



| Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance

Legislature USVI

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- 0:00:00 We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. Good morning, the Committee on Budget Appropriations and Finance is hereby called to order. Madam Clerk, can I have the roll call, please?
- 0:23:41 Senator Marvin A. Blyden. Present. Senator Blyden, present. Senator Samuel Caryong. Senator Caryong, absent. Senator Dwayne M. DeGraff. Senator DeGraff, present. Senator Ray Fonseca. Senator Fonseca absent. Senator Donna A. Fred Gregory. Senator Fred Gregory present. Here. Senator Novel E. Francis Jr. Senator Francis Jr. absent.
- 0:24:19 Senator Jevon A. James Sr. No, no, no. I don't want to walk in this committee. Okay? All right. Senator James Sr. present. Madam Chair, we have three members present. I'm sorry, four members present and three absent. Thank you, Madam Clerk. Can you please read today's agenda into the record yes madam chair the committee and budget appropriations and finance has scheduled a meeting for tuesday july 25th 2023 at 9 00 a.m in the uh in the fritz elowets conference room st croix to receive testimony on the proposed fiscal year 2024 executive budget for the government of the virgin islands of the united states block one bi department of bi department of human services invited testifier honorable kimberly kazi gomez commissioner vi department of human services block two vi office of the territorial public defender invited testifier julie smith todman esquire interim chief public defender office of the public defender Block 3, VI Labor Management Committee and VI Public Employees Relations Board invited testifier. Ms. Yaira Tutain, Executive Director, VI Labor Management Committee.

- 0:26:00 Mrs. Perrina Jacobs-Fellman, Chairperson, Virgin Islands Public Employees Relations Board. Madam Chair, this concludes the reading of today's agenda. Thank you, Madam Clerk, and good morning to the listening and viewing audience and those that are here with us in the St. Croix committee room, and good morning to the family of the Department of Human Services. Today we have quite an extensive day. We have the Virgin Islands Department of Human Services, the Office of the Public Defender, the VA Labor Management Committee, and the Public Employees Relations Board. They will all provide testimony on the 2024 budget. This morning I'm going to ask the testifiers to please put their names and titles on the record and we're going to start with our ABLE Commissioner, Kimberly Kazi-Gomez.
- 0:27:03 may proceed and then your supporting team can put their name and title on the record as well. You may proceed Commissioner. Good morning Kimberly Cozzi Gomez Commissioner Virgin Islands Department of Human Services. Good morning Danelle Baptiste Assistant Commissioner VI Department of Human Services. Good morning Michael Trotman Deputy Commissioner Human Resources labor relations and human resources and labor relations good morning Lydia McGrath chief financial officer good morning Carla Benjamin assistant commissioner good morning Sean Georges deputy commissioner operations you're gonna have to either pull the mic to you or you're gonna speak louder good morning Sean Georges deputy commissioner operation st. Thomas st. John district good morning Miguel Tricotchi deputy commissioner operations st. Croix all right thank you is that everyone from your team all right very well commissioner you may proceed with your testimony a pleasant good morning budget appropriations and finance committee chair senator Donna Freck Vice Chair, Senator Novell E. Francis, Jr., Committee Members, Senator Marvin A. Blyden, Dwayne M. DeGraff, Giovanni James, Sr., Ray Fonseca, and Samuel Carrion.
- 0:28:39 Non-Committee Members present, my Department of Human Services team, and everyone listening and viewing today. I'm Kimberly Cozzi-Gomez, and I have the privilege of serving our community as the Commissioner as the Commissioner of the Virgin Islands Department of Human Services. We appreciate the opportunity to be here today to discuss the fiscal year 2024 budget and its potential impacts on the constituents we serve. I want to express my sincere appreciation to all of you for your active participation with the Department as we set forth in a new fiscal year. Many of you have called or emailed to schedule a visit to one of our facilities where we serve our most vulnerable population and as a result of your continued commitment to fund the department which allows our DHS professionals to better provide social services that will enhance the quality of life for individuals and families with diverse needs in the Virgin Islands and that's through empowering them through self-sufficiency.
- 0:29:37 Together we can and will make a difference. With me today are members from my senior leadership team carla benjamin assistant commissioner daniel baptiste assistant commissioner lydia mcgras chief financial officer michael trotman deputy commissioner human resources and labor relations sean georges deputy commissioner operation st thomas st john district miguel tricocchi deputy commissioner operations for st croix we also have our dhs administrators and directors here present in the event that they need to be brought up for more specific information for our program and service areas.
- 0:30:23 Thank you, Madam Chair, for extending the invitation to provide testimony on the proposed fiscal year 2024 general fund budget of the United States Virgin Islands Department of Human Services. I'm here to offer some insight into the valuable work carried out by our professional team and who are dedicated to serving. Our scope and overview. The Virgin Islands Department of Human Services derives its authority from Title 34 of the Virgin Islands Code and operates as a designated state agency for publicly funded social services programs, excluding those pertaining to public health and housing. DHS holds a prominent position within the government of the U.S. Virgin Islands. Being one of the largest departments, We provide services to almost half of the territory's population of 87,146 from the Census 2020 and currently employ 638 individuals across 15 divisions overseeing a total of 84 programs. As an agency intricately woven into the fabric of our society, DHS plays a pivotal role in enhancing the well-being and resilience of approximately 40,000 residents in the U.S. Virgin Islands throughout their lifespans. We achieve this by facilitating access to services either directly or through a comprehensive network of coordinated care provided by various local agencies, businesses and non-profit agencies. One of our primary objectives upheld by our committed workforce is to deliver high quality and professional social services across the entire territory 24-7. The diligent men and women of DHS are devoted to supporting individuals, children, families, persons with disabilities, and the elderly in pursuit of self-sufficiency during prosperous times, but as well as offering emotional and financial assistance during periods of economic downturn. Poverty thresholds and poverty guidelines are dollar amounts set by the U.S. government to indicate the least amount of income a person or family needs to
- 0:32:29 meet their basic needs. DHS in recent discussions with the federal government on how to best change this is to the benefit of the U.S. Virgin Islands. The social consequences of poverty include family issues, impacts of social and cultural lives, and sometimes a higher rate of crime. Being poor means more than just not having enough money. It may mean cut off

from resources that may help one escape poverty. DHS is a crucial link to those resources both within our department and referrals to other agencies to assist individuals and families today we will justify our 2024 budget requests in support of our continued goal of providing these essential services that continue to foster growth and strengthen the social fabric of our virgin islands community so that our vulnerable individuals and families across the territory receive their support that they need to overcome the challenges and thrive In addition to fulfilling local and federal obligations, DHS also carries significant responsibilities in disaster management as the leading agency of Emergency Support Function 6.

0:33:38 ESF 6 is organized into four primary areas, mass care, emergency assistance, housing and human services. The fiscal year 2024 recommended funding level for the Virgin Islands Department of Human and services amounts to \$257,824,393. The sum encompasses various funding sources, each contributing to the overall financial framework, and as follows. The general fund is \$72,331,610, and this includes \$575,000 of miscellaneous funds.

0:34:20 This constitutes 28% of the total funds. Federal funds, we have \$182,844,930. This makes up 71% of the total funds. The non-appropriated special funds are \$2,647,853, and this comprises of 1%. The Office of Management and Budget sets a ceiling for the department, and we utilize that to ensure our six prime categories are within that budget. The general fund appropriation covers the following six prime categories. Personnel, fringe, supplies, other services, utilities, and capital outlays. Table one outlines the amounts in each of the prime areas. For personnel, we have 20 million, 047,018 and two cents.

0:35:14 Fringe is \$10,051,491.08. Supplies is \$1,060,319. Other services is \$38,498,781.68. Utilities is \$2.3 million. Capital is \$374,000. with a total budget of \$72,331,609. The department will work with the Office of the Governor and the Office of Management and Budget relative on additional fiscal needs that may arise as the year comes. Additionally, the miscellaneous portion of the budget includes specific allocations for our centenarians amounting to \$75,000 and \$500,000 in energy crisis funds. Below on table three, the operational budget is listed by activity name and center.

0:36:11 Our personnel costs are recommended at \$20,047,018, that represents 27.72% of our budget. Our fringe benefits, the recommended cost is \$10,051,491, or 13.9% of the total budget. Human resources data. The Virgin Islands Department of Human Services is in line with our other territories and our nation's workforce shortages in critical areas. Throughout the year the Office of Human Resources and Labor Relations has been recruiting through various means. Advertisements continue through government websites, social media, LinkedIn, email blasts to licensed professionals through the licensing and Department of Licensing Consumer Affairs. DHS is also actively involved in job fairs virtually, locally, and we've also been to Florida for nurses specifically. We continue to experience challenges in and our ability to recruit and retain talent, which includes a lack of qualified workforce in certain critical areas.

0:37:13 The high cost of the living in the territory, affordable housing, and lacking of incentives. With our personnel services obligation, we allocate federal and local funds to support the salaries of a dedicated workforce consisting of 638 diligent professionals. There are 361 professionals on the island of St. Croix, 272 on St. Thomas, and five on St. John. Currently of the 638 employees, there are 290 or 100% of the Virgin Islands local funds. 223 or 100% federally funded employees. Included in that is 43 CSEP or Senior Community Senior Employment Program and 82 are in the GVI federal match requirement. DHS began fiscal year 2023 with a new vacancy count of 197 positions.

0:38:11 And as of June 30, 2023, progress has been made in reducing the number of vacancies, resulting in a current total of 148 remaining vacant positions within the department. Out of the 197 vacancies, 82 are supported by general funds, 85 are fully federally funded positions and the additional 30 are a blend of general and federal allocations supplies the fiscal year 2024 budget recommendation of 1 million 60 319 dollars has been allocated for supplies the budget category remains relatively consistent with the fiscal year 2023 appropriations this line item provides an adequate amount of supplies, however noting there are trends, continual price hikes, especially with food and medical supplies. While the department remains frugal in expending funds, there are continual price increases that affect the food and medical supplies required in various divisions such as Senior Citizens, which is the Homes for the Age, and Interprevention and prevention services as either Y or C in our group home. Other services, the FY 2024 recommended budget of \$38,498,792 is an increase by approximately 10% when compared to fiscal year 2023. There are currently 32 general fund professional agreements and the complete list of the contracts is in the appendix section. These increases are primarily attributed to the rate increases for court-ordered residential placements, specifically in the Office of Residential Services and Interstate Compact Affairs. Additionally, this also includes rate increases for the first time in seven to ten years for some of our providers. Utilities. We've decreased utilities costs for fiscal year 2024, as we will be utilizing federal dollars for some of the buildings occupied by our federal program. The cost is estimated at \$2.3

0:40:13 million dollars. The capital outlays for 2024 are \$374,000. The department will be replacing copiers in various units and also doing some air condition replacements. We do have some cost comparisons and a couple of the tables here as well. We have a three-year comparison for federal grants the department of human services currently manages federal grants

with the expectation of new grant funding for fiscal year 2024 is 182 million eight hundred and forty four thousand nine hundred and thirty dollars this plays a pivotal role in the department's budgetary framework these grants originate from federal partners including the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Labor, the Department of Education, the U.S. Department of Justice, and the Corporation for National and Community Services. These federal sources contribute significantly to the Department's financial resources, enabling the effective implementation of crucial programs and initiatives. Additionally, it's noteworthy that the Department also anticipates approximately \$60 million and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP benefits to be disbursed to eligible program recipients. The Department has received an influx of much-needed federal dollars and large, unobligated balances do still exist. There are several contributing factors for the delay in spending and the Department of Human Services continues to work with both our federal and internal departments to resolve the issues as well as extend when possible. DHS have been implemented in our Office of Fiscal Affairs to closely monitor and track federal and local spending. Trackers will be implemented for all programs which outline budget plans and obligation dates.

0:42:13 This will provide accountability internally. We have a federal grants listing and a table here for fiscal year 24. Disaster recovery and capital projects. DHS has diligently collaborated with the Office of Disaster Recovery locally to seek and maximize its funding through the FEMA Public Assistance and Hazard Mitigation Grant programs to enhance our disaster recovery efforts. We've been obligated \$83,688,471.14 for FEMA PA projects, and \$3,651,784.94 for hazard MIT projects.

0:42:56 The Department also anticipates an additional \$258,336,104.75 to be obligated for FEMA PA. As discussed in previous committee hearings, many of our facilities are very outdated and have been through several major storms which have impacted on the infrastructure of the buildings. The continued cost of maintenance and repairs has taken its toll and is no longer a cost-effective approach. We're pleased that through a concerted effort in a series of appeals of original FEMA projects, we now have major full prudent replacements approvals pending for our DHS St. Thomas Newt Hanson Complex at an approximate cost of \$128 million, Harburg-Grick Home for the Age in the approximate amount of \$129 million, and the Queen Louise Home for the Age full prudent replacement cost is \$66,782,944.53. As well as the much-needed permanent repairs to our Cruise Bay St. John Multipurpose Center in the amount of \$2,325,153.61. Our Office of Head Start, our Head Start program, secured \$41,154,092 in federal disaster recovery grants, separate and apart from FEMA, from the office, Federal Office of Head Start, and is proceeding with six major construction projects across the territory. The vendors have already been selected and grand breaking ceremonies and demolition is forthcoming. Continuum of care challenges within the community. The public health emergency unwind.

