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0:00:00 Department of Finance so we have made some improvements in the process we've also implemented some sort of supportive redundancies like before providers would drop off their invoices and whether or not their invoices lined up would kind of be what the provider said versus the person who received them now we're having them submit them in hardcopy as well as electronically and that's received by multiple people so for instance i can go back and check and see what a specific provider submitted and have you open a line of communication with the providers again so that this could be addressed because you know my office was inundated with with calls in respect to that and we um you know so have we opened that line of communication so that there'll be some level of feedback provided to the feed um providers yes we have i get calls from them all the time speak to them often very well thank you i'll move on from there what is what is the what is the difficulty commissioner in regards to filling vacancies what is what is the hindrance so there's different there's different levels of vacancies so um i'll let dc rojas um to speak on it specifically um so for the nurses actually the salary was uh too low so we had three people that we were going to bring on board and they they turned us down because they have the salary aspect of things so and the fiscal office as well we had two accountants that didn't want to come because of the salary was was low um so as far as that considering right now everything that we've posted we've been doing really all the other ones we've been getting a good return on investment meaning that as soon as we post them we get we hire and we're ready to go so we've been in a better flow than we were last year two minutes just my one comment and i really quick as we continue to vet the various agencies that's coming before us a lot of them continue to have significant vacancies and that has a tremendous impact on our grs system as well so we really need to um

0:02:00 work collectively to to be able to address that and for our vacancies they're not all gbi so if if we the ones that we've gotten back successfully have been the ones that have been hundred percent federal and just i just got back eight this morning from omb so anything that was a backfill we were able to fill for gbi anything that was a full-on federal one we've been done doing really well once the budget was approved the only other ones was the gbi 100 gbi we had issues with actually having a vacancy and funding that okay my time is running so i really want to move in a couple questions

real quick in regards to the harvard grig home the hire of uh the kitchen staff uh kitchen manager as well as the two cooks where are we with that assistant commissioner mccall rhima brown we have a backfill for a cook position um the we are also awaiting some supplemental funding to hire for the cook. But there are some specific positions that we were able to backfill, and DC Rojas could give some more specifics on that.

0:03:12 But I think we're moving in the correct direction. MR. Okay. Maybe I could get the chair to have her address that and his time. Nonprofit organization, are we up to date in terms of the miscellaneous? due to our non-profit organizations we're pretty much up to date on everything that regarding the nonprofits whether it be from the miscellaneous the crisis intervention funds so Kendall to time has been making sure that all those invoices are received timely and we've requested the releases so they're they're pretty happy they're pretty much up to date I believe that the second quarter has definitely been paid and then potentially the third quarter has That's been processed.

0:03:52 Time. Commissioner, you have a number of administrators, and I'm seeing that a lot of them are actually supervising people and making more money than them. How are you addressing that particular issue? That's a union issue. That's across government. And so, for example, if I had stayed as social worker three, I probably would be making more from my account to that. So I think that needs to be addressed not just within human services but across government wide, looking at exempt versus classified and then those positions, so it is correct. But this is occurring within your shop, and it's creating a morale issue, so. It's true. Yeah, so how are you? Are you speaking with Office of Collective Bargaining or whoever? Yes, we're in constant communication with OCB and then negotiations as well is that concern, but it comes back to the exempt level, and then having to raise those up, because all the administrators right now, our majority of them are exempt employees. And so if they're exempt employees, they're all going to need raises in order for us to do that. So we can come back and put that in the budget to accommodate that. But there are people that have been doing service for 20 or 25 years, and with the rate increases for their negotiations for each of the contracts, like social workers, they're going to get continued increases. The exempt employees don't necessarily get accrued increases like the rest of them.

0:05:11 Okay, my time has been called, but there is an opportunity for you to pay out of classification or something to be able to compensate that because that's a real moral issue. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for the time. Thank you, Senator Francis, and Commissioners, you have to slow down a little bit when you're answering. Sure. You're going a little too fast. Okay. Okay, the actuals, you have the information? Yes. Charmaine, Modessa Antoine, the CFO. Okay, one minute. Let us all get our pens.

0:05:38 The actuals through July 25th is \$14 million, \$685.97. For personnel? For personnel. \$14 million. \$680,597. Fringe? Currently have fringe at \$6 million, \$517 and \$10. Supplies.

0:06:22 \$270,166. Out of services. \$18,174,242. Did you spend the \$35,000 on capital projects? There was \$35,000? We will be. We have been combining capital projects on some of our federal budgets, so we will be utilizing this funding, yes.

0:06:56 Okay, so July 25th represents just about 10 months out of the 12-month cycle, or five, six? In other services, you seem that you would have more than \$1.2 million to pay vendors because you have expended \$18 million, you still have the next \$10 million, or is that going to be obligated? It seems like you're going to have enough within that \$28 million that you can pay those Because we have to do justification letters because of our unexecuted contracts, we are in the process of doing justification letters to pay some of our residential vendors. The Medicaid program continues to be an issue.

0:07:51 We have some adjustments that need to be brought on to the local side to ensure that we're capturing the full amount of the local match on the general fund. Okay, so hold up one minute. In terms of the contracts and having to do the justification, I know that property and procurement had an issue with the continuous justifications that we have been sending in. Why are we still not there with these contracts being executed? Don't we have someone dedicated to execution of contracts?

0:08:23 It was not the issue of the execution of the contracts. is actually a funding issue so in the midst of our 2021 we didn't have an executed contract i'm not talking about all of them just talking about residential alone so our people are there they're in devereau and st you know texas and stuff they're in there so during the 2021 they did a rate increase so because we didn't have enough money in the budget to to actually do an executed contract for all of them because if i did execute a contract for one then it would not be able to pay them the other ones so for 2022 we're fully funded at the rate increase because we've included that in the budget so we'll be able to execute all of the residential contracts come october but but you still have to pay we'll still have to pay 21 no matter what correct that is still an obligation correct it's still an obligation i'm sure somebody's gonna I'm going to drill down and send Senator Sarah a point of inquiry.

0:09:28 Thank you, Mr. Chief. I did a mark correctly, your actuals only totaled some 39.6 million, correct? Ms. I was going to call you Ms. Mothers. Yes. Ms. Antoine. Yes, ma'am. So you have a balance of roughly 17.3 that hasn't been spent and the fourth quarter are you going are you on track to spend in a matter of two months 17.3 million dollars we do have

encumbrances that don't show up as actual expenditures so what's your average what's your amount for your encumbrances what i'm looking at right here is the 1.9 million that's your conferences right now that's a drop in a bucket 17.3 million you understand what i'm asking i do understand what you're asking we um 42 million was released for 42 as of july as of july of the 57 million the 42 million was released and um we have utilized 39 million of that we have 1.9 in encumbrances. We are in the process of requesting justification letters to execute for the funding that were the allotments that were released. We track it by the allotments that are released. The concern this body has is that you came up with a massive budget increase. You're asking for an appropriation. There's some 20 plus million dollars than last year but as of the end of the third quarter when the fourth quarter now you have a balance of 17.3 million which are 1.9 in encumbrances and you're claiming that you may not be able to meet vendor payments but when you look at the numbers the numbers depict a very different picture from what you're testifying on mr chad if you notice that on the vice chair as well the actuals um 39.6

0:11:26 million they have a 17.3 million balance in conferences of 1.9 million and they're asking for 20 million plus increase the math doesn't add up in a sense but thank you mr. chair for the point of inquiry so I need to clarify that for you guys I can pull that analysis together for you but we are on track for spending the funds so you're saying you're on track to spend the entire 57 yes sir okay let me go back to the cook position so I could just get some clarification because I know you spoke about a cook but I still don't get the position as to whether or not the cook is being hired or the cooks for Kerbert Grigg are they in process of being hired assistant commissioner McHale Brown there is a backfill position which one but I mean yes or no yes but I also mentioned we did request a supplemental budget for critical hires the kitchen staff is among them senator for Herbert Greg and Queen Louise home may the other aspect to help with with Herbert Greg we actually took one of our cooks from YRC and place them at Herbert Grigg as well to help with that deficit from Youth Rehabilitation Center because our census is actually very low there so we had more of an abundance in our nutrition staff there. So we have a NOPA that's going through for a cook at Herbert Grigg. We have somebody in the pipeline and NOPA that has been sent for approval.

0:13:04 I would yield to DC Rojas to specifically address that. Deputy Commissioner Rojas, the Cook position was posted and it expired and it is in process of reviewing all of the eligible applicants. So there's not a NOPA right now because it's at the early stage of the process, Senator Viale. But how is it at the early stage, I know Cooks were interviewed from last year for that particular position why are we still at the early stage for this 28 29 thousand dollar position it seemed like rank and file we always have issues getting rank and file that is so necessary on board we which there's a long list of individuals are interviewed for cook position i know that human services interviewed individuals you're going to re-interview again senator billi um commissioner Deputy Commissioner Rojas again. Last year, all of our vacancies were cut. So even if cooks were interviewed, there were no vacancies to put them in because all of those general vacancies were cut.

0:14:14 Okay, let me start back. I understand what you're saying with that. However, the projections that we projected last year, we met. money to fill these positions, the executive rents decided to cut positions, so they cut that particular position. But you had interviews, you had cooks that you interviewed position, so you had a process where you could have selected somebody. If you now have the monies, why can't you go back to the interviews that were conducted last year and see if those individuals are not interested in the position?

0:14:50 so this is deputy commissioner rojas because this is a classified position it has to and this is a position for someone who resigned it has to be posted and then those individuals have to apply to be to create an eligibility list for us to interview granted some of those individuals who may have interviewed previously are on that list then we have to review that list first from division of personnel and that is where we are right now we can't just pull those individuals we still have to get the list from division of personnel that tells us these are the eligible applicants who applied for that position so this is not the same position that we had previously what is your timeline to get a new cook on board or cooks on board given that we've gotten the list today um because i just confirmed with the generalist that we got the list today um from now i would say it would take us a good week to go through resumes do interviews and then select a candidate so i would say between one to two weeks to actually get through the interview process and then um make an offer and then bring that person on um well not one to two weeks to do all of that sorry it's not that quick okay let's try to make it a priority because But as we're burning out the cooks at Adaira-Torbert-Grig right now, they're really on to the point of burnt out and they're providing food for elderly population and others. We really got to get this problem.

0:16:23 It's been a long time. I know they're frustrated. Senator Saro. Thank you. I'm not a customer being so high on the list. Commissioner, you don't see what's happening in human resources? The length of time we're moving to hire people, we don't see an issue? And let me tell you, I had a discussion with the president this morning on the way here. Government is to move in real time. If a pandemic hits, when the pandemic hit, the U.S. Congress, whatever vacation they were on,

whatever they were doing they had to gather in the halls of congress to draft a legislation that gave aid to the territories and the states in a timely fashion in political science you are taught that government moves in real time so to sit here and say we have a position here we have them here we interviewed them last year we have to post this we don't see a problem with the lack of urgency as the department of human services services some of the most the indigent population in this territory that needs help we don't see a problem with that and i have to be a little and see today and frustrated because look at the officer intake you think i should be calling you to tell you the officer in taking answering their phone and somebody need to call me i should not be the operator to tell you that a child is in distress and if i didn't know you senators are answering the phone over and over and over again to say commissioner i need help that defeats the purpose of why you were established that's my rant for today because i'm really serious about what is happening and we're not moving in real time and then you know you may disagree but you and i talk quite often and this

0:18:27 this can't work so let's let's go tell me the status of overtime mm-hmm um what do you want overtime cfo yeah sense of amounts now repeat your question i'm sorry what do you owe in overtime you have a lot of you have employees in maintenance that worked since the storms you mean acting pay not acting i don't get to acting yet outstanding pay yes what is what is the total amount of outstanding pay i don't know if dc rojas has mr has what's the amount of standing pay overtime but is the categories outstanding pay so overtime should not necessarily be outstanding outstanding okay well unless it happened prior so tell me or however you have it categorized you have a lot of people i know maintenance was one from the storms we owe people money so that is outstanding miss rojas tell me the numbers please good um morning good morning senator server deputy commissioner rojas um in regards to outstanding monies owed to individuals across different groups that total is hold on one second sorry it's about a hundred and seventy thousand dollars in total that combined with acting pay is approximately four hundred thousand dollars so you know the madam president is sit and see we have a 170 000 discussion we're processing those we're doing that okay by the end of the fiscal year pay Pay every single employee what they are owed, they worked, pay them, and pay the acting positions, the \$400K, pay them as well. So let's go to acting.

0:20:18 When do we plan to have these people, again, ASCA awards at this point, Academy Awards, Emmy Awards, when are we going to solidify these people's positions? So by the end of the fiscal year, everybody will be paid between the acting and the past money's owed. there's a couple of people that are currently in acting positions that those positions that they need to move into are not available so that's not a vacancy I believe that's two positions DC Rojas I'm looking at you so miss Ross what are we doing to rectify this because if they're acting in a position clearly the position is necessary correct no it's necessary however the position for them to go into may not be available for them to go into that makes sense. Yes. Um, Mr. House. What are we? What's your plan? What's your plan to stop? I list these acting positions.

0:21:11 Thank you, Senator, sir, for the question. Deputy Commissioner Rojas, the individuals that we have who are continuing to act, there are vacancies that we have on our FY 22 personnel listing that will allow for them to move into those positions. And we have also requested supplemental budget to fund other positions that we have um right now there are 10 individuals that are in um that will continue to be in acting positions because we do not have the vacancies and there are seven who have moved this year into the positions um that they were acting in was the longest um give me the time frame of the longest acting employee the longest acting person who actually has a out-of-class compensation on their pay but they are still continuing to act i believe is 11 years so we have people acting for 11 years i've only been here for two so i'm working on it no no no i understand what i and i just come on is seen as a 35-year-old millennial, and I have a GRS system to save, right? Hold on, Commissioner, so when you take the job, it comes with the responsibilities. I don't have the luxury of telling the people of the Virgin Islands. Hold on, but I don't have the luxury of saying that I just come here, so GRS isn't my responsibility. GRS not failed in 19... Hold on, Commissioner. Okay. The system started to fail in 1993. I was in third grade, and I can't tell people that some can be fixed okay so you have the responsibility stop we have to limit the acting positions pay your overtime and pay the acting salaries MAP we were instrumental in the budget markup of giving you the 407 did

0:23:08 you expand the full 407 miss CFO because the testimony says one thing and it can allude to the you know that you. We were successful in posting the positions and interviewing. Yes. But we haven't recognized the actual expenditures yet because we're just onboarding the staff. And could I just Senator McHale-Reimer Brown, assistant commissioner, because of the \$407,000 we will be able to transfer the temporary to permanent and we have back pay going back to October that will be paid out to them and then they will we'll be using monies that way and we're hiring individuals right now to fill those 32 positions okay but say your name for the stenographer please before you speak Michal Reimer, Commissioner with Oversight of Medicaid. Okay so your testimony says you're finally able to transfer the nine temporary employees Medicaid yes so when did that happen and in now okay they were transitioned and their begin date is August 2nd but their NOPAs and Ms. Rojas could go into detail on that okay your testimony you know I like I need a truth I don't need you to tell me that they have been transferred when they haven't really been transferred yet so Ms.

