



| Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance

Legislature USVI

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0:00:00 I'll see you next time Let's go. Let's get started. Thank you. Thank you. Let's go. We'll be right back. Let's go. Thank you. Thank you. Let's go. Thank you.

0:06:00 Thank you. Thank you.

0:07:00 Thank you. Thank you.

0:08:00 Thank you. Oh, my God.

0:09:00 Thank you. Thank you.

0:10:00 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

0:12:00 Thank you. Thank you.

0:13:00 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

0:15:00 Oh, my God. Oh, my God. I love you I love you.

0:17:00 Thank you. I love you Oh, my God. Oh, my God. [3 such phrases repeated 16 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

0:25:30 Oh, my God. Oh, my God.

0:26:30 Thank you. Thank you.

0:27:30 Thank you. Thank you.

0:28:30 Oh, my God. Thank you. I love you, I love you The committee on budget appropriations and finance meeting of July 17th, 2024 is hereby I call to order. Madam Clerk, can you please read today's agenda into the record?

- 0:30:33 The Committee on Budget Appropriations and Finance will meet on Wednesday, July 17, 2024 at 9 a.m. in the Earl B. Utley Legislative Chambers on St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, to receive testimony on the proposed fiscal year 2025 executive budget for the government of the Virgin Islands of the United States. Virgin Islands Public Broadcasting System, invited testifier, Miss Tanya Marie Singh, Chief Executive Officer, Virgin Islands Public Broadcasting system. Block 2, VI Casino Control Commission. Invited testifier, Mr. Marvin Pickering, Chairman, VI Casino Control Commission. Madam Chair, this concludes the reading of today's agenda. Thank you, Madam Clerk. Can I have the roll call please. Senator Marvin A. Blyden? Present. Senator Blyden? Present. Senator Samuel Carrion?
- 0:31:51 Senator Carrion? Absent. Senator Dwayne M. DeGraff? Senator DeGraff? Absent. Senator Ray Fonseca? I'm here. Senator Fonseca? Present. Senator Novell E. Francis, Jr.? I'm here. Here. Senator Francis Jr. Present. Senator Donna A. Fred Gregory. Here. Senator Fred Gregory. Present. Senator Javon E. James Sr. Present.
- 0:32:21 Senator James Sr. Present. Madam Chair, five present, two absent. Thank you, Madam Clerk. We've established a quorum. Do we have any correspondence to be read into the record? Yes, Madam Chair. You may proceed. Letter dated July 17, 2024. Addressed to Honorable Donna A. Fred Gregory, Chair Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance, 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, Capitol Building, Charlotte and Marley, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, 00804. Dear Chairwoman Fred Gregory, I regret to inform you that I will not be able to attend today's Committee on Budget Appropriation and Finance Meeting, scheduled to begin at 9 a.m. in the R.B. Artley Legislative Hall on the island of St. Thomas. Please accept my apologies for my absence, and I kindly request that it be recorded an excuse. Your cooperation and understanding in this matter is appreciated. Sincerely, Samuel Carrion, Senator, 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands. This is the end of the correspondence, Madam Chair.
- 0:33:33 Thank you, Madam Clerk, and good morning to my colleagues, good morning to the listening and viewing audience, and good morning to the testifiers that are here with us today. Welcome. Today we will hear from the Virgin Islands Public Broadcasting System and the Virgin Islands Casino Control Commission as they provide testimony in support of their FY 2025 budget recommendations submitted by the executive branch. Testifiers, I see that you're ready to roll.
- 0:34:07 So we're going to make this a good day, a good morning. What we're going to do, we're going to start with the CEO, Ms. Tanya Marie Singh. We're going to ask you to put your name and title on the record, and then we're going to start with my right, your left. You'll put your name and title on the record, and then we'll move to the other side. CEO Singh, you may proceed. Please recognize the mic of the testifiers. One more time. No, one more time. Try it again. Testing. Okay. Tonya Marie Singh, Chief Executive Officer, Virgin Islands Public Broadcasting System.
- 0:34:56 Raul DeMason, Director of Human Resources, Virgin Islands Public Broadcasting System. Yonel Maduro. One second, the mic, please turn on the mics. Turn on all the mics, please. Proceed. Yonel Maduro. No. Let's speak directly to the mic. Check.
- 0:35:23 It's not on. Yonel Maduro, Interim Director, Virgin Islands Public Broadcasting System. Okay. Nedra Thomas, Chief Financial Officer, Virgin Islands Public Broadcasting System. Marie White, Senior Financial Officer. Next person. bring the mic to you kia tinique thomas disaster recovery specialist virgin island's public broadcasting system all right um media can you please turn up the mics we are having a hard time hearing do you have anyone on st croix no okay perfect uh you may proceed with your testimony good morning senator frett gregory chairwoman of the legislature's committee and budget appropriations and finance members of the committee and other members of the 35th legislature of the Virgin Islands I am Tanya Marie Singh chief executive officer of the Virgin Islands public broadcasting system I am here today to respectfully request your support of the Virgin Islands public broadcasting systems 2025 fiscal year budget in the amount of four million four hundred and thirty one thousand nine hundred and two dollars today in the well i have with me thomas the system's chief financial officer marie white senior financial officer kia tanik thomas disaster recovery specialist ralda mason director of human resources and our interim director of engineering yonel maduro the virgin islands public broadcasting system continues to be the pbs member station in the territory we are also the NPR member station serving the Virgin Islands PBS provides this member stations with educational programming in arts and performances historical cultural and scientific areas in children's fair and in news and public affairs it also provides educational resources to its member stations to support the educational development of
- 0:37:34 of individuals starting at the preschool level. NPR offers a broad range of high quality news and informational programming to radio stations through programs such as Morning Edition, All Things Considered, Fresh Air, and Throughline to name a few. In short, WTGX is part of two nationwide systems that continue to be a trusted resource for our community. In 1972, the Virgin Islands Public Broadcasting System began to transmit and next month will mark 52 years that WTJX TV has provided non-commercial, educational, cultural and entertaining programming along with informative and public affairs programs to the people of the Virgin Islands. We will be celebrating WTJX FM's 10 year anniversary on the air in January 2025.

- 0:38:31 We continue to expand our local programs on radio. This year we added the Commissioner's Corner with Education Commissioner Dion Wells-Hendrington to our lineup. We also live streamed this program visually online. The organic coverage of the television and radio stations extend beyond our borders to the British Virgin Islands Vieques, Culebra and the easternmost areas of Puerto Rico. The system receives oversight by an 11-member board, presently we have 10 board members and one vacancy. Senators, I'm proud to report that once again our audit is unmodified and there were zero audit findings. We are, however, experiencing threats to our financial future.
- 0:39:20 As you may know, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting contributes approximately 18% to our overall funding. Last week, the House Appropriations Committee passed the FY 2025 Labor HHS Appropriations Bill, which eliminates the two-year advance appropriation for CPB. The Committee noted that it does not believe that CPB should continue to receive a two-year advance appropriation and thus is not including the advance request for FY 2027. It looks like the House will take up this bill on the floor at the end of July. We are concerned that during the floor consideration there could be introduction of more amendments that would seek to do more harm to public media funding. For example, last year we saw an amendment introduced that proposed rescinding previously approved funding. I will keep this committee posted on any definitive CPB funding concerns. Our recovery continues to inch along. Our architectural and engineering firm has finalized the design for our new Hay Peace facility. We are awaiting favorable response on our federal consistency determination. Once this is received, we will submit permits to commence demolition. We have made progress towards the digitization of our tape archives. We've received several quality bids for restoration and digitization. However, due to the cost of this project, we're seeking an increase in funding from FEMA. We have two projects at our transmitter site located at Mountaintop St. Thomas.
- 0:41:10 our contractor is currently mobilizing to begin the necessary repairs to the building and we're in the design phase for the rebuild of the small office located on the property speaking of our transmitter facility we applied for and were awarded a grant of 795 000 through the virgin islands energy office for a micro grid at that location this will include solar batteries and ups for our most important yet most remote facility. We're working closely with the energy office to move this project along as best we can. This fiscal year we jumped feet first into our news bag and if I do say so myself we are providing an outstanding news product on all of our platforms. Last fall we premiered two news programs on radio we began the WTJX News Feed with our radio reporter Marcelina Ventura-Douglas. The radio news feed is a dynamic half-hour news show that airs weekdays at 5 p.m. on WTJX FM 93.1 and subsequently available on demand on our website, the free WTJX app or wherever you get your podcasts. On television, we launched our Sunday news and information show comes with the territory this is an hour-long show that airs sundays at 1 p.m and repeats at 7 p.m and Mondays at 8 p.m this program is currently on hiatus it will return the second Sunday in September comes with the territory features a newsmaker at the beginning of the show and then breaks out to a knowledgeable panel that analyzes current news events and issues impacting our community. We rounded out our news offerings in February when the
- 0:43:06 St. Croix Avis sadly shuttered its operation in January I reached out to its bureau chief Tom Ader in hopes of expanding our news to an online publication. People still like to read their news. Fortunately we moved swiftly and brought Tom on board and we now provide digital news stories on the newsfeed.wtjx.org. Let me say that again smoothly, newsfeed.wtjx.org. Our news endeavors have truly been a giant undertaking as my staff and I pour our entire selves into providing trusted fact-based reporting to the people of the Virgin Islands on the system's multiple platforms. Staying true to our mission, WTJets provided quality programs throughout the year. In terms of local programming, we renewed two series, Recovering Focus, Season 4, hosted by Adrian Williams Octolin, which provides viewers with recent developments in the territories recovery, and the bookcase, Season 3, which is hosted and co-produced by Shauna K. Richards. We introduced or in some cases reintroduced the following local authors and books to the community. Bradley Christian Quadril, Ashley Ruth Molinar Bernier Ripen, Pearlene James A Frank Conversation with Today's Youth, Michael Fleming Elijah and Paba, Sylvanas Donai, A Caribbean Man's Perspective on Race, Religion and Capitalism in America Janet Millen Young, Because They Dared Dr. Karen Turlan, Masqueraders, Musicians and the Old Time St. Croix Christmas Festival Torhera Durand, How Anansi Spun Madras Abdul Ali, A Matured Seed, Tended to with Helping Hands Tamika Larray, My Island Home, St. Croix, Rick Grant, When Storm Winds Blow, Melissa
- 0:45:18 Fredericks, Murr, A Caribbean Underwater Adventure, Reuben Dowling, The United States of Hamilton, Rudel James, 2020, Near Perfect Vision, The Corona Effect, Ajib Prince, Ten Steps of Killing a King, Johanna Samuel, Passion and Purpose, Maxine Fredericks, Living Life to the Max, Valrika Bryson, Rika and the Tamarind Tree, Howard Jones, Julian, Queen of the Ruins, and Jael Paul, Brown Brothers' Save a Friend. We air the following Christmas season programs, the 47th Annual Challenge of the Carols, Live from Emancipation Gardens on St. Thomas, Partners for Strings, Virgin Islands Youth Steel Orchestra present, Blow the Trumpet Peace and Joy Have Come to Earth, Superior Court Rising Stars Youth Steel Orchestra, a holiday tribute to our past honoring the legend and the legacy, and the Crujan Christmas Festival Children's and Adults Parades. We broadcasted live Governor Albert Bryan's sixth state of the territory address,

the St. Thomas Carnival Children's and Adults Parade and the St. John Celebration Parade. We rounded out our local programming with Education Under U.S. Rule, a program in partnership with the Radical Education and Advocacy League LLC and Right to Democracy. We hosted a panel of educators and education leaders from five U.S. territories, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands as they discuss their respective education histories and how the public school curriculum can be a tool for local empowerment and self-determination. WTJX also aired programs from its national

