

WAP

VIRGIN ISLANDS ENERGY OFFICE

2024 Program Update



Directors' Note

Delivering relief now is the mantra the Energy Office has taken up in 2024, a credo that recognizes the real pain that high energy costs and grid instability have sown in our community. To address these conjoined issues, we are taking a holistic approach, implementing forward thinking strategies that encourage the widespread adoption of the kinds of automatic battery back systems essential for smart utility grids of the future, administering easily accessible programs that can help people invest in energy efficient upgrades for their homes, and building the charging infrastructure needed for folks to embrace electronic vehicles. At the Energy Office we know that Virgin Islanders are seeking relief, and everyday we are working to make sure that it is accessible to them.



Residents of the D. Hamilton Jackson Housing Community attend a WAP informational session.

WAP REACHES THE MASSES

*Lowering utility bills one
efficient upgrade at a time*

The realities of a warming world have been felt keenly across the Virgin Islands this summer as average residential electrical consumption climbed northward according to an informal survey conducted by the Water and Power Authority's customer service department. September marked the third consecutive month the National Weather Service issued near daily excessive heat advisories for the territory, a stark reminder of the harsh reality of a warming world that serves to underscore the importance of the major headway the Virgin Islands Energy Office (VIEO) has made in delivering the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) to residents.

The simplest, easiest, and most effective way to reduce utility bills is to increase the energy efficiency of your household. WAP is designed to help those with the least energy efficient homes, and direst economic situations, access new, highly rated, energy efficient

appliances and solutions. WAP applications are evaluated based on need, with emphasis placed on households with low income, young children, elderly, and disabled members.

The WAP program was relaunched this February after a near five year hiatus due to the aftermaths of Hurricanes Irma and Maria, and the global coronavirus pandemic. VIEO has been aggressive in its approach to grant writing, and this year marks the first time in the territory's history that the program has benefitted from three rounds of funding, bringing the total WAP allocation to over \$4 million. Along with the initial \$900,000 WAP allocation, the program has been augmented with an additional \$1.7 million from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to support its normal operation, and a further \$1.5 million in Sustainable Energy Resources for Consumers (SERC) grants that will allow VIEO to install distributed solar generation for eligible homes, and automatic battery backup systems. VIEO is one of only 14 state energy offices selected from a nationwide pool of applicants to be awarded a SERC grant.

Approved in August, VIEO's SERC grant will give the Office the funds it needs to install approximately 10 residential solar systems, and an estimated 107 residential automatic battery backup systems. Like the traditional WAP program, its solar arm will be based on need. Folks who have already previously applied for the WAP program, or who are currently going through the process, will not have to submit a new application to be considered for the solar and battery upgrades.



LSSVI maintains an extensive stock of affordable housing in the territory



Genip Gardens is a vibrant community, in 2024 the majority of its resident's signed up for WAP





Top: Vernicia Joseph, VIEO administrative coordinator, at the D. Hamilton Jackson Housing community informational WAP session.

Bottom: A VIEO energy auditor installs a lightbulb, and adjusts the placement of a new refrigerator.



VIEO has been aggressive in its approach to grant writing, and in 2024 for the first time ever secured three rounds of funding, bringing the program total over \$4 million.

Now that the funding has been awarded, VIEO is in the process of ironing out programmatic details with its federal partners, VIEO Grants Program Coordinator Alanna Brenneman said.

“So, if they are a standalone home, and they are in a good position -the roof is in an ok condition, they are facing the right way and everything – we can do solar PV [photovoltaic] installed with battery backup. And then if they are not, say they are in one of the apartment complexes, or a multi family housing like that, we can just do the residential [battery] backup system,” Brenneman said.

So far this year VIEO has approved over 100 WAP applications, and begun installing energy efficient appliances at dozens of residences. A number of eligible applicants have had their homes assessed by a VIEO energy auditor, who compiled a list of their existing inefficient household appliances. Once identified, and while supplies are available, VIEO will replace these appliances with updated energy efficient versions such as, low-flow showerheads and aerators, energy efficient light-bulbs, air-conditioners, ENERGY STAR refrigerators, water heaters, and other approved items.