Rojas start date is August 2nd Deputy Commissioner Rojas Yes, Senator Saru, their start date right now is August 2nd.

0:24:39 Okay, let's, I'm going to follow up on this MEP situation. Let's go quickly to the Queen Louise home and our senior centers. Have we outfitted them? Outfitted meaning what? COVID. We had a discussion in disaster recovery hearing. So outfitted them, meaning that I'm not bringing, I'm not going to open the senior centers as it is right now. No, no, no. Hold on. remember we had a discussion about using cares act funding to make it a covet safe environment because queen louise is just open i use the word bond it probably was inappropriate but it's congregate living it really it needs to be um we just need to move it and build a new senior center but in the meantime have we retrofitted a queen louise home because we have the delta variant you have nurses that work not one job when those nurses are coming from one job to another job to your senior center were you able to ask for or request for the covet funds to retrofit our senior centers to be a safe environment there's two different things so senior center is what our social social rec our homes for the age is what you're referring to so i just want to make sure You know what I meant. Go ahead, Assistant Commissioner.

0:25:57 Mikal Reimer Brown, Assistant Commissioner with Oversight. So our COVID funding, we are not using COVID funding for the senior centers. There is sufficient monies in our senior center revolving fund. So they will have the washing stations. We'll have- Okay, has it been done? Yes or no? Looking at the Strife Center, we are almost 100% completed. Has the Queen Louise Center been done with the revival? Yes or no, Commissioner?

0:26:27 But Senator Saru, you're calling something that it's two different things. Queen Louise Home is not a senior center. Okay, any place that has a population that's vulnerable. Because I don't want to play semantics. with your indulgence, Mr. Chair, I don't want to place semantics insofar as a senior center, a rec center, they all have senior citizens in them, right? That's vulnerable. Let's call them Homes for the Age, Senator. Okay, whatever you want to call them, have you used a revolving fund to retrofit them in a safe manner?

0:27:01 As far as Queen Louise home, they still remain as a congregate site in a ward setting. The The home for the age on St. Croix has rooms, and they are separated. As you said, we need to move to the new facility, and that's what we're going to do with our federal funding, building the new skilled nursing facility for Queen Louise home. You know that we, the champ, your mic okay now? Yes, I'm good.

0:27:31 Ma'am. I guess you could follow up because we all have senior people in our lives and that response is insufficient thank you for the time so we actually have partitions they're not rooms but we have partitions in between so which is what you're asking about queen louise specifically so partitions in between yes okay okay a question that i have i have a number of questions but um a healthcare professional just sent me and senator francis an email and the healthcare professional takes care of elderly individuals and was concerned because of lack of vaccination of those individuals who are taking care of the elderly population.

0:28:19 Yes. I'm also concerned. And I read the entire email and the person was a bit concerned because they were saying that they don't want to be responsible for carrying the variant or COVID into the home of the elderly, but they're targeted with taking care of the elderly. You have the exact same situation because we have individuals who work at Queen Louise, work at Herbert Grigg, home care, et cetera.

0:28:53 And choosing not to be vaccinated? yes and choose not to be vaccinated how how can we ensure that those individuals are not going to be a carrier when they're going to the home i i can't guarantee that they won't be um to be honest i can't guarantee that i can only hope they do they use their pps and do everything universal precautions plus the covid no but i really put it out there not for you to give an I put it out there because I am now seriously concerned because there is, I mean, the freedom of choice, but you know you're taking care of a 90-something-year-old person that has been surviving all the time, and then somebody that refuses to get vaccinated, carry that variant into that particular home, and I've seen these individuals, one 105 years old and St. Thomas and X-Aid, you know, they had to contact that from some place. So as we move on, it's a difficult decision for the Virgin Islands in terms of how we're going to take care of our elderly population, you know, and that is why I don't want anybody taking care of my 92-year-old dad because although he's vaccinated, I want to make sure that whoever is taking care of him is vaccinated. Yes.

0:30:14 There are some states that are moving in the direction of if you're a frontline worker, that you are mandated to get vaccinated. You have meals on wheels, right? Correct. You have individuals going to this elderly population every single day to drop our food, every day. We are now dropping at the door, so there's no interaction per se, meaning that they're not coming in close contact, and we did it on purpose to ensure that. We've had a COVID experience in almost every one of our divisions where we've had to shut down, whether it be Head Start, YRC, Queen Louise, we've had every single one.

0:30:53 And so what people are doing outside and then bringing it to their coworkers. So for me, I've instilled that you have to do your social distancing, you're masking up, and you're making sure that you're doing everything possible to keep yourself

safe as well as our clients and our other staff as well. But there are some that are moving towards that, towards that, uh, mandation of, um, Okay. Vaccination. That conversation was just for everybody to think about. Yeah. Out there in the community.

0:31:22 For everybody to just have a serious reflection in terms of our elderly, um, population, where the Virgin Islands is now, um, where we can be in, in, in, in a couple of weeks If we don't control what is now the Delta variant, we have seen over 22 deaths in the British Virgin Islands in the last 21 days and 1,800 cases in the last 21 days. We're doing okay now, our numbers are increasing. So we still have to be very cautious and we still need to try to get as much individuals vaccinated as possible. The governor came on Saturday and he said that schools are in jeopardy if we don't get the numbers under control. So we're talking about a lot of different economic impact and activity on this island. If we can resume to some type of normalcy because of herd immunity.

0:32:21 And I have been telling everyone there's only two ways to get herd immunity, vaccinations or you get it. And if you get COVID now with the Delta variant, many individuals are dying from that or getting seriously ill. So I don't think you want to risk that. Before I go to the next, Senator, the restroom facility at the Richmond facility, we funded money for a restroom. We funded money for a wheelchair accessible fan. Has that been completed? McHale-Rimer Brown, Assistant Commissioner, the wheelchair van has been- It's here?

0:32:53 It is here. It's being wrapped. I think it's due to be released to us on Thursday, but the ADA van is bought as well as the Queen Louise. And the Richmond bathrooms are being worked on by our Nouveau Construction. And that should be, we're hoping to be finished, by the end of September. Okay, thank you. Senator Carrion. And Senator DeGraff is also here, and Senator James, I haven't identified him yet, so committee members are here.

0:33:23 Okay, and don't forget, please state your name, Ms. Modest, remember your name. Okay, thank you. Good morning. I think it's still morning. Good morning to my colleagues and good morning to the testifiers. Commissioner, I must commend you and your team for providing such a detailed appendix. I really appreciate how you have everything so detailed and categorized. So that's good. I really wanted to continue on the line that the chair mentioned in regards to the Richmond Senior Center, a little status update of where they are. I know I took my dad to get his photo ID there, and the staff was very pleasant and the protocol was right in place. But I realize issues with the bathroom. Is that still the status? I mean, are we operating without bathrooms in there?

0:34:15 No, we're not. McHale-Rhyma Brown, assistant commissioner. We have not returned to senior centers on any of the islands. And frankly, we are not going to do so right now because of the surging numbers. So the Richmond bathroom itself, before the senior center participants return, that will be fully renovated, all new equipment, total ADA, that will be done. But currently the facility is being used for photo, senior photo ID. so you have clients that come in to get that type of service so correct but with the seniors so what bathroom what bathroom do they use there there are bathrooms but however the bathrooms we are trying to retrofit them in preparation for the seniors returning remember they'll be there all day so it needs to have more than one available we need to have the full complement okay well i hope i hope that's finished soon. Now, how is your financial department? Is it efficient as it should be? Commissioner, do you feel confident? Or where are you in regards to automating and digitalizing the system to improve the efficiency of that department? Great question. We're severely short staffed for the budget and the amount of programs we have in our fiscal office. And so for us to be efficient operations we have to staff up and we have to be able to have that so recently you have for example we have an accountant that's just for head start so she's not able to work on any other program except for head start because that's a federal mandate if you're paid 100% federally funded so for us we're extremely short-staffed and so if we need a grants management we need an audit because audit the 29 18 and 19 audits were a lot of work they asked for a lot questions um and so for us we're severely stopped shortage in that area if we had more staff we would do so those those positions are included in the fy 22 budget there's a few that are in that not

0:36:14 fully not fully what does that mean meaning that there's a few positions we have a backfill position um that we're doing at two accountant positions that are currently in there we're also added another accountant on a hundred percent medicaid so we're doing some creative ways with not just the gvi but we're putting them on some other federal budgets some federal grants okay that's good that's what we want the commissioners and directors to do to find creative ways to you know be able to share out the funds and and and remove the burden if we can from our general funds to federal dollars that are available so that's that's that's a good thing now i'm a little bit confused still i know we've been talking a lot about vacant positions but i'm i'm still kind of confused because i've been hearing different numbers being thrown out there what is the number exactly so i'm going to allow dc rojas but basically as far as i understand it there were six 78 total vacancies and of the 78 10 are currently posted however we just got that includes just this morning at eight something i got an additional eight that will be included in in that 78 and those 68 say the 10 posted and 68 are in different phases meaning that they might have just got a budget currently uh the ones i just got from this morning the vocational rehab was 100

federally funded i just got that that's been sitting there for five weeks at omb so for me we're getting them and they're all in different phases and so if you get a grant award for a federal program it may be from october 1 but the actual grant award we might not get until february march or april of the following year so therefore i can't put a budget online until i actually get the grant award from the federal government i hear you miss rojas you had anything to add to that

0:38:05 deputy commissioner rojas no she answered it for me okay so then so thank you so it's 78 positions that we have vacant because i heard like 100 uh 120 thrown out there's something from head start also so we have some that are listed in our testimony on page beginning and well actually it's on page 27 of the appendices um the critical hires are not funded in the 2022 budget so critical hires are not funded so we had some critical hires that were included in the 2022 budget And then we have a list that we still need in order for us to be a full workforce that are not included in the 2022 budget.

0:38:47 I didn't ask for more money. Okay. So what do you plan to do then for that other need that you have that we're not included? Either come back later and let you know that I'm still in dire need. But for right now, some positions have been included into the 2022 budget, and we're very thankful for that. Okay. Your Meals on Wheels program. And how often are we delivering those meals? McHale Rimer-Brown, Assistant Commissioner, the Meals on Wheels are delivered to the majority of our seniors Monday through Friday.

0:39:27 So it's an everyday, it's a program that services every day. Correct. And then for those elderly frail who have no other option, we do seven days per week. With the COVID, we've increased to several more seniors, over 1,000. Many of them are able-bodied, but to help them to stop going out as much for shopping, we do them five days per week. Two minutes. Okay.

0:39:55 I know someone's in the program, but they're only receiving it, I think, twice or three times a week. Why some seniors are not? Because if it's supposed to be a daily thing, but some people are receiving it, what's the reason for that? that for example there are some seniors who may live at extreme ends of the island and because of our shortage of staff they may get it three days a week where they'll get a second meal to be refrigerated or frozen and then we go back um the other days of the week but most of the seniors get it five days a week there have been times when there have been covid uh scares among staff that we've had to alter that schedule but we've returned pretty much to five days per week okay yeah because if it's five days and then you have seniors that have in between days that are not receiving those meals and that's that's concerning now also within your professional services i see you have a few contracts here that are expiring um i mean i'm not going to go over all of them but there's one in particular also that calls my attention which is a smart that LLC for approximately \$700,000 what what do you plan to do with with that Commissioner that's in the post-audit report and I'm seeing here hosted infrastructure and cloud support utilizing the Microsoft cloud and I am under we're drafting that contract you're drafting I understand that through BIT, WE HAVE A GENERAL MASTER CONTRACT WITH MICROSOFT TO PROVIDE SERVICES TO ALL DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES. HOW IS THAT DIFFERENT FROM THIS CONTRACT THAT YOU ARE, THAT YOU HAVE PREPARED FOR APPROXIMATELY \$700,000?

0:41:44 I BELIEVE IT'S GOING TO BE INCORPORATED AND BLENDED. BUT I HAVE OUR ADMINISTRATOR FOR MIS, MS. JOCINA BALYPOOL, IF YOU'D LIKE A LITTLE ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THAT. YES, PLEASE, BECAUSE WE'RE TRYING TO AVOID OVERLAPING TIME. JOCINA? Yes, good morning. Justina Balipole, systems manager. The contract you're referring to is the hosting for the VIBE system. Currently, BIT do not provide hosting for cloud services. So that contract is for the VIBE system for clarification. You refer to BIT, their Microsoft service.

0:42:22 service their microsoft service is 365 that's microsoft office so currently did do not provide cloud services but they are looking into that so that's something we are considering once bit brings that on board all right thank you for clarifying that mr chair thank you for the time i don't want to boy thank you senator carrion in last year budget i'm counting the i'm seeing 41 that we funded on one page, a new position of a health aide.

0:42:58 And then I think I have like five more. But in those, there are two more. So that's 44 position and then we gave an additional \$408,000 on the MAP to hire additional workers for MAP. I'm looking at COM Nutrition Aid. What's the COM? Community? Yes, Community Nutrition Aid.