0:47:16 partners regarding the Virgin Islands. Prime among them is great performances at the Met Champion which is the operatic retelling of the dramatic story of St. Thomas boxer Emil Griffith. Bass baritone Ryan Speedo Green stars as the closeted young hat maker turned prize fighter who rises from obscurity to become a world champion and in one of the great tragedies in sports history kills his homophobic arch rival in the ring. we aired the good road st. Thomas USVI not just Iraq which follows dr. Marilyn Brandt and her scuba diving scientists as they attempt to study and rehabilitate the existential threat to coral known to be the lungs of the planet also the good road st. Croix USVI farm tech city which explores how people are transforming the food and tech landscape on the island pivoting to national topics we broadcasted freedom house ambulance the first responders which tells the history of america's first emt service which was comprised solely of black men and women recruited from pittsburgh's hill district neighborhood their groundbreaking work became the basis of for all paramedic training in the country we aired the six-part series power trip which explores tailoring energy initiatives to individual societies we premiered lila in the loop a dynamic seven-year-old black girl with an african-american father and a jamaican mother lila and her close-knit family and friends teach creative and strategic problem-solving and critical thinking to four to eight-year-olds. Not only did we air Brief Tender Light, a documentary which reveals opportunities and obstacles four Black African students at MIT faced as they experienced American culture and its embedded racism, we partnered with UVI and the Department of Education to screen the show to high school seniors on St. Thomas and St. Croix with funding from the film's distributor

0:49:46 POV. The students in the documentary's goal was to return to their respective countries in Africa and better their home. Not all of them returned. This issue was one of the discussion points for our high schoolers who attended the screening. We also aired Beyond Barbados, the Carolina connection which traces the historic influence of the small island on the wealth and success of a place 2,000 miles away, the Carolinas. Beyond the broadcast, WTJX continues to support our community. Of note, we were extremely proud to partner with the Virgin Islands Basketball Federation, the Virgin Islands Olympic Committee, and Government House to host a recognition ceremony and reception, and a parade for the VI gold medalists of the Central American and Caribbean games.

0:50:42 The Virgin Islands women national basketball team and archer Nicholas Damore won gold in their respective sport at the CAC games. To honor their accomplishments and raise VI pride, WTJX played a pivotal role in planning and executing the ceremony and parade which showed these athletes how much this community appreciates their hard work and tenacity. As I conclude my presentation, I would like to publicly thank my staff as we continue to navigate the challenges facing every single media company. Given the weight of our 24-7 operation and our desire to provide excellence, it can be so easy to be overwhelmed by the tasks before us. I'd like to thank everyone who continues to support our stations, such as our board of directors, donors, members, underwriters, on-air contributors, and partners who are so generous and patient with us. I'd like to thank the legislature and the administration for maintaining our funding. Through this funding, we are able to continue to open up a world of possibilities through with the power of our platforms to benefit the people we serve. Thank you for your time. My team and I look forward to addressing your questions and concerns. Thank you for your testimony. Colleagues, we're gonna go to a four minute round. And we're gonna start with Senator Marvin Blyden, let me just add my voice to your testimony.

0:52:37 The work that you've been doing with the news has, it's really good work. We know that we've been challenged with us getting news in the Virgin Islands within the past few years and with the closure of the AVS it has become a lot more challenging for us so I really want to congratulate you for that work that you're doing and I also want to congratulate you for the analyze this program lots of us to include the LLD population here we look forward to listening to the analyze this this is how we know what's happening in the Virgin Islands so it's a it's a well sought out program so congratulations to you and those two things but please whatever we can do to ensure that we maintain that news section is important to us because these days news don't come about so easily it doesn't so a lot of things we've been learning from I mean you guys are definitely in tune to what's going on and you do the necessary reach out and you really have an excellent news programming program that you are sharing with us in the territory. I want to congratulate you and your team for that. Out the gate is important to us. Senator Blyden, you are recognised for your four minutes.

0:54:02 Before he goes, please mark Senator DeGraff as present. Good morning, Senator DeGraff, and thank you for being here. You may proceed, Senator Blyden. Thank you so much, Madam Chair. to my colleagues, viewing, listening audiences,

staff, central staff, good morning. CEO Singh and your supporting team there with you and thank you so much for your testimony. I say ditto to that also. Your team got your ears to the ground. That's important. We appreciate that. I'm going to go directly to the post our report. So, Ms. White, I guess most of my question will be coming to you? That's true, my bad. Let me ask, under the category of utilities, is that an error?

0:54:53 1,700 for 25 projections or is it in a different category? Page 4 of 12. Under utilities. That is not an error, that is deliberate, what you are saying there is just for cable, we pay our electricity from our CPB grant, we are going to pay that from our grant in fiscal year 2025.

0:55:31 Okay, very well. And in respect to the CPB grant, I heard the concerns with the stuff that's going on in Congress and you get a two-year advance. How much do you receive or expend on an annual basis with that grant? I'll have our CFO respond. That varies, but in most cases we spend all of it. Most of it goes to our PBS dues, some 760 000 a year wow so that's granted it's critical as you said 18 of your budget correct yes but fiscally at 24 it was 1.3 million dollars we have to keep a close watch on that and if not you have to come up with a plan b because it's critical that um the operation continues um let's go to page seven of twelve your contract listing um you have a chart below with different businesses etc you have two for professional service one for track media services and another one for shenequa robinson what type of service do they provide in respect to your operations track media services schedules their consult contractors that schedules the television all three of our channels and shenequa robinson is a contract producer on saint croix okay very well also on page 9 of 12 outstanding obligations let's talk about it for a minute you have a listing of outstanding vendors um one minute it's only 45 000 dollars which is not much but these are many vendors and it makes most of them state net 30 days pain at the creed. Explain that to me, please.

0:57:27 Marie White, senior financial officer. As of March, as of June, our outstanding obligations were fourteen thousand three hundred sixty eight dollars and sixty seven cents we pay our vendors 30 seconds timely and within the 30-day payment period okay thank you for that update and you i believe you stated you have how many vacancies do you have five how many vacancies do you have mason respond currently we have six vacancies six okay um and we back to your vacancies i i saw one for director of development and fundraising um how long have this position be vacant and what's been done in in order to fill that vacancy because i note that you really need some um it's been vacant since january and it's a tough position to fill but we are actively attempting. Why is it tough? Because the salary is not attractive for the amount of work that the person does. So what are you doing about that in respect to the salary? I have met with my board and I'll meet with them again. That's a very important position because I So you have a category for it and zero. So we need some revenue than a category to help you with your operation. Thank you so much for what you do. You guys are doing a very good job and continue the good work. Thank you so much Madam Chair for the time.

0:59:11 Thank you, Senator Blayden. So who does your, currently, who does your marketing? We just hired a marketing director. He's been on for about a month and a half. I think I met him. Yes, you did. Yeah, okay. So your marketing and your fundraising are two separate positions? Yes. Okay. So you said you lost that position in? January. So you've been out of a marketing fundraising lead since January, so that's what, seven months? Yes.

0:59:47 So how have you been dealing with that side of the business? So, the vice chair of our board is the first development director that the station had, and she's been helping. That's... Yvette Delabanc. Yvette Delabanc. She is so dedicated to WTJR. Yes, she is. It's amazing. Yeah, it is. Shout out to you, Yvette. Yeah, I watch it all the time. I see it all the time. Very dedicated. I didn't even realize you on the board.

1:00:17 Yes. Okay. So you say you have six vacancies? Yes. And those became vacant in this fiscal year, all of them? Have you filled any positions in fiscal year? How many positions have you filled in fiscal year 24? For fiscal year 24, we actually filled eight positions. And you lost? And we lost nine. So why are you having, I mean you're a small organization, losing eight, nine positions in a fiscal year is a lot for your size. What's the, what are you hearing or is there a survey that's conducted or do you do an exit meeting?

1:01:10 That's the question. I agree. It's a lot. I would say it's for various reasons. For instance, we lost an employee in December that didn't want to be vested in the GRS. He works with us on call still. We separated from two employees in January for some nonsense, and then we have folks that moved here and they don't want to be here anymore yeah so those are our challenges I think that's the rezoning challenges that we've been hearing once the younger employees get close to that vesting period yeah they're in fact leaving so we need to figure out how to fill that gap how to really address that as a government because you know the last thing we want to do is lose our younger employees we need them mm-hmm we definitely need them so so you filled it last night and now you have five six six vacants and those vacancies that you have you are actively trying to fill them correct correct so and do you have the available funding to fill them in this year yes okay and again you said You said something about your CPB funding, and that funding is in jeopardy?

