

logo not found or type unknown

# Premium Pay, Social Security Stipends, Other ARPA Stimulus Funds Will All be Distributed by April, Says Department of Finance

Government / **Published On February 22, 2023 06:19 PM /**

Elesha George **February 22, 2023**

Image not found or type unknown



Stimulus payments that were funded by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), will all be sent out by April. That includes checks for Premium Pay recipients, payments of Social Security stipends, revenue replacement funds for approved government and affiliated agencies, and a number of other financial assistance programs that fall under the ARPA umbrella.

Thousands of retirees and front-line workers have been waiting months to receive assistance. Last November, senior citizens hoping to get their \$500 checks queued in long lines under the sun.

On Tuesday, Finance Commissioner Bosede Bruce testified that reviewing and processing the mountain of additional payments by the department was exceedingly difficult, particularly with no

additional staff to assist.

“It has indeed been a daunting task to review, approve, and process all of these payments, all at the same time, inclusive of tax refunds, biweekly payroll, and vendor payments, especially with limited staff at OMB [the Office of Management and Budget] and DOF, but we expect to be able to bring these programs to a final close by the end of April,” she said.

Ms. Bruce said Premium Pay checks were being processed manually for both private businesses and government agencies. At the same time, both OMB and her office are short staffed. There are currently almost 400 private companies whose eligible staff have not received their payments, she disclosed.

“We are processing those all manually. So we’ve received requests from private businesses but we have the information for government and we’re processing those all manually,” Ms. Bruce noted. The staff shortage has led to a backlog of payments for thousands of part-time and full-time employees.

The overwhelming amount of work has also led to logistical issues that affect the amount of money some eligible for Premium Pay will receive.

“We’ve gotten complaints in our office where individuals have received the Premium Pay for their part-time job and not their full-time jobs,” Senator Donna Frett-Gregory noted.

Ms. Bruce explained, “We have to flag employees who are due a Premium Pay in the government and with maybe a part-time job” ... “If some appears in two spreadsheets, we flag them and so if we’re processing for a part-time job first and we pay, when we get to that person’s agency in government, they’ve been flagged, they will not get another payment.”

Ms. Frett-Gregory, chair of the Committee on Budget, Appropriations & Finance said people are feeling marginalized and are at a disadvantage because the process was not properly thought out and communication to the public was not clear. “You don’t get the benefit of being that full-time employee,” she added.

To date, the department has issued a total of \$23,249,519 in Premium Payments to 13,344 individuals at 387 private sector businesses and 24 government entities. A total of 1,537 Premium Pay checks valued at \$2,397,250 are still awaiting disbursement.

“We have requested additional information from 139 companies so that we can finalize distribution of Premium Payments for employees who worked during the pandemic,” Ms. Bruce stated.

Similarly, the staffing shortage and increased workload has caused some people to receive two payments instead of their allotted one. Ms. Frett-Gregory also exhorted people who have received two payments to return one.

Meanwhile, Senator Marvin Blyden said he has been getting calls from senior citizens and other community members who have not received their Social Security checks. The Consortium’s inbox has also received similar messages since our reporting on the [Premium Pay delays](#).

To date, the Dept. of Finance has processed 21,059 stipend checks at \$500 each, totaling \$10,529,500.

However, Ms. Bruce said payments to eligible Social Security recipients proved to be a bit more challenging as they have been unable to contact more than 1,500 recipients.

While the department was able to distribute 19,269 checks, totaling \$9,634,500, there were 32 checks that were returned to OMB and 1,575 checks with incomplete or bad addresses. There are also 183 checks for recipients who are deceased. According to the commissioner, these checks will be returned to the Dept. of Finance to adjust the accounting system and to have them voided.

They expect that an online system for listing of checks, expected to go live in mid-March, will assist in reducing the backlog.

“We are in the process of creating a database and a technology-driven solution whereby eligible Social Security residents who have not received a stipend check can enter their name and other pertinent information into a web-based application for further processing. That includes those who may be prompted to enter a correct mailing address so that we can mail out the checks we still have, plus those who will be prompted to upload evidence that they are a Social Security recipient since 2020 for those who have not yet received stipend payments,” she explained.

Alternative measures will be put in place to assist seniors who are unable to access computers, including publishing names in the newspaper of the 1,575 recipients that they don’t have addresses for.

In early 2022, OMB established the USVI Premium Pay program guidelines consistent with U.S. Treasury legislation and set aside up to \$40 million of ARPA funds for this initiative.