0:43:26 Okay, we funded one, two, three, four, five, six, seven. Were those positions fail, Mr. Rojas? Seven, Community Nutrition Aid. That should be the Meals and Wheels. One second. Deputy Commissioner Rojas, do you need to give me one second to confirm, Senator Bailey? You're okay. Thank you. So we funded there some \$1.4 million in positions, and then the next \$408 million. The \$1.8 million there, and then we did the next \$408 million. So we included over \$2.2 million in new positions for this fiscal year, and you signed that. I know you had a chart where you said how much you were able to hire now, how much new positions were you able to hire? You had it in your testimony.

- 0:44:16 we hired 44 this year those are 44 new or some transfers those are the new um positions um senator and then we had internal transfers or promotions were 25 so we imported 44 new hires and then those that were transferred or within units and or internally promoted which is what I really love because then there's movement in the department, which then allows for a backfill position.
- 0:44:48 So if somebody moves up, then their position becomes available and then we can hire. But what happens is that because it's internal, it doesn't look like we hired anything or did anything if the 25 continued to move on, if that makes sense. Okay. And just to be clear, you said those in acting positions, they're going to be made whole By September? Yes, sir. Okay. With the exception of two. Yes. Correct? No.
- 0:45:18 Deputy Commissioner Rojas, I don't recall saying anything about two people not getting their payments. So I apologize if that's stated. That's not the case. I am meeting with OMB tomorrow to go through the 36 PRF that we have submitted. have 13 that are pending because some prfs are more than one for are for one person but three different time frames um so there's nobody that i have on my list for either acting pay or additional monies due that is um that will not be paid by the end of the fiscal year okay commissioner you had referred to those to two positions that you said somebody was in that position no they'll get their pay for acting however we're still waiting on the position okay so they're going to be paid for acting they'll be paid for acting okay but they will still be acting potentially okay but the other individuals will no longer be acting they will be in the position we're moving our best if the position's available then we post it accordingly and they're obviously able to apply to to to be in that position well that's a different story Those individuals that are acting, how many of them are going to receive a NOPA that states they are no longer acting? If they're still in that acting position presently and they've been in that acting position for three, four years, how many of them are going to receive a NOPA for the position that they're in?
- 0:46:55 Well, if it's a district manager position that's classified, they'll have to apply for it. so I can't legally say they can just move into the position. If it's an exempt position in an acting capacity, then I'm a little bit more liberty. But as a classified, it has to be posted and duly noted like under the union regulations are. So I can't guarantee that because you're in acting capacity and you're moving into a classified position, I can't guarantee you that you will have that job. Does that make sense?
- 0:47:33 It makes sense, but it doesn't make sense. It makes sense because- You still have to go through the process of applying for the position. Okay, one minute, one minute, it makes sense because that is a process. Correct. It doesn't make sense because we've been acting for years. Agreed. So, we need a solution. If somebody's been acting for five years, four years, and now you come and you tell me, going to open up interviews and there's a possibility that I'm not going to give you the position. Thank you for acting for four years but too bad we don't need you now. I would be like why was I acting for such a long period of time? So what is the game plan in terms of the acting employees have been there for years. Yes.
- 0:48:16 In terms of making them whole. Okay you gotta list it we know that. Now how are we going to fast track this process to make those individuals whole if the If the person wasn't doing a good job in the acting position and they need a letter stating, you weren't doing a good job, we're going to hire somebody else, but what is the position? If there is a way for us to do a waiver or something with personnel, then we can request that, which we've done in the past for not necessarily moving into the position, but we're doing that aspect. So if there's a way to do it and they're doing well in the acting capacity, for me, you've been acting for five years, you've done a great job, there's no reason for you not to be in the position or assume the position and role. If you've not done such a good job, you shouldn't be acting.
- 0:48:59 I know you would have. Point of an increase, Senator Gregory. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just for my own edification and understanding, these positions that these individuals are acting in, are those actual positions on the books? The positions that they're currently acting in? Yeah, so are they actual positions on the books? There's some that are not. there's no, for example, the district manager position. So you see the issue, right? I see the issue. Can you act in a position that's not in your budget?
- 0:49:31 It might have been a vacancy that was taken away, which is what we talked about in 2020. So it was an unfunded vacancy. So then here we are, we have somebody that was in acting capacity. You all are engaging in unfair labor practices. You are. You're all lucky that these employees didn't take eye to where you need to go. It's unfair. If there's a position that's, if the position is not available, they should not be acting in it. Correct. And you've had enough time, this body has moved significant funding to support critical vacancies. If a district manager position is a critical vacancy, send it down to OMB, have y'all sent them down to OMB? Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes? Yes.
- 0:50:16 this is because it's a critical hire because the other aspect of it is this what we are doing to these government employees is a disservice we can't keep doing this to people but it's not your and your agency alone mr chair thank you for the time this is very frustrating when you come and you hear this i mean we need to ask ourselves what if this was me would that be

okay the answer is no No.

- 0:50:45 As far as the, just going back to what Senator Belay was saying regarding the acting capacity and the union aspect, the classified positions, they have to apply for the position. Commissioner, you can't act for five years. I'm sure there's laws on the books. I just didn't have time to look at them because I didn't bring my computer today. Okay, there are laws on the books to prevent that kind of thing. You can't have somebody acting for five years. That is an unfair labor practice. Okay. And it needs to stop. Thank you, Mr. Chair. At some point, all of the positions were there. Some of them might have been zero-funded and taken out after, but at some point, when they were appointed to that acting position, the position existed. And then there was a wait whether or not the person was retiring, and you had to wait for the NOPA, et cetera, and they continued to act. But I think that they're listening, and they want us to come up with a concise answer. And that's why I think it's so important for us to be able to see that we have the one part. The first part is they'll be paid before the end of this fiscal year by September. But now the second part is how are you going to develop a mechanism for those individuals that have been acting and have been doing a good job and doing the job for them to remain in that position. And that's the only fair thing because they've been doing it for a couple of years. If they weren't doing a good job, that is something else.
- 0:52:20 So my point of inquiry is Senator Francis. Senator Francis, mic please. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I think that this conversation is really critical. You know, as a commissioner, I've indicated, as commissioner, it's my privilege and honor to lead a team of people that show up every day to fulfill our mandates and continue and contribute to our skills, to our respective position. There's a level of frustration, because, you know, we get the techs coming in and their conversation. Employees are frustrated. We're talking about individuals as very compassionate. continue to go out there and do their jobs but we have to compensate them we have to remove the barriers you know when we get in these cabinet meetings we have to have discussion or our counterparts you know OMB office of collective bargaining delete and create whatever it takes you know if someone is acting in a position for 90 days the law require that they should be considered for those position and if not then they should not be acting but you you know, if you don't address this issue, we'll continue to see morale issue, all right?
- 0:53:40 So please, whatever I could do to bring the team together, I'm willing to do that as well, but something needs to happen because our government employees are very, very frustrated. Thank you very much. Thank you, Senator. So then the recommendation there is that we need a meeting with Office of Management and Budget and Collective Bargaining. You guys need to sit down in the same room, or we need to come up with a mechanism to solve this problem. It's going to be a tremendous morale booster to your staff. We have, in fact, with the list that I'm looking at, the monies owed, back monies, and the acting. So just to let you know that it's not just all of them haven't.
- 0:54:19 Some of them have moved into the positions when they became vacant, so just so you know that. And then they'll made whole by the end of this fiscal year. OK. End of inquiry, Senator Saro. with Senator Joseph Vincent Thomas. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to call you Elliot. Antoine. CFO Antoine. I apologize. Payments to Cigna. At one point we overpaid Cigna, right? Did we? Go ahead. Name, name and title, sorry. Charmaine, Modeste, Antoine. We have had issues paying Cigna on time consistently, so we are current with the payments as of today. They are in overpayment status, but they normally receive huge credits a couple times each week.
- 0:55:16 Thank you, Senator Joseph, you're recognized. A pleasant good day, Mr. Chairman, colleagues, as well as testifiers. We're having a slight feedback. Thank you so much. It's been addressed, Lisa. I want to, one, thank the hardworking people at the Department of Human Services for their work over the years, especially during this time of the pandemic.
- 0:56:03 Commissioner, I want to thank you and your leadership team for all that you've been doing. In spite of some of the challenges that we have, I want to, Mr. Chairman, there's this feedback and it has me a bit discombobulated. So is it possible we could take a little break until we get it addressed and hold on my time? Say that again, I'm not getting any feedback here. You're as clear as they. Tell me what's happening.
- 0:56:39 it's internally here in the chamber sir okay media knows how to to deal with that in St Thomas they'll just turn it off so you don't get a feedback they will deal with it as you continue talking I'm happy to hear your optimism but it's still occurring so let me just ask a couple of questions I did go through the post audit listing for personnel services and I came up with a number relative to the vacant position as listed in post audit. I counted 144 vacant and 62 new positions. Now kindly indicate to us Commissioner if you are going to be actually expending your entire budget, this budget that you are asking for on these to fill these 144 vacant positions. I'll allow DC Rojas however I believe the list that you're currently looking at may not be completely correct. Then Mr. Chairman may may I request through the chair a list of their vacant their current vacant positions as well as their current new positions through the chair commissioner I read your testimony intently and I had a few questions regarding on page 7 of your testimony you indicated that you have some critical hiring needs kindly indicate the number of those positions

- 0:58:29 that you have that is critically higher needs i believe it was 99 dc rojas is that correct additional and i believe it's in the appendix section as well miss uh senator joseph it's in the appendix yes okay i didn't get to read through all of the appendices Okay, so it's 99 critical hiring needs. Okay, thank you so much for placing that on the record.
- 0:59:07 I want to go into one of the areas that I'm familiar with, is the federal grants. Okay, do you have indirect costs associated with any of these federal grants that you manage in the Department of Human Services? Yes, Charmaine, Modeste Antoine, CFO. Yes, we normally have. Yes, can you indicate the indirect cost rate? The indirect cost rate is currently, the last issued indirect cost rate was Issued for 2019 at 13.73%, and that's split between the central government and our agency, about half-half. I can have the exact amounts to you. If you'd be so kind to provide that information as well. So yours is split between the government and your agency. Now, going down to your federal grants. I noted that you have this social services block grant.
- 1:00:16 You are in the red for \$1.3 million, is that correct? No, ma'am. There's normally a lag in getting the awards online, so we have received some of the awards, so we are in the process of sending that information to ensure that we can get that placed online to update the amount. But you have already expended \$1.3 million, and what was your funding source, even though that that isn't online your funding source what was your funding source for that that is normally payroll i'm sorry i said i said right now the payroll is normal is significantly fine um the payroll is the block grant is significantly funding the payroll for certain areas so that's the amount that's being reported that's expended name okay that grant expired in a grant would have expired this year september 30th 2021 but then i go down a little further and i see you're having the same issue for a grant that is expiring in september 30th 2022 let me make sure because these these numbers are so small on this chart and you have 1.4 million 1.1 million sorry that you're in the red for but you have this other grant which will be expiring is the same social services block grant right that will be expiring in September 30th of 2022 and you have money in that that fund which totals remaining which totals 1.5 1.5 million so tell me how you're managing these sources of fund because for me it looks like something is happening there that leads to uh management or of how we are managing the funds
- 1:02:29 and pulling them down tell me how you're going to address uh these two uh red area where you have over overspent on these two areas one this these two grants let me tell you the project numbers the project number is f geez and bread this thing is so small f seven two f six and look like f seven two nine three what is the strategy what is the strategy because first thing they like to say is that we are mismanaging our money the federal money What is the strategy?
- 1:03:09 Charmaine Modeste-Antoine, CFO. I can assure you, Senator, that these grants are in the process of establishing the awards. There has been a lag, as the Commissioner mentioned. Two years seems like a long time, but we have found that several of the grants were addressed to addresses that we weren't actually receiving the awards. There were some delays in us receiving the awards. And so now we reached out to the regulatory bodies. We are consistently receiving the awards on a timely basis. So we're now getting the awards. We're in the process of incorporating a new process at OMB, ensuring that all of the information is in the eService system and ensuring that we have the spending plans associated with those. And based on the new process, there's been a little bit of a lag. But I assure you, we are in the process of getting all of these awards that are outstanding placed online.
- 1:04:09 Two minutes. Have your funders indicated, because that's not the only program, you know. I looked down here and I saw you had some, well, TANF, TANF, you're in the red too for \$220,000. So I'm looking at that you've overspent. Have the funders, your federal funders, your federal partners, have they indicated to you in writing that you can utilize the monies that were expended? Because you had to have used our general fund monies to cover the cost of payroll for these employees that would normally be paid through the grant.
- 1:04:53 So have they indicated that they would, you can now utilize in writing? they indicated that you can now utilize the funding that you get you get available from the funding sources for these grants social services block grant to pay for these costs and so you could do the necessary reconciliation yes ma'am we do have all of the approvals we work very closely as the commissioner mentioned with our federal Charmaine Modest Antoine sorry CFO Charmaine Modest Antoine CFO okay so I want to go to the the commissioner are any of your critical hires going to be individuals to assist the CFO with managing these federal funds yes ma'am how many I will allow her to answer for the fiscal office of what the needs are specifically to run the multiple grants.
- 1:06:02 Charmaine, Modessa, we have nine positions listed in the critical vacancies as the commissioner mentioned. There has been challenges with recruiting for the fiscal office. We are in the process of establishing the grants unit. We do have a significant amount of grants that require oversight and reporting responsibilities. With the new grants that we're receiving for the COVID funding, the ARPA, the Carissa, there's the specialization that occurs. You have to ensure that you review the program instructor instructions. And so we are recruiting for those positions. We have nine.