- 1:02:48 I would say we need to keep a close watch on it. And how much do you receive? For fiscal year 2024, we received \$1.3 million. It fluctuates, but generally it has been just over a million dollars. And it's basically entitlement dollars that you receive, or is it competitive? do you receive those funds it's based on a formula partly of it is from the base so they have a base that they give everyone based on their appropriation another part of it is based on our non-federal financial support and so our allotment from the VI government contributes to that grant because it's taken into consideration how much we are able to raise in a say for fiscal year 24 it would be 2022 and they will have a multiplier they will also have a portion a small portion that goes to because we are considered rural and the small urban and so we get an incentive grant as well as part of the makeup of the 1.3 million and are we um see are we working with our government Have we shared these concerns up the chain to ensure that we have folks advocating for the Virgin Islands on this funding?
- 1:04:07 So nationally we do, and I did, when I received this information, I did call our delegate to Congress, Chief of Staff. Okay. And what was the feedback? She said they're going to start tracking it. Okay. Very well. Senator Fonseca, you're recognized for your four minutes. Yes, pleasant good morning and thank you so kindly, Madam Chair. We give warm greetings to the VI Public Broadcasting staff and Executive Director, CEO, Tanya Marie Singh. We give thanks and praises to the Most High and blessings, blessings. Okay, you know, 52 years in operation is a milestone achievement, commendable.
- 1:05:05 You know, you got some new programs, you got the WTJX app, which I have downloaded on my phone. You got the WTJX.org, the news feed. You know, this is one of the organizations that are being managed real good. A couple of questions on the Bert and Smalls audit, the status, what kind of opinions have you received and up to what year have you audited? Ms. Thomas. We have an unqualified opinion and we are audited up to fiscal year 2023.
- 1:05:47 We're going to have to take a recess. Oh, okay. Hold us Senator's time. We were not seeing the Senator on the screen. All right. Proceed, Senator. Yes. Thank you, Manche. Okay. So you got an unqualified opinion. Oh, Popa, that's excellent. You got a clean audit. Congratulations. Okay. So the \$795,000 grant for the transmitter facility with the solar, the batteries, UPS, how long would that stay up and how many batteries do you have? How long would that stay up before it goes down and do you have a generator also as a backup?
- 1:06:29 We do have a backup generator currently and we are just we just found out that we got the money or was awarded the grant so we are working closely with the energy office to see how the build out would look. So those questions I don't have the answer to. Okay. So, you know, it's commendable that you also have a CD for \$400,000. So what is the maturity date on that CD?
- 1:07:02 The CD matures every six months. Six months. And where is it held? bank VI. That's commendable that you have reserves that you can secure for six months. I wanted to ask you now about the \$75,000 satellite uplink. Give me the details on that that grant this 75 I'm missing that yeah on page 6 of 12 he says for fiscal year 24 WTJX receive one grant in amount of 75,000 from the VI government for a satellite uplink on St. Thomas production vehicle what page is that, Senator? I think you have maybe last year testimony? No, this is a post audit report, page 612. Okay, sorry. Let me go to that. While you're looking for that, I also wanted to congratulate you. You said you got an unqualified opinion. That's great. and one minute okay senator yes we last we got that money we do have it and initially we selected a contractor things did not go well we have rescinded that that contract and we are now on our way. We have identified a new contractor to to satisfy that grant that we got from the legislature. We just actually got that done.
- 1:09:01 Okay so good. So your budget is four million four thirty one nine hundred two dollars. It remains at the same level is um is there anything outstanding is that a satisfactory funding level for the virgin islands public broadcasting system i would say so we're just grateful we didn't get cut okay awesome um madam chair um thank you very much for the time Thank you, Senator Fonseca. We'll now hear from Senator Javon James Sr.
- 1:09:40 Greetings to the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands. Thank you, testifiers, for being here. Membership dues and subscription on page four of the post audit report. I think that's on that page even if it's not on that page page five page five of the post audit report speaks to membership dues or subscription I just would like to hear from you some of the strategies or some of the things you plan to implement to increase membership dues or subscription. Senator thanks for that question that's one of the things that after this hearing I would be meeting with our new marketing person and strategizing about okay and of course you don't want to put your strategy that's what puts you gives you an advantage but I just want to make sure because without saying much I saw a little dip and I want to make sure that we that we remain consistent because WTGX is a platform that we definitely need in the Virgin Islands and I want to say congratulations to the entire team and it was a wise move to bring Tom Ada on board and my good friend Shanika Robinson from the Syncro Educational Complex High School. As far as the lump sum payments I saw in FY 2023 you had one FY 2024 you had one as well not saying it's an issue but there's no lump sum payments for FY 2025 if you could just explain to us um the process and what transpired and the progress there can you clarify is that in the post audit report I'm not following

you yes it's in the post audit report it's on page 4 of 12 it speaks to lump sum

1:11:37 payments oh lump sum payments is is something that we would not know it it's it's a payout to persons when they leave the organization so it's like their vacation and whatever they would have accrued you don't have any projected for fy 2025 not in the sorry sir not in this the government budget so it's um our budget is 4.4 million and um we have put it to our operations okay so it was moved to a different categories what you're saying yes okay that's that's why that's all i wanted to know and as far as electricity i sorry for f4 2025 you have zero dollars i'm assuming that you did something they just explain to us what you have done to yes our electricity is budgeted in our cpp grant so it's not reflected in our vig allotment one minute so a lot of changes were made and you consolidated a lot of things is what you basically say yes awesome and as far as the the federal grants, who's in charge of your federal grants at WTGX?

1:13:07 The business office. A specific person who's? No, it's, well, we have our disaster recovery specialist who's doing femur information and she's present here on the panel. Our CPD grant is dealt by the business office. okay okay thanks for that and then I see as we speak about FEMA I saw where you have capital outlays FY 2023 you had something budgeted FY 2024 shows the actuals at the time you presented this budget and FY 2025 there is no allotment so you don't need anything from the government to the Virgin Islands as far as capital? No we are focusing on our operations for this grant for the allotments sorry for the government allotment we'll just focus in on salaries and operations. Thank you my time was called this is a straightforward budget I have no doubts that WTGX will not do the job I know you have highly qualified people continue to make us proud and god bless the virgin alums thank you uh senator james senior so let me ask um the budget amount the the amount is the same amount from fiscal year 24 correct so um You don't have any other projected expenses that will come online in FY25, i.e. salary increases. We do. Do you have anything else that will impact these numbers? We do have salary increases for the union in the fall, in the next fiscal year. And how do you plan to accommodate those? I will ask the business office. It's accommodated in our fiscal year 2025 budget numbers.

1:15:10 So it's included in your numbers? Yes, for the union employees only. See, that makes me ask this question. Did you have salary increases in 2024? Yes. Okay, so you do an annual. For union employees at this point. So, do you have like savings in your allotments at the close of the fiscal years? We've been using all of our allotment within recent years.

1:15:39 So this 4.4 million will be used within fiscal year 2024. And then you just married up with your funding that you receive, your federal dollars, your federal funding. Yes, we pay specific things from different funds, yes. Okay. I also recalled CEO Singh that a few years ago, probably two or a year and a half ago, you were very interested in building out some space in St. Croix for your team as they come over during hurricanes, major events, etc. What's the status of that? I didn't mention it, but we, because we don't have the money yet, but we were awarded money from ARPA. Is it? OIA. From Interior. Interior? Yes.

1:16:35 For the upfitting of that? Yes. How much? \$400,000. Good. Very innovative. Yes. I'm very happy to hear that because it's something that's been on my mind because I know that we had toward it and it's really an excellent idea um so when did that award take place and when do you anticipate receiving the funding it took place in april of fiscal year 2024 it is a reimbursable grant so we actually have to spend the money and yet be reimbursed so at current currently we are getting quotes for an architect to build out a space at this point okay all right um and you anticipate that is going to be around four hundred thousand dollars to to we're hoping so okay all right well um i i don't i don't ever like to say that you know whatever we can do to assist especially in these times we can but um let us know how is how the project is going let us know how it's going all right uh senator francis jr you recognize for your four minutes Thank you very much Madam Chair and good morning to my colleagues, good morning to the listening audience and of course good morning to team WTGX Virgin Islands Public Broadcasting System.

1:18:01 Good morning. CEO, thank you for your testimony this morning and the good work that continue to be done by the WTGX and the Public Broadcasting System. Of course, I'm an avid supporter of Analyze This for obvious reasons. And I wanted to ask you if there is a boost that's required, I'm having some difficulties hearing the radio station in certain areas as I traverse the Virgin Islands. Is there a boost that's required to be able to make it a little bit stronger? need an FM translator and there is a moratorium on FM translators with the FCC they're not they're not giving out any and until such time we've also explored the possibility of purchasing a radio station on St. Croix but we've not been successful thus far but we we keep trying because I live on St. Croix and I want to hear our station on St. Croix not just in some neighborhoods but throughout the island. Correct yes that's definitely observation that I've made and too I too don't want to miss a beat. In regards to the WAPA payment we up to date I heard I think was the business office that spoke to the fact that all of your vendors payments are pretty much up to date is your WAPA payment one of Marie White, Senior Financial Officer. Yes, Senator, we are up to date with WAPA.