0:44:46 With the end of the COVID-19 public health emergency or PHE on May 11, 2023, the department has had to once again pivot in its operations and unwind the benefits and flexibilities that have been offered over the last three years, especially within the eligibility programs. Unwinding refers to the resumption of regular eligibility and enrollment operations. Divisions such as Medicaid and the Division of Family Assistance, or DFA, which operates the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, have developed plans to adjust to the PHE unwind, which includes utilizing and extending waivers to avoid abrupt disruptions to the process. Challenges that the department continues to work through include recertification processes that have been on hold throughout the pandemic, identifying alternatives for clients who will no longer be eligible for benefits, and adjusting to the reduced federal match assistance percentage or the FMAP rates for Medicaid claims, among other process-oriented considerations. Additionally, the Department has already seen a decrease in the support services and supplemental funding that's been received during the pandemic. In December, 2023, the Consolidated Appropriations Act 2023 or Public Law 117-328 made permanent the 83% FMAP for the United States Virgin Islands. In March, 2020, as part of the COVID-19 relief enacted in the Family First Coronavirus Response Act, or FFCRA, Congress provided increased Medicaid funding to states and territories throughout, through increased FMAP rates. Increased FMAP rates, in turn, reduced the local fund match requirement, and in this case, by 6.2% in the response to the public health emergency. To receive the increased FMAP, FFCRA, It requires that any individuals who were enrolled in Medicaid at the start of the public health emergency or became enrolled in Medicaid during the emergency period remain eligible

0:47:02 for Medicaid through the last day of the month in which the COVID-19 public health emergency ends unless the individual requests a voluntary termination of eligibility or the individual ceases to be a resident of the state or the territory. At the end of the PHE, which occurred on May 11, 2023, states and territories must initiate all renewals, post-enrollment verifications, and re-determinations for all individuals enrolled with a continuous enrollment expires. To facilitate this, the Department has sent a renewal notice and request for information to enrollees through the mail and via text and email messages. As a result of the unwind, many Medicaid members could lose coverage and become uninsured or experience gaps in coverage. To mitigate some of the impact, the Division is working with the Government Employees Service Commission or GESC for the Health Insurance Board to understand and coordinate the transition of eligible

individuals impacted. Like Medicaid, the SNAP program is also unwinding from various waivers and flexibilities and additional benefits afforded during the public health emergency. One challenge experienced by both programs includes enrollees not receiving or paying due attention to the provided communication regarding the requirement to recertify and the timeline to do so. And another challenge includes the significant increase in workload during the unwinding period process and that has been difficult to keep up with regarding conducting renewals for these large caseloads in a timely fashion. The senior continuum of care is also a challenge for us. Long-term care for seniors requiring assistance with daily living activities continues to be the challenge. Given the capacity and resources available to the department, we are limited in the support we can provide, specifically the number of beds currently available within the homes for the aged. While we currently have some physical capacity to accommodate additional seniors within the infrastructure and support services do not allow for us to do that, that is safe and compliant with the regulations. With the increase in resident census, additional funding would be needed to support the nursing and support services and the staff ratio to patient or resident, as well as additional supplies. But beyond funding, DHS joins the fight with other health care providers locally and nationally to find and retain qualified nursing staff. These are some of the challenges that have been identified and that the department is working to address through developing training and incentive programs and doing some temporary repairs and of course our permanent replacement to facilities in pursuing the ability to receive federal funding from the center for medicare and medicaid services or cms by building two

0:49:54 skilled nursing facilities one in each district conclusion today our fiscal year 2024 budget presentation is dedicated to the department of human services employees have who have recently passed away this year their friends and the family who continue to grieve the loss of our social worker ino inayama our homemaker gloria warner and our headstart teacher monique mercer senators we express our gratitude for granting us the privilege to present our fiscal year 2024 general fund budget recommendations of 72 million three hundred and thirty one thousand six hundred and ten dollars to strengthen our families We're kindly requesting a modified line-item budget to allow for flexibility and personnel infringed to fully utilize any savings. We're fully aware of the challenges that LIHA had, and we approached them with a sense of humility, but also for excitement for the opportunities that present. With the support of this esteemed body, our Honorable Governor Bryan Jr., my fellow cabinet members, our community, and our local and federal partners, we remain committed to providing social services that contribute to enhancing the quality of life for individuals and families with diverse needs. Madam Chairwoman, this concludes our prepared statement and the Department of Human Services team stands ready to any questions that you or the committee may have. Thank you. Thank you for your testimony, Commissioner Gomez. Let me take this opportunity to recognize Senator Novelli Francis jr. member of this committee please mark Senator Francis as present Senator Samuel Carrion please mark Senator Carrion as present we we have some honorary committee members that's here

0:51:50 with us Senator Carla J. Joseph, Senator Angel Bulkes Jr. and today we also have with us Senator Maurice James and Senator Franklin D. Johnson. Noncommittee members, thank you for being here with us. This is a very important conversation with regards to the Department of Human Services 2024 budget. So colleagues, we're going to go to a four minute round, but of course before we go to that round, Madam Chair, I always have to ask her questions, right? So let me just start by asking about your federal funds. Have you returned any federal funds within the past two years?

0:52:37 Yes. Why? And what funds? CFM O'Grass. We did return some funds. Okay, so before we start, I'm going to ask you, when you speak first, not in every instance, but your first time that you speak, please put your name on the record for the sake of the stenographer. Okay?

0:53:03 You may proceed. And, Media, please make sure that the mics are turned up so we can hear the testifiers. And Senator Fonseca, please mark Senator Fonseca as present. And he was here for quite some time, so I apologize, Senator Fonseca. You may proceed with your response. Lady McGrath, CFO. We did have some funds returned for 23. It was not a large amount of funds. The areas pretty much was the Title IVB and Title IVE programs, wherein we don't have a cost allocation plan, so it bars us from spending the money. We are working with our federal partners and also DPP in getting the cost allocation in place. Okay.

0:54:01 Share that with me again. What is the name of that particular grant? It's a multitude of small grants. It's a Title IVE. total I can provide that to you yeah so yeah so we need to get the total but you said that you don't have a cost allocation plan who's responsible for establishing or putting the cost allocation plan together I am we're working in tandem with the assistant commissioner and also with the fed our federal product partners who have actually put us in touch with the persons who did the cost allocation in Puerto Rico okay so that I don't I'm not following you on the ground who is the ultimate agency that's responsible for the cost allocation plan does the Department of Human Services team provide the information and then you send it somewhere to be approved what's that process AC Benjamin good morning Carla Benjamin assistant commissioner The cost allocation plan that we're referencing is one that is specific to the Children's

Bureau and the Title IVB and IVE funds that the Territory receives. We generated with our federal Region 2 partners an RFP that was put out. And the feedback that we got was that it wasn't clear enough. And so the original RFP was pulled. As CFO McGrath stated, we're currently working again to get an RFP out.

0:55:39 With the help of the federal partners, we have identified two potential providers who we believe will probably respond to the RFP. And so we're going to be putting that back up again. So when was the last time you did a cost allocation plan? And I'm asking that question because it's very troubling when you indicate that whatever was sent out initially from this territory, it was not satisfactory. So it sounds as if this is something new, or is this something that you do annually, every five years, every three years? What is the challenge as to why we cannot get it right, basically? That's what I'm asking.

0:56:19 Yes, Senator, it is new. It is a process that all of the jurisdictions across the United States who are Title IV E jurisdictions have to do. The cost allocation plan has to be developed and then submitted to the federal clearing house for approval and then implemented. So you're saying, is it your testimony that under the Title IV B and what was the other program? Title IV E. Title IV E and what's the other program? Those are the two funding streams. Title IV E. B. Title 4B, Title 4E, and the authority is the Children's Bureau. The Children's Bureau.

0:56:59 So it's your testimony that this is the first time that the Virgin Islands Department of Human Services had to submit a cost allocation plan? Yes, Senator. For this particular program? Yes. And how long did you know that you were required to do this before it was done? We became a Title IV E jurisdiction in 2017, I believe. The Family First Prevention Services Act rolled out in October of 2021, and so there has been program instruction instructing all the jurisdictions that a cost allocation plan needs to be put in place. Our administration came on board in 2019.

0:57:48 We've pretty much been working on that, just as other jurisdictions have been. The original RFP that was put out was with the assistance of the federal government, and so it's been sort of a trial and error for most jurisdictions. I know that there's always a challenge when you're working with processes with the federal government.

0:58:14 moving the goalposts, but when did you send out your RFP? When did you send it out compared to when it's actually due? Because it's very troubling to hear that we are in fact losing federal dollars because we were unable to get an approved cost allocation plan. So how do we balance this? So, in addition to the cost allocation plan, the Territory's foster care role, and it's connected Territory's foster care role, or children in care, went from a little above 100 in 2020 to nowhere less than 50. And so the opportunities for us to also spend those same Title IV B and Title IV E dollars has drastically reduced as well.

0:59:13 The first allocation, the first RFP that went out, went out in 2020, 2021, I believe, late 2021. And so we thought that we had identified a possible maybe noncompetitive selection in in Puerto Rico with the vendor that did Puerto Rico, since Puerto Rico is a territory, and we have some of the same challenges with regard to just geographical stuff, but then we're not able to do that as a sole selection, so we're back to putting out an RFP again. So the final question on this for me, when do you intend to get that done, the final submission of your RFP and do you have timelines around the whole process hopefully we can get that out before the end of this fiscal year our federal funds are our two-year grants so the sooner we get it out the sooner we'll be so who's who's who is the person that's primarily focused on making sure that we get it out before the end of the fiscal year and it's not a hope but it's a we're gonna to get it done that would be myself okay so is it that is it that you are going to get it out by the end of the fiscal year yes senator commissioner gomez i confirm that we'll work together to ensure it because it's in the best interest of our children and families um so we'll make sure that the rfp goes out and then the two the two vendors that we currently have identified we'll make sure that they're notified so when the rfp comes out we'll have a positive response All right, so I still need to get what is the dollar amount that the aggregate amount of grants that were impacted or federal dollars that were impacted as a result of the lack of a cost allocation plan. Okay, the FMAP. You referenced, so So we had the Wanglui here before us, and of course our hospitals are still challenged with uncompensated care. They did share with us that they believe that the process that they have internally is in fact working as it relates to the applications and the information being sent to your office. They were not able to share with us, though, how fast or how timely they're getting back the certifications of an individual, whether or not they qualify or they don't qualify. But my question is more so around, I know what we've had discussions about the poverty

1:02:02 levels here in the territory, and I believe the last number was, what was that about? Not the amount of poverty, but the dollar amount as far as the wages. The lowest, it depends on the household size, so it's a household of one, I think it's 15,000. Yeah, that's what I'm trying to get from you. I'll have to double check, but I think. Okay, so I don't need to know the exact number right now, but what matters is we did have a conversation before about a concern that that number was very, is it low or is it high?

- 1:02:39 So that number was too high, and we needed to get reconsideration as it relates to our poverty wages here in the territory. So my question is, what has Human Services done, or the government collectively, because I'm not sure, I suspect the application has several levels that it will have to go through. Is there work being done, or is that done already as it relates to an application to be submitted with regards to addressing our poverty levels, because it briefs well that we now have 83% FMAP. However, if our poverty levels are not in line with what our true reality is, then we're not going to see the true benefit.
- 1:03:22 So where are we with this application that we discussed a few years ago? Thanks for the question. We actually had a recent site visit from Alonzo Nicholas, who our region two person, as well as with the governor, and we have that comprehensive discussion. They're actually gonna be boots on the ground in August. So we're having continuous conversations, but each individual eligibility program like SNAP would have to apply individually. So it's not just one concerted effort necessarily for the Virgin Islands per se, but like you'd have to do a state plan amendment for Medicaid, you'd have to do one specific for SNAP. So we're trying to get a good consensus of what that would look like for us and then be able to do the applications individually for each one of them. Childcare would also be included. Head Start would potentially be a benefit. WIC, potentially under Department of Health, may be impacted as well. So we are in discussions, we're actively discussing it to make sure, but I'm in constant conversations with them up to, they were here in June, I believe, June, July.
- 1:04:21 So Commissioner, for clarification, are you saying that there's a requirement for us to have a discussion with the federal government for them to say yes, you can pull the trigger, or us here, we on the ground here in the Virgin Islands, we determine, look, this is not working for us. This does not show or this does not provide a true picture of what our true poverty levels are here in the Virgin Islands, so hence, we will move forward and begin to move forward with this application. I'm very unclear about the part the federal government and your role as commissioner and you identifying because you see the clients so you have an understanding of what we're seeing and people that are in fact being turned away because of uh the threshold if you will the federal the federal guidelines correct correct so i'm trying to figure out do we have to get do we have to have consultation with the federal government or can we say hey guys um this is a challenge for us this continues to be a challenge and this is our application or what's the process for this application because we we've discussed this before and we continue to hear that we are in talks but at what point i mean i'm sure that you've seen the kids count data so at what point do we really begin to address this well we are addressing it and i think that the biggest part for us right now is what would be a the guideline for the virgin islands and what take a state or territory would be in in in adherence to hawaii is usually the one we kind of go in consensus with but a lot of times they'd like to group us with mississippi louisiana um because of my question commissioner i don't need you to answer
- 1:06:07 my question so my question is do we have to work with the federal government or can yes we identify this as a challenge for us as virgin islanders and move forward with our submission that's the question so if it's no then it's no if it's that we have to look at other states or other comparable states or territories in order for us to move forward then I understand that so that's what I'm trying to get from you in order for we do have to work with the federal government for the to get approval and that would be for each eligibility program so for a good consensus internally I need to make a good consensus of what that looks like so then I can roll it out for each of the eligibility programs so yes as far As far as the application or as far as· You still have to get approval from the federal government for the poverty guidelines. Because they are the ones that· I know. I know.
- 1:07:02 So we're going to ask what that would be, what that threshold would be. Can we change it and what that would look like for each? So it has to be through each of the federal guidelines. It might· Okay. I don't have an offline conversation. I basically ask you, can you submit an application, yes or no? Yes, we can. Or applications? It would be applications. So what's preventing us from doing that? making sure that we we have the most recommended guidelines in place of what that would look like what specifically make sure of that so when do we actually pull the trigger that's the question okay I get um let's have the offline conversations that I'll pull you yeah we kind of have keeps having the same discussion of the same thing just when I get many movement that's basically what asking. Okay. All right, colleagues. Let me recognize the presence of Senator Diane Capehart, noncommittee member. Thank you for being here. Senator Capehart. I also realize, Commissioner, that you have, I'm seeing four members of your team that's sitting in the St. Thomas Chambers so I'm need to ask them as well to please put their name and titles on the record we madam chair they're not part of senior leadership and we would only bring their administrators and directors just like the ones they're sitting in the well they have to put their name and title on the record so we need for them to do that please media can you please turn on the mic of the testifiers in St. Thomas to allow them to put their name and title on the record and we will start with the from my far okay proceed