Robust community outreach has

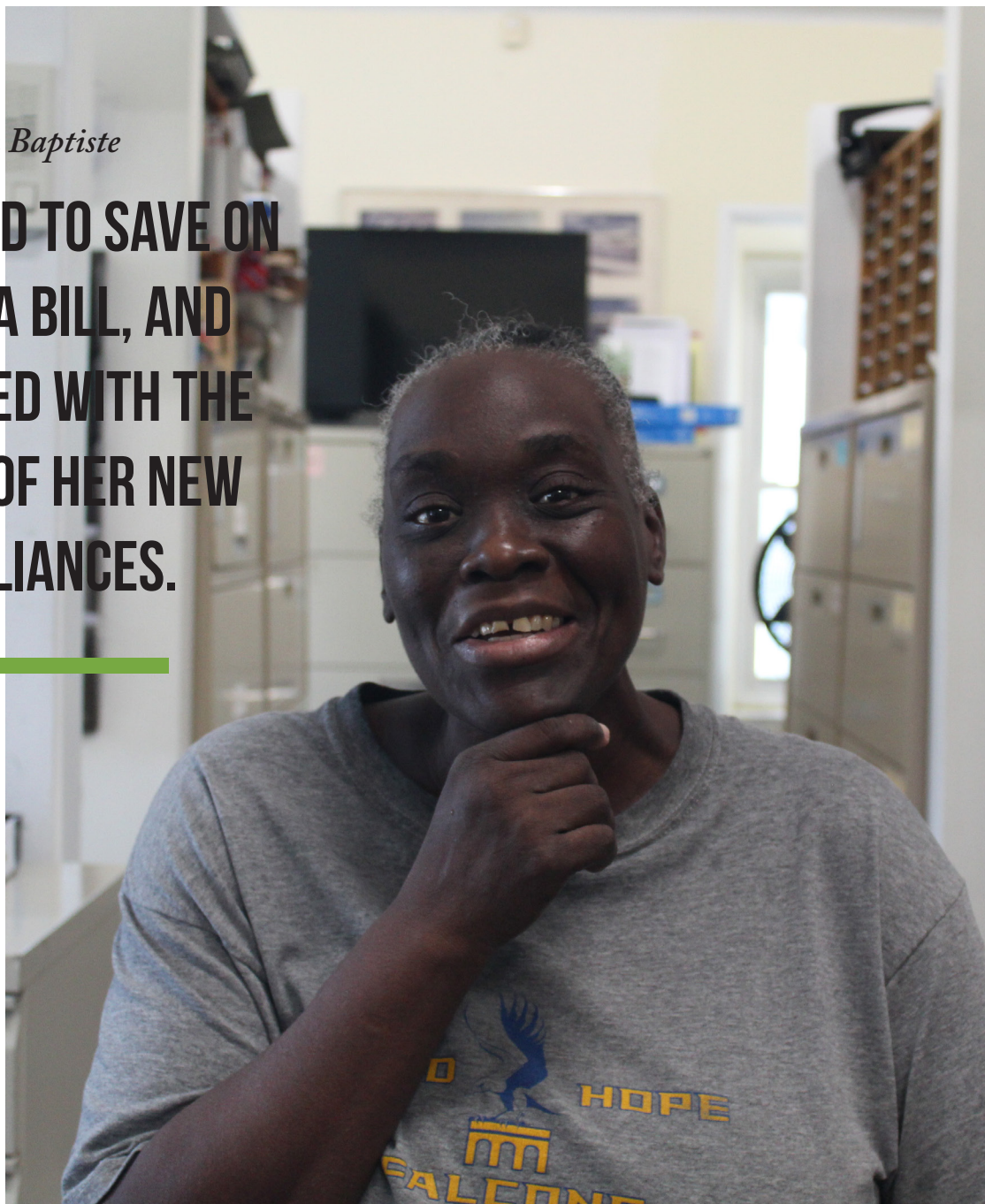
been essential to VIEO’s efforts to help eligible Virgin Islanders take advantage of the program. Leading the charge has been Vernicia Joseph, VIEO administrative coordinator, who has become a regular sight at housing communities and community fairs as she works to spread the word about WAP.