- 1:19:39 If I may, Senator, I would add that there's a water issue that you may see from WAPA that there's an outstanding amount for a water bill on St. Croix that we're currently disputing. Okay. Are you pursuing any alternative or renewable energies to support um your energy system there electricity we are at the space the location at mountaintop I have also asked the energy director Kyle Fleming to look into Richmond our Richmond facility the property behind the parking lot is WTJX's property and with this influx of money the energy office is getting I am I asked him to do a solar farm back there for not just WTJX but the Richmond community.
- 1:20:45 Excellent, excellent. I'd like to hear more about that. I didn't see anything in your FY25 for any capital projects. Are you intended to undertake any capital projects for FY25? Repeat Senator, I missed that. I didn't see anything in the FY25 for capital projects. Do you intend to undertake any capital projects in FY25? Just the build-out we were just speaking about with Senator Fred Gregory about the back area of the building upstairs that's derelict, and we want to build that out.
- 1:21:24 Okay. And have you received any philanthropy donations or anything now? 30 seconds. Yes? No. are you utilizing any of the key performance indicators how are you able to evaluate your success or your challenges senator they reveal themselves to us every day I don't know if we've sat down and evaluated them because we're just always trying to outfire time we do need to sit down and evaluate them but one thing I know we need to do better is market what the the excellent programming that we have okay I'm on a chair at my time call I just have one follow-up question if you allow it sure Madam CEO in regards to a wish list is there anything that you see as a critical improvement that if you had an opportunity to ask for you be asking for in this budget? I would love to buy a radio station on St. Croix that's my wish list. And is there do you have a dollar value to that? I offered I don't I offered a station a hundred thousand dollars the other day and they left so I don't know. Very well maybe we could partner together and you and I can share that responsibility and buy a radio station. We'll have some further discussion on that. Thank you very much Madam Chair for the time and the opportunity. Thank you Madam CEO for your responses. Thank you Senator Francis Junior. The satellite uplink for St. Thomas. I know that we appropriated those dollars probably about two or three fiscal years ago what's the status we're about to go ahead first in that give us a few months i think by the time you see us here again senator
- 1:23:34 you would have already attended a ribbon cutting okay good um Um, your, what do you call it, hair piece? Hair piece. Hair piece. What's going on with that? I'll let Kia answer that. Ms. Thomas. Kia Tinek Thomas, disaster recovery specialist. So in April, we finalized our 100% designs, and we submitted that to DPNR for a federal consistency determination. on June 21st we had our public hearing for that during the hearing there were no major findings or concerns from any of the stakeholders so DPNR said within or around 30 days so hopefully any day now we'll receive a favorable federal consistency determination at which point we can begin permitting and putting out bids for demolition wow how much years has it been? seven?
- 1:24:31 and i know that you've been pushing on this yes oh my gosh i thought you would have given me something like yeah we design wow i'm gonna stay encouraged i'm really looking forward to that um space being upfitted and rebuilt and upfitted it was a good space and i know that under your leadership that you probably have a really nice expansion there so i'm looking forward to that I had another question, but it escaped me, so I'm going to go to the next senator. Senator DeGraff, you recognize me of four minutes.
- 1:25:13 Good morning. Test, test, one, two. Thank you. Good morning, Madam Chair. Good morning, colleagues. Good morning, testifiers of viewing, listening, and present. First of all, thank you for allowing my summer intern, Ms. Charlize Matthews, to be there. She's very, very happy to be there. That's our employee. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Keep that in mind.
- 1:25:39 But, you know, I'm very happy to sponsor her and to work with you. She really enjoys it. I have a little weightlifting program. I need you to come and produce. A weightlifting program? But we don't have a weightlifter right at the end. That's what I say. because she's a winner all the time, but I want to make sure the people of the territory in marketing or weightlifting, the great D's that women are doing. She's stronger than everybody else. The guys in the office let her lift boxes.
- 1:26:11 No, no, no. A guy got to be a guy still. Don't let them do that. Don't let them get away. I'm looking at the post-audit report from last year, 24 and 25. and something that's interesting says 2023 your request was four million four one nine or two your recommendation your governor's recommendation of four million for 23 four million four thirty one nine or two the 24 request is four million four thirty one nine or your 25 request is \$4,431,902 how you give or when did how you deal with wage increases you see a gay wage increase in 24 your acts is the same from 23 the same in 24 the same now in 25 so I'm trying to figure that out your personnel that you had with seven vacancies in 24 was two million six your acts in 25 with five vacancies is two million five two million three so I'm missing something with the numbers in are we able to cover the wage increases that you had and the wage increases that are coming in the 25 budget so I don't want to jump ahead of my CFO but I'm gonna say this if we we want to fill our all of our all of our vacancies we do if we do then we're in a little bit of a pickle because we're able to do these things because we have vacancies but once we're at full operations

which we are striving to do then we may have an issue okay then then then you're in the right place because that's what i'm saying that's what i'm seeing that you need to straighten out because you will end up in a pickle right and i don't

- 1:28:24 want it to happen because like i said i'm i'm an avid great supporter of what you're doing now i see you have one minute oh so oh and who is getting the raises you say unionized employees union you have any any gs employees what's gs uh i guess if you don't know then you probably don't have okay so i just want to make sure okay the gs or non-union classified so i just want to make sure okay now i see there's a post audit report page nine there's outstanding obligations that come to a total of thirty seconds forty five thousand three hundred twenty eight ten now you said your outstanding obligations there are none as of june 30th our outstanding obligations were fourteen thousand three hundred sixty eight dollars and sixty seven cents and we pay within a 30 day time period okay because i also notice in the 24 budget same listing of outstanding obligations is it when you receive your appropriation and when you pay that causes time it to show up if i may wrap up madam chair that causes to show up in the post auditor's report because it makes it seem as if it's outstanding from one year to a next to a next no at the time we make our submission that at the end of march that is what was outstanding at the end of march and right now it's down to 14 000. so we report what is open in our accounts payable at the time of submission we don't have anything from prior fiscal years okay wapa alone was 16 824 that was paid yes we are completely paid up with wapa except for one water bill on st croix that is in
- 1:30:11 dispute and just in closing there is on the post started report page nine there's a term net 30 day paying as agreed what does that mean we most of our vendors give us a 30-day window to pay so we pay within that 30-day time okay that doesn't answer okay thank you for the time madam chair thank you senator de graaf so basically um your appropriations cover all categories within um your your operations, and you have \$756,000 under other services, what does that entail? Can you let me know the page you're referring to?
- 1:31:07 Page four of the post-salot report, it basically gives the breakdown of your FY25 projections. It gives the different categories, personnel, associated fringe benefits, supplies. We know that you receive a long-sum budget, but we still want to know what's in these categories. So that breakdown should be in the table immediately following Exhibit four on the same page? So there's a breakout there, auto services and charges. You have professional services, 200,000, communication, 130 and so on and so on. So let's talk about insurance.
- 1:31:49 So you are a semi-autonomous entity, correct? Yes. And during the hurricanes of 2017, you're getting your assistance from FEMA to do your rebuild. Yes. I see that you don't have any insurance. We do have insurance. It's just not budgeted in fiscal year 2025 appropriations. We paid from our CPB grant. Okay. Our insurance is paid from that grant.
- 1:32:20 So, you have insurance that's paid from the federal funds? Yes. Okay. And your rental of land and building, I thought that those are being covered, particularly in this district, by FEMA. Is that... It is. It's still being covered, but on St. Croix. So tell me the reason for your \$41,000 expense for rental. For rental, we have \$41,000 because we're renting, we have tower rent in St. Croix. Okay. Yeah. And we also have, and we have two small storage units on St. Thomas. Okay.
- 1:33:11 The storage units are covered by FEMA. Okay, so basically the \$41,000, you have a contract with your, a lease rather, with your current, with the antenna providers? Yes. I see. Okay. What about your vehicles? All your vehicles are in good condition?
- 1:33:41 Yes. Okay. All right. All right, I am trying to make sure we cover all of this before I close, which are, and you do, you receive FCC grant funding? Not in fiscal year 24 and 25. Our last payout was in fiscal year 2023. Our towers have been completed and is now online. So it was for the purpose of- It was specifically for the new towers. And then you get the CBP funding. Yes.
- 1:34:17 That's an annual PL. Okay. All right, colleagues. I don't have any other questions for the WTJX. I don't know if anyone has a burning question. Any burning questions? Don't look that way. Good. So CEO Singh, we're going to ask you to give a 30-second close. We don't have any through the chair requests. So 30 seconds. We'll allow you to close.
- 1:34:59 Thank you, Senator, and thank you, everyone. I would like to close by encouraging the public to become members of the station. go on our website WTJX.org and I would like to encourage everyone I'm specifically re-airing Champion this Sunday at 3 p.m. I wanted to use this platform to push that program watch the opera about Emil Griffith most operas are tragedies anyway. And it really educated me about Emile Griffith. I cried. It's a brilliant program. Please watch it.
- 1:35:48 Okay. Well, thank you. And I didn't ask you, have you received your allotment up to the third quarter? Our last allotment, the last allotment we received was in June. hours for what quarter or what period we receive it monthly also June yeah okay all right all right colleagues we have exhausted our conversation with WTJX and we are now looking forward to hearing from the Virgin Islands casino control Commission we are a little early so we're going to resume at 11 o'clock the The committee stands in recess until 11.

1:36:55 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. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. Let's go. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. I love 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. Thank you. Thank you. Li-lu-la-la-le-lo-la, li-lu-la-la-la-le-lo-la

1:51:25 Thank you. ¶¶ ¶¶ ¶¶ ¶¶ Oh, yeah, man.

1:54:24 Thank you. I love you. Oh, my God.

1:55:54 Oh, my God. Thank you. Thank you.

1:57:24 Thank you. Oh, my God. [2 such phrases repeated 13 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

2:03:54 Oh, my God. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

2:06:54 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

2:08:54 ¶¶ Thank you. Thank you.

2:10:24 Lilo la la de los dedos hay Lilo la la de los dedos hay Thank you. Thank you.

2:11:54 Oh, yeah, man. Thank you. Thank you. so so

2:14:24 Thank you. Thank you.

2:15:24 Thank you. Thank you.

2:16:24 I love you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

2:18:25 The committee is back on the record. Madam Clerk, can you please read block two into the record? Recognize the mic, the mic, please. Try it again. V.I. Casino Control Commission, Invited Testifier, Mr. Marvin Pickering, Chairman, V.I. Casino Control Commission. This concludes the reading of today's agenda, Madam Chair. Thank you, Madam Clerk, and good afternoon to the testifiers.

2:19:10 We're still warning. We're ahead of ourselves today, right? So good morning to the members of the Virgin Islands Casino Control Commission, and good morning again to all listening and viewing today's proceedings. This morning, we're going to hear, we've concluded our discussion, our budget discussion with the WTJX family. family. I will now hear from the Casino Control Commission. I'm going to ask Mr. Pickerin, the chairman of the Virgin Islands Casino Commission, to please put his name and title on the record. I see that he has two other commission members accompanying him. I will also ask them to put their names and titles on the record. Mr. Pickering, you may proceed. Good morning. Marvin Pickering, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the Virgin Islands Casino Control Commission.

2:20:21 Good morning. My name is Carolyn P. Herman Purcell, Commissioner from the District of St. Thomas and the Vice Chairman of the Virgin Islands Casino Control Commission. Okay. Good morning. My name is Luther F. Renee, Commissioner, Secretary-Treasurer of the Virgin Islands Casino Control Commission. All right. Thank you for putting your names on the record. And I have to say to attorney Herman Purcell, you could have come and stay with me. I could have. That's okay. That's okay. All right, so we're going to ask who speaks for the Casino Commission this morning?