- 1:08:51 good morning Kimberly Washington Division of Disabilities and Rehabilitation Services Acting Administrator good morning Evie Monique James I'm the Administrator of the Office of residential and interstate compact affairs good morning i'm tishma tucker lance the administrator for office of child care and regulatory services good morning masika louis administrator for the office of head start okay so i missed two names the second lady that's the third person that spoke i missed your full name could you speak a little slower good morning my name is tishma Tucker Lance the office of child care and regulatory services the administrator and the last person to speak Masika Lewis administrator for the office of head start okay that's that all right colleagues we're gonna go to a four-minute round and we're going to start with senator Angel Bulkes jr. so you may proceed thank you madam chair madam chair colleagues good morning good morning to central staff good morning to the listening and viewing audience good morning to the leadership team of the department of human services and good morning commissioner how are you doing today good morning i'm well thank you okay very well let me ask you in your testimony you provided information on the office of fiscal affairs can you provide details on the initiatives that have been implemented by the Office of Fiscal Affairs to monitor and track federal and local spending?
- 1:10:31 Are these initiatives enhancing your accountability and fiscal transparency? Most definitely, but I'll have my Chief Financial Officer, Lydia McGrath, speak on that behalf. Good morning, Lydia McGrath, Chief Financial Officer. When I onboarded less than a year ago, August 1st is going to make a year, I was down to So one accountant, a director of financial services, office assistant. We had practically no staff for 84 programs. What we did is we started to onboard persons, raking up the accounting position where we have analysts and we have accounts payables processing.
- 1:11:20 So the analysts, which it's a team of four right now that's newly on boarded. We're working with the administrators. We're working with the information in ERP so we can actually build out dashboards for each of the administrators to be able to go in pretty much live data. If I may interject for one quick second. I ask the question because based on the fact that we have seen our federal grants go back, I'm assuming that the Office of Fiscal Affairs is predominantly responsible for assuring that those funds are utilized properly. Am I correct or incorrect? Correct. We're working with the administrators to ensure that if there are any, as the grant year end approaches, if we can look at other areas where we can shift funds and spend those funds in accordance with the federal regulations? Very well.
- 1:12:19 Based on what I've been able to collect, it seems as if we need to buff up that office or even put other parameters in place to assure that we utilize these funds because we don't want any red penny going back to the federal government. It has to be utilized. Concerning your budget trackers for your programs, have there been any overruns or under utilization of funds? Currently, the area where we have issues is the childcare grants, and I will leave AC Benjamin speak a little to that. Thank you. Quickly, because my time is running, please. One minute. SSN Commissioner Carla Benjamin.
- 1:13:08 The childcare program, the level of funding increased as I understand it in 2018 with the advent of COVID there was a deluge of money as well as the introduction of an additional formula grant that we're receiving. So in addition to that, as a result of COVID we lost a number of child care providers, And we're required to spend 70% of all of the money that we receive on subsidies. So our ability to spend is directly related to the number of the- The number. It's directly- And what happens to those funds now, being that they have been underutilized? What is the plan? What is your strategy in trying to utilize them in the time available?
- 1:13:57 We have submitted requests for waivers for some of the funding, so that we can continue to spend. Time. very well madam chair may i please have one quick wrap-up you may proceed senator thank you very much madam chair i have a question about a saint john the saint john facility how has the cost of maintaining and repairing the saint john facility evolved over time is there Is there data or any long-term information concerning the cost-effectiveness of repairing it versus a full prudent replacement for the multipurpose center? Thank you for the question, Senator.
- 1:14:45 We actually didn't get a full prudent replacement, so we got more than we originally anticipated. I think it was less than \$200,000 when we originally appealed it and now it's over \$2 million plus some change for the st john multipurpose center um it is the best we could do at this time um unfortunately we didn't get a full prudent replacement when we requested it okay thank you commissioner and thank you madam chair for your leniency thank you uh senator bulkus senator blighton you're madame blighton you're recognized for your four minutes thank you so much madam chair good morning to my colleagues this is interviewing audiences, staff, central staff. Good morning Commissioner Gomez and your management team there with you and thank you so much for your testimony. I am also very concerned when it comes to our federal and local grants and the execution of those grants. On page 27 to 29 of the post other report you have a listing of over 50 some plus grants federal grants 64 to be exact and many of them are about to expire many and they're all important that's why we get them because we need those grants can we don't have much time but can you tell me first of all uh do you anticipate utilizing those grants before the funds expired are the first question i have Thank you for the question. We will spend the majority of it.

- 1:16:24 There will be some that we've requested extensions for. We get an amount of money that we got on top of money, especially for the childcare and the limited number of facilities that we have. It's been difficult to spend some of those funds. So you do have a plan to utilize those funds despite them being ready to expire? you're going to ask for um for for additional time correct okay very well next i want to go to your vacancies you have 148 vacant positions and that ties in with these funds because you need you need staff to do the work now uh many of these vacant positions i know you had 48 new hires right you said 48 correct new hires these 48 new hires uh were critical higher and are they in relation to trying to address most of these areas where you fall short every division has a short fall or workforce shortage um right now um you know dc trotman may be able to enlighten you a little bit more as far as that's concerned but most of them are multi-year grants so they They may expire, but we might get another grant for the following year, Head Start as one example. And so they're on a different fiscal year. They're on July to June.
- 1:17:51 So those are sometimes carried over to the next budget cycle for the federal budget. Very well, your local grants of 3.2 million dollars. Have all of these different organizations been applied for or received the funding? Most of them have. So our director of nonprofit has worked directly with each agency that's been allocated. Some were not in favor of receiving the money, so we didn't do that. Or they have making sure that they're doing the reporting requirements, but we also do notification grant awards for each one, so they have to provide the documentation in order to be certified before they can receive funds, and then making sure they get their invoices on time.
- 1:18:32 So you have notified those that did not receive it, that it's available? Correct. Okay, also in the report it stated that you have no outstanding obligations, is that correct? For past fiscal years, yes. We have some outstanding obligations that pop up. Interestingly enough, from 2006 or 2002, they'll say, oh, you owe us, and there's no way I can track that. So you do have outstanding obligations from time to time? Lydia McGrath, CFO, yes. From time to time we do have outstanding obligations.
- 1:19:06 And your bank accounts, how often do you reconcile your bank accounts? When was the last time you reconciled them? Since I onboarded, we have not reconciled them. We actually need, we're going to have them audited. Time. To ensure that everything is what it says it is. What the plan? What the time frame you plan to reconcile? Because I don't understand that. I actually have someone who is a volunteer, a former DOF employee who's on board with me, and she is going to be doing the reconciliations into that.
- 1:19:47 Do you have a time frame? It's going to take a minute because of the amount of accounts, so I'm hoping by March of next year, next year, everything including the big social security which is going to take a lot of filtering through the account to find all the funds that belong to all the wards of the state so we can identify those. That's going to take probably the longest. The smaller ones should be done within the next two to three months. Thank you so much for your response, Madam Chair. Thank you so much for the time.
- 1:20:19 Thank you, Senator Blyton. Two things that came up from my colleague, the federal grants and the bank accounts. So based on the report that I have in front of me, the aggregate of the federal funds that the Department of Human Services has been awarded since I think the latest one or the earliest one is 2018. You and the majority, but for 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, expire in 2023.
- 1:21:18 And the total is \$320.3 million in federal funds. And as of this report, Mr. Paul-Sadeta, could you please share with us when this report is as of? Speaking of mic, please. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair. this report was as of March 2023 so this report is of March so that's about three months ago in March the expenditures represented of the 3.3 million 1.109 110 million was expended so that's actually less than half.
- 1:22:22 And I'm noting that the balances in the grants individually is significant. The numbers are significant. So I need to understand, how do you intend to expend, I guess you have an obligation period? You have an obligation and then an expenditure period? Lydia McGrath, CFO, yes.
- 1:22:55 So your obligation is the end of 23, and your expenditure period is the end of 24, or is it six months to expend after the obligation? Most grants are three months. On the charitable grants, we have a one-year obligation. So most of them are obligation 2023, September, June, based on the dates that I'm seeing, and then you have to expend by the three months out? Correct. How? To liquidate. How do I plan to get this due?
- 1:23:27 Most of Lydia McGrath, CFO, we have the first set of grants on here listed are the Head Start construction grants. Okay. And we have gotten, we just received the extension, hold on. We just received low-cost extensions out for 12 months initially. So you have no-cost extensions on the construction-related grants, right? Correct. Which are listed here.
- 1:23:56 What's the total on your no-cost extensions grants? Approximately \$42 million, just shy of \$42 million, Madam Chair. That's the grant for the project that they had start building, build out, correct? Correct. But then what are we talking about? They're listed in this number. Unfortunately, we didn't pull them out. We have everything combined. They're the

first one from the second grant go down.

- 1:24:26 Okay, so that brings you down to \$285 million. Additionally, in medical assistance, we had, at that point, \$58 million. To date, we've spent \$116 million. You had a medical assistance? In the claims payments. Here is listed at \$58 million. We've spent, to date, \$116 million, \$425, and \$17.18 on the federal side. Okay, so you're basically saying that the majority of these funds are associated That's \$152 million, about.
- 1:25:07 Yes, and with the other Medicaid grants, we don't have contracts in place for several of these, so it takes a process, but all this money is going to be spent. So basically, in order to expend these dollars, you're going to need to request for extensions. Yeah, because some of them are, there's one here that says expired in 2023 of June. For medical assistance?
- 1:25:39 No, I'm looking at all the grants, so this one is, this one says FOSA grandparents, this say retired and volunteer program, et cetera. Correct. The FGP, that grant, and the RSVP, those grants, expired in June, and this is an old list. They did most of their spending in the last quarter, so most of that money is spent. So this is what I'm going to ask. If you can provide us with an updated report on the expenditure of your federal funds because it's very concerning based on what we have in front of us today and it's concerning because we've heard we've listened to so many of the challenges that individuals in our community are experiencing as it relates to social services and if we have all these federal dollars we have to come up with a plan we know that it's challenging to hire employees we understand the challenges but I believe what matters most is you know what is that strategic plan to provide the support we have to be able to see that we have done all that we could do we have to show that we've circled the wagon if you will all that we could do before we start saying okay we could do this extension or this money went back for this reason i'm not warm and fuzzy about what i'm seeing in front of me but again an updated report is very necessary okay all right All right, Senator Johnson, you recognize your point of information, and then we're going to go to the next senator, which is Senator Duane M. DeGraff.
- 1:27:21 Good morning. Good morning. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I just want the record to be clear that when I count these grants, out of 64 of them, 39 of them are going to expire this year. 39. And I don't know how you guys are going to spend all of this money. Thirty-nine of them are going to expire this year, 2023. I just want it on the record, because what I'm hearing you saying here, I can't see it happening. And people complain about service. We have federal money going back. We keep putting it for extension. I don't see how we're going to happen. And I'm being very straightforward. I don't see you getting this money spent. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Thank you, Senator Johnson. Senator DeGraff, you're recognized for your four minutes. Thank you, thank you, thank you.
- 1:28:11 Good morning. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair. Good morning, colleagues. Good morning, testifiers. You know, the topic at hand is a great topic and I'd like to follow up on, but because time permits, I'm going to start with employees. I don't go to, and you're going to program me for the next 10 years, I'm going to talk please first. But I want to look at your capital outlay, \$374,000. I went to Human Services the other day to visit one of my summer interns. And is some of that capital outlay going to be used in Old Clued Hanson, Department of Human Services building?
- 1:28:54 Maybe for the air conditionings, thank you for the question. So some AAC repairs, but in a in discussions with fema to get a full prudent replacement so we're going to actually demo that building and started started new so putting money into a building that we're in the process of trying to do a demo and rebuild um is concerning so we're actually looking at rental space and moving everyone out of the building so we can get go ahead and start that project okay how so during the 24 budget i don't i don't have the timeline on it because i haven't been fully approved by fema for the for the prudent replacement but we already have a space identified to move um and so hopefully in the next maybe three months four months we'll be able to move partially into that space yeah they need to move move everybody i still have the stench of the morgue in that building and it's been a hundred years so you know as soon as we could get out you know make the work environment maybe that's why some of these uh things are happening on the other ends employees just eating the work best working conditions and agreed and that's why we went for the full prudent replacement I was looking at Act 84 74 the 23 budget your acts for personal services or 21 4 13 5 84 that's what you got in the 23 budget now the personal services for your 24 budget have gone down to 20 million 47,018 you lost employees or what the wage increases or instead of everybody received them what's the difference with the monies so what we're doing is we're actually moving some of our locally funded positions onto our federal budgets to kind of alleviate some of that pressure from the gvi uh social services black grant head start are two
- 1:30:46 examples of what we'll be doing that with okay so how do you address wage increases when you do that so we've actually done the negotiated wage increases are in the process for SIU and USW masters and we're in the process of doing that and that's reflected in our 24 budget okay so in the 22 budget wage increases were given seven hundred and a thousand and additionally for how many How many unions were there, was that? I believe it was. One minute.