Given WAP’s focus on helping elderly and disabled low income individuals, Joseph said that it was only natural that she would tailor her outreach activities to focus on communities that serve these groups. Since coming on board with the Office earlier this year, Joseph and the WAP team have visited with hundreds of community members at events like the Agricultural Food Fair, and targeted visits to Lutheran Social Services of the Virgin Islands (LSSVI) low income assisted living facilities.

Over the last 27 years LLSVI has made it a core part of its mission to house Virgin Islanders who would otherwise find it nearly impossible to find homes of their own. Across

Garlanda Jean Baptiste

**IS EXCITED TO SAVE ON
HER WAPA BILL, AND
IMPRESSED WITH THE
QUALITY OF HER NEW
WAP APPLIANCES.**



seven housing communities split between St. Croix and St. Thomas LLSVI houses 156 individuals. The group homes each have their own resident makeup, and cater to folks living at or below the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) Very Low Income Limit, the elderly, and disabled.

“Some of the residents are blind, or otherwise disabled, which means they need a little extra assistance. So, when we go there and explain the program, what I usually do is coordinate with the property manager to get the documents the residents need, and if they need

help filling out the forms, I sit with them and help guide them through the process,” Joseph said.

After spending weeks touring LLSVI’s facilities and signing up scores of their residents, Joseph has become a part of the group’s family, Raymonia Leonce, LLSVI housing director, said. Leonce was one of the driving forces behind the exceptional response to VIEO’s outreach efforts, and said she was committed to fostering the relationship because of how clear it was to see the benefits that WAP would bring to her residents. Given her resident’s must subsist on fixed

James Williams

“TREMENDOUS, NOT GOOD, EXTRA GOOD, 110%” ON HOW WELL HE LIKES HIS UPGRADED WAP APPLIANCES



incomes that struggle to keep up with the rate of inflation, Leonce said that she knows they would struggle to invest in replacement refrigerators, an issue that at the beginning of the year LLSVI didn't have a clear funding source for. Even as the ones installed in their units approached the end of their useful term of service, and were less efficient than models currently on the market.

“Because of the program, my residents will come to me and say, ‘I am so happy, I am so grateful that you allowed the Energy Office to come in and offer this program to us, because it will help tremendously.’ Because now they can have extra cash to be able to do something else, instead of using it to pay their utility bill,” Leonce said.

As the program rollout has ramped up, beneficiaries of the WAP program have begun to be able to gauge for themselves just how much the appliance retrofits will benefit their households. Many of the homes selected to participate in the program require extensive overhauls, and so VIEO energy auditors, and contractors, have been making multiple visits to install everything from new light

bulbs, to brand new refrigerators.

Ninety-two year old James Williams has lived in his Estate Mount Pleasant home since 1993, its portrait festooned walls a time capsule recording his family's happiest moments and dearest faces. But just like the pictures on the wall, Williams' appliances had remained frozen in time, and could no longer operate in an efficient manner. That all began to change however, after Williams' daughter filled out a WAP application for him, and VIEO began retrofitting his home.

“Tremendous, not good, extra good, 110%,” Williams said when asked how he liked his WAP upgrades.

So far Williams has had lightbulbs,



VIEO, delivering relief now

WAP 2024

water faucet aerators, a refrigerator, and two air conditioners replaced. Next on the WAP crews agenda, switching out a living room ceiling fan that is on its last legs. Williams said that he is afraid to even turn the fan on because of how it bumps and rattles when operating at speed, and that he has worried the fan could fall and hit him, as its situated right above his favorite spot on the couch.

Garlanda Jean Baptiste didn't know much about energy efficient appliances or how they could impact her WAPA bill, until Joseph explained the details of the WAP program to her, the Genip Garden resident said. But once she learned

that the program could help her lessen her water bill, she was sold. Baptiste, who has lived at the facility for decades, loves taking long showers, and was ecstatic after a VIEO Energy Auditor installed new low flow aerators and a shower head in her unit. Having a shower that can be taken off its mount has elevated bath time, Baptiste said, and she's now looking forward to when her new fridge will be installed so that she can make ice pops.

For a full list of what appliances can be upgraded under WAP or to start an application, visit energy.vi.gov.