2:21:06 I do. You may proceed with your testimony. Thank you. Good morning, Honorable Senator Donna Fred Gregory, Chairperson of the Committee on Budget Appropriations and Finance, all honorable members of the committee, other honorable members of the 35th legislature, legislative staff and those listening and viewing via radio television and the internet. For the record my name is Marvin L. Pickering and I am the chairman and chief executive officer of the Virgin Islands Casino Control Commission, the Commission. Accompanying me today is Commissioner Carolyn P. Herman Purcell Vice-Chair, Commissioner Luther F. Rene, Secretary-Treasurer and our Executive Director Linda I. Smith. We thank you for the opportunity to present and discuss the fiscal year 2025 budget request for the Commission. The Commission is responsible for the regulation of casinos pursuant to the Virgin Islands Casino and Resort Control Act of 1995 as amended. Internet gaming and gambling pursuant to the Virgin Islands Internet Gaming and Gambling Act as amended, Casino's pursuant to the Virgin Islands Horse Racing Industry Assistance Acts of 2011 and 2016, and Casino Four Establishments Act permitted within the enterprise zones of Christianstead and Frederickstead St. Croix U.S. Virgin Islands. These statutes and all relevant amendments established a basis for the governance and operations of the Commission and its staff. Finances. The commission has four funding sources. The general fund for salaries of the commissioners and staff only. The casino control revolving fund pursuant to 32 VI code section 514. This account is funded by casino license fees, casino employee license fees, fines, and other fees imposed by law or through regulation by the commission. 3. The Casino Revenue Fund, pursuant to 32 VI Code 517, which is funded by the 12% tax on gross

revenues from the two casinos and casino hotels currently operating in the casino zone, namely Divi Carina Bay Casino and Resort and VIGL-CRG, commonly referred to as Caraval Hotel and Casino.

2 : 23 : 45 the Commission receives 25% of these taxes with 75% allocated to other government departments or agencies including 1% to the Commission for programs to treat and prevent gambling addiction and for the horse racetrack casino revenue fund pursuant to 32 VI code section 901 the Commission has not received funding from this source since 2016 when Traxco ceased operations at the Randall Doc James racetrack however on April 18th 2024 the Commission granted an initial one-year license to VIGL operations LLC to operate a casino at the Randall Doc James racetrack once this casino commences operations the Commission will begin to receive monies from the horse racetrack casino revenue fund. As it relates to the general fund for the Commission's personnel, the total sum we are requesting is \$1,604,300, including fringe costs, which represents 17 employees, including four vacancies. The vacant positions are an in-house legal counsel and three casino inspectors. The table below lists the names, proposed budgeted salaries, and other related information for the employees of the Commission. The casino control revolving fund is a special checking account that serves as a depository of monies collected from all license registration and permit fees, fines, penalties, and other fees. All sums appropriated thereto by the legislature of the Virgin Islands and all donations gifts and bequests in this fiscal year 2024 from October 1st 2023 through May 31st 2024 the Commission collected 473 thousand eight hundred thirty eight dollars of which 80 percent or three

2 : 25 : 53 hundred seventy nine thousand seventy dollars was allocated to the Commission and 20% or \$94,768 was allocated to the Department of Justice Division of Gaming Enforcement's operating account for their operating expenses relative to gaming enforcement. The mandated signatories on this account are the commissioners and the Attorney General of the Virgin Islands. the casino revenue fund the commission is currently allocated 25 percent of the gross casino revenue taxes levied on casinos at the rate of 12 percent in fiscal year 2023 the amount appropriated to the commission from the department of finance was five hundred sixty seven thousand four hundred two as compared to \$265,680 for fiscal year 2022. This increase is primarily attributed to the change in April 2022 in the allocation rate from 10% to 25% pursuant to Act 8577. For the current fiscal year 2024 through May the amount allocated to the Commission was two hundred eighty three thousand twenty one dollars versus two hundred thirty eight thousand eight hundred seventeen dollars when compared to the same period last fiscal year an increase of nineteen percent the second quarter report below from the Department of Finance for fiscal year 24 shows the percentages and amounts distributed. The funds were distributed to Department of Health, Department of Education, Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Internal Revenue, University of the Virgin Islands, VI Alliance for Responsible Gaming, Department of Sports, Parks and Recreation, Casino Control Commission, and the Police Department. The distribution reports for fiscal years 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022-2023 and through the second quarter of fiscal year 2024 can be found on the Commission's website

2 : 28 : 08 thus far in this fiscal year the Commission has not received any federal funds however overall the Commission received approval for a project worksheet in the total amount of one hundred \$23,326.72 for damages related to Hurricane Maria. Of that amount the Commission has received \$87,412 thus far. In our fiscal year 2024 budget testimony last year we indicated that approval was pending from Vitima regarding a mold remediation project in the amount of \$50,000. That approval was granted and the project was completed and paid for by the Commission. We are now awaiting reimbursement from FEMA slash VITEMA based on the current cost share ratio. A financial overview of the Commission by bank accounts for the period October 1st 2023 through May 31st 2024 is inserted here for your review.

2 : 29 : 15 Administrative Actions. On May 31st, 2024, Mr. Henry Shang, the Commission's Special Assistant for Licensing and Compliance, retired from the agency. Mr. Shang was one of the original employees of the Commission. He began his tenure as a casino inspector supervisor and held that position for 20 years. After a brief absence to serve in another role, he returned to the Commission for another three years as the licensing and compliance special assistant. The Commission thanks Mr. Shang for his service and wishes him well in his retirement. Ms. Marva Ostry joined the Commission on June 17th, 2024 to succeed Mr. Shang. Her title is licensing and compliance officer. When the Commission last appeared for our budget testimony we did not have an executive director, a position that is mandated by 32 VI code section 408C. After an extensive search where we received 11 applications as far-flung as the United Kingdom, the Commission selected Ms. Linda Smith to serve as Executive Director. The Commission currently has two vacancies from its 15 budgeted positions a legal counsel and a casino inspector two. Vacancy notices have been published for these positions. In anticipation of the completion and operation of the proposed casino at the Randall Doc James racetrack the commission is requesting two additional positions for casino inspectors one with base salaries of forty two thousand dollars and fringe costs of twenty eight thousand three \$330 each for a total of \$140,660. On January 31st 2024 the Commission issued

- 2:31:10 its fourth annual report to the governor and the legislature of the Virgin Islands. The report was issued in accordance with the provisions of 32 VI code section 424 and can also be found on the Commission's website. In addition On the same date, in accordance with the mandates of 32 VI code section 514E, the Commission submitted a second annual report for the Casino Revolving Fund to the Legislature and the Commissioner of Finance. As was stated in the Commission's budget testimony last year, with the submission of quarterly reports and annual reports to the Commissioner of Finance and the Legislature, it removes a yellow book audit finding that was cited as a significant deficiency in internal controls as it related to the Department of Finance. The Commissioners and staff are very pleased with this continuing accomplishment. One other accomplishment that I am personally proud of and I believe my colleagues are as well is the completion of the Commission's first ever financial audit.
- 2:32:19 The Commission received an unmodified opinion of its financial statements for the fiscal year ended September 30th 2021 in the in the audit report prepared by Burt Smith and a company I wish to thank all the members of the staff for their contribution to this historical achievement the audit for the fiscal year ended September 30th 2022 has just begun and should be completed before the end of this calendar year as was mentioned previously the casino revolving fund is a special checking account wherein all license, registration and permit fees, fines, penalties and other fees are deposited. The funds are split 80% to the Casino Control Commission and 20% to the Division of Gaming Enforcement for the operating expenses of both entities. The signatories to this account are the members of the Commission and the Attorney General of the Virgin Islands. The Commission provides monthly financial reports to the Attorney General and the Director of Gaming Enforcement detailing the revenues and expenditures related to the revolving fund. All Commission employees, including the Commissioners, received ethics training last fiscal year. The training was conducted on September 6, 2023. It is imperative that the Commission's Code of Ethics is adhered to by all Commission members and employees without exception. Further the Commission conducted responsible gaming training again for all Commission members and staff. This training was well received by the staff and prizes were awarded to the first three employees completing the online training. The Commission is committed to providing its employees with opportunities for training and development. To that end, the Commission paid all expenses that resulted in several employees successfully completing courses offered through UVicel in QuickBooks Pro Business Management, Fundamentals of Supervision and Management, and Introduction to Coding. In addition, the Commission's casino inspectors received trading in table games and anti-money laundering earlier this fiscal year. The Commission continues to review and monitor the licensure process for employees of the
- 2:34:49 casinos and casino hotels, gaming related and non-gaming related entities doing business with the casinos. The Division of Gaming Enforcement conducts the background investigations on the applications for all persons and entities seeking licensure. As we have emphatically stated for many years, the DGE lacks the resources to adequately and timely submit the investigative reports relative to these applications to the Commission. The Commission's records indicate that currently there are more than 240 applications at DGE awaiting investigative reports. These include a variety of types of applications and registrations such as gaming and non-gaming related entities, casino hotel employees, casino key employees, and casino service employees.
- 2:35:45 Moreover, our cursory review finds that it can take the DGE almost two years to return an investigative report to the Commission. affects the Commission's ability to ensure that persons or entities with unacceptable backgrounds and records of behavior are prohibited entry into the Virgin Islands casino industry. Although DGE is a division of the Department of Justice and not a part of the Commission's budget, the Commission would like to strongly advocate for sufficient staffing for the DGE and hopes that this body would look favorably on requests from the Justice Department to provide these resources to the DGE. During fiscal year 2024, one casino patron was 86D, which in the industry refers to persons ejected or banned for improper conduct by a casino. The Commission processed three patron complaints and six petitions for voluntary self-exclusion. The Commission has secured the services of an independent hearing officer who will preside over matters such as these when warranted and make recommendations to the Commission for final disposition. Additionally the Commission received five complaints filed by DGE for licensure revocation. The Commission has no outstanding past due invoices and our only outstanding payments are for current goods and services procured over the immediately preceding month. The Commission is located at number 3005 Estate Grove Christianstedt St. Croix. The building is leased from the Government Employees Retirement System GRS and consists of approximately four thousand six hundred sixty-seven square feet of gross leasable area. The The Commission remains current with our rental obligations to the GRS. The Commission and the GRS executed a renewal of our lease agreement effective for the period
- 2:37:57 October 5th, 2023 through October 4th, 2028, a term of five years. The lease agreement provides for increases from \$84,006 to \$94,087 in the first year, \$99,732 in the second year and \$102,674 for the third through the fifth years of the lease. The Commission issued licenses and statements of compliance that included both new and renewal for all licensed

categories to include casinos, casino employees, casino key employees, gaming related entities and non-gaming related entities. The table below shows a comparison of licenses issued by the Commission for fiscal year 2023 and thus far for the current fiscal year. Please note that a total of 577 licenses in all categories were issued in fiscal year 2023. Through May of the current fiscal year a total of 505 licenses were issued which will definitely surpass fiscal year 2023 numbers on an annualized basis. Additionally through May of this fiscal year the Commission issued 69 exemptions from licensure and 65 waivers from registration slash licensure. As expressed last year at our budget hearing the Commission reported that a review of the provisions of the internet gaming and gambling laws of the Virgin Islands, 32 VI Code, Chapter 21, Article 14 was underway. This law has been on the books for more than 20 years and has never been fully implemented despite previous attempts to do so. The review was completed and the recommended amendments

