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- 0:00:00 I'll see you next time. Thank you. Thank you. And we're out of recess I want to thank our public servants For your patience While we were able to navigate This outage Thank you so much To our media division For getting us back on record
- 0:01:52 Sincor, are you able to hear us? Sign? Yes, very well. Thank you. Before we went on the recess, and this is the Committee of Budget Appropriations and Finance, and we're back on record at this time. We heard the bill presentation from Senator Clifford Joseph on Bill 36.0274, an act requiring the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority to pay compensation to the homeowners within the LBJ Gardens Committee, who have been required to vacate their homes as a result of the actions taken related to the demolition of properties owned by the Virgin Islands Housing and Finance Authority and associated with the operations of the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority and the Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority. We heard the presentation bill being placed on the record by Senator Clifford Joseph, and now we'll go to the testifiers, and we'll begin with Director Julia Reimer. are you Julio, Julio Reimer, Office of Management and Budget for presentation or testimony on that bill at this time.
- 0:03:02 You recognize. Once again, Mr. Chair, good afternoon. Thank you, distinguished senators, committee members of the Budget Appropriation and Finance Committee and the viewing and listening audience. My name is Julio A. Reimer, Senior, Director of Office Management and Budget and a board member of the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority. Along with me is Commissioner of Finance, Commissioner Kevin McCurdy. We appear before you today in support of Bill 36-0274, which seeks to provide a pathway for the relocation of residents of the LBJ Gardens community. First and foremost, this is a matter of public safety.
- 0:03:41 The families at LBJ Gardens are living in an area where there is a recognized risk. and we both have a moral and governmental obligation to act decisively to ensure their safety and well-being. This bill takes an important step by proposing \$7 million in funding from stamp tax revenues to facilitate the buyout and relocation of these residents. While

the intent is commendable and the urgency is clear, I respectfully offer a strategic recommendation to strengthen the bill's fiscal approach. Rather than utilizing stamp tax revenues, I recommend that the Territory instead does the following Leverage already approved U.S. HUD, which is Housing Urban Development Mitigation Grant funding up to \$3 million to initiate the relocation and bioprocess And actively pursue a Brownfields grant to secure the balance of funding needed up to an additional \$4 million to fully support the relocation efforts This alternative approach achieves the same objective, fully funding a safe relocation of LBJ residents while preserving a critical local revenue source. Stamp tax funds are essential to the Territory's broader housing strategy. By maintaining these funds, we ensure that the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority can continue to leverage them alongside \$700 million of the CDBG-DR funding to finance and accelerate the development of much-needed housing across the Territory. Preserving stamp tax revenues allows us to expand affordable housing development, strengthen infrastructure investments tied to housing, maximize the long-term impact of existing federal recovery funds. In contrast, redirecting these funds to a single relocation effort, while necessary, limits our ability to address the broader housing crisis. To try to put it in context, Mr. Chair,

0:05:35 if you borrowed the \$700 million that I mentioned before, at 4% over a 30-year window, you can actually recoup \$190 million in interest. So that funds the housing program over and over in perpetuity for the Housing Finance Authority. Therefore, in the long run, they would not be coming to the general fund for \$2 million worth of funding going forward. In creating this actual opportunity and actually moving the stamp tax to put in the infrastructure would assist them through stamp tax instead of using the funds to do a one-time purchase that does not generate additional investment opportunities.

0:06:15 So therefore, in summary, Bill No. 360274 is critical because it addresses an immediate need and a serious public safety concern, provides a mechanism to relocate vulnerable residents with dignity, and with the recommended adjustment, it can also leverage federal funding sources more effectively, preserve local revenues for long-term housing development, aligning immediate action with long-term strategic planning. The resident of LBJ deserves switched action, but the Territory also deserves a solution that both is responsible and sustainable. I respectfully urge this body to support Bill 36024 with a consideration given to amending the funding structure to utilize HUD mitigation funds and Brownfield grant opportunities in place of stamp tax revenues.