- 1:31:15 D.C. Trotman. Michael Trotman, Deputy Commissioner, HR, Labor Relations. That encompassed two unions, sir. Two unions, was everybody brought up to what is supposed to be, any retro owed? We still have some employees that are outstanding, but they are federal employees. So we're working through that revision with the Office of Management and Budget. Those employees should be brought current within the next 30 days but as far as those on the general fund they have completed and received their retro payments so when you say they're federal employees we had to revise the budget sheets to reflect their new salaries because when the budgets were some federal budgets were submitted they didn't have they're paid by the federal monies but they're they're they're local employees okay so so they did get a wage increases but to reflect in the federal end they can be paid within the next 30 days right they should see the changes in the next 30 days and would they receive retro yes sir okay okay the next 30 days I'll check on that time so like I said just in closing you know all of us have our 40s and what we do everything is as important but um for me not more important than employees and and where they're working out of.
- 1:32:30 And then we address all the other issues. So thank you for what Human Services does. And I need to know, do you need any increase for the centenarians? So you could do that in Madam Chair's time. Thank you. Thank you for the questions about centenarians. We have \$75,000, I believe, set aside. And that kind of coincides with what our needs are anticipated for those for those that are coming to be a hundred years old thank you for your responses I'm here trying to figure out let me just ask your fiscal leader lead here miss McGrath your personal services what is What is the amount that you have listed or noted as the amount that was appropriated by the legislature for FY 2023 for your personnel services?
- 1:33:33 Lydia McGrath, CFO for personnel services for 23, \$20,563,31. Okay, did you look in the budget book? Did y'all see the budget book? That includes the additional funds that were given for the salary increases. So \$20,799,423? Okay, so \$20,799,423 is as a result of the salary increases that were granted in FY23. So that's tied to the union contracts, I assume?
- 1:34:12 Okay, so the recommendation for FY24 is \$20,047,18, correct? Yes. So that is a \$516,000 reduction, 2.5% reduction in your 22, sorry, your 24 budget, right? Yes. Yes.
- 1:34:40 And you indicated that that reduction is as a direct result of you moving some \$516,000 worth of positions from your local funds to your federal funds? Yes. Specifically our consolidated block grant. Okay. So it's specifically tied to your consolidated grant. And we are making some adjustments on the Head Start budget to move some of the employees over to their federal budget. So are you saying that we anticipate seeing a further reduction in the \$20 million, \$47.18?
- 1:35:20 We're still working the numbers because, again, with the block grant, we knew that we were getting an increase. We didn't know the exact amount. We still have a quarter of funding to go. did send the budget down to the Office of Management and budget with I think it was additional DC Troutman if you can how many vacant positions were on the block grant the block grant currently we have Michael Troutman currently we have 34 vacant positions on the block right social service block right that so you're saying that you have a possible 34 vacant positions on the block grant I I need to be clear. I'm talking about this \$20 million. Are we going to see, is there a high possibility that we will see a reduction in the \$20 million because those salaries will be charged to the block grant? That's the question.
- 1:36:17 I don't think there will be any further reduction. Okay, so then we're contradicting ourselves. Which one is it? You indicated that you all are truing it up and making a determination as to what are those personnel, if you will, that would be moved, whether it be the 100% or percentage, so which one is it? Well, for the block grant and for Head Start, they would be moving 100%, but we have to work with the federal dollars, especially with the Head Start, to see exactly how much we would move. Move from where? From general fund to the federal. Right. Yes. Sorry. Yes. Correct.
- 1:37:00 So as we work this 2023 budget, 2024 budget, we need to see what that amount is, because We are looking for resources to accommodate true needs. What we see on an annual basis is departments and agencies having excess funds in their budget and then they come to the legislature in mid-September to ask for appropriation transfers. While we have challenges with uncompensated care, et cetera. So while we have challenges with your very own Herbert Gregg and the amount of resources available to provide food and the other necessary items, so we want to make sure that we right fit this budget so we can ensure that we are accommodating or we are making sure that we are covering the true, true needs of your department. So that number we're going to need to get from you before we are done with the FY24 budget.
- 1:38:06 what a number look like from your department as the associated fringe benefits as well as the personal expense. And then I note that your fringe benefits is increased by some \$680,000, so can you please provide an explanation to that as well? Lydia McGrath, CFO, the fringe numbers are auto-populated in the OpenGov system. We did do a comparison, and there are instances where the fringe is excessively high, as high as I think 84%.
- 1:38:43 We are in communications with OMB, they sent us the differences, so we need to reconcile to see what the true fringe cost is, because it's definitely overstated. One of the things that we've asked all of our departments and agencies to do

before we wrap up this budget is to please provide us with your associated fringe benefits correctly. The personnel, because we know some people have single, some people have single insurance, some have family. So we need to see that proper true up so we can make a decision on this budget because it's very off when you see a reduction of 516 in your personnel but an increase of 680 in your associated fringe. We got to right correct this budget, please. We need each department and agency to assist us. We don't want to make the decisions in a vacuum and blindly, if you will. But this definitely is off and needs to be corrected, please.

1:39:39 Okay? And we did... Go ahead. We did ask Office of Management and Budget to provide us the breakdown of the fringe, and they did, but it just came in recently, so we haven't had a chance to really go through and see. Okay. to do that um that's the only way we gonna move forward this budget we got right correct this okay there's a point of information from senator Franken from Senator DeGraff you're recognized for your point of information it's interesting yeah thank you thank you madam chair if I had the time I was trying to get at in terms of at 8474 which is the 23 budget your personnel was 21 million 413 548 that's what I was saying then based on you're talking to get down to 20 you're going to take more money off of this 21 to move it around to the federal is what i was saying that was the kind of thing i was alluding to because what you have in 23 covers way more than your acts in 24. so as long as your wage increases and everything are covered your retro is covered then i fine but i think that's what i'm madame chair trying to drill down on in terms of that 21 million that you have covers wage increases and everything so once you cover that if you start shifting around okay so thank you thank you for the time madam chair let me recognize the president the presence of senator kenneth l-gitten's non-committee member thank you for being here it seems like we have a full house today thank you colleagues for being here this is a very important department so thank you for being here Senator Javon James Senator Johnson you're recognized for your four minutes

1:41:34 I met some folks here but I don't know if you want me to go ahead no you you are next I wasn't prepared but I'm ready to go still if you want no no I can't catch off God, but I can still go ahead. Great. Good morning to all, good morning to all testifiers, good morning to the listening and viewing audience. As we started out today, I think I watched that bunch of grants that's sitting there, and that's very disheartening for me, very disheartening, because we continue asking for money and money, and we have the federal money, and we're not using it. And every time we let that money go back, it doesn't help us. It hurts us. because then the local fund now have to match and make up for all of that federal money that we are allowing to go back. So I hope that we definitely get these grants. You mentioned a large unobligated balance still exists. There are several contributing factors for the delay in spending.

1:42:33 What are they? Lydia McGrath, CFO. The listing in the post audit report report is as of March 31st. Most of our grants did not even go online until maybe January or February for varying factors including we have to wait for a notice of grant award to be issued before we can put the budget online. So while personnel and fringe may run, the programs are not allowed to spend until that money is online. So the first quarter, especially, is always very, very limited in spending.

1:43:17 But we ramp up towards the end of the year. Are all your contracts, employee contracts, already secured and signed off? Everybody's up to this step in pay? For the negotiated, the new ones? All your employees, under the union obligations. Good morning, Senator Johnson. Michael Trotman, Deputy Commissioner, HR, Labor Relations. Not in this entirety, sir. We have approximately about 100 employees that are still waiting to get on step and get their retro activities.

1:43:56 I want to ask this question. Commissioner, you and a couple of your team, your assistant commissioner, guys got a raise in that legislation the governor did put in all this commission up is that true to say uh commissioners did get a raise yes sir and what your salary is now 135 000. oh and your assistant commissioners uh they're still at the same rate they're not didn't receive no they have not been approved yet but they are projected to get increased i have made the recommendations are this is in line with the may i finish please uh this is actually in line a lot of our um a lot of our unionized employees actually make almost or if not more than the exempt leadership so it's not just senior leadership but also the administrators and directors so many of the unionized employees that are being supervised by an administrator or director of a division, the divisional head of that, they're making more.

1:45:04 Do you have employees under the master agreement? We have six or seven union contracts. And some of them are under the master agreement. It's fair to say that. Yes. The master agreement that the governor refused to sign. These are low-level positions. Is it correct to say that too? 30 seconds. Is it correct to say that? Low level, I would prefer not to say low level, but I would say not, um, the salaries are low. The salaries are very low.

1:45:36 The salaries are very low. And that's my problem here, you know, um, when I go, I just go hard. I don't know, have no in between. When you have people making these small income, and we can't afford to pay them, but then we make these positions and give high executive these raise, \$10,000, \$15,000, what are we saying to our people? what are we saying to them thank you very much madam chair let me just ask because I see FY 24 budget book that was provided to this committee and to the senators by the Department of Human Services. Do you have your updated information as it relates

to your federal funds in here?

- 1:46:36 The most updated... What page is it on? I'm trying to locate it but I'm having a problem loading it. It's not loading in... And in the appendix section, page 19 starts the fiscal attachments. Let me just double check. Is it in there? It's Lydia Magracia. I believe it was the same information for the post audit. Yeah, but this is a thing.
- 1:47:05 You see the problem? So this is what we do. So you bring us a report today. So we request the information from post-audit, post-audit requests the information from you in March of 2024, three, right? This year, 2023, and you provide a beautiful book, it's very pretty, with the information and then you didn't take the time to give us the updated information so now we're asking you to send the information back, that's not satisfactory. We need, if you're going to send the information, where would you give us what we're going to see in the post-salty report?
- 1:47:49 Give us the up-to-date information, because that up-to-date information will show that there is in fact true movement, right? So we need to have some kind of accountability with the information that's being provided. So what's the challenge? What's the challenge of providing the information, up-to-date information? We received this report a few days ago, right? So why we couldn't get updated report of the grant awards?
- 1:48:23 What's the problem? No problem, Senator Laidia McGrath, CFO. We will provide it before the close of business tomorrow. No, we need it today. We need it today because you all are coming for your budget. And the information that should be provided should be up-to-date information. If you're going to take the time to prepare a document like this, then give us what we need. It's like, I don't want to say what this looks like to me, okay? We need to get updated information because you're representing that you've dialed down or you've spent down a lot of these dollars, but we have no proof of that, and you should have been able to provide us with a report that showed that okay um senator carry on senator bulka is here recognized for your point of information thank you madam chair what steps is is the department taking to monitor and control utility and rental costs especially with the utilization of federal funds for these buildings occupied by federal programs um good good morning again could you repeat um the first part of it the question what i'm trying to get at is can are these federal funds also being utilized for rental and utility costs of the department what steps are you taking to monitor and control that yes thank you for the question yes a few of the grants do include utilities like we mentioned and thus as well as rental costs but not all of them some are very specific about services specific only like the retired senior volunteer program is only specifically for that service or CSEP is only for specifically that for that purpose so some of the grants will have an allowable cost for rents but some will not in those specific cases are we
- 1:50:30 lapsing in that area as well with those federal monies my question I do I'm not sure if I okay so the first question was asked what is the next question because the point of inquiry points of information is a one question so what What was that question so the commissioner can answer the question and we can move on. Thank you for your leniency, Madam Chair. What I'm trying to understand is, are we also lapsing with those federal monies when it comes to the utility costs and the rental costs of the buildings that house these federal programs?
- 1:51:13 Lydia McGrath-CFO, no or not. Did you hear the response, Senator? They said no. Okay, thank you. Senator Carillon, you're recognized for your four minutes. Thank you. Good morning. Good morning to you, Madam Chair, my colleagues, and to testifiers this morning. First, I would like to start with the decrease in personnel services for FOI 24. Is that because of all the vacancies that you have? What's the reason for the increase in personnel? Increase or decrease? Decrease. What we stated earlier was we're moving some of our locally funded to federal grants. Great. And how many vacancies you said you have?
- 1:52:06 Currently we have D.C. Trotman. Good morning. Senator Carrion, Michael Trotman, D.C. HR Labor relations, 102 Vickers. 102. And those in FY24, are they at 50% funded or 100%? They're currently at 50% funded. 50% funded. How many were you able to fill in FY23? So far, we have 48, 49 with anticipated. We have a couple of onboardings now. We have 12 positions posted currently, so we should be able to, as long as we get a good eligibility list.
- 1:52:39 Okay, what about your capital projects? I see you have some listed under the federal section. There was a decrease of 50%. What are your plans? And I see from the general fund you have 374 in capital projects. What are your plans with that? That will be mostly for air conditioning units and copy machines. We did do another appropriation transfer for this year, requested through Committee on Finance, So we'll see how that goes as well. Very well. For the post-audit report, page 3, exhibit 1, what is your recommendation request for the Centennial Program? Because what I'm seeing here is zero reflected in post-audit report.
- 1:53:31 Page 3, table 1. Centennial. I believe it's listed on page 5. There's supposed to be 75,000 proposed for fiscal year 24 in that table in the miscellaneous section. Okay, 75,000. What are your actuals for this year? Actuals for this year? Danelle, do you have the actuals for centenarians? We can get that for you, I believe it's 32,000. 32?