- 1:06:51 How many of the nine are ready to go to onboard time? We have had positions for the fiscal office posted for about 60 days, possibly 90 days without any applicants. And the commissioner mentioned it may be the challenges of the salaries. And so we are, I am working with the commissioner and HR on a strategy for onboarding staff. If we can bring on some office assistance to process the voluminous amount of invoices that we get on a daily basis, then the accountants that have been with the program for five years, 10 years, 20 years can be elevated. And so we are internally looking at restructuring, and that's part of our recruiting strategy. Thank you. Mr. Chairman, I know that my time has expired, and I would just ask you to allow me to just wrap up, if you'll be so kind.
- 1:08:01 You may conclude. Thank you kindly. Now, my line of questioning is really outlined and demonstrated on page 11 of 40, where under the Food and Nutrition Services SNAP, and this goes to the accounting, we have to now find money totaling \$673,331.40 to pay back for this allowed cost. You know, that's how critical it is for us to get persons who are accountants, but they could also be persons who are trained. You can have persons who have the background and the experience. So I'm hopeful, Ms. Modest, that you get some people there who could support you and support the agency so we don't have to be paying back the money out of the general fund because we don't have no money. We need all the federal dollars. Thank you kindly, Mr. Chairman, for the leeway.
- 1:09:07 Thank you, Senator Joseph. You do have a grants administrator, though? Yes. Yes. The person is on? Yes. Okay. Because I'm not hearing them answer the questions relative to grants, or they think we're going to. If I can clarify, so the grants administrator does help with the e-service and training that's under the fiscal office. Each administrator for the programs are really responsible for their grants aspect of things they write the grant they develop the budgets and all of that so the grants administrator does more of the administrative role not the actual aspect of it so all of our administrator expertise and their own areas are they doing their job up to snuff in terms of being able to account for the monies that are allocated to them yes I never lies heavily on the fiscal so if you don't have an accountant or you're short staffed and that information then doesn't get to them timely in order to help with it and that's what I'm asking is the information from those separate grant administrators flow into the CFO in a timely manner so that she can be able to reconcile her figures etc it's as Commissioner Charmaine Modeste Antoine CFO as the Commissioner mentioned based on the staffing constraints that we We have, it's been a struggle, but the team, the skeleton team.
- 1:10:32 Stop being constrained to your part, but I'm talking about the individual divisions, the individual grant administrators like SNAP. No, no, no. There's one grant administrator at the Department of Human Services. So one grant administrator, but each individual that's currently on, the administrators for their program are the ones that are responsible for that, so it flows into the fiscal year. Those are who I'm talking about. Is it flowing? That's all I'm saying. Individuals, are they providing the information like they should? For the most part, majority of the time.
- 1:11:02 Okay, and Con, do you have one contract administrator? Yes. That person is on leave? Yes. How long now? Three weeks, two weeks, three weeks, they'll be out for a period of time. So what we've done somehow with the other contracts, so the Medicaid contracts, I have somebody that's working on the Medicaid um the attorney our legal counsel has now been trained specifically so she's been helping to work on that as well it's definitely a deficit in our area considering the amount of grants we have senator fred gregory point of inquiry thank you mr chair um my colleague that spoke earlier uh made reference to is uh an amount of funds that has to be paid back, I think it's in the post-salary report, I think it's some \$693, \$70,000, etc. What is the cause for that and what are the corrective actions that you have put in place to mitigate that from occurring in the future? Thank you.
- 1:12:06 These were due to the review of the SNAP program for disallowed costs for 2017 and 2018 that were cost allocated without an approved cost allocation methodology. And so when the reviewers came in 2019 and they notified us that these costs were disallowed, we stopped applying those costs to the grant using that methodology. And that's why there's the push for the cost allocation plan that would go across the human services agency but is mandatory for some programs such as a Title IV E program.
- 1:12:59 What type of costs were disallowed, what were they? They were shared costs like cleaning, security, you know, because we didn't have an approved cost allocation methodology, they were disallowed. Okay. Are you going to have that cost allocation methodology in place by one? Do you have it already? Working on it. We're working on a cost allocation plan. We're working with a vendor to ensure that all the documentation is in place to execute the contract. We have identified the funding and sufficient funding has been placed in the 2022 budget to cover it.
- 1:13:35 The target date for that is? Well, the process is a two-year process. We were hoping to get started before the end of this fiscal year. But because the contract process takes a little bit, we hope to get started at the beginning of 2022. You made reference at 7.5 million SIGNA. What was that? I missed that. So when Senator Saru asks a question about Cigna. Well, the amount that we owe Cigna varies based on the prescription.

- 1:14:14 Like it was something about an overpay or something you said? Did you say overpay? Okay, not by 7.5 million. Yes, we are in overpayment status currently with Cigna. And this is for what services? The Prescription Drugs for the Medicaid Program. Prescription Drugs for the Medicaid Program. May I? May I? May I? Yes. McHale Reimer Brown, Assistant Commissioner with Oversight of Medicaid. With the Cigna arrangement, there is an agreement you have to fund the account of up to close to \$500,000 in advance because the medication cost hit throughout the week. So at any given point, our medication costs maybe \$1.1 million, then we'll be in a deficit. So when Ms. CFO is talking about an overpayment currently, currently maybe as of today, but by tomorrow you could have \$500,000 charged to that account.
- 1:15:11 Just to clarify. Okay. Your lease, I see that you, we have a lease for the Mars Hill Wheel of Fortune property in the amount of \$478,000, why are we entering into a new lease at the same site, the same property, for \$70,000? I thought the whole building was human services. No, it was not.
- 1:15:41 McHale Rymer, Brown Assistant Commissioner, the first lease, which we're in already, was for the DFA and the MAP, Medicaid staff. If you recall, the energy office was previously in a section or a wing of. And they're moving. And they moved. So now, we're going to be moving our hardworking seniors with Grigg and moving them to the Mars Hill location where the former energy office was. Okay, so a senior citizen is moving out of Herbert Grigg?
- 1:16:11 Senior Citizens Affairs, all the programs that they can get now, will be in a very much upgraded building in Mars Hill. Yes. Okay, so I'm glad to hear you say that. You're going to now renovate those rooms and turn them into rooms for seniors, so the elderly population. That is why we're vacating, so we could proceed with renovations. Give me some target dates. Okay, so we have FEMA monies, which is currently for the current property. We are close to being obligated to the tune of about \$4 million to proceed to start doing the repairs.
- 1:16:46 And that would give you an additional how many rooms? It may give us additional rooms, Senator, but we cannot necessarily open the beds without the concurrent staff. Remember, our goal is to- We need beds for seniors. So staff ain't a big issue for us to find monies for staff. We need to know, we need to know what is the cost. So we can hire, so we can prepare. Pat yourself on the back.
- 1:17:13 It took four years or five years, so pat yourself on the back that we're finally not using this contracting company to hire our own people. I mean, that country goes so crazy. So now they're full-fledged government employees. That's why we're in the transition process. That's what I just sent you over the weekend, sir. Submit a plan for those additional rooms and the staff. Yes, ma'am. And if you could have that plan for the staffing. Ms. Rojas, you're listening for the additional room, so Herbert Grigg, staffing at Herbert Grigg, in the next two weeks, if we can have that staffing plan.
- 1:17:51 So FEMA's a reimbursable program, so making sure that we get the funding to actually make the space good, that'll be the contingency, so I will do a full plan on making sure that FEMA is in that process and what their timeline is as far as the funding is concerned to ensure that the building's done. Okay, but what we need an assessment as to what is going to be the cost, because we can't have, this is like going into the Anna's Hope situation with the mental health, if it's going to cost \$700,000, \$800,000 to get 20 additional seniors in, you know, we can't wait for FEMA five years on the line.
- 1:18:27 Exactly. We are going to have to be able to make some decisions as to how we're going to move up, because we have those borders that, are you paying for the borders in Puerto Rico that the hospital sent to Puerto Rico from the hospital no sir okay so and that's really a human services responsibility I did not place them it cost us days to loot sir so you guys many that I have guardianship over them okay that's a conversation need to be had though it is a conversation let me go center the graph you recognize I thank you mr. chair good afternoon colleagues good afternoon testifiers of your listening and present our Commissioner dear your team I thank you for all you do for the people that were known and you have my support now I'd like to make a quick mention of our termite nest by your on st john at the uh head start the closed down head start there's a large termite nest there um going over into the adjacent buildings and so if you could have your maintenance team look at it to try see if you could uh eradicate that nest on st john yes Back to employees, you mentioned about the acting position, the acting pay.
- 1:20:03 That \$400,000 come to about \$9,000 plus for each of those employees, that's how it would be? Roughly or different employees, different amounts? Every employee is a different amount, sir. Okay. Okay. So now have all your unionized employees, non-unionized employees received their wage increases? Getting a little bit of feedback. If I may. Deputy Commissioner Roana Rojas.
- 1:20:41 I'm hearing feedback. I just want to make sure you guys can hear me clearly. yeah okay um so thank you senator um for the question uh we are currently for some of our unions still in negotiations and that is usw masters and siu yrc and voc for the correction officers so those are still um in the negotiation process for the lesu um in for the lesu members their um increases are being implemented they had two increases that we were working on one has come back from um through a process they do have their new nopas and the second increase that's due to them is being done through the internal dhs

process to submit their nova um sorry to submit the PRF to OMB for approval and then once we have everything back that will get submitted and then the last group is the SIU organization the members there we had 48 members who had incorrect salaries that are being worked on right now and we have submitted to OMB the funding for the increase that is due to them and that was submitted last week we are in a september cohort that our our increases for them are due by the end of september and that's where we are with the increases for the members of unions at dhs okay good good news so in fy20 you received 175 150 for wage pay increases and in 21 you received 848 000 640 610 i think it is for wage

1:22:40 increases what was that money spent all those money spent for wage increases other than what you just mentioned there was that covered for the individuals i believe the so sorry deputy commissioner rojas um i believe the 177 that you're referring to for fy20 are for the colas that's for the vi worker union um head start employees um and then the 800 000 that you mentioned i believe as well those those fundings were for the head start increases um and that was implemented uh and so vi workers union increases are all up to date okay good good news uh the facilities uh i i know the capital outlay wasn't uh that much uh i i i'm saying thomas human services building what is the status of that building and is there any funds needed to address anything currently i have deputy commissioner of operations, also with my disaster recovery specialist Ms. Akilah O'Brien on, but basically most of the funding for the Newt Hansen complex specifically will be coming from FEMA. And so for us, that's the assessment. Capital outlay for less than \$50,000 for Department of Human Services that has over 13 facilities is a little bit lower than I would have liked to see but I think the Newt Hanson complex if I'm not mistaken is about was it four million I think it's about four million I need to double-check that for you Senator DeGraff but most of the funding for Newt Hanson complex is

1:24:30 specifically from FEMA related funds no GVI funding and also in St. Cory you Is it at 13? Does it cover everything? No, yeah, that capital outlay. So if you look at our number of buildings that we currently own, because my ultimate goal would be to get out of a rental capacity and be able to have my own space. So that's kind of our vision. However, in saying that, you would still need all of the buildings. Like, for example, in Estate Diamond and St. Croix, we have lots of buildings there, but we would love to need to renovate all of them, specifically, and \$45,000 would not be enough for capital outlay.

1:25:10 Two minutes. Two minutes. Okay, the MAP provider relations unit, how many personnel in that unit right now? The personnel, so for MAP, for the provider relations specifically, how many do we currently have? We could probably do a query real quick for you on that. Okay, we could follow up on that for me and find out, you know, the staff and how much individuals you need. Now, you control the senior citizen fund, how much money is in that fund?

1:25:44 Which fund specifically, Revolving Fund? The Senior Citizen Center. Or the Senior Citizen Center Fund. The Senior Citizen Center, the Senior Citizen Revolving Fund, and the Home for the Aid Revolving Fund, and the Crisis Intervention Fund. I'd like to know how much money are in those particular funds. Give me a second. Let me get that to you. Charmaine, Modessa, Antoine. Sure. And also now for the Queen Louise home, I believe Housing Finance Authority from either the 32nd or 33rd legislature had provided, I think it was \$15 million between Queen Louise and Herbert Gregg for build out. Is that money still available?

1:26:29 but would you mind stating the question one more time so for for what we're doing right now for Queen Louise home for the aged we're applying for our community development block grant million dollars awarded between queen louise home and i think it was the herbert greg home so we have those facilities to be um for that money to be used to repair rebuild those facilities is that money still available so we don't have all of the funding for both facilities quite yet we're in the middle of applying so the cdbg or the community development block grant disaster funding we're going to have to mix that with some other funding in order to get the total amount so for example a total renovation for a 60-bed skilled nursing facility um for st croix is going to be about 61 million dollars and for queen louise home for the age in st thomas once we acquire the land and start building that from from the ground up um that'll be about 48 million dollars sir so we do not have the full allotment for either one of those time okay and um if i may wrap up mr chair and then he could give me those funding amongst the the do you have any savings um from 21 um budget that you're looking at because of the 2020 with the covet beginning and that are we looking at any savings that may be passed over into the budget i don't believe so that's why we're talking about a little bit earlier um we'll make sure that we look at that a little bit closer uh for this body to ensure that we're able to expend all of our funding for 2021.

1:28:16 okay thank you and like i said for those funds if you go when you find them if you could give me that information uh thank you for the time mr chair it's my pleasure thank you senator the graph as soon as you get the amount just give me a signal and i'll let you put it on the record um So I have, for the Medicaid, there are 28 full-time employees and nine temporary employees, specifically in the area that Senator DeGraff asked about. Is that provider relations, DC Rojas? Well, that's MAP?