2:39:53 were submitted to the Commission and evaluated by the Commission's then legal counsel and approved. The Commission has issued an RFQ to conduct a thorough market impact analysis to determine the amount of projected revenues, among other things, to be realized from the implementation of Internet gambling in the Virgin Islands. One response was received and is currently under evaluation. Goals for 2025, continuous review of the existing laws, regulations, and policies that govern the affairs of the Commission and propose amendments or make changes where necessary. Seek meeting with the Governor and the Legislature to gain support of the amendments needed to the internet gaming and gambling statutes and rules and regulations. development of internal policies and procedures for efficient and effective operations and management of the Commission including the full implementation of a formal accounting policy. Execute an MOU with the Department of Health to provide training and certification of gambling addiction counselors which will enable the Commission to provide resources locally to patrons with gambling addiction through the Alliance on Responsible gaming fund. Develop and implement a territory-wide problem gambling and responsible gaming awareness campaign utilizing means and methods such as specialized web pages, social media, electronic billboards, and mobile advertising. Provide technical training and other educational opportunities for the Commission staff while implementing activities designed to maintain and improve the positive workplace environment of the Commission. Continue to foster and enhance the working relationship between the Commission and DGE to ensure that regulatory compliance is maintained throughout the local gaming industry. Continue to advocate for enhanced funding for staffing of the DGE to ensure that it can timely perform its investigatory and prosecutorial roles with the Commission. Continue to encourage casino entities and other stakeholders

2:42:15 to undertake the obligations of a gambling and gaming industry in promoting responsible gambling while working to prevent problem gambling. Before closing I wish to take this opportunity to express my thanks and gratitude to my colleagues on the Commission and the entire staff including our inspectors who are usually off site at the casinos for their hard work and support of our efforts to restore integrity and trust to the Commission. These efforts must continue as we strive to regain the public's trust and instill confidence that this Commission will operate above reproach and in a transparent manner at all times. Madam Chair, this concludes the testimony of the Virgin Islands Casino Control Commission relative to its fiscal year 2025 budget. The representatives of the Commission stand ready to respond to all the questions you and the members of this body may have to the best of our ability. Thank you.

2:43:21 Thank you for your testimony. Colleagues, we're going to go to a four-minute round. Before Before we begin, let me just ask you, Mr. Pickering, you are aware that the recommendation submitted by the, in the 2025 budget submission to the legislature is \$1,423,800, are you aware? Yes, Senator.

2:43:56 Okay, so that is a difference of 180,500 above what you submitted or below what you submitted. So let me ask you, what does that additional 181,500 represent? As I mentioned in my testimony, \$140,000 plus is for the two new casino, one inspectors, and it includes base salaries of \$42,000 each and some \$28,000 plus in fringe, that amongst the 140,000. The other 40,000 is for proposed salary adjustments for some staff members.

2:44:52 So it's for proposed salary adjustments and two new positions. That is correct. Okay. Got it. Okay. I know that you read it in your testimony, but I wanted to make sure that it's clearly placed on the record. All right. Colleagues, we're going to go to a four-minute round like I stated, and we're going to start with Senator Marvin Blyton. You may proceed, Senator Blyton. Thank you, Madam Chair. Good afternoon, Commissioner Pickering. Thank you so much for your testimony. Let me ask you on page 7 of your testimony, 7 of 9, you have a chart and you have accounts, youth programs account, there have been no disbursement to date. What is the account used for and why there have not been any disbursement to date?

2:45:46 Can you repeat the question, please, Senator? The disbursements for youth programs account, there have been no disbursement to date. Is there a reason for that and what is the program used for? And you are referring to page seven of my testimony. Is that correct? I'm sorry, page seven of our post report. I apologize. Oh, okay. If you were to turn to page seven of my testimony, you would note that the current balance is now zero we we began the year with \$385,441 the account earned \$416 with a total of \$285,957 and that was disbursed and this was this was this these funds were

disbursed to the Department of Labor to support the jag vi program uh and uh that was uh earlier this year so currently there are no more funds in that account very well good to know um let me ask you i mean respect your testimony you mentioned training many times which is very important uh i know you have ethic training you have technical training etc your training budget for 25 have there been an increase in in a budget for 25 for training um it's the second because you have leave that i believe that there was but uh i don't see any i see training expenses but you really don't have a comparison in terms of how much you have budgeted for your 25 budget? If not, you can always send a copy of what that amount is, I'll appreciate it, OK?

- 2:47:53 We have 25,000 budgeted for fiscal year 2025. For training? How much do you have? 25,000. That's for the training. That doesn't include travel. Travel is a separate line item, training is for is for the training fees training fees so it's all inclusive you stated so it's not broken down there's a line item well let's let's let's get one minute let's get to the point where we're on the same page. You are referring to the post audit. There's a line item. It was \$10,000 last year, last fiscal year, and it's now \$25,000 that we have budgeted for training.
- 2:48:49 Okay, very well. Before my time is up, let's go to licenses and you note in your testimony 30 seconds. You're going to have an increase in a number of licenses for fiscal year 24. What's the, um, what's behind that? What's the reason for that? Well, you know, one of the, um, one of the, uh, our current licensees, you know, there's a, there's a lot of turnover, uh, and it's, and it's projected, uh, that, that, that this year that there'll be some seasonal, some higher seasonal turnover than in the past, but there's a problem keeping employees at one of their licensees. Okay, and 86D within the industry, what would cause someone to be buying? Give an example form to me, please, for improper conduct It could be obnoxious behavior, getting in fights at the casinos with other patrons, cheating is another incident that can cause one to be banned.
- 2:50:09 Okay, very well, and that's why it's critical that you have a full of investigators on staff. Your vacancy, how many vacancies do you have? Does any of those vacancies include investigators? The investigation is left to the Division of Game and Enforcement, which we are advocating for more staffing for that entity, but we have casino inspectors and we reported our vacancies. We have three vacancies for casino inspectors. And they are funded in the budget? And are they new? Yes. And are there new positions?
- 2:50:57 The two casino inspectors will be new in anticipation of the start-up of the casino Thank you so much for your responses, Madam Chair. Thank you so much for the time. All right. Thank you, Senator Bleden. Let me ask you. So on our pro salary report, page four, the expenses are up until February 29, 2024.
- 2:51:33 Could you submit an updated expense report to the post-salid division? No, Senator, but we can. Yeah, we're going to need to get an updated expense report, so we're going to ask for that report to be up to date to June 30th of 2024 at minimum. We currently have it through May. June is not completed as yet. And when would you, do you anticipate May will be completed? I mean, June? No, May is already.
- 2:52:05 June? June? I'm sorry. No, we can send you that today. No. When do you anticipate June will be completed? Within the next week or so. Okay, good. We can wait the week. Okay? Okay. So, you can send back to the committee the updated reporting, because usually by the time we have these meetings, the information is more up-to-date, so I don't know if we requested it, but the information is a bit outdated for us at this time.
- 2:52:38 Senator Fonseca, Senator Fonseca is not there. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and good afternoon to team BICC. Still morning. Still morning. Still morning, huh?
- 2:53:06 Like we've been here all day. So I want to thank you for your testimony and thank you for the team spirit. I think that every time I come into your company, you are always there with your team, all of the commission members. so that's commendable that you're not a one-man show. Not to be. Correct. I also want to recognize and thank you for the completion of the first-ever financial audit and that's expected from you. Again, finances is your background and I'm sure that that was one of the conditions of you taking over the casino commission. Do you currently have any casino application in process is there any uh no sir uh we do not nothing on the horizon no i there's been some talk but there's nothing officially be uh before no online gaming or nothing in consideration or anything like that the uh as i mentioned we are working on updating those those uh internet uh gaming which would include online um because they uh the laws are so outdated you know the whole environment has changed you know since 2001 when this law was put on the books.
- 2:54:16 In your testimony you made reference to the well actually on the question you made reference to the rapid turnover of employees by one of your licensees. Are you doing a deep dive to make a determination whether or not there is any to glean from that whether or not there's any circumstances that should be considered in terms of compliance or anything that may require for the VICC to get involved in that rapid turnover? As a matter of fact, that same licensee has written to us to determine if there was any way that we could relax some of the rules and regulations regarding the the hiring process for for the casinos. The it is extensive you know we you know we admit depending on the level of the

employment a casino key employee they have to go through an extensive background check some people might be a little hesitant to go through that process but and then again too it's seasonal in particularly this entity this casino licensee so yes there is some rapid turnover. So are you seeing any possibility where there may be some adjustment modification made again maintaining the integrity of the requirements to allow for these employees to continue to exist and you don't continue to see those rapid turnovers?

2:56:02 Yeah, it is. We have consideration to address in the very near future. Very well. Thank you. Is there any particular litigation or judgment against the BICC at this time? Yeah, we have two matters, I believe, in the Superior Court right now. and they're proceeding as normal as can be. No final judgments or anything that has been levied against. I know that you spoke about there is some requests for salary adjustments. I noticed that the inspectors seem to be kind of steady for quite some time. Is any of those adjustments for inspectors well as a matter of fact um senator we the commission adjusted the salaries of the inspectors was that last fiscal year last fiscal year they were adjusted yes they were just the last fiscal year well you know uh i i was more in the area you know like uh we have right now a a position for in-house legal counsel uh the maximum salary is a hundred thousand uh uh not getting a whole lot of bites at that level. So are we looking to see if we could have some flexibility there?

2:57:30 Very well. Madam Chair, I heard my time call. I have two more if you'll allow it. Of course, Senator. Thank you. You spoke about the JAG program with Department of Labor and I think the \$385,000 that was given, that was the final payment that's going to JAG, correct? That's correct. That is correct. So there is a requirement to allow for, well, they'll need some legislative adjustment in order for that to continue because that is impactful. I think I've heard from Department of Labor several times that in fact this impacts their JAG program. That would require some legislation? Yes, the legislation took it away so the legislation will have to restore it.

