solely to the U.S. Virgin Islands and because the Virgin Islands is outside the U.S. customs zone by law, it would not allow entry into any other part of the United States.

Also present at the PFA meeting were advisory companies Winston and Strawn LLP, and Total Spectrum, LLC.

Other Board members attending the meeting include the Commissioner of Finance and PFA Executive Director, Bosede Bruce, OMB Director Jenifer O'Neal, Attorney Dorothy Issacs, and Board Secretary Keith O'Neale.