- 1:28:51 Correct. Mr. Smith, are you the one? Mr. Smith, you're still there? Yeah, I'm here. Good morning. For provider relations, we require three additional claim reviewers and one intake person. We could probably use two intake, one for St. Thomas and St. Thomas, St. John, and one for St. Croix, but we'll do it one right now. Do we have, how are we making out with credentialing doctors or providers? Any backlog or is it a seamless process now? We are doing so great. I'm so thankful for asking.
- 1:29:29 yeah the commissioner the commissioner mentioned in her testimony we you know uh since the release to the department and you know um under the leadership of the commissioner and the assistant commissioner that that is no longer an issue so we don't have any outstanding you're turning it around in how long how long it takes you to turn around a provider if we get all the documentation go ahead and director once all the documentation is complete you go ahead commissioner as soon as i can sign that in five minutes literally um i get a text of when it comes to me and i sign off when they provide our agreement so there's no holding off my because i sign everything electronically so we presently don't have any provider who has come submitted all the information that has been waiting for weeks, that's gone.
- 1:30:22 If they've submitted everything that they're supposed to and nothing's expired and they're ready to go, then it'll be a quick turnaround. In the event that they don't have all of their documents and or licensure on file, then that'll be an issue. CFO. Charmaine Modeste-Antoine, CFO. I just need to clarify that the payments to the providers happen a little bit different from the other payments. It happens via a cycle and so it's the entire cycle is fed to the ERP system if there's an error within the cycle or the batch then that may hold up the process which has happened in the last 90 days. We have been on schedule with the cycles over the last couple of weeks and so we haven't received any notification that there were any errors in any batch.
- 1:31:16 So there should be no issues, but if there's any time an issue with the batch being held up for some type of error, that would be completely separate from the check run cycles. Okay. Before I go to the point, I'm getting some concerns still about the child care providers. They said if you could repeat the information, because some child care providers have been calling and said they haven't been paid for September of last year. So how are we? We keep on getting that. We hear that it's going out, but then we have these individuals who continue to say that they have not been paid.
- 1:31:51 I have asked my staff to get the specific names. So, and Senator Francis, I think, has some, everybody probably has some, so that we can provide you with those specific names that have not been paid. But can you repeat the information as to why, or an explanation as to why some child care providers have not been paid since September? The Assistant Commissioner Carla Benjamin, she's been working with them directly. Assistant Commissioner Carla Benjamin, the issues or challenges with the child care payments have been all around.
- 1:32:27 Some has been documentation that's provided by the child care providers, yes, from as far back as 2020 are still duplicate invoices and other issues. One of the things that was holding the payments up was our not having a vehicle for payment. Sort of the same issue with Medicaid. Since authority has been given to the Department of Human Services to execute our own agreements, we've executed We've completed 74 of them since the beginning of the year.
- 1:33:02 It no longer goes to PMP. No, it does not. Praise God. Go ahead. So we have agreements in place, like I mentioned earlier. So the 2021s are being paid because of some of the staffing issues. In order to get the 2020 payments done that we have gotten done, we've gotten a lot of them done over the last few weeks. My office has literally had to go into the payment system, locate invoices, correlate them with purchase orders, put them in a package and send them to the fiscal office to get that done. And then since they've been forwarded to the Department of Finance, we've subsequently had to go and create a spreadsheet from the approval that was gotten from PMP in order that everything that was approved shows so that Department of Finance, I guess, that would prevent us from trying to get paid anything that was not specifically approved.
- 1:34:00 So you have a mechanism in place to get those individuals from September 2020 paid? Yes, sir. Okay, and you're going to be working with notifying those individuals who are missing information, or have duplicate information as to what they need to turn in so that you could be able process of paperwork yes sir okay and if i have specific names i will provide it to you can i can i do a plug for the thirty thousand dollars of the applications to improve their facilities right now that's thirty thousand dollars for child care licensed child care facilities they can apply for that ends at the end of july it's like it's like a little mini grant you need 30 000 dollars no what i'm telling they the child care providers okay wait wait start over i'm sorry so this is the payment issue is a separate issue but i wanted to put a plug in that we got additional federal money so every single every single licensed child care provider facility may apply for up to thirty thousand dollars okay stop yes how How? An application, it's a very short application.
- 1:35:14 Is the application online? Yes. Who has to address the site directly, say it slowly so that they can. And then we put it out, there's \$30,000 in federal funds that child care providers can apply for and get. You're already in the system, apply for

that \$30,000. So we're going to see the application process. We're going to give out the website, apply for the \$30,000. We have to spend these federal funds or they're going to go back. St. Thomas, St. Croix, St. John. So give me the application and then two points. Give me the site.

1:35:53 Do you have applications you could give us some? Let me pass it out for you. Yeah, well, I was going to hand deliver a few months, though. But it's a great opportunity because if you want to pay your rent for a year, you can pay your rent for a year. If you want to buy a generator, you can buy your generator. If you want to reinforce your PPEs or cleaning supplies, feel free to do so. If you want to do a new curriculum or buy tablets for your children that are in your facility, you want to upgrade your security. There's so many options. And they need to provide the invoices after they're done, reconcile. They'll reconcile it all for us, yes.

1:36:23 Take your address, website. What's the website? They can call the child care offices. Oh, God, sometimes when they call, we call them forever and we can't get through. I want something that they could just get it. We can upload the mini-grant application to the DHS website. So they could call or they could come into the office and pick up the application? They could call and come in. Carl and Benjamin, Assistant Commissioner. I do believe that the child care program has actually emailed the information out on a mass email. and we followed up because there wasn't a very good response, which is why commissioners plugging it.

1:37:09 All they have to do is apply. There aren't very many situations where an application would be denied, and at the end of the process, all they need to do is provide documentation to show that the money was spent in the way that they said they would in the budget. Okay. Are you email already to the child care providers, but you haven't received a good response? I think we got 10. We got 10? Yeah. And how much care providers we have? A hundred and... License, 172. 172.

1:37:40 And we got back 10. Correct. For \$30,000, all you need to do is fill an application. I'm putting it out there. \$30,000, all you need to do is fill an application out. So we don't want to hear no excuses. Senator Sauer, you wanted a point and then Senator carry on. And Senator James. Thank you, Mr. Chair. is a two-prong question. So I'm seeing this MAP listing and the testimony is very, you straddle the fence in saying what's happening in MAP. You're careful with your words. Do you still have the same two employees in provider relations? Mr. Smith?

1:38:18 The same two. You had two employees in provider relations that were pleading for help and we refunded positions for MAP. Did we add any to provider relations, Mr. Smith? And the second one would be, how you're wording, what I'm comprehending from the reading is that the Medicaid program integrity unit is not up and running, you intend to have it up and running? McHale-Ryma Brown, Assistant Commissioner with Oversight of Medicaid. So we created all of the new positions. We've already started to interview. So you know what, it's not running though. You're in the process of getting it.

1:38:57 Because the way your testimony reads, somebody who don't know how to read and comprehend well will think that you have a program up and running, so you're on the way. So, okay, the last point is the timeline. What's the timeline to get the integrity unit up and running? Yes, we'll be doing interviews for the rest of July and August, and I'm anticipating hires before the end of August. So what's the timeline? Do you intend to have the unit up and running by October 1?

1:39:27 I would say full implementation pending on the interviews and the right candidates before the end of September we should have that unit up and running. And the two employees provider relations still have the two employees? Mr. Smith can let you know who works with provider relations. Mr. Smith. Gary Smith Medicaid director uh there are five uh staff working in the provider relations unit senator saru has been for uh since um dating back to sometime in 2018. Mr. Trevor may clarify in 2018 when he testified before us in the cardiac center he those employees belong to a different unit and they were assisting in provider relations that was his response vividly do we have people that have been hired specifically for the provider relations unit so um senator saru again you know we have five employees that have been working within the provider relations unit since back in 2018 and we have not hired any additional um staff as yet but uh we did do an interview two or three weeks ago and um hold up one minute we will be how many are on sick leave say that again how many of the five are on sick leave no one on sick leave right now so all five are back to work the last time i know we spoke you had a number of individuals out um on sick leave from that particular office so you're saying no you have all five bodies that are back in the provider office back working yes

1:41:22 mr chair i just need to clarify the question the question was he did not hire i'm telling you the answer right so provider relations only have two employees still and they were borrowing employees or cross-training employees from other areas that total in his eyes the five but we put money in the budget did he hire because those two employees are on st thomas st john so did he hire people to fully staff up the provider relations area of map and the answer mr chair is no he said they're working on it and they're doing interviews and something but the answer is no thank you mr chair do we have any provider relations individuals on st croix mikhail rima brown assistant commissioner yes we have miss beverly joseph

and she oversees the provider relations and she has i believe two staff who work with her and the two on saint thomas so ms joseph have two soft and st croix and then the two and then the two on saint thomas who work with the provider relations okay so beverly plus two that's three and mr smith or two more yeah so so mr chairman can i uh may i may clarify something so the provider relations unit um was established when you know i came on board and there was basically one person addressing provider applications okay so what i did is i had conversations with a couple of staff and you know worked with with miss beverly joseph and we established the provider relations unit now regarding class

1:43:17 Ms. Joseph joined you when, last year? No. No, I met Ms. Joseph at the program. She was working at the program when I came up. Okay, so let me stress to you one minute, we gave \$408,000 for MAP, was that money spent? We gave \$408,000 for vacancies, was that spent? Mikel Reimer-Brown, Assistant Commissioner with Oversight. As we talked about, the temporary hires are going permanent, and they are going to be paid back pay, retro-paid to October, and before the end of this year, we should have staff with that \$407,000, so there will be some expenditures, but it will not all be expended in fiscal year 2021. So right now, have we hired anyone with the \$408,000, or are you in the process of temporary back pay? We gave money to hire permanent positions. Have we hired any permanent position with the \$408,000?

1:44:24 The August 2nd date will be the first nine coming on as hires. Okay, so we're going to have nine people coming on for the first in August. Right, and then you will see the liquidation coming down from that. And as Mr. Smith said, he and his staff and myself were in the midst of hiring. We had a director of program integrity. I was part of that interview. The candidates, we moved on because we needed to get some other candidates for interview. So those nine were temporary workers before?

1:44:55 Yes. So they were working with human services in a temporary position? Exactly. In MAP? In MAP. okay for the whole year yes yes to get those temporary workers permanent and we gave the money from october first so when you gave the money senator it is not necessarily when the monies were released as as you know um but we didn't need a full 408 to be released on the week i was going to be paid every two weeks we only needed enough to pay the nine individuals and every two-week cycle. Yes, but in order to send for the PRFs, which triggers the personnel hires, OMB has to release those funding. D.C. Rojas can say- So you just got a release? I believe it was somewhere around March or April of 2021. So those nine temporary workers have been paid out of a different account? No, they were being paid from our allocation regular 20 that we had for 2021 but with the permanent hires sir they will be getting increases because they're now going into the classified union and some of them are due increases so the bulk of the 408 thousand still exists so you could reprogram some of that to pay some of your outstanding yes thank you mr chair uh my question is Assistant Commissioner Benjamin was talking about that the department now is dealing with their own procurement process, so I want to know what's the turnaround time for that, because we get complaints coming in that stuff are just taking forever to be processed and too long.

1:46:41 So she spoke about the mechanism, but what's the timeframe, the turnaround time for that? the time the provider in Carla Benjamin assistant commissioner when the child care office receives the documentation they have given a five-day timeframe to vet and make sure that the invoices and everything is in place and the fiscal office has given a turnaround time of I believe they said five days as well and And then, as I understand, the Department of Finance has 10 days to two weeks to vet to make sure that the documentation is correct.

1:47:27 And then the payment can be disbursed if the funding is available. So within a month time? A month is liberal, yes. And internally within your divisions and department where requests are made, what's the turnaround time for that? If someone, a director of the division is making a request for supplies or anything that they need within their budget for the department, what's the whole up and why also that process sometimes delays so much? I'm not sure. Charmaine Modeste Antoine, CFO. I'm not sure I captured your question correctly.

1:48:04 But if you're asking about the turnaround timeframe for when things get processed, when submitted to the fiscal office, it's possible because we've been on monthly allotments, we've been having to manage the line item categories that funding is available. So a program, we have about 40 different programs that we've assigned general fund accounts to, and a program may not have sufficient, if they need supplies for \$10,000, they may only have \$6,000 available because the amount of allotments that have been released, and it won't be able to be processed sufficiently. So we are constantly working on coordinating the time to ensure that we can process the payments for our various programs.

1:48:54 I'm not sure I captured your question. No, you did. It's based on the allotment you received, so that gives me some clarity as to what's happening. Thank you so much. Senator James. Good afternoon to the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands, good afternoon testifiers. My question is, I see here the Office of Intake and Emergency Services, do we have vacancies in that office? Good afternoon, excuse me, I'm Carla Benjamin Assistant Commissioner, yes, Senator, we do.

- 1:49:35 Okay, because in the budget, it's hard to determine which vacancies belong to which division. So can you provide to me how many vacancies you have in the Office of Intake and Emergency Services? And while you're looking up that information, the reason why I'm asking that, because it says here that the Office of Intake and Emergency Services has opened 226 investigations of suspected child abuse and neglect. So if there's a high need for staff in there i'd like you to provide those vacancies to us because you know um as we speak about kobe 19 and all the things that are going on in the territory we we do have an issue in the territory where our children are being neglected and abused and for office that has so many cases i want to make sure that we place a high priority on getting those vacancies filled so can I get our information yes senator and in my answer you'll get some of the sort of confusion that has happened with the vacancy question to date so in our st. Croix office we have a vacancy for a district manager someone has been acting and we have a need for an administrative assistant and I'm saying miss the DC Rojas might be able to add some light to this I'm using the terms vacancy and a need because some of the positions that we need to fill are not funded so on st. Croix the district manager position remains vacant someone has been acting for some time. We need an administrative assistant. District manager for which district? For St. Croix. St. Croix. Yes. And then we have so the
- 1:51:30 social worker who's acting as district manager is kind of sitting in two positions. When she moves on to be a district manager her social worker position becomes available and that would be a vacancy at that point because it would be funded. You would backfill it. On the St. Thomas St. Don district There's a need for a social worker on St. John, and there's a need, well, there's a need for two social workers on St. Thomas. However, we are able to backfill a position of someone who retired, and there is also a need for an intake councillor. They're the ones that do brief services.
- 1:52:06 Each and every single division and office within the Department of Human Services should be placed as a priority. But I'm kindly asking that we place this specific Office of Intake and Emergency Services as a higher priority. 226 investigations of suspected child abuse and neglect. And I'm hoping and praying out of those cases, it does result in arrest. That's cruelty, man. It's hard to even sit here and find out. That's what's really going on here in the territory. 26 investigations of suspected child abuse and neglect Wow so whatever funding you need please make sure that you let us know so we can beef up when it comes to that office and I know the last time you came before us I inquired about the disparity with the social workers and I think you were able to clarify that there I think at one point we had one social worker on St. Croix and at four on St. Thomas so with the new social worker positions that we see here in the budget that's what's it this inquiry district so Carla Benjamin assistant commissioner the position social worker and the appearance on any list might be sort of misleading there are a number of social workers who whose positions are now family services specialists and they we also have case workers so it's not a true representation of how much staff is doing social work work social work type work in the divisions so we still have that disparity between the two districts when it comes to the social workers there's a I know there was there's a high need for our social workers in the territory that's relating to schools and we know the high possibility school might not open again but I just want to make sure we're prepared for that are we prepared as having that those numbers available do we have new positions for social workers
- 1:54:00 in the district of St. Croix there is a need for staffing in all the units that have social workers no but there's a is there an vacancy right now because I'm going to the vacancies and you say it doesn't really represent a true reflection of social workers compared to case workers I need to know specifically when it comes to those who assist with the school children all of our social workers deal with school children okay I'm not still but you are you getting what I'm coming from right the last thing when you came here you told me you only had one person in the district of St. Croix so what I'm leading to are we beefing up social workers in the District of St. Croix? Is there vacancies? There are vacancies and we need funding for additional vacancies. And is included in this budget? Yes it would appear on the critical hires. Understood. The ones that we need funding for appear on the critical hires appendix which I believe is page 27 and then the the funded vacancies are in our budget protection and i see in the post added report um when it comes to pharmacy assistance for the age i'm not sure if it's being defunded or not but i see that there isn't um any funds appropriated for the fy 2022. mccaal rima brown assistant commissioner with oversight, the pharmacy assistance fund comes through the VLTs, or the video lottery, and so the funds come from the lottery department, so that's what we are dependent upon.
- 1:55:38 So you are receiving those funds? We receive them on a quarterly basis. At this point, we may be a little bit behind, but usually the lottery will make it whole before the end of the fiscal year. One minute, 30 seconds. Can you just clarify? What is the true issue with the delay with getting the funds from the VLTs to deal with the pharmacy assistance for the age? What is the delay? McHale Reimer-Brown, Assistant Commissioner, well they deposit and they send the monies to the fund, which is managed by the Department of Finance. And then as soon as those monies come, we set up the budgets for the fiscal year.
- 1:56:21 Okay. Ann Astrid, thank you for that clarification. And then I see in the budget you have 18 new positions for nurses. Those positions are filled, right? Michal Reimer-Brown, assistant commissioner. The nurses' positions, we have those