2:58:13 We consider that, restore it very well. We certainly consider that. And in regards to technology. What does this technology look like for you over at the VICCC? MR. It's greatly improved thanks to this body. We came before you a couple of years ago and requested funding for two positions at the time. One was the in-house legal counsel and the other one was IT support specialist. MR. I think what I was trying to get out to you is the thank you. I didn't hear any thank you to the legislation for giving money to improve your technology. You didn't let me finish. I did that last year and I'm doing it again today. Thank you so much. I hope that there's full consideration given to what I'm asking for this year as well. Thank you very much. A lot of times we have these agencies come before us and nobody wants to say thank you at the end of it because we comply, we give you the money and then everybody forget about the legislation. I always say thank you, Thank you, Senator.

2:59:14 You know that. Thank you very much, sir. Thank you, Madam Chair, for the time and opportunity. Thank you, Senator Francis Jr. So just remind me, because this is the second time I've heard about this reduction to the DOL, one of the youth programs. Can you please tell us specifically when that happened? Just to refresh me, perhaps my colleagues, they know, but I do not remember exactly when and what specific act, if you have that information, or, yeah, that created what we have in front of us right now.

2:59:56 It was Act 8577, I believe it was passed in April of 2022, and there were certain adjustments made to the allocation from the Casino Revenue Fund. That program used to get a 10% allocation and it was, that allocation was removed with Act 8577. Okay, so I'll look into that. All right. Thank you. Senator DeGrasse, you're recognised for your four minutes.

3:00:32 Thank you, Madam Chair. Good afternoon, colleagues. Good afternoon, testifiers, All viewing, listening, and present. I want to address personal services. Chairman Pickering, good day. How are you doing, sir? I'm very wonderful, sir. And you? Excellent. Can't complain. On the post-audit third report, page 3 of 9, personal unclassified salaries, general fund total projection 25 1,116,900. You see it?

3:01:15 Yes sir. And then on page 8 when you list your entire 15 persons the salaries come to a total of 1,11,130. I know you said legal council was a hundred thousand but uh the post audit report here has it at 90. yes uh when we submitted the uh required uh budget information these are the current salaries right so for 25. we are projecting the 1.1 million that you spoke of earlier These are the current salaries. Right okay so so then no one really received any wage increases or anything at all? That's that's not correct. Prior to? You're projecting for them to get wage increases in 25? Yes but the commission granted our salary increases in the last fiscal year as well right and and your your your axe your axe is two million four hundred thousand eight hundred that is incorrect sir okay so your act is one million four twenty three eight hundred our ask is one million six hundred four thousand three hundred dollars okay 604 300 okay because um i the 24 acts was one million four twenty three eight uh actually the 24 ask was one million four seventy seven three hundred dollars the governor recommended one one million four twenty three eight okay i guess i guess because we don't have those numbers is is what was throwing me off um so i see the increase from 1 million 477 to 1 million 6. that's the increase and then um so the difference in your acts from the governor's recommendation is how much uh about 180 000.

okay and does that's from the casino

- 3:03:35 revenue fund no that's from the general fund the general fund okay yes what let me see you have a highlight on page six the casino revenue fund is used to defer any costs incurred for supplies utilities and other charges how much money from the casino revenue fund are you using for that one minute in the 25 budget i'm not sure that i understand your question okay and the post auditor's report page six of nine yes under the casino revenue fund the the graph exhibit three there's a highlighted uh the casino review revenue fund is used to defer any costs incurred for supplies utilities and other charges how much money are we talking about for that from that phone uh looking at uh in the neighborhood of 800 000 hours if you take the difference between the 2.4 for a total budget 30 seconds you subtract the 1.64 salaries that's our operating uh expenses so it's roughly 800 000 hours okay and then one more thing give me your axe one million six six oh four three hundred okay good uh and all you have now for the because in the 24 budget your legal counsel your axe was uh the salary was 100 000. now in the 25 it shows 90. so that particular which is it come from the 24 you're asking for 100 but now the post-sadded report is showing 90.
- 3:05:26 As I just stated earlier, that 90,000 was the current salaries. We are projecting for 25, 100,000 for that particular position. Oh, okay. Because I saw it in the 24 post-sadded report too. That's what I was asking if it was a typo. Okay, and then... so so then your current allotment expenditure if you have it for personal and fringe is what do you have those numbers currently you're 24 fourth quarter what's the latest you have mayor said what are those numbers for personal and fringe one more time please uh you mean the uh current expenditure for the 24 the actuals correct uh the actual for i don't have a i don't have a uh total um and if somebody could total that for me we have um okay then i think that was one of the requests to the chair anyhow um in getting the actuals for updated so yeah that would be fine okay it would you'd be able to give it to the chair uh thank you for the time thank you madam chair yes thank you um senator degra so i'm over hair smiling because I know what Act 8577 is now. Yeah, right? So, so Act 8577 caused as per Remember, Section 2, B5, caused us to increase your amount to 25%, correct?
- 3:07:33 That is correct. And previously you received 12%? Ten. Right? Ten. Okay. Ten. Ten. Okay. So you are now getting an additional percentage, right? So, again, additional 15%. And it reduced, how much was the Department of Labor program getting previously? Ten. Ten. So I guess we allocate it all over the place. And in this legislation, it wiped out the Department of Labor.
- 3:08:15 Correct? That is correct. Yes. Correct. So now we are hearing from Labor that they are having challenges with our program. We like the 25%. Go ahead. Say that again. Sorry. We like the 25%. Yes. I'm going somewhere with this. I'm going somewhere with this. So you like the 25%. So if we give you, you represented that the 25% meant an additional, I think it's \$283,000. \$283,021 thus far. That's what I read in your testimony.
- 3:08:59 Yes. Right? So that's 283 as opposed to, I forgot what number you said in the previous years. So then, if we give you an additional percentage, my question for you is the number that we're giving you on the general fund proper, shouldn't that number decrease as well? I'm sorry, I didn't understand your question.
- 3:09:32 Okay, let me say it again. So, me pull up this, give me a second. So in fiscal year 2024, your total budget was 1.4, right? That's what the number is? 1.4. Yes. In 25, you're asking for the same 1.4. However, I mean, I don't have the previous years in front of me.
- 3:10:09 previous years in front of me, but I have to get the previous years, but I'm saying since there's an increase of an additional 15%, then it means that we really need to take a deeper dive at your budget, because now you have an additional 15% that we don't necessarily have to give you all of what you're asking for in your FY25 budget, because we increased the percentage, all it may be small, it really matters to us trying to balance our budget, so that we've increased your percentage that you're getting. Where's that funding coming from? So we could all be clear. Where is the increase?
- 3:10:52 I'm not sure which. The percentage that we're talking about, where the money coming from? The casino revenue fund. Great. So good. You're coming from the casino revenue fund. So I'm saying we've increased the amount that you now have direct access to, which is no longer 10%, but now 25%, which is a 15% increase. So I'm saying, we're trying to do the dance. So the dance is the ask that you have in your 24 and 25 budgets, so we're now in 25, that amount should be lower because now you've seen an increase in your percentages that you're receiving from the casino revenue fund.
- 3:11:41 The law as it is, I don't know, what is that? This is confusing. As the law is now written, the general fund supports the salaries and fringe costs of the commission, which include the commissioners and staff. The casino revenue fund is used for our operating expenses. Okay.
- 3:12:10 So have you seen an increase? Have you seen an increase in your operating expenses? So what we're going to need to get from you is clearly what your operating expenses are so we can determine whether or not we need to make any adjustments to this. Because what we've done, and I guess it's in the haste in moving this forward, or all of the activity

that was going on around this, we have reduced our allotment, or the allotment to our children. And I don't know how that sits with my colleagues, but it don't sit very well with me. So we have to figure out how to do the dance on this one, because this is the second time I heard it when the Department of Labor came before us for their budget hearing, they talked about it, and I actually received a call from DOL saying that they were unable to hire as many students this year because of the monies, some of the funds going away.

3:13:15 And it's something I was supposed to look into, but I didn't at the time. And now it's coming, it has come back full circle. So just help me to understand. We just need to get a clear breakdown of your expenses so we could make a determination as to, you know, how best we could work with this. I'm not suggesting in any way that we reduce your numbers because we know that costs are going up. So I'm suggesting that Mr. Pickering. I'm just trying to figure out how we can figure this out so everybody benefits at the end of the day. Senator Francis, you recognize your point of information.

3:13:51 Senator Francis Jr. Thank you, Madam Chair. What I will suggest and we could do, definitely take a closer look at this, is that we shave from each of all those other categories so that we can make sure that the 10% is then restored to the Department of Labor. I think there's some opportunity there. There's 25, 25, 15, 10, 10, another 10, 3% to the University of Arizona, and 1% of course to the Bureau of Internal Revenue. I think if there could be some shaven, I believe that we could come up with that very same 10% that allow for everyone to benefit from this in the long run.

3:14:29 Excellent suggestion, so what we'll do is go back and look at what the percentage were before and then align them and then we could make a final decision. I have to agree with you on that, Mr. President. So Mr. Pickering. Yes, Senator. We're going to do what we have to do to make sure that you're properly funded, but we also have to make sure that we look out for the programs that we have for our youth in the territory, okay? I think all of us would agree to that. I appreciate it. If I may make a point, because I may have not understood you correctly, but the Commission is requesting 1.604300. The Governor has recommended 1.423800, which is the same as for the past three fiscal years.

3:15:21 Mm-hmm. Understood. Yeah, that's what I pointed out in the beginning. Okay. And you actually gave us, you actually broke down for us why you needed that additional 180. You spoke specifically to two investigators and I think there was \$40,000 for, I don't know, I have a note here, but I ain't reading my own handwriting. What was that, 44? It's like a salary adjustment, salary adjustment.

3:15:50 Okay, it says proposed salary adjustments. Okay. And just let me ask you, So, your salary, how often do you adjust your salaries? Well, there's no regular schedule. We're hoping that ideally it should be based on the annual cost of living, but in real life it doesn't work that way. But I don't know, I can't think off the top of my head when was, before the last increases, when was the prior increase? Okay, so when was the last?

