



Our Town Frederiksted, Inc.
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November 2, 2023

Senator Novelle E. Francis, Jr.
Senate President,
Legislature of the Virgin Islands
Chairperson, Committee of the Whole
3022 Est. Golden Rock Christiansted, VI 00820
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Good day Honorable Senator Francis, Honorable Members of the 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands and the listening and viewing audiences.

My name is Aimée Griles-Cariño, and I am the Executive Director of Our Town Frederiksted, Inc. ("OTF"), a community advocacy organization that has been passionately serving the Historic District and outlying areas of Frederiksted since 1988. We are gravely concerned about the recent discovery of lead contamination in the potable water supply of St. Croix, as underscored by the FEMA advisory on October 14th and further deliberated upon at the Community Environmental Dialogue facilitated by the EPA on October 24th.

The persistent challenges regarding our water quality, often manifested as "brown water," have been an ongoing concern for the residents of St. Croix. To our collective dismay, these concerns were frequently dismissed, and notably, on September 12th, WAPA's CEO, Mr. Andrew Smith, reassured the public that this brown water was of no concern. Given the new findings about lead contamination, our community's trust is deeply shaken.

We hereby request the following urgent actions from WAPA:

- 1. Clean Water Supply & Water Filters for Affected Residents:** WAPA should promptly facilitate the distribution of safe water for residents to consume and provide certified lead-removal water filters to the impacted customers.
- 2. Clear Communication on Distribution:** A comprehensive timeline for the distribution of these water filters and safe drinking water should be communicated to the affected households. This transparency is pivotal in restoring our community's trust.
- 3. Waive Charges for Contaminated Water:** We strongly advocate for the suspension of utility bills for the customers who received water tainted with lead during the period of contamination. It is

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The lead advocate for community development and transformation of the town of Frederiksted and outlying areas.



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unacceptable for impacted customers to be burdened with utility bills for water that has been compromised by lead contamination. WAPA should ensure that these customers are not charged for the period during which their water was unsafe.

- 4. Regular Updates on Data:** Within a fortnight, WAPA should set up a dedicated website, offering regular updates through interactive maps, details of testing locations, results, the state of water lines, and the replacement timelines. To cater to residents who rely on traditional media, weekly press releases are imperative.
- 5. Expanded Pediatric Lead Testing:** We urge the Department of Health to extend pediatric lead testing for children from the current age range of 0-6 to encompass all children ages 0-18 across St. Croix. The water quality issues plaguing our community span well before this recent revelation, with numerous complaints registered over the past 15 years. Research highlights the alarming fact that babies and toddlers experience higher exposure to metals compared to adults. Their intake of food and water relative to body weight is higher, and they absorb metals at a rate between 40 to 90 percent more than adults. Furthermore, children's ability to metabolize and eliminate heavy metals is underdeveloped compared to adults due to their weaker detoxification mechanisms and less robust immune systems. Taking into account the rising diagnoses of neurodevelopmental disabilities and the increasing number of children undergoing treatment on the island, it becomes imperative to test all school-aged children for heavy metal exposure.

Furthermore, we call for a public apology from WAPA CEO, Mr. Andrew Smith, for previously downplaying our concerns. Accountability, transparency, and a genuine commitment to remediation are what our community deserves.

In conclusion, OTF stands ready to collaborate with WAPA and all relevant stakeholders to prioritize the well-being of our residents. By addressing this matter with sincerity and urgency, we hope to embark on the journey of restoring faith in our public utility provider.

We appreciate the opportunity that the Committee has given us to express our concerns on behalf of OTF and Frederiksted residents regarding this matter affecting our community. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

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