- 1:54:03 32? And also, yeah, if you could confirm that. Also, I see in that same section in the page three of the post-op report, what's happening with your crime victims' compensation program? I know in Act 86-17, we appropriated \$391,000. What are your actuals to date? And I'm not seeing anything uh reflected um for fy 24. um so thank you one minute thanks for the question so uh since april we've lost two people in our office of legal uh we've reassigned someone to review and do meet with the commission to do those um reviews and claims uh cases approved and waiting payment is thirty nine thousand eight hundred and thirty dollars um and we have approximately seven applications that will be reviewed in the commission in august and september and that'll be 18 that it depends on the commission and what they approve because you can ask for something i mean it might not be an allowable cost um it's about eighteen thousand eight hundred and seventy seven dollars of requests that are there right now uh so far right now we've paid out sixty three a thousand nine hundred and sixty dollars okay so hopefully they get new people in that area and it'll move on yeah we want to make sure that doesn't that that program doesn't become stagnant you have you have recommendations for FY 24 within the budget correct okay now the senior citizen center fund I also see that it's zero I know for FY 22 it was 350,000 Lydia McGrath CFO it's actually five hundred thousand dollars that we receive
- 1:55:49 annually from the Lonesome Dove fund and there was a hiccup because it was showing up in our general fund and we tried to transfer it so I think it got lost in the shuffle. All right. And for 23 to date, we've spent \$147,612. In 22, we spent \$351,436 of that fund. Good. Madam Chair, if I may, last question.
- 1:56:16 In regards to Herbert Grigg, I was very concerned yesterday hearing the shortfalls within that area. The director mentioned staffing, funding, and supplies. Looking back, I was seeing how that has been decreased over the years in the budget. What's the plan? We want to see those numbers represented in your budget report. Seniors need the important care that we provide in that area. So Commissioner. Lydia McGrath, CFO. When we develop the budget, we work with administrators, and in looking at the ceiling and working with administrators, we also factor in historical data. What you've spent the prior year, where you are with your spending, what you project.
- 1:57:09 For 2022, for Herbert Gregg Home, they had \$38,889 of unspent money in the supplies category for the general fund. For Queen Louise, it was \$19,552. And other services for Herbert Gregg unspent was \$116,955 and for Queen Louise was \$133,793. So that's close to \$250,000 that was not spent in supplies and other services for both homes.
- 1:57:52 However, for 2024, knowing the increases in the cost, the food supplies have gone up, the medical supplies have also gone up, we did increase their supplies budget. We doubled the amount of food. And factors that are also taken we need to take into account is that both homes are recipients of food supplies from the emergency food assistance program through the Department of Education. For example, two weeks ago, Herbert Gregg received 30 cases of whole chicken. The month before, they received 30 cases of shrimp, which is 10 bags in each case. The chicken was 12 in each case. So we look at all these factors, but I don't think there's any particular... As a matter of fact, when I called Queen Louise last month, they said their freezer was full. I do periodic check-ins. So I think with Herbert Gregg, we did visit from the fiscal aspect to help them set up an inventory system. So they did ask for the leeway to get things in place so we're moving in so we can actually put something where we can track the inventory and we can see where the shortage is, how the supplies are actually being dispersed.
- 1:59:14 Additionally, the funding is released on a monthly basis. So it's difficult when you're running that type of facility to plan for each month. Quarterly is a much better way to plan. Once the PO is in place, then you can draw down. So we will be working closer with the homes, with the administrative staff to ensure that they're not utilizing all their funds now to buy three months of supplies when you actually only receive the allotment for one month very well thank you for that response and i will also be working closely with your department to ensure that our seniors receive what they deserve thank you thank you madam chair thank you senator carrion so i want to go back to the response that you made with regards to FY2022. Do you recall coming before the legislature for an appropriation transfer in FY2022? It did. Okay and you noted that there was a balance in the general fund accounts for the senior facilities in particular totaling some 250k, correct? What prevented the Department of Human services from including those senior centers in appropriation transfer as well as it briefs well to say you have a balance but who's monitoring this what gets monitored gets done so well you have the facility leadership who is the person on your leadership team commissioner who's responsible for looking at these senior homes and whatever other facilities that you have to make sure that if their balance is, because while Ms. McGrath is doing her part, they also have to do their part. So who's the person that's responsible for the senior
- 2:01:10 homes and your leadership team? So Assistant Commissioner Donnell Baptiste, who just joined our team, has oversight of- Who was that person before? Mikkel Reimer-Brown. Okay, so that was Ms. Reimer-Brown. So you're saying that in fiscal year 22, We did not appropriate, we appropriated, we left \$250,000 on the table. You see what's wrong with this? We see what's wrong with this?

- 2:01:42 Somebody got to be monitoring this stuff. There's no excuse because we see departments come back here for furniture, car, all kind of different things they come back here for. and your department is no exception you come back for the same things but we have money that's left on the table for our senior home and we can come back and say hey we need to grab that for fy 2022 and make it available until expended or whatever the case is so you can make sure we cover the challenges with these homes that's not satisfactory so we don't need to see that in 23 because i know that you spoke specifically about the appropriation transfer and i just want want to be clear, this chair is different. We make an appropriation transfer when the hospitals and our health centers are in dire straits. It ain't happening with me. I mean I'm only one vote, of course, I'm only one vote, but I'm going to definitely push hard.
- 2:02:46 Lydia McGrath, CFO. Our appropriation transfer for this year is pretty much to help cover some of the shortages, especially in the medical assistance claims that we're projecting about 2.9 million dollars in shortage so we need to talk about that we'll get back to that let me just go to the next senator senator Fonseca you're recognized for your five four minutes yes thank you madam chair and pleasant good morning to the listening audience um to the distinguished testifiers from the department of human services um honorable commissioner gomez um mr james lance lewis mcgrass milligan the whole Parsi welcome. You know, first I want to say a special congratulations to Commissioner Derrick Gabriel. Brother, thank you, them road in Bovone, they paving all them road in Bovone, I went out, them road look good. So I promise you I ain't gonna mess with you no more at all, you know when you finish them before we got some place in savannah you know as a savonero we got a couple place up in savannah we gotta pay buying or mess with your blessings uh commissioner gabriel excellent um okay human services you know um boy let me tell you um the the personnel budget is 20 million 47 thousand 18 dollars you got 638 employees you know human services take the cake
- 2:04:38 so far this is the lowest paid department you know you got maintenance worker too making 29 thousand ten dollars that same maintenance marker could make forty five thousand dollars in the private sector a different of sixteen thousand seven fifty when you work for the government that you make twenty nine thousand when they take out this take out that take out order you're only going home with seven hundred twenty five dollars that same maintenance worker will go home with a thousand seven hundred sixty dollars bi-weekly so you see that if i'm a maintenance worker i ain't working for no government i gain a thousand dollars more every two weeks you got the institution attendant here 29 000 a laundry walk at 28 000 homemaker aid 30 000 food sacred food service worker 27 000 institution attendant they got about 50 employees in this department less than 15 dollars an hour the commissioner get big raise about 18 percent raise gone up but it got 50 employees making less than 15 dollars an hour how could this be you know we got departments entire departments in the vi government don't have 50 employees human services got 50 employees making less than 15 hours an hour okay you know the medical aid program the map program you service more than 37 000 clients one minute there's a lot good the supplemental nutrition assistance the low-income housing water assistance program human services have so much good programs you know the foster grandparent program i want to talk about that because they work in 20 hours and you're paying them three dollars and 15 cents so for two and a half days you giving them
- 2:06:39 sixty three dollars how you gonna give somebody sixty three dollars for working two and a half days unconscionable no i've been looking at the federal grants etc and i'm not even gonna ask you about the spending plan because i know the spending plan have issues so i am looking forward to getting the opportunity for the commissioner of human services to come before the committee on health hospital human services so we can have a thorough review of this program the employees them got to get a raise a lot of money need to put into this department thank you very much madam Thank you, Madam Chair, for your time.
- 2:07:27 Thank you, Senator Fonseca. Senator Francis, you recognize for your four minutes. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. In the essence of time, let me just say good morning to everyone. Real quickly, Commissioner, are you properly staffed up at this time to be able to, at least in your leadership, to be able to adequately run the Department of Human Services? Now, I think when we get our vacancies filled, we'll be in better shape. So you have two assistant commissioners, three deputy.
- 2:07:57 I'm asking if that's sufficient now for the leadership to be able to run DHS effectively. Yes. So how do we reconcile \$257 million in funding with an additional \$258 million while we still have 33% poverty in the Virgin Islands? that's the kids count report 33 percent poverty for an agency that have close to a half a billion dollars to run that department i'm hurting today after reading this report and seeing what's happening here and discussing, I am truly hurting. Because we still have people hungry. We still have seniors in our homes that don't know where the meal can come from, have no one in the house to turn them. They're bedridden. They got bed sores.
- 2:09:03 Do you have a response to me, Commissioner? So the programs that the Department of Human Services have are prevention programs and there are certain eligibility requirements for each of the federal programs. So they do support those that are in poverty. So SNAP helps with the nutrition, Meals on Wheels helps with the nutritional aspects of

programs. A lot of these are supplemented with the federal guidelines and the eligibility requirements. I know we have a high poverty rate, especially in the Virgin Islands, especially in St. Corey. So our programs, we do our best, child care subsidies is another aspect of it, TANF is another one snap Medicaid all of our all of our programs support those that are in the most dire straits so I see that in the our 24 budget that we zero funded for CD citizen Center for pharmacy assisted to age fund to the home age revolving fund all zero funded why is that actually I think that's incorrect if you're looking at the post-audit report Lydia McGrath CFO the senior fund is is funded from the lonesome dove fund that's five hundred thousand dollars a year that we receive um and if you need me to repeat how much we've spent i can because i do have the numbers one minute so the zero fund is a mistake you're saying yes yes it is can you provide the information so it could be corrected yes commissioner the quality control stipend for employees, those that I guess with the SNAP program that goes above and beyond in their performance, what's the status on that payout of that stipend?

2:10:57 Can you repeat the question? The quality control stipend, you're talking about the rebate? Yes. We didn't actually get a rebate this year. 30 seconds? No. Was the last one you received paid out? I would have to double check. Can I get that back to you? You don't know whether that was paid out? I'm not exactly sure which year it was, so I need to double check. YRC, real quickly, in regards to these funding, and I didn't get a chance to really just review what's happening with the necessary funding for YRC.

2:11:32 Are we up to snuff and food and everything else for YRC? Yes, we are. Time? I have Assistant Commissioner Benjamin. Do you have any other comments? Assistant Commissioner Carla Benjamin, we have no concerns regarding YRC. No concerns regarding YRC. My time has been called. I don't know if I've been able to do justice to my constituency today, but again, I am truly hurting with what I'm hearing here. Human Services is near and dear to my heart certainly I love you Commissioner but something I have to give here thank you very much madam chair for the time thank you Senator Francis so I need to clear up this record the information in the post audit report is correct. Page 695 of the budget book represents the senior citizen center fund for FY 2024 zero dollars and of course the government the executive branch send down a two-year budget and if we were considering 25 zero dollars. The pharmacy assistance to the aged zero dollars for \$24, \$0 for \$25. The home age revolving, \$0 for \$24, \$0 for \$25. The crisis intervention fund, \$0. This is what was submitted to the legislature in the FY 2020 for five budget requests. Did you receive a copy of the budget book?

2:13:17 Lydia McGrath- Okay, so I strongly suggest that you all review the budget books when you receive them, because the information that's been provided to us, and what we shared with you in the post audit report, is regurgitating what was provided in the executive budget that was submitted to the legislature. So we will have to make the decision, because we can make the decision to continue to fund these categories, but this information that came down to the legislature is, and I believe some of them are by statute.

2:13:51 The crisis intervention is under the miscellaneous for OMB. It's no longer the million dollars going to the fund. It's instead a million dollars that is under the OMB. Under OMB? There's one Department of Human Services, okay? OMB does not get to put these funds under their account. They don't get to do that. It goes under the Virgin Islands Department of Human Services. This thing where the only person that said I do or I will for this department is Kimberly Kazi Gomez. That's where the fund needs to be properly placed.

2:14:26 If there's an issue with managing it, then the GVI has to figure out how to do that. But we can't be having creative funding here or creating creative appropriations. We got to do the thing the right way because what we're doing is making confusion in our budget. consistent and we can't follow it but of course I don't have anything to do with you but I'm just saying when you receive the budget book please review it because the information that we regurgitate is what's provided in this budget book so and that's on page 695 of the budget book that was sent down to the legislature senator get things you recognize your point of information Thank you. Good morning to all. Based on your line of question, Madam Chair, I'm also seeing that senior citizen center funds also zeroed out. Is that the case?

2:15:22 No, it's not. That fund is funding, Lydia McGrath, CFO, the funding is provided by the Lonesome Dove Fund. So it's a \$500,000 infusion that we receive every year. 500 you're correct it is zero doubt senator i made mention to that i'm paid 695 of the budget it represents zero i believe by statute um the lonesome dove fund is funding uh the senior citizen center and she's also saying by 500 000 but i'm seeing here uh 250 000 so which is it it's 500 000 okay thank you So I'm going to ask my staff to look at the statute around the loan summed up to determine if that amount is by statute or it is something that we just appropriate based on a need.

2:16:16 And what concerns me, now that we brought that up, is that fund usually available until expended? Yes. So it's available until expended. In 2022, the amount, how much did you spend in 2022? You have a balance of 351, 436 in FY2022. In FY2023, you have a balance of 250.

