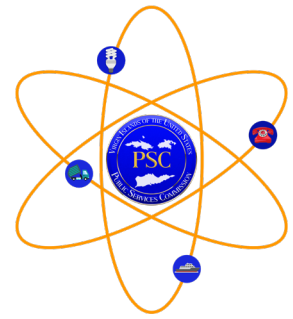




## Government of the United States Virgin Islands Public Services Commission

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Tuesday, October 08, 2024

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### **PSC Regular Meeting – Tuesday, October 08, 2024**

#### **Energy Matters**

US VIRGIN ISLANDS – The Virgin Islands Public Services Commission (PSC or the Commission) held its regular meeting on Tuesday, October 8, 2024.

The PSC has noted a significant increase in customer complaints and inquiries related to service issues with the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority (WAPA). Staff have received complaints through in-person visits, online submissions, phone calls, and mail, along with concerns expressed on social media. The primary issues include estimated bills, unusually high bills, nonresponsive meters, and solar or net billing problems. Assistant Executive Director Tisean Hendricks reported to the Commission, stating, “The PSC is extremely concerned about the volume and nature of complaints we have received in recent months. Staff have diligently documented the increase in complaints since July 2024.” Hendricks also outlined various efforts made by staff to address WAPA’s customer service issues, including press releases, open houses, community outreach initiatives, and interviews.

The Commission and WAPA representatives engaged in a lengthy discussion regarding the Authority’s customer service and billing challenges. Lorraine Kelly, Chief Financial Officer, and Marlene Francis, Customer Service Manager, detailed the actions being taken by WAPA to resolve these issues. The Authority is currently seeking federal funding to revitalize its Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) system. WAPA has approximately 55,000 customer accounts in the Electric system, and another 20,000 in its Water system. Prior to Irma/Maria, the Authority had installed an Automated Metering Infrastructure (“AMI”) that allowed WAPA to remotely read and control electric and water billing and service. That system has been failing, causing a significant part of the current billing issues.

WAPA has ordered 1,100 new meters, with plans to order an additional 10,000 at a rate of 2,500 per month, totaling 11,100 new or refurbished meters for the Territory. Once installed, these new meters should help WAPA provide more accurate billing to customers, although these meters will not be equipped with the automatic functions, requiring a meter reader to physically come to the meter each month.

WAPA has also applied for and been approved for Federal grant funds to replace the existing metering system and all the meters. That process is just beginning.

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As the Commission and WAPA continue their efforts to resolve customer complaints, the community is reminded of the procedure for disputing a bill:

### **Steps to Dispute a WAPA Bill:**

Submit a Request to WAPA

To dispute a bill, submit a request for correction or review to WAPA, allowing them the opportunity to address your concerns. You can file a complaint through the following channels:

- In-person:
  - Port of Sale Mall (Havensight), St. Thomas
  - The Marketplace, St. John
  - Sunny Isles Annex, St. Croix
- Online: [customer.service@viwapa.vi](mailto:customer.service@viwapa.vi)
- By phone: 340-773-2250 or 340-774-3552 (Option 5)

WAPA has 30 days to address your complaint. If you are unsatisfied with their response after 30 days or if the issue remains unresolved, you may escalate your complaint to the PSC.

In other energy matters, BMR Solar (BMR), which operates solar fields in St. Croix (Spanish Town) and St. Thomas (Donoe), has been providing electricity to WAPA, which resells it to customers. However, WAPA has not paid BMR, resulting in BMR being owed over \$2.3 million for energy from St. Croix and \$1.4 million from St. Thomas. BMR had petitioned to sell its power directly to customers near its facilities while paying WAPA a “wheeling fee” for delivery. A hearing for this petition was scheduled for today’s meeting, in compliance with the schedule set out by the Commission. BMR and WAPA had submitted and exchanged direct testimony and were required to meet and confer on all outstanding issues. In that process BMR and WAPA reached a settlement before the meeting and asked to suspend the petition indefinitely. Pending the details of the settlement, the Commission will table this matter for discussion at its next scheduled meeting.

The Commission began the meeting with an Executive Session for legal advice and to discuss pending litigation, during which no motions or actions were taken. Commissioners in attendance included Chairman Pedro Williams, Raymond Williams, Clement Magras, and Laura Nichols-Samms. Commissioner David Hughes and ex-officio members Senator Carla Joseph and Senator Marise James were absent.

**For recent news releases, more information on the PSC, and easy access to information on utility issues visit our website at [psc.vi.gov](http://psc.vi.gov). Like our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/VIPSC1965](https://www.facebook.com/VIPSC1965).**