0:07:03 Mr. Chair, thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I'm available to answer any questions you may have. Thank you very much, Director Reimer, for your testimony. Next, we'll go to Ms. Shelford, Interim Executive Director of the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority. You recognize your testimony. Good afternoon, Senator Norwell E. Francis, Jr., Chairman of the Committee on Budget Appropriations and Finance, distinguished members of the committee, and the listening and viewing audience. I am Valette Shelford, Interim Executive Director of the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority, and I am accompanied by Mr. Rupert Pell, Director of Planning and Construction, Jamila Perez and Frida Webster, Jamila Perez, Director of Housing Programs, and Frida Webster, Director of Home Ownership. As requested, we appear before you to provide testimony regarding Bill No. 36-0274, an act requiring the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority to provide compensation to LBJ homeowners due to actions related to demolition of properties owned by VIHFA, as well as activities associated with adjacent facilities operated by Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority and the Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority, respectively. As presented, the legislation appears to be premised on the assumption that the current demolition activities within the LBJ Gardens community will result in the displacement of homeowners and residents. It is important to clarify that the VIHFA has not required that LBJ property owners vacate their homes temporarily nor permanently. VIHFA's demolishment activities are strictly limited to the

0:09:00 abandoned, dilapidated, and structurally unsafe multifamily apartment buildings that are owned by VIHFA within the surrounding area. These VIHFA-owned long vacant structures have become sites of criminal activity and pose ongoing safety risks. Accordingly, the demolition initiative is being pursued as a targeted public safety and nuisance abatement measure to eliminate hazardous conditions, enhance community safety to include the neighboring LBJ homeowners, and support the restoration of the area, including conversion to green space where appropriately. Importantly, the demolition of these abandoned structures does not require any homeowners or residents currently living in LGA Garden to vacate their properties, no privately owned properties are being undertaken, no occupied homes are being demolished, and no residents are being displaced as part of this initiative. Therefore, the conditions that would typically trigger displacement protections, namely the involuntary removal of residents from occupied housing, are not present while the authority recognizes the legislature's commitment to safeguarding residents from involuntary displacement that is the demolition and clearance activities at Lbj garment do not involve such displacement rather they reflect a deliberate and necessary effort to remove unsafe structures and improve the overall safety and livability of the community for existing residents. The VIHFA supports effort to ensure that residents are not and will not be adversely impacted by the demolition activities. We maintain that any potential environmental conditions

- 0:11:00 posed by the demolition of the buildings, for example noise, vibration, dust would be temporary and could be reasonably managed with proper mitigation measures. As such VIHFA is committed to put in place measures included but not limited to notification to residents, reasonable work hours, safety protocols, air quality monitoring, dust control, self-fencing, and close oversight of the contractor to ensure compliance.
- 0:11:33 VIHFA is aware that the LBJ homeowner's properties are impacted by other environmental hazards posed by proximity to WAPA's Richmond Plant and Waste Management Authority's LBJ Pump Station, which are more permanent in nature. To the extent that the bill seeks to address this condition, VIHFA supports the effort to assist the LBJ homeowners.
- 0:12:01 However, we cannot support the bill as currently drafted. The bill proposes the use of \$7 million from stamp tax funds owed, due, or becoming due to the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority pursuant to 33 Virgin Islands Code Section 130 as the funding source for the compensation of the LBJ homeowners. The use of stamp tax funds to compensate the LBJ homeowners will have a severe negative impact on the authority's operations. Stamp tax funds are used to support infrastructure development and home construction in various housing developments throughout the territory. The availability of stamp tax funds to install the necessary roads and utilities is critical to attracting developers' interest in building homes in our affordable housing subdivisions. With construction costs continuing to increase, stamp tax funds are used to supplement housing development costs, thereby decreasing the overall price of home, making them more affordable to our clients. Currently, stamp tax proceeds are slated for the following projects. Construction infrastructure and homes in the estate Fortuna, North City Verge, Ross & Ross, Tannenberg on St. Thomas, and estate Bond-Esperance, Concordia, Adventure on Mount Pleasant, West on St. Croix. In addition, 12% of the Stamp Tax Fund is authorized for operating expenses of the authority. This amount represents a sizable portion of the operating revenues reflected in the authority's annual budget.
- 0:13:50 VIH is aware of several other possible funding sources which would not require the use of the stamp tax funding that is critically needed by the VIHFA. For example, there may be a funding opportunity to the CDBG mid-grant under the recently approved buy-out program. This program is intended to reduce long-term risk by acquiring properties in high-risk areas and removing them from future disaster exposure.
- 0:14:24 VIHFA initially submitted a request to HUD to fund a combined buyout and acquisition program. This approach was not approved. The program was subsequently revised to a buyout-only structure consistent with HUD mitigation objectives and approved for \$3 million through a substantial amendment to the CDBG Mid-Action Program. Within the action plan, VIHFA identify LBJ Gardens as a strong candidate for the buyout program with potential future expansions into other eligible areas across the territory. We have also included a safe housing initiative in the program to ensure that no participating household is left unhoused as a result of voluntary relocation.
- 0:15:16 This program is anticipated to launch in October, 2026. Additionally, because of the environmental impacts of WAPA and Waste Management Authority, the LBJ site seems like a strong candidate for recognition as a brownfield. A brownfield site is defined as previously developed land, often industrial or commercial, commercial whose reuse or redevelopment may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of hazardous substances, pollutants, or contaminants. A possible recommendation is that the Government of the Virgin Islands pursue a declaration of the area as a brownfield as this designation will likely open various federal grant funding opportunities such as EPA's brownfield grants. A Brownfield grant provides funding to assess, clean up, and safely redevelop abandoned or contaminated properties. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this bill and clarify that VIHFA demolition activities are strictly limited to its own abandoned, dilapidated and structurally unsafe buildings within the surrounding area and that our activities do not require the displacement of nearby residents. We are available to answer any questions you may have.
- 0:16:46 Thank you Interim and Direct Executive Director Shell Ford for your testimony there. And next we'll go to General Counsel St. Clair Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority. You recognize your testimony at this time. Thank you, and good morning, Honorable Chair-oh, good morning. Let's get our mic a little bit closer to you. All right, let's try again. Good afternoon, Honorable Chairman Navelle Francis, Jr., Honorable Members of the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance, Honorable Senators present, fellow testifiers, and members of the listening and viewing public I am Dion Sinclair general counsel for the Virgin Islands water and power authority which I may reference as WAPA or the authority appearing today on behalf of the Executive Director and CEO Carl Knight. I thank you for the opportunity to testify on bill number 36 dash 0274 which would require the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority to provide compensation to homeowners in the LBJ Gardens community who have been displaced as a result of demolition activities on nearby VI Housing Finance Authority properties. WAPA appreciates the legislature's attention to this important matter and recognizes the urgency of ensuring that effective residents are relocated in a safe, fair, and equitable manner. The authority supports Bill No. 36-0274, as proposed. Over time, the LBJ Gardens area has evolved from a primarily