available. Commissioner mentioned just before you came in, we're having some struggles with the current salaries of the positions the union for those positions is still negotiating so we have for example we've hired the st croix about five or six of them st thomas we offered three and three refused we're processing um nops now for i believe three additional let me ask this question sorry to cut you off out of the 18 new positions for nurses how many of them have been filled we had five on saint croix and uh dc rojas if you could give me the saint thomas number because that's an in-process number please deputy commissioner ross the um we hired a total of one um in saint thomas well as the commission as assistant commissioner michael rhimer brown said we made three offers and and they were declined. We also are in the process of completing interviews, and we have a couple of the nurses that I have to work with Division of Personnel on because of dual employment. And so we have to work with Division of Personnel to bring them on.

1:57:56 Time. Thank you for the explanation. And I see here where you have a grant grant for the energy crisis elder slash other, and it's \$1.1 million. It seems very interesting. Can you break that down for me, what that grant is about, and how does it benefit our elders? Okay. Mikael Reimer-Brown.

1:58:24 From GVI, we usually get about \$1.1 million for energy assistance, and we give that out to our seniors and adults with disabilities on a monthly basis so that is a very important program however on the federal side we are about to launch in a larger way our LIHEAP low income home energy assistance program that's going to be opened up during the month of august to all low income families and if you don't mind me asking how many individuals benefit from this program? From the ECAP? I could get that number for you. I just have to flip to that. I don't want to guess. I have the information here. Thank you. Mr.

1:59:10 Chair, just one last question regarding I see here that you provided assistance to 32 college students to receive tuition assistance which includes travel room and board and as well as books. Is there something in there that speaks to some obligation of them be able to come back to the territory and provide the services once they get a degree how does that go but that's what that's for personnel so specifically that's a federal program so it goes back to federal federal dollars that go to help individual disabilities to go to college and so they don't necessarily have to come back necessarily to do it many are some are away and some are local okay so I'm happy to know that you're providing those benefits and things to people I just want to know how does it benefits the territory but thank you for the explanation thank you mr. chair for the turn mr. chair I have the answer for senator James if I may for the ECAP program thank you senator Mr. James, go ahead and respond.

2:00:18 Yes, McHale Reimer-Brown, Assistant Commissioner. And there were 489 individuals who benefited during FY21. And we had a total of 4,303 issuances to seniors. Thank you, thank you so much. Colleagues. Senator, Apata is here now, Senator Apata, welcome. Senator Fred Gregory, welcome.

2:01:04 You're recognized. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I'm present today, as usual. Good afternoon to Human Services. Good afternoon, Commissioner, to you and your team. I see that you guys are wearing some morning-like colors today, the black and purples. I'm not sure what that represents. You're matching the chair, I see. Okay.

2:01:29 And our chairman. I'm going to rest that down then. I didn't realize the chair was wearing purple as well, but let me get back to the budget. So I was trying to figure out where in the testimony or in your appendices that you indicated exactly what that \$4 million difference is that you're asking for in the FY2022 budget. So you're moving, you're asking to for an increase from \$18.8 to \$22.8 million for FY2022.

2:02:05 So what is that made up of? What is it? New positions? What is it? Charmaine, Modeste, Antoine, CFO. I may have to tag team with Deputy Commissioner Rhoda Rojas because the 22.8 is the proposed amount for personnel that was placed in the executive budget for human services. So, for 2021, we received 18...

2:02:35 Yeah, but I'll tell you, what's the \$4 million represent? Okay, so now DC Rojas can drill down. Hold up, because I have a lot of questions, and I think that for some odd reason, the Department of Human Services has escaped coming before the legislature for some oversight discussion, because we have a lot of questions. so hold that and hopefully I'll get the answer at the appropriate time you also have 10.5 million dollars an increase of 10.5 million dollars in your other services category what's included in that 10.5 million that was not reflected in your testimony you're coming for a budget hearing you're asking for an increase we need to know what is what it's reflective of I don't know if I missed it but what is that 10 million dollars about 10.5 so for the additional 10 point the 10 million dollars 10.5 million dollars Charmaine Modeste Antoine CFO 5 million of that is associated with the Medicaid program and increased from the prior year that they've received for the local match requirement okay what's the difference about five million right what's the other five million for okay and as Commissioner mentioned it was in her testimony about the rate increases to execute the contract for our residential services about two million to know about two million of that is for the increases for the residential contracts included in that amount as well we have successfully been able to identify funding for a 1.4 million dollars for the design

and development implementation of the VIBE system that

2:04:26 was mentioned earlier which is the eligibility and enrollment system. As I also mentioned that the cost allocation plan the funding has been made available in the 2022 budget so can you I'm gonna stop you there I think you've pretty much gave me right at 10.5 can you please follow through the chair a breakout of your other services increase please will do thank you I have a question around your title 4e program I know that in your testimony on page 11 you reference that your increase in the FY 2022 budget will allow you to hire staff a lot allow you to hire staff to train etc license and monitor foster homes to procure psychological and behavioral services um do we how do we utilize our title for e funds and do we have money in that particular fund I'm a bit surprised that you would be asking to utilize general fund dollars for that purpose frankly. Assistant Commissioner Carla Benjamin the title for most of the title for B funding there's a 25% local match. Since the funding came online well the funding came online somewhere around 2017 and it was not until we came on board in 2019 that we realized that the millions of dollars that the Children's Bureau was saying we were receiving. We actually were not. So you have it now, right? We do have it now, but the processes need to be put in place for us to be able to spend that money in real time.

2:06:10 Yeah, but you can't ask us, the legislature, to appropriate money for that purpose. So we need to get from you what those positions are that you have backed in to the FY2022 budget if you have millions of dollars in a Title IV. Is it E or B? Title IV B. But Senator, we can't put salaries on there. It's not like the social services block grant. But you have other items in here. You have train, license, monitor, procure, psychological, and behavioral services.

2:06:41 So a percentage of the salaries, if they go directly towards care or services for children in care, we can ask for reimbursement for. But the licensing specialists and the folks who do the licensing and the monitoring, we don't have those, those positions are vacant and are critical needs in some situations. They're vacant or the critical needed? I believe they were on the supplemental list, both.

2:07:12 DC Rojas can speak to whether they're vacant or critical need. Okay, I'm open to hearing that. Deputy Commissioner Rojas, Rota Rojas, in regards to the licensing specialist, Again, these were vacancies that were on, they are FY20 that were cut and not given to us for FY21. They are listed as critical hires requesting for us to have them. In what year?

2:07:40 There is one licensing specialist listed right now on the FY22 personnel listing. um it's shown actually twice um but it's incorrect because it's shown as having um a 0.5 um uh funding okay but there actually is a need for two okay so let me ask you y'all continue to talk about critical needs lists so in fy 2021 you have you you do have a critical needs list correct did you have that conversation with the office of management and budget to address your critical needs and how much of that request did you receive two minutes yes we did and I did a complete comprehensive report on critical nature as well as the impact for each division by division succinctly my time is running yes I did no I didn't get anything and what no I did not receive so you sent a request to OMB correct does anyone know what amount was that you sent to OMB? For the total critical hire? Uh-huh. It was \$6.3 million for personnel, not including. Well, they couldn't give you all, but have you actually done an assessment to determine what your priority needs are? Yes, we actually, yes. So if, can you please send to, back to this committee an assessment of your priority needs? Sure. Okay, because we have financial challenges in this government we cannot ignore that we do um under your um pharmacy assisted age i know that there is a reduction a recommendation for a reduction of some 750 000 hours what would be the reason for that for the reduction

2:09:30 From \$2.5 million to \$1.7 million. Charmaine, Modeste, Antoine, CFO. It wasn't a request by us. It was what was processed in the executive budget. Thank you for that. I'm very happy for your honesty. Because when the financial team came before us, they tried to convince this committee that they did their homework and they scrubbed their files, and that's why they have a two-year budget and that's why we push back the way we did because we it is very obvious that numbers were just being true and are wrong and plugged into this to the 2022 budget that 2022 23 budget that came down to us and that's the same responses we continue to get did OMB meet with you commissioner around your FY 2022 budget and 23 for that matter not like thank you for your response I figured not so you asking well I want to go back to the I think miss Ross need to answer my question with regards to the four million dollar increase for the personnel services because there's just so much to discuss here Thank you, Senator Frank Gregory, the Rota Rojas Deputy Commissioner.

2:10:52 Yes, so the increase in the personnel services includes new positions, a total of 26 new positions, and also it's where all of our lump sums are for overtime, shift differential, and any other totals that we have for personnel costs, including uniform allowances. allowances. Do you have salary increases in that lump sum category? Time. The salary, Commissioner Rojas, sorry. The salary increases that are in there are for the expected increases of the SIU master's group because they're the ones who are currently does not have their increases and the LESU correction officers because they do receive an increase on 10-1 effective 10 1 2021. Mr. Chair, may I wrap up? Yes, go ahead. Well, what is the amount

of those increases? And I ask the question because so that's those are contracts that's already in play.

- 2:12:00 Deputy Commissioner Rota Rofas for SIU masters that contract is current. And yes, the increase for that if um and i will confirm but it's about 1.2 million dollars and what year that is effective for the fy20 um that should have already been implemented for fy20 however um i was informed by ocb that we are in a cohort so there was a discussion and that um we are in a cohort organized to have those increases implemented in September of this year. And we have submitted the funding request to OMB. I submitted it last week. And once I have that approval, I'll be able to submit the NOPAs for that increase. But that increase, I did make sure to put in for our FY22 budget. So that would be the new salaries for those employees. Understood. I have more questions, but my time has been called, so I am going to hope that we will have a hearing around Human Services shortly, so we could really drill down on some of the issues that we are having with the Department of Human Services.
- 2:13:19 Thank you for the time, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Senator Fred Gregory. Your St. John Building status? the multi-purpose center. Is it in this repair? St. John. Oh, yes, it sure is. I have Deputy Commissioner Miguel Tricocci of Operations. He just visited St. John and has a status. Mr. Tricocci.
- 2:13:51 Miguel Tricocci, Deputy Commissioner of Operations. senator currently in the st john facility multi-purpose center on this tomorrow we will be doing a test for a lab test for mold and mildew so we can move forward with the projects that are currently pending that's one of the things that are needed for fema and we're going to do that tomorrow and then rate on the results of the test and based on the results of the test that will determine how fast we move forward is the ac not working that is correct the ac is not working at this time but we have we are currently taking bids for a temporary fix for that ac and so the employees on st john are working part-time they're not working eight hours they're working for our shift because of the condition of the building Thank you. Yes.
- 2:14:55 Mikal Reimer Brown, assistant commissioner. For the St. John, we have very few staff there. Many of them, we have a few of them who are field workers. So they come in, they get their assignments, and they go out. And those are the drivers, our home makers. We just hired a full-time eligibility specialist. She's partially St. Thomas and then on St. John. john what we're doing to correct the situation is installing split units in those offices that the staff are there during the day and that will be done by one we have the estimates i would say in august okay do you have sufficient maintenance staff for your buildings her but greg etc to really maintain the buildings the way that you're supposed to it's a negatives okay Okay. Have you included maintenance staff in your budget? Yes.
- 2:15:49 Okay. Senator Zapata? Senator Zapata? Good afternoon. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon, Commissioner Kazi-Gomez, to you and your executive team. I want to really thank you and the staff and management of the Department of Human Services for all the work that you do in support of the most vulnerable among us. I'm hearing a feedback again, but I tried to push through it.
- 2:16:20 Commissioner, in your testimony, you cite the statistic that the Territory increased its Medicaid population from 8,000 to 9,000 in 2012 to approximately 33,000 to date. And I know that this expansion could only have taken place because DHS contracted with Molina to implement a Medicaid management information system. And I know this was done in partnership with West Virginia, who held a contract with Molina for years.
- 2:16:56 It's my understanding that the USVI-Molina contract is slated to expire in 2022. What is the plan for that? what's going to happen if um you know after this expiration takes place uh how will we ensure that the mmis services um are continued at the department of human services thank you i'll pass that yes mikhail rima brown assistant commissioner with oversight of medicaid for our contract that would be expiring in 2022 senator we'll be issuing an rfp that one will be you know a very complex uh contract and any um contracts that are expiring especially for mmis it will be offered publicly and all eligible vendors will apply okay thank you very much Commissioner for that. Dr. Amaro was here, Commissioner, last Friday, I believe, for the hospital, Schneider Hospital's budget hearing, and there was some discussion about dialysis and the challenges the territory is facing providing dialysis care to patients.
- 2:18:16 We know that dialysis takes its tolls on patients' bodies. My dad, in his later years, was a dialysis patient. I know sometimes you have to go in there and have treatment three, four times a week. This definitely impacts your quality of life and I think that is why CMS has mandated that Medicaid programs cover organ transplant as one of its services. I know a couple years ago DHS had hired two transplant coordinators. What is the department, where is the department rather, with respect to this whole transplant issue?
- 2:18:56 Michal Reimer-Brown, Assistant Commissioner. We were successful this year to have our organ, one of our members who received an organ transplant, so we're very happy with that. We have currently our current contractual doctor who is has been a kidney transplant doctor and amidst others so he has really led that effort we are about to hire a new organ transplant lead she will be she is a registered nurse and should be joining us shortly I believe likely in August. I'm glad to

hear that I know that diabetes and dialysis I mean is running rampant here in our community so it's really good to know that you're you're focused on that. Does the Department of Human Services believe that family engagement with the YRC, I'm talking about YRC now, helps inmates in their rehabilitation efforts? So first and foremost they're not called inmates they're called residents because they're minors so i just want to make sure we're we're clear on that um and so i think family engagement no matter what aspect of um when we're working with minors family engagement is crucial to their success that includes that includes um our residents at yrc as well thank you for the correction commissioner uh has Has there been any thoughts to having a YRC program here on St. Thomas, just to allow the St. Thomas-based residents to have the opportunity to have regular visits from their families? Because I know it's a hardship to get on a seaplane

2:20:59 and travel to St. Croix to visit residents who may be housed at YRC on St. Croix. Is there or has there been any serious consideration given towards developing a facility here on St. Thomas? In my opinion, currently we have seven as a census, so five male, two female. So to have an additional cost associated with a 24-hour facility in St. Thomas, I don't believe is cost-effective for our territory. So at this stage of the game, I would say no to having an additional one in St. Thomas. The family contact is important, and I do understand that can be because the water situation, and having to fly and or take the boat to visit your youth or your minor, I do understand that.