- 2:16:46 So if we have challenges with senior citizen programs, et cetera, why are we spending the money? Because the act, Lydia Magrassia, for the act is specific, it's for the operations of the senior centers, the socio-rec centers. Okay, so is it your testimony that the 351 balance means that you did not need the, um, you don't want to show me how much money was appropriated in the beginning. I just seen a balance of what has been, um, actually 351 is the expenditures for fiscal year 2022.
- 2:17:21 Right, so then you have \$250,000 left. So what's the challenge with spending these funds? Is it that we're giving you too much money? And the answer is no, because we're hearing all of the challenges. What is the challenge? I do, Lydia McGrath CFO, I'm sure Mr. Milligan can chime in because the centers were reduced for COVID, but now they're ramping back up. These are for the Senior Center Operations, the Sociorec, the Stripe Center, and the Richmond Center on St. Croix.
- 2:18:02 And then the Home Makeup Program. What's going on with the Home Makeup Program? How many employees do we have in each district? And then I'm going to go to the next Senator. you for the question between DC and AC I'll have to get information to you senator we know who's which one of these which one of the assistant commissioners or the deputies are responsible for the homemaker program the Nile Baptiste assistant commissioner we have 12 homemakers in total and how much per district well in each district 12 in each district she got 24 homemakers 24 homemakers. Is it your testimony that we have 12 homemakers in this district, in the St. Croix district? That is correct. And likewise in the St. Thomas St. John district? That is correct. So we have 24 homemakers. What about St. John? How are we sharing that with St. John? So we have two homemakers that serve as St. John. I'm going to go to the next senator. Get prepared to discuss the Wheels and Meals program for our elderly, please.
- 2:19:21 Senator Joseph, you're recognized. A pleasant good day everyone, Commissioner Kazi-Gomez and your staff, the people of the Virgin Islands. I want to start my line of questioning relative to what you have indicated in your budget category, other services and charges.
- 2:19:56 I know we had appropriated through Act number 8617 some monies for this budget category, and I wanted to ask you, based on the post-audit report, it seems as though for half of this fiscal year you have spent only about 12 million the 12.5 million dollars however you were budgeted at I believe 34 million dollars do you anticipate being able to spend on all of that money because I note that you have increased, ask for an increase in that budget category for fiscal year 2024. Lydia McGrath, CFO.
- 2:20:54 The reason why, again, the lag in the spending is because we have a lot of unexecuted contracts, so it takes a while because you have to write to the Department of Property and Procurement to get permission to move forward and pay. The expenditures unfortunately doesn't also reflect the encumbrances which you would see that we at the beginning of every month the funds are actually encumbered for each of the contracts. So if you could tell me what is the amount of encumbrances as of June 30th for this specific budget category?
- 2:21:32 For the other services budget category I would have to go in and pull that number for you. okay so that would be helpful and i suspect you also have to be able to pull the amount for the expenditures as well correct okay so you know just going forward it would be helpful to us because we are having a budget discussion and i know that everyone here is not is a veteran to the process it would definitely help us in the process to get updated numbers and so you should uh come prepared with that that figure so that you could uh give us some true uh numbers and so we could have a really good uh idea of how much we're going to be expending for fiscal year 2024 based on the actuals now i wanted to ask you a question regarding uh your one minute uh what what percentage is your indirect cost rate Lydia McGrath CFO we don't have an approved indirect cost rate so you so what do you do with any funds that would be allocated to your indirect cost we use them in the program within the program okay so they're programmatic okay all right and that's because you don't have your cost allocation plan 30 seconds okay i just also wanted to ask you i'm looking at page five of the post-addit report i noted under the miscellaneous section that it had hires for nurses for fisk the actuals for fiscal year 2022 was 85 000 and we don't see any for for 2020, three fiscal year, not 2024.
- 2:23:29 Why is that? And the same goes for hire for MAP. Not hiring new people? Thank you for the question. We had a contractual agreement with CHG, we had a nursing contract and we ended the contract and absorbed the nurses within our budget. That was specific to hire to ensure that we got the amount of nurses on to our budget as well as the contract was ending. Okay, so are you saying you don't have any further need for those contractual services or are you now wrapping them up within your other services budget category?
- 2:24:12 We're no longer contracting any kind of nurses, travel nurses or anything like that currently. the Pafford nursing contract expired. Okay, and so how are you meeting the need because you hired them because you had a need to meet within servicing our elderly population, I suspect, as well as those within YRC and the like. So how are you meeting that need?

So currently whatever positions we have that are vacant are posted, and so those have been in our budget. don't currently have a nurse at yrc okay i think my time has called madam chair i just have one question how many nurses do you have on board right now employed at the department of human services i'll get that information are you looking at specifically rns lpn cnas or all of them rns and lpn specifically okay because those were the ones that were covered with the preferred nurses contract correct yes and additional services but yes specifically they were helpful in our okay my question let me just wrap up my question is really derived because we have a growing population of elderly people uh the silver tsunami is it's approaching and so we have to be able to provide that level of care you said your quality care and services the nurses are critical component of that care as well as the cna thank you so much madam chair for your leniency um madam chair maylee absolutely um michael trapman deputy commissioner hr labor relations On board currently at DHS, we have 24 CNAs, we have 10 licensed practical nurses, and one registered nurse. One, you said?

2:26:17 Yes. One? One registered nurse, sorry. And how many? 10 licensed practical nurses, and 24 certified nursing assistants. Okay, so LPNs are not, isn't it that LPNs have to be under an RN? That is correct. So how is that working for you? Danelle Baptiste, Assistant Commissioner. So given we currently do not have an RN at our Queen Louise facility, and so what we have is the staff of Queen Louise currently reports up to our Herbert Gregg senior staff. which includes the administrative staff and our head nurse at Herbert Gregg.

2:27:04 So are you in, what mechanisms or what have you done to try to attract a RN? That's in the St. Thomas, St. John District, correct? That is correct. So what is that looking like? What are you doing to attract a RN? So we have been trying to attract nursing staff in general and have been faced with the fact that salaries are better at the hospitals. So some of the things that we are looking to do is seeing how we could train our current staff. Obviously that's long term. And second we're looking at how can we increase the salaries at the facility.

2:27:47 So what's the current salary for your nursing staff? Because you're saying CNAs, but CNAs are not nurses. Yes? CNAs are not nurses, so you have 10 LPNs. How are those LPNs divided per district? So we currently have eight LPNs in the St. Croix District.

2:28:21 And you have two in St. Thomas. And two in St. Thomas. But I believe we are in the process of onboarding at least two additional LPNs in St. Thomas. Do you believe or we know? We are onboarding two additional LPNs in St. Thomas. And these two work out of what facility? Out of the Queen Louise home. And you have eight in St. Croix and you have 24 CNAs, what's the breakout of your CNAs? So we have 16 CNAs in St. Croix at Herbert Gregg, the remaining in St. Thomas. What's that number? So we have eight CNAs in St. Thomas.

2:29:21 Commissioner, what, but before I ask you that, so what's the salary of your, what's the difference in the salary of the nurses at the hospital compared to those at Department of Human Services? So the salaries differ based on experience, of course, but we're looking on average at about a \$30,000 difference. So what's the starting salary at Human Services? The starting salary for a registered nurse at DHS would be about \$70,000.

2:29:55 How much? \$70,000. 7-0. And your LPNs? The LPNs, their salary begins roughly around \$49,000. 49. And these are unionized positions? Yes. So what conversations are you all having with the OCB to address this issue? Because we're one government. So if we're one government, and we're one government that's competing with each other, then so we have the hospitals who's challenged, we have human services who's challenged. So where is that, Commissioner?

2:30:32

Is there a tank tank with all of the medical-related type agencies, human services, Department of Health, and our hospitals? What is that relationship? How are we disbursing this, operating successfully in one area, and the next area we fall in now? Ain't working. So how are we collaborating as a government to make sure that, I mean, I don't know that you have the answer but I just see that this is a challenge so everybody like everybody holding on to their own lifeline but we ain't getting a place it's it's concerning now but it's also going to be concerning when I have two skilled nursing facilities that are 60 beds each so where is that gonna come from so if we don't so let me ask the question again how are you collaborating with those other entities as it relates to the salaries as to as it relates to the right fitting etc don't y'all have to be talking about so how do we help each other if there's an issue with the the salaries what was that conversation like whoa how are we going to move the needle if we are not if everybody just going about on their own survival mode and when I say everybody I mean every department every entity every agency but we we have the same needs and we have the same type of employees I'm not sure if I can answer that we've had conversations especially when we did the union negotiations for nurses but there were conversations I think the semi-autonomous portion for the hospitals a little different than the unionized employees that we have in government so they're no different because we are we are when we come look

[illegible]

really highlight how important your department is to a society and it's from Hubert Humphrey he says the moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in a dawn of life the children those who are in a twilight of life the elderly and those who are in the shadows of life the sick the needy and handicapped so the moral test for today as a government is how are we treating those populations and I want to follow up on what the the chair said it seems as if it hit me right away where is the synergy between the various departments to make sure that we are taking care of our people and with respect to Herbert Gregg I heard the CFO talk about shrimp and chicken and and and you know it's like wow they're being well-fed at the same time I hear stories about them lacking toilet paper and pampas adult pampas what's going on where's the disconnect and are those stories true let's be honest today how much money are you providing to Herbert greg for those supplies that keep our seniors comfortable besides being well fed with shrimp and chicken thank you for the question senator daniel baptiste assistant commissioner so um and i've had this conversation with the cfo as well um both truths do exist in that um there has been additional funding that has been unspent yet our homes do have needs and it's a matter of trying to work within the confines of the system to make sure that they get what they need some of the issues that they're having is beyond funding and it does translate into their allotments that they're receiving each month the contracts that we have in place that they must work through in order to procure those items and availability of those items so that also compounds the problem

2:35:00 of them not being able to have the supplies that they need how are you addressing those i think we need to start finding solutions correct how are you addressing those agreed so one of the things that we're planning to do is to work with the department of property and procurement to look at the contracts that they have in place for procurement to see for the homes what can be done to go outside of that so um temporarily what we do do is write those letters to say hey this vendor is not um providing what we need and so we need to be able to go to open market so that's some things that we have done temporarily to provide relief uh we are looking additionally as to how we can get them some one orders so they're not just constantly running out of supplies and thereby having to use their own funding um to supplement or just being in these dire strengths thank you so many questions so little time yesterday you said we it was you yesterday you did a great job by the way um commissioner assistant commissioner baptiste correct correct remember the window screens i asked you about that because if the window screens can't be fixed the air conditioner 30 seconds doesn't function so you're you are losing money you're leaking money out the window do you reach out and partner maybe with organizations churches contractors people who can help adopt a facility maybe something along that lines what are you doing for issues like that that to me must be fixed and before my time ran out too I heard about rat infestation at Mars Hill can you talk about that too? Sure. Time. So as it pertains to what creative things we could do to

2:36:50 fix the facilities, number one, I really do think that we need to sit down and have a good assessment of what all the issues are. And so we made some headway with that leadership. We had fiscal and we also brought in some subject matter experts to do an assessment of the Herbert Gregg facility. So we do have a punch list, if you will say, of all the things that need to be addressed and we're working to prioritize that. And the CFO has been very instrumental in helping us identify the funding so that we could address it and to understand what order we need to address it. What is most pressing and what are the root causes of some of the other issues so that we can make sure that we're doing those things first. So that's one of the things that we have started to do. I do think that we will need to look at how we can engage some of our partners to help address some additional needs we may have okay um because you know you you we could sit here all day and plan a budget but if needs aren't being met we're not really helping our community um and we can't have unspent funds i wanted to ask this one last question when it comes to keep when we keep asking for extensions on grants doesn't that mean then that services are not being provided it? It can mean that. So like if I don't receive a notification of grant award, so let's just say the fiscal year started on October 1 and I just received one literally like last week, so then I'm not able to put a budget online until that's on. And it may be that that budgetary expenditure has to be done September 30th. That's why we then ask for another year of spending. So that goes back to the extension requests sometimes it's allowable sometimes it's not but in the event that we can we do okay has my time been called one more question then um how many social workers do you have

2:38:37 on board acs assistant commissioner benjamin currently we have 13. 13 my time was called um madam chair thank you thank you do you have another burning question senator you can proceed you can okay yes thank you this is the the other burning question i have again about getting the money to the people the medicaid and snap programs you said you made a statement that one challenge experienced by both programs includes enrollees not receiving or paying due attention to the provided information regarding the requirement to recertify and the timeline to do so what's the percentage of people so far that have recertified and I don't want I surely don't want to get the money to go back or wherever I don't want us to lose the money how do we make or get people to certify and what percentage has not certified so far and we need to tell the people out there please please recertify our children need to be fed, our needs need to be met. Thank you, Madam Chair.

- 2:39:59 Danelle Baptiste, Assistant Commissioner. So the recertification process is a rolling process, so we do have a certain amount that needs to be recertified each month. Like we said, we've been sending out mailings, we've sent text messages, we have commercials. What generally happens especially as it relates like our snap benefits when folks do not receive their benefits then they realize something is wrong and they come in and that gives us the opportunity to do what we need to do with those folks so it's just a bit been about us just continuing to reach out and eventually they do realize hey I have an issue and so they're able to come in but we want to be proactive so we're just asking the public as much as possible pay attention the notices that you are receiving because there's action that's required I was no definitely not and like I said it's a rule in targets I would say like 10 percent I would say each month maybe we're missing out on and then they're coming in it is a small percentage but it just becomes a problem that doesn't have to be a problem if they would come in when we're requesting that they come in I don't know the page but you you state commissioner oh I'm sorry you state commissioner our government should invest in the development of a vulnerable population coordinated entry system I'm actually drawn to the fact that you say our government so who's our government and who are you having conversations with for for this system um i mean i would prefer that uh director to time um that asked me it's a coordinated entry system mostly for homelessness and then tracking system um so everybody would uh sign up for that issue if if the chair allows i would prefer her to be able to answer that specifically so we'll double check on that but while she is doing that i can answer
- 2:42:00 your you want to answer the our government statement the rat our government who's our government it would be a coordinated system of non-profit agencies as well as our government entities that are responsible for giving services human services would be one department of health also does behavioral health and substance abuse for those that are homeless but a lot of our non-profit agencies so if the chair would allow for the specific for the coordinated entry system i have Director Tutane, if you'd like to answer that question, or we would be able to provide- I actually don't think that's necessary right now because I think my chair for housing will probably bring you guys in. I was just interested because the chair mentioned about the coordination between the different agencies. So when you said our government should invest, it just prompted me to ask, who is our government?
- 2:42:56 it should have been a combined effort so my apologies for that misspoke thank you madam chair thank you senator James for your your insight in this discussion you know this conversation is very frustrating and you know a lot of times the conversation within our community is what is the senators doing what are we doing we do not run the day-to-day operations of the GVI the government of the Virgin Islands our responsibility is oversight but we can't keep having the same conversation over and over and that's what we're doing and And this is not a joke.
- 2:43:49 We have to come to a point where we have to get serious about our collaboration. We just find that there are too many, too much of, I don't want to use the wrong word because I can't, there's just too much, we see too much of individuals in these heads of agencies and semi-autonomous agencies operating in silos because everybody wants to · there's a survival for your department or your agency, but in that survival, we're really accomplishing nothing because there is no synergy, there is no collaboration. I saw in the · there's a grant in looking at the grants that we have in the document that we got from, who saw it, where there's some available funding for homelessness, right?
- 2:44:51 And I don't know what that means anymore in the Virgin Islands, because we have a simple example of, give me the name, in St. Thomas, and I'm sure we have challenges here in this District that we're sitting in. Michelle Motel. I have been at this with my colleague Senator Blyden for months regarding this homelessness situation and to see today that we are funding to support homeless individuals and the money is spent. Now I knew that I do know that we have a challenge with housing stock in the territory so I'd like to keep it real as well we have a challenge with housing stock but the question is we still gotta beg the question what is the conversation that we're having with Department of Human Services a Housing Finance Authority and our VI Housing Authority what a conversation look like what are we doing and it's difficult for us to sit here and continue to have this hamster wheel discussion and we're not seeing any progress so again my colleague brought it up is something that is weighs heavy on me I heard senator mr.
- 2:46:19 president what is that collaboration at what point are we going to have these true discussions to move the needle on the challenges that we have we can't keep moving forward and doing things in in silos and from the legislative perspective oversight and appropriations but we need some action that's the issue specifically for the Michelle Motel coordination we are actually taking action between Department of Health Catholic Charities and Human Services we're doing a coordinated effort for that that's specific to your requests in the meetings that you've had so um and of course director to time who i was going to bring up has uh confidently and and bend in discussions with catholic charities and specific what we're doing for each individual because it would have to be each individual that we need and you're right about the housing shortage per se um i did there is a in depart on page six those are department of health um oh we we made a correction to the report you should have received the correction i don't believe i received the correction so yeah we yeah i

know we noted that and then we you should have received the correction yeah so that the homeless one is mentioned in the department of health grants but not necessarily the human services ones but i'd like to you don't answer my questions you know no but i specifically asked housing human services hfa what is that think tank coordination that's occurring specifically is it happening are we having regular discussions are we trying to seek ways to assist these people and it's not only um um the situation that we have in content it's a situation that we have throughout

2:48:07 the territory what what may i have kendall to tie in uh assist with answering um you can come Mr. Tain, Sergeant-at-Arms, Sergeant-at-Arms, please bring the testifier in the will. Please put your name and title on the record and then provide a response.