residential neighborhood into a more industrialized zone.

- 0:19:07 Today, it is sounded by critical infrastructure and commercial operations, including the Waste Management Authority's LBJ pump station, a boatyard, and WAPA's Richmond power plant and related facilities such as the fuel dock. These are essential fixed assets that cannot be readily relocated. As a result, the most practical and responsible path forward is to facilitate the voluntary relocation of residents through structured and equitable process. The bill establishes a clear and transparent framework for providing compensation, relocation assistance, and replacement housing to eligible homeowners. It also appropriately assigns responsibility for funding these efforts to the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority, consistent with its mission to promote housing stability and resilience across the territory.
- 0:20:13 WAPA believes that legislation serves the best interests of the government, the residents of the LBJ garden community, and the people of the Virgin Islands as a whole. It advances public safety, supports families during a difficult transition, and enables long-term development planning that benefits the broader community. Accordingly, WAPA supports Bill No. 36-0274. This concludes our testimony, and we are available to answer any questions the committee may have. Thank you very much, General Counsel Sinclair, for your testimony on behalf of the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority.
- 0:20:54 Next, we'll recognize Ms. Wanda Centeno, resident of LBJ. You recognize your testimony at this time. Thank you. Good afternoon, Senator Novell E. Francis, Jr., Chair of the Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance. Vice Chair, Senator Marvin A. Blyden, members of the committee, the senators of the 30th 6th legislature and the listening and viewing public. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding the ongoing conditions facing the residents of LBD Gardens community in Christensen St. Croix. My name is Wanda Centeno and I appear before you today as a concerned resident and advocate for the families who continue to live under circumstances that no Virgin Islander should be expected to endure. For years, residents of LBJ Gardens have lived with uncertainty, health concerns, environmental hazards, and repeated promises that have yet to produce meaningful solutions. The people of this community have demonstrated patience, resilience, and cooperation. Unfortunately, government agencies have not demonstrated the same urgency. The issues confronting LBJ Gardens extend far beyond aging housing stock. Residents live in close proximity to critical industrial infrastructure. The WAPA power plant, a Wage Management Authority sewage pump station, and a yacht manufacturing company which is Gold Coast.
- 0:22:53 All generating legitimate concerns regarding public health, safety, and quality of life. These concerns include the continued operation and maintenance challenges associated with neighboring WAPA facilities, including its propane tanks, and fear many residents have regarding the proximity to major utility infrastructure, referred to as a blast zone. The proposed relocation projects of Waste Management Authority, persistent concerns surrounding Waste Management Authority facilities, mechanical problems, orders, emissions, leaks, and environmental impacts.
- 0:23:44 The proposed relocation and demolition activities associated with the LBJ infrastructure projects from VA Housing Finance Authority, air quality concerns related to industrial activities in the surrounding area, the deteriorated and abandoned government-owned structures located among occupied residents. long-standing questions regarding environmental testing, health monitoring, and public transparency, which was highlighted and made public during VI Housing Finance Authority illegal attempt of demolition.
- 0:24:32 Perhaps most troubling is that residents have repeatedly attended meetings, participate in community discussions, and listen to commitments from government officials only to see little measurable progress until today. In 2023, residents were informed that a buyout and relocation strategy was being considered. Specific discussions included financial assistance, amounts that would allow families to relocate from an area increasingly viewed as unsuitable for long-term resident occupation. Yet months later, yet another meeting was renegade.
- 0:25:23 Since then, residents have watched as studies are announced, plans are discussed, consultants are retained, and meetings are held, while conditions on the ground remain largely unchanged. As time passes, some residents have died. Others have been placed in long-term care centers, and the remaining are exactly where they are, still waiting for answers. The results have been a growing erosion of public trust. The people of Abidja Gardens know any Virgin Island resident shall have to choose between protecting their health and maintaining a roof over their heads. Excuse me. Today, I respectfully ask this committee to exercise its oversight authority and require accountability from the agencies involved. Only a consorted effort from the legislation and the government of the Virgin Islands can make right the wrong there we are living. Number one, urgency and fair compensations for residents. Mr.
- 0:26:58 Chairman, members of this community. Residents of LBJ Gardens understand that solving a problem of this magnitude, legislative action, funding, planning, and coordination among multiple agencies. However, what residents can no longer accept is an open-ended process with no clear timeline for completion. For many families, every passing day brings