2:21:55 And so we'll do our best to be able to, whatever the court order states, that we'll be able to do our best to ensure that that's completed. But I don't believe that's cost effective to have two detention facilities in our territory. We're just too small at this stage of the game. Two minutes. Okay. I understand from a dollars and cents perspective, what I know just from the perspective of families with your loved one over on St. Croix, a cost being a challenge for families, having to fly over to St. Croix, it is a significant hardship on the family. So I know that hopefully there's some balance between just efficiency from a government standpoint and us looking at the situation as young people who are, like you said, not inmates, but residents who are receiving treatment and having access, or regular access to the family, I think goes a long way towards their efforts to turn the corner. But I'll shift from that a little bit now. Commissioner, is the increase, and I apologize if it was mentioned before, are the increases for the steel workers supervisors included in the FY 2022 budget?

2:23:24 I'll have to DC Rojas or CFO? DC Rojas. and I'm gonna pass that one. Hi, DC Rojas, thank you Senator Prada. Trey again. DC Rojas, can you answer again?

2:23:58 Okay, can you hear me well? No, yes. I'm hearing an echo on my end. Yes. D.C. Okay. Okay. Senator Potter, I'll have to check and confirm because I'm not aware of an outstanding supervisor supervisor, USW supervisor increase, um, but I will have to get back to you on that.

2:24:34 Um, my, the increases that I know are outstanding are for the SIU masters and the LESU correction officers, and those are being worked on. Um, but I'll have to double check on the USW supervisors. So I'm not aware that there's an increase outstanding for them. Time. Thank you for that. And just one final question, um, Mr. Chair, if I may. You may conclude. Commissioner, on page 31 of the post audit report, there's an indication that there's \$66 million remaining with regards to the medical assistant program.

2:25:19 In your testimony, you mentioned that the department received \$126 million. and you expended 60 million dollars are we at risk of losing this 66 million dollars come the end of september of this year mccall rhymer brown assistant commissioner with oversight of medicaid uh the medicaid is a one year program and we spend our federal um amount but we it must be matched uh last year we spent about 100 million of the 126 million so after september 30th we do lose that particular um federal year and it goes to a new award we are hoping that our congress will continue the enhanced funding for medicaid in 2022. okay thank you very much one final question i promise i apologize mr chair what is the status of the virginal benefits eligibility system um is map is uh map still the only program currently using vibes i knew you were going to ask that question today so yes mccall rima brown um assistant commissioner yes um cfo mentioned we asked for some additional monies um you know as we were talking senator fred gregory asked about the additional other services monies so we do need the additional monies to finish the vibe system so we can include um snap tanef light heap child care

2:27:09 okay thank you very much for your responses thank you very much mr chair for the extra time Thank you, Senator Potter. Senator Fred Gerger, you have a point of inquiry. Yes. And thank you, Mr. Chair. Very quickly, what's the difference between the social worker and the family support specialist positions? Assistant Commissioner Carla Benjamin, the difference between the social worker position and the family services specialist position is in order to practice social work in the Virgin Islands, you need a social work license. so the social workers are licensed as well as they have investigative responsibilities the family services specialists do not what do they do they do everything else they do home visits they coordinate services they generate court reports and petitions they testify in court but if it's a matter of an investigation of child maltreatment that would be assigned to a social day on that because I asked a question to follow up on the question that my millennial colleague from Cinco was asking so they are not providing any social worker services

in this territory they're providing social work services but they are not across the nation that's what then why actually you don't tell me across the nation let's talk about what happened in the Virgin Islands and what's legal. Are they providing social worker services in the territory? Because I know why y'all moved to this family service specialist because they were unable to pass the social worker certification program, right? So I need to understand if they are providing social worker services because the courts are complaining about it. They're not providing social worker services because they're not social workers they're providing social services to families so our caseworkers so human services are going to find itself in a lawsuit down the road Commissioner human services is more likely to find themselves in a lawsuit for having people called social workers practicing who don't have social work licenses commissioner right and that's what i'm that's where i'm going family service support specialists practicing as social workers but they don't have social worker licenses so that's a question commissioner the delineation of duties is delineate across the board and across the nation the delineation of duties looks similar so i could have deleted all of my social work positions and only had family services specialists it depends on the state or the territory what you call them Because social workers do not have the licenses, I'm a licensed social worker, just so you know. I'm a licensed social worker. I've kept my license. So because of that, to have them go to court and be called a social worker without the license would have put us more at risk than to have...

2:28:57

Are they providing social worker services? That's what I'm asking. Is a yes or a no? I would call them social services type of work. as as some of our lpn cnas rns are the lpns providing a type of nursing service yes but there's a there's a line of what they can and can't do it's the same direct question you tell you what lpn and i cannot take i'm telling you right now for the social work service part of it there may be duties that look like social work but they're also called social services specialists or a skilled nurse or a different type of title. I'm more at risk to having a social worker called a social worker with a non-license in the courtroom than not.

2:30:06

You're also at risk with having a family service support specialist providing social worker services and they're not licensed. That's not true. Thank you for the time. May I? Yes. The social services specialist is not required to be licensed. The social worker is. Right, but the family service support specialists, when this position came about, how long have we had this particular position? Okay, so may I? So when we came on board, we had social workers that were not licensed. I gave them 15 months to get their licenses. When they did not or could not get their licenses, we did a change in title to many of them. A change in title and a change in salary or just change in title?

2:30:52

Change in title. If I may. No. Assistant Commissioner Carla Benchman. I don't know if that was D.C. Rojas. A full job description. There is a change in salary that's commensurate with that change in position. And I have to say, across the nation, because I've worked out. Okay, no, no, I'm saying across. Let me just be direct. It's a direct result of those individuals that did not become certified, correct? Correct.

2:31:48

So if I am a social worker and I became certified, I did what I have to do, and somebody didn't even try, are the salaries the same? Because it was the same before. We recommended that the salaries not be the same. But recommend and is, it's two different things. So if you're, if both of us are social workers, you gave us X amount of time to be able to become licensed. The 15 month passed, this pool of employees did not become licensed, this pool became licensed. The two pools can still receive the same salary.

2:32:17

but Senator that is that the the if they are still being paid the same salary that is not a function of the the change that is a function of how slowly the GVI processes work and I believe that that's what DC Rojas was speaking to okay so she so a submission have been made that those who are licensed social workers are making more than the family service support specialist the only thing about this and I know that it's going to one minute I'll let you speak the only thing about this is that individuals who are hired in a social worker position that were supposed to meet certain qualifications you know it's important for us to make sure that they meet certain qualifications because what's really going on I mean we might change the terminology here or there but the family service support specialists acting as if they're social workers and And that's the reality that's happening out there, because they're still saying that they are social workers.

2:33:02

They can't be called· They can't, but they're acting as if they are. They haven't changed the scope, responsibility of what they're doing, so they're still performing the same duties that they were performing when they were social workers. So the alternative to that would have been? That you must pay those individuals who are social workers who got the license. they got to be paid more than somebody who refused to get the license and we have to encourage all of the the family service support specialists that they need to they need to be licensed can we just can't we can't water it down and name it something else assistant commissioner benjamin it's not family services support specialist it's family services specialist okay family services it is a professional um position it was vetted to the department the Division of Personnel, it is already categorized in terms of where it would fall if it were in the union and all that kind of stuff. It is not anything that the Department of Human Services came up with. The issue of social worker licensure was an issue across government. It was not a Department of Human Services specific problem.

2:34:05

- 2:35:18 And the Family Services Specialist title, Google it. Child Protective Services' work is what they do. I could Google this, but this is our way of dealing with individuals who fail to adhere to the policies of the department. So being approximately between 250 and 300 people short staffed from 10 years ago, the alternative would have been to terminate them because they didn't meet the qualifications of their duties. How many Family Service Specialists do we have?
- 2:35:53 deputy commissioner rhoda rojas there are in the reclassification of the social workers who did not meet having their license there's a total of nine that are being reclassified to family services specialists and to what as ac rimer brown um carla benjamin said i apologize this was a process that we did with division of personnel their grade and their pay and their status in the union has changed. Because of the internal process, it has not been fully completed, but it will be shortly because we just got everything we needed to push that forward. But this is not just a title change. There is duties that changed so that this is not a social worker role. It is a family services specialist position. Additionally, as part of the social work change, we used to have a social worker 1, 2, and 3. As part of the reclassification, the social worker collapsed into just a social worker. There is no longer a 1, 2, or 3.
- 2:37:07 How many social workers do we have? And that is the full reclassification process. I'm sorry. How many social workers do we have? We have today, as a social worker with license, there are 17. And moving forward, are you going to be, what are we going to be hiring? Both? Go on. Yes.
- 2:37:34 Deputy Commissioner Rojas, I apologize. Senator Villale, yes. Our goal in our critical hires is to hire social workers. and if we have a backfill position because we did have someone resign who was a social worker and did not have their license that position currently would be used as a family services specialist position what's the qualification for a family service specialist position what's the qualification about uh if you give me a minute i don't have it in front of me but i can pull that up and this is deputy commissioner rojas i apologize we can send you both job specs if you like as assistant commissioner benjamin i wanted to add one other thing um there there is a unit your name again assistant commissioner carla benjamin the office of intake and emergency services is the primary unit that does investigations and their unit is fully staffed with social workers there's one family services specialist in the office of intake and emergency services and what they deal with is not investigations it's the referrals that come in that are for behavioral issues and those issues not including investigations point of inquiry senator sorrow thank you thank you mr. Chen just along the line of you know things that do with our young people are you a stakeholder in the Sea View adolescent unit? A stakeholder? Like do you have any like it's called so Sea View and I said stakeholder but correct me. So Sea View is the business that was CMS certified that's no longer a business we have St. Thomas Health Care which is the adolescent portion currently. So the name changed and They had two businesses, one was Steve View and one was St. Thomas Healthcare.
- 2:39:36 We contract with St. Thomas Healthcare. That's with the Adolescent Unit? Correct. So what does that funding look like for those adolescents that are stationed or that are living in the Adolescent? That are living there, so St. Thomas Healthcare also requested a rate increase, and that's listed in our contract list, and I can just take a quick look. Okay. Because recently, and the PPEs and everything, do you provide that, or that would be the should be under their budget if they needed an additional um so the question i'm asking is they had an outbreak recently as you know i'm sure you know and some things are happening over there who's the check of the checker so you they have a contract with you correct so you have so who's ensuring that those that adolescent unit is is top priority in that who's over that they have assistant commissioner oh that's you miss ben okay sorry this is not gonna be Benjamin, talk to me. Go ahead. Assistant Commissioner Carla Benjamin. So we have a, we have two contractors in St. Thomas Healthcare Management, one for the adolescent residential unit and one for the day treatment. The administrator for Office of Residential and Interstate Compact Affairs, Ms. Evie Monique James, that administrator has oversight of all residential facilities. So So she would be responsible, one of the persons responsible for ensuring the safety of the children. However, the individual administrators, so the administrator for foster care, that's a potential placement.
- 2:41:10 That administrator and the assigned worker would check in as well. If it happened to be someone from our intervention and prevention services unit, if they had a child who was there, they would also check. So it's sort of a dual responsibility. Okay. Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you so much. Senators, before we continue with the point of inquiries, I just saw our next senator joining us. Senator Almar Francis Heiliger. So CFO, I'm coming to you right now. Go ahead and respond.
- 2:41:43 Charmaine Modeste Antoine, CFO. I just wanted to respond to Senator DeGraff's question about the fund balances. I have requested the latest deposits into those accounts, but I can give him the current balance as of right now the for crisis it was one million four thirty four four fifteen and sixty-five cents for the homes for the age I currently have it listed as 436,000 494 and 90 cents and for the senior center. I have listed at 864,000 704 and 20 cents Okay. Thank you so much. 4136, the Home for the Age, do they have access to those funds that we have sufficient supplies and everything in Herbert Grigg and also Queen Louise, do they have sufficient supplies?