2:48:58 Kendall Tutane, Director of Nonprofit and Support Services, Department of Human Services. In response to the question about the collaboration. You have to speak into the mic. You can pull the mic out. In response to the question regarding collaboration between the Department of Human Services, VI Housing Finance Authority, and the Department of Health. And the Housing Authority.

2:49:28 And the Housing Authority. My, me and my capacity as a Director of Nonprofits, I serve on the Continuum of Care Council Board and I work very closely with the VI Housing Finance Authority with the discussions and planning around the Emergency Solutions Grant, which is federal funding that supports homelessness in the territory, and also on the Continuum of Care Grant that supports the funding coming through the Continuum of Care Council.

2:50:03 The bottom line is this. There's no housing. That's our problem. We have people who are in shelter. They can't move because of the limited permanent supportive housing inventory in the territory. And I mean, we're not, we're not the only area that has this problem. It's all over the United States and it's also in the world. When you look at other countries that are trying to deal with homelessness, it's the same thing. You have people that are coming into facilities, there's no place for them to move. If you do have inventory available, there are not enough people providing the services to support those vulnerable populations to maintain their housing.

2:50:50 So discussions are happening. We're all frustrated. I hear your frustration, but if we could just get some inventory, we can open up those 17 beds that are in Catholic Charities Bethlehem House in St. Thomas and move those people on to permanent supportive housing and expand the capacity for people to receive services once they're permanently housed. So when you look at the continuum, we're backed up. Community First is a center that we had on St. Croix. They had a fire in January.

2:51:30 They're not open anymore. We've lost beds. So we're doing outreach. The nonprofits are doing outreach. They're working with people where they are. That's what outreach is. You mentioned the Michelle Motel. There are 25 occupants in that building. Catholic Charities is there every day. They provide meals. They offer transportation to get access to medical care. We do have several people there who are in need of substance abuse treatment. I've had the meeting with the Department of Health, Dr. Noelle Chatel, Catholic Charities, Andrea Schillingford, the Executive Director there, and myself. And they have agreed to partner.

2:52:15 Catholic Charities knows these people. Department of Health needs to get to know these people. So they're going to start going out together and introducing them. But the point is, where can we put them? Even if we remove them, where will they go? So let me respond. I know you didn't ask me the question, but I'm a firm believer that on everything that you said I appreciate what you said because you speak from a place of someone who's been at this however you cannot be the Lone Ranger on this that's one and two this requires a strategic plan so we recognize that we have an issue we have a number of abandoned government buildings here in the territory we have all this federal funding coming through we continue to ask for extensions upon extensions but when are we going to collectively look at all of our dollars when are we and this is not necessarily for you okay because you're just doing your part right when are we going to look at all of our dollars and make a concerted decision about having the conversation on the national level like that you know what this is our true need and this is what we want to do with our resources we have all these little pots of money and they're doing nothing for us that's the issue that's our issue that is and that's why I keep saying what is the synergy to my colleagues point what is that collaboration there really isn't none we have these one-off discussions that's what we do when the issue bubbles up to the top and again this hearing really is not for this we're dealing with our funding but we really need to have health and human services meet so we could really flesh this so we need a

2:54:04 difference this situation that we have with our social services human services in the US Virgin Islands remains a challenge for our people our poverty rate is 40% and then we come before the committee on finance we don't understand how these things align if we are not if we have a poverty level of 40% it means that the majority of the people who are working here in the territory and paying taxes, that we are, when you continue to hear we need our income tax back, there's a reason why all of these things align, because we have to give child care credit, and what's the other one?

- 2:54:52 Earn income credit. money that's coming out of the federal government gives us a portion of it but it comes out of our coffers we don't align this work we don't align our responsibility we just off doing everybody off doing their own thing that's why we have a challenge so I appreciate the work that you're doing but you need help meaning there must be help coming from the top we are recognized that this is a challenge in the Virgin Islands and we have to ask ourselves what are we going to do about it and how are we going to help Mr. Tyne and Mrs. Tyne in moving this forward and making true progress that's how much that's not a challenge we can't have individuals struggling on this you would can you wrap up so I could move on to the next senator because this is you Do you want to add something else, Mr. Tieng? Recognize the mic of Mr. Tieng, please.
- 2:55:51 The mic is not on. You probably want to pull it out. No we can't hear you. We can't hear you, use the other mic. That mic may have been pulled out, because I think when you were pulling it, it probably got pulled out. Can you hear me now? Yes. I can hear me. All I wanted to say is there's work being done. A lot of the nonprofits have applied for the CDBGDR funding to do the capital improvements on buildings. The beds will come. For me, while we're waiting for the beds to come. I agree with you. We need to strategically plan how we're going to be ready for when they're here. We don't have the capacity to staff those facilities that are coming. The nonprofits are going to need more money, whether it's through federal or local. And in regard to the CES, the Coordinated Entry System is a mandate for HUD. We have to have it in the territory. We started working on protocols, I mean, we spent two years in committee working on protocols and setting it all up, but we need to get to the next step. And again, most of the communities that are really able to address homelessness, they have funded positions. We're doing it by council, with people who are running organizations and dealing with the missions of their individual organizations. don't have adequate staff to do what you're saying collect that data really put it together and help us develop the plan that we need to go forward so we're not wasting resources and not duplicating effort so thank you for your
- 2:57:48 honest responses it means that the Department of Human Services has a leadership team and I hate to say the conversation need to begin can we lead so kinds of information senator blighting and Senator Francis and then we're gonna go to senator Capehart for her four minutes thank you thank you thank you so much madam chair and thank you mr. time I know that the Commissioner or human services sits on the board for continuum of care and there is federal funding but it's part of your part of continuum of care and there's a hundred thousand dollars in federal funding to assist in terms of coming up with a plan so um at appropriate time we will move forward with those discussions thank you so much thank you senator bladen senator Francis Thank you very much, Madam Chair.
- 2:58:48 I want to say to Mr. Tain that we agree that work is being done, however, we have too many technocrats. We need boots on the ground. The community really need to feel that work is being done. But I ask for the point of information, again, just to be able to ask you, Commissioner, whether or not have you seen any large-scale removal or denial of individuals from SNAP and MAP. You have individuals as texting me inquiring that they were denied an inability to even continue to be on the kidney transplant list. What's happening in that space? I'll allow AC Baptiste. I know that we have an estimated number of I know that estimated number that could be impactful for the Virgin Islands is about seven to eight thousand for Medicaid alone. For snap it's a little bit different um but i'll allow asic baptize um yes uh danelle baptize assistant commissioner so we've just started the process for recertification for the map program and so we have started to see folks roll off of that program um unfortunately where we are today there's not much that we're going to be able to do for individuals who are no longer qualified for the program and who don't have an alternative. Some folks who work for the government will be able to get onto the government's insurance once their coverage ends. And right now we've just, the hospitals do anticipate the fact that uncompensated care may increase as a result of this, and we are having the conversations, but we do not have a solution today.
- 3:00:35 Very well, thank you, but I think that it needs to be communicated to this body then we'll have to subsidize in one way, shape, or form. We can't just have individuals left out there to die. That's the reality of what happens if, in fact, they're not able to receive timely care. All right, thank you. Senator Kepa, you're recognized for your four minutes. Thank you, Madam Chair, and good afternoon, colleagues. Good afternoon, DHS. Commissioner Gomez on your team. Um, Commissioner, do you agree that Medicaid is a health insurance program?
- 3:01:16 Yes, that's the purpose of it. You certify 36,278 people in the territory. And why I ask if you agree that this is a Medicaid is a health insurance program, therefore it should be ran as such. have individuals that work in there that you have a Medicaid program that has provider relations eligibility special services claims you have so many different legs in this program and therefore as you know let Medicaid is largest pair of all these long-term services for support services Queen Louise Herbert Grigg the federal qualified health centers hospital this is where a lot of these monies are paid to these individuals to these different agencies so therefore I know that your eligibility walkers are doing claims your eligibility walkers are doing provider relations and there you have on page three a whole slew of vacancies and i feel there's no

- urgency to fill these positions commissioner and i think it needs to be high priority that we treat medicaid as an insurance division and not just a division for low-income individuals the services that is provided for individuals that cannot receive
- 3:03:09 care on the island this the special services program where individuals have to get permission to travel app island how many people do you have working in special services and i get passionate because i understand your past experience um how many people do you have working in special services on st croix and st thomas good afternoon senator um thank you for the question if you could just give me one moment to get those numbers while you are looking for that so have you even thought about having a job fair with all the vacancies in your department yes we've actually done several virtual ones but we have discussed having actually I'm almost like an open house to DHS welcome to DHS and list all the 84 programs and just happen to be vacancies as well so eligibility all of that would come into to play there okay before I leave from medicaid um you stated on page one um the vi program executed 108 providers in 23 2023 um so providers meaning for the listening and viewing audience providers mean these individuals that offer care correct medicaid providers so just for their understanding right now we have 1261 enrolled medicaid providers of those 323 are on island and 938 are off island for those services who's doing the credentialing of all these providers we're doing those internally now
- 3:05:02 and so they have a specific guideline and checklist that's an adherence to the department of property and procurement because they were doing it before and there was a delay and doing that so those go through our legal counsel commissioner you had a provider uh agreement with someone who was doing the credentialing correct we have a provider was equa career doing credentialing of your providers one vi equa care was never doing you have credentialing that's being done in-house by how many employees employees one person you can't have one person doing the credentialing of all these all these providers you need to hire people agreed you you your people are crying out for help in that division they need help you have eligibility walkers that going and doing other 30 seconds should be doing eligibility for the individuals that are coming in to be certifying one of my colleagues my colleagues next to me mentioned about individuals who are being denied are they being offered a fair process that they say i was determined ineligible how did you do this process are they being offered a fair hearing we have yes or no yes so they can come back to me we have a fair hearing appeals officer yes do you have some do you have a madam chair if i may um do you have a quality control division in medicaid you have a qc person in medicaid um we do have qc individuals in medicaid i am not talking about
- 3:06:50 the food stamp assistance program that's working for medicaid you have qc individuals doing quality control work for medicaid so what i will say is i should revise that and said we are building out our qc division we've hired a program integrity director to which the qc individual will be working under so we've recently brought that person on board and so we do actively are building a quality control unit and if i could just correct one thing we have three individuals who are currently doing provider agreements and we are also in the process of of bringing on an electronic system to help us improve that process I am just saying the vacancies that you have here in your testimony today it's unbelievable you have so many vacancies and there's so many people out here want to walk and they you have vacancies have a job fair hire people because Medicaid the the food stamp program they need help and they need to be paid more thank you madam chair you recognize your point of information senator and thank you senator Kepa you recognize your point of information senator James thank you Thank you, Madam Chair. I was sitting here and I went back to a statement that you made that government employees who were on Medicaid, were Medicaid eligible, are the ones losing their eligibility or am I confused and are going back to government insurance? Explain, I want to be clear on that. So just to correct, I'm Danelle Baptiste, Assistant Commissioner.
- 3:08:44 So for the individuals who will no longer be eligible on the MAP program, for those who are government employees, they will be able to then go on to the government insurance. For the others, we have been referring them to the individual insurance program, which we know is very expensive. Okay. Let me interrupt you. It just begs this question. If they were eligible for that program before, as government employees, then that means going back to government insurance, that's going to create a hardship for them. Is that not so? Because if you were eligible for a program that took it... Okay, I just wanted to be clear on that.
- 3:09:30 I noticed a number of my colleagues nodding. So that's what it was that struck me. Thank you, Madam Chair. Could you please respond? Yeah, the clarification for Medicaid specifically, no one's had to recertify at all during COVID and previous. So everyone, if you are eligible and then got a job and made more, you're still eligible. We couldn't recertify anybody according to the federal government. It's just until the public health emergency ended, now we're recertifying everyone. And because of that, now your eligibility is being redetermined of whether you are making enough or not making enough. So if you are a government employee, maybe you were hired after you are receiving Medicaid, which is a potential, and if that's the case, then you're no longer eligible depending upon your salary and your requirements of your household, really. So it's an option for health insurance for those that may not have it. Okay, so we're talking about in my

program.