3:16:31 When was the last salary increases? When was the last salary increases? The last fiscal year, right? Early last fiscal year. I believe it was January of 23? Yes. Yes. So, so, so last, so fiscal year 2023 was your last salary increases. Okay. That is correct. All right. Okay. So we'll look at it. We'll have a conversation with you so we could figure out how to make that a reality for your employees as well. Okay. Thank you so much. Absolutely.

3:17:06 Um, colleagues, I don't have any other questions since that James is here. Oh, Senator James, be recognized for your four minutes. Greetings to the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands, thank you for being here. If any question was asked before, my apologies, I stepped out. Page four of the post audit report speaks to subscriptions. I just want you to elaborate some more what those subscriptions are about.

3:17:41 We have, primarily it is for QuickBooks accounting system, I think that's the bulk of it. And we have other, that's the bulk of it. And I see a next one for membership, elaborate. The Commission has membership in several organizations, industry organizations, American Gaming Association, we have National North American Gaming Regulators Association, we have IGML, several organizations we have membership in. Understood. And then I see here for the job training programs you are basically subsidizing 50% of the budgetary needs of the jobs for Virgin Islands graduates program in no way shape or form I'm asking to micromanage but do you receive a report or an assessment to find out effective effectiveness of this program do you have data? Well not formally but we were pleased a couple of years ago to learn that the local program was nationally recognized I think it was last year or the year before. So getting that, gaining that national recognition means that something's happening positively. And who's a go-to person for jobs for Virgin Islands graduates program? That's a program under the Department of Labor so I would say the Commissioner of Labor. Commissioner of Labor, okay. I would definitely follow up with him because we have a lot of things on the books, and I'm not blaming you. Those individuals, senators before me saw the wisdom to put those things in place, and we just want to make sure that they're actually

3:19:34 performing. As we know, gambling has a good and a bad side, and we want to make sure that we're impacting the community in a positive way. And then as far as IT, I know all across government we're seeing a whole digitizing

transformation. How are you digitizing and transforming the Virgin Islands Casino Control Commission, and does your budget reflect that as far as being able to update and enhance your IT? Oh yeah, yes, not this fiscal year's budget, but in the prior years, you know our investment in IT infrastructure you know which we have done and it's continuing we upgraded our you know our entire IT infrastructure we upgraded our hearing room with modern technology, so yes. And then we're in the process of trying to digitize all of our records, all of our records. We do have a digital process, but it wasn't for all our records, but now we're moving in that direction. Everything should be digitized. Understood. And as far as capital, always, I saw where you have vehicle, computers, servers, office furniture, other equipment, but you have anything pertaining to infrastructure or you're cool with your infrastructure? I guess the person who you're renting from, they take care of that?

3:21:12 Any capital outlays, any major projects or enhancement needed? We don't rent IT infrastructure. No, that's all taken care of with the commission's internal funds. But no need for capital outlays? As far as infrastructure? Not at the moment. And if there's one thing that you would like to see, because you know sometimes in government we have to go based off of realistic collections and revenues, but if there's anything you'd like to see in hands of funding that you haven't been able to fund or won't be able to meet that mark for the FY2025 budget, what would that be? Well, as I mentioned earlier, we are currently looking at getting the internet gaming and gambling online gaming initiated. How much is that going to cost?

3:22:15 We don't know. We just issued a RFQ to do a marketing impact study, among other things, to project revenues, and what resources will be needed to implement that. So we don't have a firm number at the moment, but we hope to get that within the next few months. MR. My time was called. Thank you for all that you do. And I hope the people of the Virgin Islands continue to gamble responsibly. God bless the Virgin Islands. MR. Thank you. Thank you.

3:22:43 Thank you, Senator James, for your line of questioning. Colleagues, we are about to wrap up. I don't know if any of you have a burning question for Mr. Pickering or anyone on the team. Any more questions, colleagues? Santa Francis Junior, you recognize. Thank you, Madam Chair. I wanted to ask you, Mr. Pickering, I guess your team, is there any additional reach out to VIGL since the approval of the licensure? Is there any timeline that have been established for them to commence the build out of the track? Where are we with that? Yes under the current statute they are the applicant the licensee that applicant because they have a license right now they have six months from the from obtaining all licenses and permits to begin construction once that six-month period has been reached there and they have not begun the construction then we call them in. As a matter of fact just yesterday we had a discussion and we put it on our calendars that at a certain point, certain date in time, if we don't see any movement you know we have to call them in and ask them you know what's going on. So that means you wouldn't wait for the six months before the trigger. I think that

3:24:33 You're saying perhaps 120 days sometime before the six months you intend to at least engage and ask a question? Yes. Yes. Thank you. Thank you very much Madam Chair for the time. All right. Thank you. Anyone else? All right. I do know that you said that you haven't received any revenues from that particular entity since, from the Racino side, since the closure of the track. So when do we anticipate seeing some sort of revenues coming back? Do you have any, is there any anticipated timelines?

3:25:22 Well, once the casino is up and running, they had indicated to us during our many discussions that they were looking at a timeline of 14 to 16 months to construct it and be operational. But hopefully that happens. And you know, but we find out when we meet with them again. Okay, so 14 to 16 months will take us somewhere closer to the middle, closer to the 2025, 2020, yeah, and the 2025, give it a take? Early 26. Pardon? Early 26.

3:26:09 Early 26. Okay. Early 26. All right. Thank you. All right. I'll allow you. Do we have any through the chair requests? So we have one through the chair request. And we're asking for you to provide an updated operating expense report to June 30th of 2024. And we're also going to ask you to provide us with an updated expense, projected expense report for FY 2025. in all categories, your personnel, your associated fringe. Did you give us already? Let me make sure I ain't over asking you. Yes, I did.

3:26:55 You did, right? Yes, I did. Okay, you did, yes. My apologies. So just that one through the chair request, okay? Thank you. So you can give us a 30-second close. Okay. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, to you and all the honorable members of this body for the opportunity to present to the Committee on Budget Appropriations and Finance the Virgin Islands Casino Control Commission's fiscal year 2025 budget. I wish to thank my colleagues Commissioner Herman Purcell and Commissioner Rene for their assistance the guidance and the input during this budget preparation process. Last but certainly not least to our dedicated executive staff and employees of the Commission I express my heartfelt thank you for your contributions to this effort and your continued professionalism and dedication it is greatly appreciated and on another note Madam Chair I it is public knowledge that you won't be in the body for the next for the 36th Legislature and I want to thank you for the respect and courtesies that you have extended to us in all our appearances here

when you were the vice chair and then subsequently the chair even though sometimes you you you look like you're scowling at us and you won't show us that pretty smile but I want to wish you I want to wish you well in whatever your future pursuits are. Thank you. Thank you so much for those kind words and I'm leaving the legislature but I'm definitely not leaving the people of the Virgin Islands. Be assured of that. Okay but that you you made me think of one One other question as you were talking, because you know who I is. One thing you didn't share

3 : 29 : 02 with us whether or not there's any appetite out there for casino licenses coming to the Island District of St. Croix. I have heard some rumblings, but nothing is officially before the commission. Okay. All right. And does the commission do any marketing or anything like that for, to bring casinos to St. Croix? Are you required to do that? I'm not certain if you are. No, we're not required to. That was, going back to 8577, that was the function of the Department of Tourism, and I don't know what they have done quite frankly over the years, but they were also allocated a percentage of the casino revenue funds to do just that.

3 : 30 : 06 Yeah, see again, we have to look into all of this, so I thank you for your candor and for your upfront sharing of the information, because if that's not working and it's not a lot of lining, then we need to have a deeper dive conversation about how do we really stay on top of this because this is a major revenue generator for the territory. Our responsibility is to continue to grow our economy, so that's something that I believe is very important to us to focus on as we speak. Thank you again for all that you do. Thank you to the commissioners, the other commissioners that's here, and thank you for being here with us today. If we have any other follow-up questions, be certain that you will hear from us with regards to anything else that we need to ask that wasn't answered or we're not clear on today. Colleagues, we are about to wrap up today's meeting. We've been having a marathon meeting, so today is a short day so we could do some constituent business. I want to thank the central staff, my staff, all of my colleagues and their staff, all that they do to ensure that we are able to get these meetings done, and, of course, the post audit division, which is an integral part to this work. So without further ado, I will close this meeting. The Committee on Budget Appropriations and Finance meeting of July 17, 2024, is hereby adjourned.

3 : 31 : 49 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Oh, my God.

3 : 34 : 49 Thank you. . You [3 such phrases repeated 9 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

People named in this transcript

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

10x	Senator Marvin Blyden heard in this transcript as: Blayden, Bleden, Blyden, Blyton, Marvin A. Blyden, Marvin Blyton
7x	Senator Ray Fonseca heard in this transcript as: Fonseca
6x	Senator Dwayne DeGraff heard in this transcript as: DeGraff, Dwayne M. DeGraff
6x	Senator Novelle Francis heard in this transcript as: Francis, Francis Jr, Novell E. Francis Jr.
4x	Senator Marise C. James the surname alone also matches: Javan James; Giovanni James Sr heard in this transcript as: James, James Sr
3x	Senator Fred Gregory the surname alone also matches: Donna A. Frett-Gregory; Donna Frett-Gregory
3x	Senator Javan James heard in this transcript as: Javon E. James Sr, Javon James Sr
3x	Commissioner Luther F. Rene heard in this transcript as: Rene
3x	Senator Samuel Carrion heard in this transcript as: Carrion

- 2x **Commissioner Carolyn P. Herman Purcell**
- 2x **Senator Donna A. Frett-Gregory**
heard in this transcript as: Donna A. Fred Gregory, Donna Fred Gregory
- 2x **Senator Francis Junior**
- 2x **Chairwoman Fred Gregory**
the surname alone also matches: Donna A. Frett-Gregory; Donna Frett-Gregory
- 2x **Commissioner Herman Purcell**
- 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 8577 Act 8577 · April 7, 2022 · An Act amending the Virgin Islands Code, title 32, chapters 11 and 21, relating to video lottery at the horse racetrack in St. Thomas; amending title 29, chapter 3, relating to the zoning for video lottery at the horse racetrack in St. Thomas; and providing for the ratification of the Second Amended Agreement to the Video Lottery Services Agreement and the Development Agreement Regarding the Clinton E. Phipps Racetrack by and between the Government of the Virgin Islands and Southland Gaming of the Virgin Islands, Inc., and for other related purposes --0