- 2:42:34 We always work collaboratively with the program to ensure that they have sufficient supplies and yes, they have access to utilization of the funds for various payments. Is it easy access or it's a convoluted process? It's easy access. Senator Francis, and we need to look at the supplies because I have visited. They need more supplies.
- 2:43:01 I mean if you have the pens, they go through that so quickly. So we need to maybe come up with an estimate as to how much they need every single week, every month because at times they do run out and they are in need of supplies. And then for St. Croix, you've got to go through St. Thomas, correct? They no longer can draw the funds here. Correct. So you've got to go through a process of you contact who in St. Thomas? The fiscal office. Okay. They work through the fiscal office. Are you talking about the vendor? Or are you talking about the vendor? We have various vendor contracts.
- 2:43:33 How does it go? They need to apply. Does it contact you first? Not necessarily. If they have the funding available, they'll go ahead and enter the requisitions. Charmaine, Modessa, Antoine, CFO. they'll go ahead and enter the requisitions and coordinate once the requisition is converted to appeal they'll coordinate with the vendor the drop-off of the supplies okay if the vendor doesn't have the supplies then they'll call around to see where the supplies are available and then we go from there maybe a vendor may not may have the supplies and not accept the government PO and then we have to coordinate so just do me a favor and make sure that um herbert grig has sufficient supplies because i i know that they have been missing some stuff senator francis ailega thank you good afternoon colleagues good afternoon people of the territory good afternoon to the testifiers i would also make note for the record i have been here for hours i did not just arrive um i want to go ahead and ask a couple of questions and I want to say thank you first off to the human services department because as a resident and now a senator who is consistently inundated with phone calls on behalf of the constituents, one of the top agencies we get calls about is human services. And one of the things I want to ask you directly has to do when you spoke earlier about short staff in regards to individuals and delivering food how do you handle that because and how do you intend to fix that short staff issue because as a senator when i'm getting a call and i have a senior citizen crying saying they had not gotten food for days and my staff have to get up and leave to go try to contact the company to figure out why that person hadn't gotten food that's a major problem for me as their representative and when I'm listening to you today say that there's some issues at times because it's short
- 2:45:35 staff and you make adjustments for giving food multiples on certain days explain to me and how do we intend to tackle that because anyone not getting food especially seniors is a concern for me thank you yes Mikel Rymer Brown assistant commissioner and I'm glad for that question senator and i'm very happy to report that we've been given additional federal dollars from the american rescue plan to continue extending some services to those able-bodied seniors who have added to our list of seniors we have increased in the last year about 43 percent in serving our seniors throughout this community and in order to tackle the drivers and the delivery persons we are going to be hiring temporary staff. We just received a grant that will take us up into fiscal year 2024. The pandemic is upon us and we are doing our very best to extend ourselves but good news we are getting additional funding and with that we'll be hiring temporary employees to bridge the gap and and based on how much these grants are do you have an estimate of the additional persons that will be hired to test to assist their senior population with food i would say um and i'm working with my um senior managers of the senior citizen staff next week but But at least I would believe three in each district, additional staff with these funding, will go a long way in helping to bridge the gap.
- 2:47:20 It'll go a long way. And how sufficient do you believe three in each district would be able to bridge this gap? Or do you believe that getting additional monies in the budget could assist with this? Well, right now, I believe with the federal funding, we're not only going to be hiring staff, going to be paying for food as well. So at this point I believe we have sufficient funding for the Meals on Wheels program and with the additional federal we should be able to bridge the gap and I believe that our seniors will be served. How much is the grant? The additional grant is about 1.6 1.7 million dollars and that will be added to our other federal grant that comes every year and out of that for the additional you're saying six people are going to be hired for each district and the rest is going to be utilized on food yes are you going to yes we have to purchase the food because we do have a waiting list when we get the additional staff on st croix we'll be able to reduce that waiting list and so with more people comes more monies to pay the vendors okay um i want to talk a little bit about employee morale as well as you know we're dealing with covet 19 and a lot of services that human services provides at the end of the day or outside of that or even everyday child abuse dealing with family issues how has this impacted on a continuous basis the regular services of dealing with human services compounded with now dealing with situations of COVID-19 how is this affecting the employees and what are your thoughts in regards to the output and the quality of work currently so thank you for the question I think that
- 2:49:22 being severely understaffed and a lot of our employees are have multiple roles it's exhausting uh just doing the initial job duties and then anything added to uh covid the pandemic so you have your pps you're serving additional populations you're adding your pbt across the board your waivers your flexibilities every way the teleworking having to get additional

supplies in order for people to be able to work from home sometimes so all that compounded plus maybe those individuals that have had child care or children not being able to go to school and trying to balance it all it's a lot for our employees across the board not just within human services but i'm going to specifically talk about ours it's a lot and i think that we're at a place now where people are exhausted um they're on the verge of burnout um in all honesty well i'm trying to i'm trying to figure out how we can assist with that because human services is critical to this territory so i'm asking you how are you as an agency tackling that to assist the employees as well as how could we as a body assist you in making sure that they get the the help that they need so they could provide the services they need two minutes staff up was is one of them so if i'm able to adequately have a workforce that is a evil even keel across all divisions then it allows for those that um to have a little bit of a break and just do the role that they're supposed to be doing versus in addition to others i think we do need to do some more mental health or some more professional development or resiliency training i think that that is a weak area but again my hr office is very limited so we're going to try to get our employee relations board back up

2:51:14 and running. And I think that the employee relations will help build morale back up. So it'll be management and employees together coming to making suggestions that would be in the benefit of human services. Good, good. As it relates, as I was sitting here for the past couple of hours, and I was listening to the testimony and my colleagues dialogue, and there were several discussions about cost overruns as well as areas where you might have gone over and there was also discussion about managing these things a little bit better and technology wise with the things that you plan on bringing on do you think that this is sufficient in order to help curtail some of the potential issues within your agency as it relates to mistakes happening for example I got a report of I don't even know if it was previously discussed of a overpayment to Cigna for some over seven million dollars and I need to know if something like that did happen and if it was accurate and what has been put in place to assist with correcting issues such as that we're gonna clarify that statement because that was incorrect but go ahead and clarify the Cigna I do believe, if my recollection serves me correctly, back in 2019, around the time where the contract for the Cigna provider expired, we were transitioning in, it happened around May or June of 2019, and there were the contract had expired and there were some meetings I sat in on with Cigna where we would strategize about funding the account and as we would

2:53:25 move to execute the new contract. AND SO I WAS INCLUDED IN THE DISTRIBUTION LIST OF THE FUNDING NOTIFICATIONS. WE RECEIVED THE FUNDING NOTIFICATIONS. WE FUNDED THE ACCOUNT. IT IS A CITY BANK ACCOUNT WHERE WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR PLACING FUNDS AND THE CLAIMS ARE PAID FROM THAT ACCOUNT. SO IT'S NOT OVERPAYMENT TO CIGNA. funding that's sitting in an account and once claims are applied to the account it reduces the amount and so the account was the funding notices were received payments were made into the account based on the funding notices and then the account was funded by so it was over funded by I just need clarity I just need clarity for understanding so basically from your perspective monies was put in there was that monies necessary at the time or it was put in there and once realized it's now monies that is there that they're deducting out of what is the normal procedure for paying claims in regards to that and this account our name Odessa Antoine the CFO the account is funded so that the claims payment can be posted towards that account.

2:54:53 Back in 2019, mid-early 2019, when the contract was expiring, we were receiving the funding notices and payments were being submitted based on the funding notices. When it came to the fourth quarter in around August and we were doing our reporting and assessing of the accounts the account was the claims against that account was not sufficient to the balance in the account was at 5 million or so and so we didn't want to because the Medicaid program is a cash basis program we did not want to cross over fiscal years having the account at funded at a higher level than it was necessary for the claims to address the claims and so we did request a refund to CMS and we did request a refund and that was processed you how much was the amount of the refund that you got back I can provide that information to you but it's somewhere around 5.8 million and I'm just going from memory. Okay. Thank you. Now I, now I get what was happening. So we overpaid and you got it back. Okay. So Mr. Chair, could I ask my final question? I was just going to say you may conclude. Excuse me. I didn't hear what you said, sir. You may go ahead and conclude. Go ahead and ask your final question. I appreciate it. Um, I wanted to earlier when we were talking, could you just share with me a little bit as it relates specifically to child abuse in the territory? Because I want to make sure that any aspect of that is funded in a way that

2:56:46 the children in our territory are taken care of. Have you seen an influx or a rise when it comes to child abuse in the territory? What has Human Services been doing in regards to that? Do you need additional funding specifically for that not only to help with the abuse victims or either family or abusers etc. Please can you expound a little bit on that because this is very important to me as it relates to our children in the territory. Assistant Commissioner Carla Benjamin the child abuse numbers continue to be depressed since the start of the COVID pandemic and And one of the reasons why that is is because of lack of contact.

- 2:57:33 During the time when everyone was pretty much quarantined, there was no one laying eyes on children outside of their homes, which is where most of the reports come from. So because children were not going to school and they were not going, they were not out there and people weren't able to see them, the numbers slumped significantly. The numbers have increased as expected now that people are having access to children. but there hasn't been a dramatic increase to suggest that child abuse levels are exceeding where we were prior to shutdown.
- 2:58:16 Okay, and have you done, okay, that was my final question. To wrap up, I wanna thank you guys for giving me an opportunity to ask the questions, And thank you, Mr. Chair, for the additional time. Thank you, Senator Francis-Illiga. Yes, go ahead, ma'am. Assistant Commissioner Carla Benjamin, again, I've been wanting to add. Senator Potter asked about the family contact situation with YRC, and I wanted to add that as a result of the pandemic environment and the fact that we've had to go virtual, the YRC staff, including correction officers and treatment, have made great efforts to make contact with family virtually and that has turned out to be a bit of a blessing because family contact has actually increased our christmas party for example was it was a a team's meeting and and the the attendance by family members was more than we've ever seen so they've been doing a yeoman's job on that and i wanted to mention that and give them kudos for that okay thank you so much for that and i saw that some of your residents from yrc and your residents in a group home took part in the about face the summer program two individuals i had a chance to speak to both of those individuals so i'm happy to see that they were there okay we had a couple points and then we're going to let you guys put a closing statement and wrap up so just one point one point let me take after s one point senator james thank you mr. chair for the one point along the same line of questioning regarding child abuse I just need to know two things how many employees within the Department of Human Services serves on a child abuse task force and what is the role of the child abuse task force in those 20 226 open investigations, how they go about making those determinations and finding.
- 3:00:20 Assistant Commissioner Carla Benjamin, the St. Croix Child Abuse Task Force is actually an interagency task force. I know that Administrator Natalie Lewis from the Office of Intake and Emergency Services participates in that regularly. from other units are free to participate if they want to but the administrator for intake we have representatives from the police department from the women's coalition there have been times we've had when we had representation from physicians the department of justice um what was the other part of the question and what role does the child abuse task force plays in these invest investigations I know Attorney General serves on the Child Abuse Task Force as well, so I was trying to find out what is actually going on there in the Child Abuse Task Force, because I learned about it recently. I need to try and find out more about what role they play in these investigations.
- 3:01:21 I mean, historically, we've come together, like I said, it's a multidisciplinary team. So we've come together and we've talked about cases and ways that we can address the investigations. In the past, we've actually arranged to have interviews because research shows that every time a child or a victim has to recall or recount what happened to them, it's traumatic and you don't want to re-traumatize them. In the past, we've actually arranged for individuals from the appropriate agencies to be there at the same time, have one person interview, and everyone can get the answers at that time. I know we've sort of moved away from that, but the child abuse task force is sort of like a think tank for all of the individuals who are going to be involved in any investigation of child abuse and neglect.
- 3:02:15 Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the time and I will be reaching out to you regarding the child abuse task force. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Okay, thank you so much, Senator James, Senator Francis. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and my one point and two parts is in regards to your maintenance staff, and when I look at the listing that I've been provided by the post audit is woefully deficient. Can you speak to what the maintenance staff census may be as well as how are you, what are you doing in terms of vacancy-wise to staff up that area of your workforce?
- 3:02:57 Sure. I have Deputy Commissioner Miguel Tricocci just came on board. He's doing some great work as far as reassessing the needs. I know we have a couple of contracts, landscaping contracts, that help out with, that frees up our maintenance, but I'll allow him to speak on his staff. D.C. Tricocci. uh thank you commissioner deputy deputy commissioner miguel tricocci uh senator we recognize that we do have a shortage of staff and we've done a evaluation of our needs both uh territory-wise st croix st thomas and st john and we're in the process of trying to fulfill those positions and get those positions posted because they're absolutely needed and we need to get that shored up so we can manage all the properties that we have so we recognize that as a deficiency but something that we're working very hard to uh fill and make a strength for the future okay thank you so much senator francis heiliger you have a final question no mr chairman i'm listening okay thank you so much uh commissioner we're going to allow you to put a closing statement on the record i think we have exhausted all our questions for today uh just uh again thank you for allowing us the opportunity to be here today the department of human services does quite a lot we know it's a lot We know that we still have a lot more to do.
- 3:04:45 I know for a fact that our staff does everything that they can to ensure the best of their ability with what the resources that they do have. But I want to say thank you to them publicly because I know that they go above and beyond on a regular

basis. They put themselves at risk, especially during this COVID-19 pandemic, and I'm very appreciative of that. I look forward to the 2022. I think it's a breath of fresh air to get an additional amount of funding because I know that the staffing for us will be amazing and it will help us do what we do best, and that is serving the public. So, again, I look forward to being in front of you again at any given time, and I'm free to answer any questions in between. So, thank you so much for allowing us to be here today.

3:05:32 Thank you so much, Commissioner. I just wanted to encourage you to reach out as much as possible to the staff. A lot of them are very frustrated. We need to try to deal with some of the low-hanging fruits that are going to be able to build back that morale, the acting position, some of the supplies, the conditions. So as much of the low-hanging fruits as possible that we can be able to come up with some solutions, I think it would definitely increase morale. Your department is very important to the people at the Virgin Islands, so we must make sure that human services is taken care of. The Committee of Finance will take a five-minute recess. That's something cool. And it's done. And it's done. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back.

3:09:28 We'll be right back. All right. Thank you. [3 such phrases repeated 10 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

People named in this transcript

SUSPECTED, and a finding aid only. Names were matched by machine against the spellings used across all 426 of our transcripts, and the title is the one used in the room. Being named here is NOT evidence that a person attended or spoke · only that the name was said. Speech recognition mishears names, so a spelling may be wrong even where no alternative is offered.

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