- 3:10:32 Commissioner, do you have individuals who have applied to work in the medical assistance program where you have sent their names to the office of the governor for hiring and you're still waiting? We received one for the program integrity. Yes or no? That we're still waiting. Not to my knowledge, I thought the program integrity was the only one for Medicaid that I was aware of.
- 3:10:59 your Medicaid positions are filled? No, but they're... I am aware of a lady in this district who has applied for a position from January morning and up to now this woman has a bachelor's degree in business or accounting. Why she can't get a job? Why she can't get a job? We got to stop playing politics with these things. Everything here cannot be about politics. And this is what's happening. And this is why we're having these types of conversations.
- 3:11:44 Like, what's the problem? Are you aware of applications? Who's your assistant commissioner who is responsible for? I guess Denel, Ms. Baptiste, who just reached and answered all the question then. Hiring is HR specifically, so. What's the problem HR, what's the issue? The problem is Michael Trotman, Deputy Commissioner at HR, Labor Relations. Budgets for the MAP division came online I think like between March and April of this year. So it kind of put hiring on pause but since that time we have hired about four to five people for that division and the hiring is still.
- 3:12:34 How many vacant positions do you have in that division? The last count that we had I think it was approximately about 40 something territory wide. You have 40 something territory wide. Right. And do you have people who have applied that you haven't hired? To my knowledge no. let me let me retract that statement people could have applied certain interview but may not have been selected so there's a process well let me share something with I right we don't have the luxury of deciding that we are not hiring people because of whatever the political affiliation is we have a problem okay understood and we got deal with it we have 47 positions and I know of one person in this district who more than qualifies.
- 3:13:24 So I can't ask if you've got 47 positions, they don't qualify for none of them. Come on, guys. What are we doing? I couldn't speak to you off, man. Where's Mr. Smith? Is he here today? No. Donal-Baptiste Assistant Commissioner, Mr. Smith, is not in the territory currently. Okay, good. Well, he's been pushing to get these positions hired, too. even trying i know that for a fact i don't want to put him on a bus but he's been trying like what we doing there was a point of information senator capehart um thank you madam chair for your points of information i i wanted to ask um as it pertains to those availability of of vacancies for Medicaid particularly. Because the chair mentioned that she asked for Mr. Gary Smith and she mentioned that he's been trying, but I have been sending names for these individuals who have Medicaid experience that want to return back because they understand that there's a need and they want a job, they want to help.
- 3:14:48 Crickets, no hiring. But if I may, there's a question that I wanted to ask Ms. McGrath, as it pertains to all the grants that Department of Human Services have. What is your structure that you now are the Chief Financial Officer as to how you handle these grants to make sure that you meet these time-sensitive extensions or when a grant is about to finish. How much help do you have in your division? Do you have individuals assigned to certain grants and their department or their division directors are able to communicate with that financial person to help to expedite their grants?
- 3:15:42 Lydia McGrath, CFO. Relative to the medical assistance program, we just onboarded one of the GBI fellows who is tasked solely with medical assistance. He's really new to the entire program, but what we're doing with him, and also with the other analysts that we've hired, we're building out dashboards where the administrators can go in and see the spending levels. On those programs that have earmarks, the earmarking is tracked. So it's all a work in process. We're working on it right now. But that's what, you know, the young man for medical assistance, I know we will make a lot more traction. There's going to be continual meetings with him and the administrator, and of course whoever needs to be there from senior leadership. We also did that for the Division of Family Assistance. We hired someone particularly for SNAP TANF, we did for childcare and for Head Start. So we are focusing in on the grants and having those regular meetings to ensure that we can move the needle. Thank you. Thank you Madam Chair. Commissioner, I have to ask this question.
- 3:17:00 How in touch are you with the applications that are coming in to the Department of Human Services and the process of hiring? How in touch are you with that? So if they're a unionized employee, they go through? No, no, no, no. I'm not in touch at all. I don't care when they unionize or they unionize. All in touch. I'm usually not in touch with the hiring process. Why not? Why not?
- 3:17:29 Why not? why not what may ask what would be the recommendation of how i ain't got a recommendation i don't run human services why is it that you are not in touch with that it's not okay to come before this committee over and over this legislature because we have a health and human services committee and talk about how much vacancies they have are you in in touch there must be a monthly meeting, listen, what gets monitored gets done. If you're not monitoring it, it's not gonna get done. I misinterpreted what you asked. Okay so the question that I have is what is it from your level that

you're doing to make sure that you're staying on top of this? Because can you tell me right now how many, what do y'all call it, PRFs? PRFs y'all have in a pipeline that's moving and And if we were to go up on the Division of Personnel's website right now, are we going to see all these vacancies from Human Services up there?

3:18:32 So I misunderstood what you asked. So I actually have bi-weekly meetings with the HR Deputy Commissioner and the team. We do have a continuous log of all the PRFs that are sent to OMB and the timeline that we do get back. So I do, when you asked me that, I thought that you meant that am I sitting in on the interviews that's what I meant when the PRF come you have the applications so if you if somebody if somebody you receive something I say hey you we received we sent your name up to Human Services on whatever date how long does it take for the Department of Human Services to begin the interview process typically once you receive the list of eligibles from the Department of personnel, the interviews are scheduled within a week, two weeks, depending on...

3:19:22 So when do you provide notice to those individuals that they were not selected? When do they? At the end of the interview pool? But with Ireland vacancies, IGA. Right. How IGA people are in selecting? Well, I understand your question and your concern, and it is a valid point, but bear in mind the division of personnel sends a list of 50 names for one position so if we're advertising for one vacancy you see the conversation we had earlier with senator james and the synergy you see the problem yeah but if we only um each prf dictates um but i understand your position senator so i i i it goes right back so internally the synergy between your department once omb approves the prf the synergy between your department and the division of personnel is not occurring because you send 50 names for one PRF.

3:20:17 There's more than one position under that same title. What are we doing? Right, but each title has a PRF. I'm aware, but I'm saying, I don't see nothing wrong with that. Well, yes, but sometimes my hands are tied. But as the PRFs are approved, let's say if I'm hiring for eligibility specialist, if I have... So this ain't you or no? I know. This is our commissioner, because she have her department to run. Personnel didn't say, I know what I'm doing in HR. Personnel didn't know what they're doing in human services. Personnel said, I know what I'm doing in personnel. So if I have a PRF, if I have whatever come up with 50 names, and I have other positions, who's pushing? Who's in this fight? Who is in this fight? It can't be that we're operating route. This is the route. We're not doing, we're not fighting. Like what we're doing, because it doesn't impact us personally? I'm having like a hard time with this conversation. This is rough. What are we saying that we just, all we know is the PRF, the thing that come down from the Division of Personnel got a 50 name, for this PRF so we can't do nothing else that's what they hire us to do we need to start being critical thinkers and start pushing that don't commissioner commissioner so may I clarify please so if I have if I have five eligibility specialist positions and we have five different PRFs for each one but the same title when we're interviewing

3:22:03 We'll select the top five. It's not that we will have to go back and ask for the thing. Ask for an additional list. I hire a name? When you see a thing with 50 name on it, I don't get excited. I got a hundred or something position, I got 50 name, they may not qualify for this one, or you may not hire them for this one, but you call them back and say, listen, we have Well, to your point, with the additional names, we could refer them to other positions, but they still have to go through. Are you referring them as a question? I'm not part of the interview process, so I could only hope that my team is making their recommendation.

3:22:46 Oh, you're going to hope? Yes. I can't speak for certain, but I can hope that my team is making a recommendation if if they feel that the persons may qualify for their position. I hope you all are hearing. You hoping that your team, you're not saying, hey, we have a crisis, Commissioner, and, you know, as we get these names, there's certain things that we need to be doing. Again, the synergy between yourself and the division of personnel. Senator Getinji recognized for your four minutes. Positive. Thank you, Madam Chair, and good afternoon to all. I say good afternoon.

3:23:27 Good afternoon. What is this? Good afternoon. You know, I've been pondering to see what to rename this department again. And I came up with the Department of Hinderance Services. Because all y'all doing is shilly-shallying people. I can't understand this. Atal, atal, atal. Department of Human Services. Commissioner started off in her statement about high quality and professional social services at our senior homes show me the proof in the pudding show me the proof you know I'm sorry for some of you because you're new and yes deputy commissioner I mean assistant commissioner I saw your I saw your testimony yesterday thank you for stepping up I think this is trial by fire for you but you built for it but you know what I'm gonna do again because when I go down the list y'all don't put it in in order either Commissioner tell me your salary again 135,000 sir 135 and that was the recent raise yes but it hasn't I just got my NOPA yesterday What's your salary?

3:25:04 Assistant Commissioner. Carla Benjamin, Assistant Commissioner. My salary is \$97,500. \$97,500. You didn't move up yet? Assistant Commissioner. Donal Baptiste. My salary is \$110. Deputy Commissioner, Human Resources. My salary is \$90,000. Assistant Commissioner here on my left.

- 3:25:46 Please recognize the mics. Deputy Commissioner, \$95. \$95? \$1,000. Thank you. next deputy deputy Commissioner true coaching the same 95,000 95,000 CEO I will go leave you out but what's yours lady I'm a grass CFO 97 5 working 20 hours a day seven days CFO sorry about that one minute again the time going it It seemed like since we moved from typewriter to computer, we're regressing instead of progressing. I'm listening to the discussion about hiring and whatnot. We can't get people on board. 257 vacancies that I counted.
- 3:26:43 And we still can't hire people. Commissioner, all your DHS, the eligible employees receive their premium pay? No, we actually have a few that are at OMB right now that have not been paid out. How soon are you working with them to get them out? We've sent a list and we've done a follow-up. There's approximately- How many employees do you have on extended leave currently? I will have to double-check that, get that for you.
- 3:27:13 You or HR have it? Currently on extended leave, I think there's only three people. Three people where? Time. i'll have to get you the actual divisions but they don't come to me at this time all right we got people and leave for months almost into a year you got people uh in saint thomas and st corey both districts correct correct the um there is i know time has called you boy you all have me all over the place meals and wheels strapped kitchen staff strapped homemaker program strap vendors not being paid why are we increasing commissioner salaries if this is what's taking place and st croix we're paying a whole lot of rent what uh is being done currently to try to consolidate some of these services into government-owned buildings so thank you for the question that also costs money in order to today is is business seriously because people are frustrated all of you sitting there to that table 50 years and older you're on the hill or you're over the hill we gonna need to go to queen louise or or harbert greg just now are we sitting here playing games that's why i say you all are just shilly shallying people what are we doing to consolidate some of these services into a government-owned building the harvard greg state and king's hill part of the expansion project is not just for herbert greg but the buildings included in that and that would encompass some of our administrative and some of our other programs in that area
- 3:29:12 to answer your question sir and i i'll hold off hopefully the the chair will be kind enough to say she'll have a second round but this is just totally absurd i i can't understand what's going on here and you're telling me about money we taking monies and upgrading other people private uh properties and leaving the government property dilapidated and broken down we're paying you out to use your heads stop sitting on it thank you madam chair gettings we're going to have to take a recess but before we do that the senator made reference to Meals and Wheels and it's my understanding, I think I learned that about two days ago that we have a long waiting list of the Wheels and Meals program. How do we feel? A waiting list for Meals and Wheels? So tell me and then we're going to go take a recess. Oh actually we're going to take the recess and when we come back we'll discuss that. The committee stands and recess for five minutes.

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.

- 9x **Senator Novelle Francis**
heard in this transcript as: Francis, Francis Jr, Novel E. Francis Jr, Novell E. Francis Jr., Novelli Francis
- 7x **Senator Ray Fonseca**
heard in this transcript as: Fonseca
- 6x **Senator Dwayne DeGraff**
heard in this transcript as: DeGraff, Duane M. DeGraff, Dwayne M. DeGraff
- 6x **Senator Franklin D. Johnson**
heard in this transcript as: Johnson
- 6x **Senator Marvin Blyden**
heard in this transcript as: Blyden, Blyton, Marvin A. Blyden
- 4x **Commissioner Carla Benjamin**
the surname alone also matches: Barry Benjamin
heard in this transcript as: Benjamin
- 4x **Senator Samuel Carrion**
heard in this transcript as: Carrion
- 3x **Senator Carla Joseph**

the surname alone also matches: Clifford Joseph; Karla J. Joseph
heard in this transcript as: Carla J. Joseph, Joseph

3x **Senator Diane T. Capeheart**
heard in this transcript as: Capehart, Diane Capehart

3x **Senator Javan James**
heard in this transcript as: Javon James, Jevon A. James Sr

3x **Senator Marise C. James**
the surname alone also matches: Javan James; Giovanni James Sr
heard in this transcript as: James Sr, Maurice James

3x **Senator Samuel Caryong**
heard in this transcript as: Caryong

3x **Commissioner Virgin Islands Department**
heard in this transcript as: VI Department

2x **Governor Albert Bryan Jr**
heard in this transcript as: Bryan Jr

2x **Senator Angel L. Bulkes Jr**
heard in this transcript as: Angel Bulkes Jr

2x **Commissioner Derrick Gabriel**

2x **Senator Fred Gregory**
the surname alone also matches: Donna A. Frett-Gregory; Donna Frett-Gregory

2x **Senator Samuel Carillon**
heard in this transcript as: Carillon

1x **Senator Donna A. Frett-Gregory**
heard in this transcript as: Donna A. Fred Gregory

1x **Senator Donna Frett-Gregory**
heard in this transcript as: Donna A. Frett-Gregory

Bills and acts referred to

Matched by number against our own acts corpus. The number is what the recognition heard, so it may be wrong; where it resolved, the title is the one the Legislature gave the act.

Act 8617 Act 8617 · An Act providing an appropriation from the General Fund of the Treasury of the Government of the Virgin Islands for the operation of the Government of the Virgin Islands during the fiscal year October 1, 2022, through September 30, 2023 --0