additional anxiety, uncertainty, and emotional distress. We worry about our health and of the elderly residents, the parents that we now take care of, and they in turn worried about whether they will live long enough to see a resolution. Homeowners continue to question the future value of the largest investment many have ever made. The mental and emotional toll associated with certain years of uncertainty cannot be understated. Therefore, residents respectfully request that the legislation solution considers all necessary action including funding allocations property acquisition relocation assistance environmental

0:28:50 mitigation and residence compensation to be completed within six months or less the people of LBJ gardens have already waited years for relief they should not be asked to wait years more. This request is particularly important given that the 30 states legislature and the government of the Virgin Islands current administration is approaching the end of its term. Residents want assurance that any solution adopted will not become another unfinished promise passed from one administration or legislation to the next. They deserve a clear implementation timeline with measurable milestones and public accountability. Number two, establish a dedicated funded strategy. It is clear that government officials acknowledge that conditions warrant relocation or property acquisition, then funding must be identified and prioritize. Funding sources must be made available for a buyout or relocation. Third, replacement value rather than appraised value. Additionally, residents strongly believe that any compensation program should be based on replacement value rather than traditional appraisal value.

0:30:36 Many of the properties in around LBJ gardens have been negatively affected by decades of government decisions, infrastructure setting, industrial activity, environmental concerns, and public perceptions, issues that have contributed to declining property values. As a result, conventional appraisals may fail to reflect what it would actually cost a resident to purchase a comparable home elsewhere in the U.S. Virgin Islands. It would be fundamentally unfair for residents to bear the financial consequences of conditions they did not create and over which they had no control. If government action, government facilities, or government approved activities contributed to this deterioration, stigma, or devaluation of this neighborhood, then residents should not be penalized through compensation formulas that rely solely on depressed market values. A replacement value approach would ensure that families have a realistic opportunity comparable housing and maintain the quality of life they would have enjoyed had these circumstances never occurred. The goal should not merely be to compensate residents for what their property is worth today on the distress conditions. The goal should be to make residents whole. Board, demolition. The abundant public structures located within and around the residential areas should not remain standing indefinitely. These structures create hazards, safety hazards,

0:32:44 attract illegal activities, depress property values, and contribute to the perception that the government has abandoned the community. However, demolition of the VA Housing Authority abandoned structures should not take place while homeowners are within less than 10 feet away. In closing remarks, Mr. Chairman, the residents of LBJ Gardens are not seeking a windfall. They are seeking fairness, dignity, and closure. They want the opportunity to move forward without carrying the financial burden of decisions made by others. They want a process that recognizes both the economic loss and the emotional hardship they endure. Most importantly, they want certainty that this legislature will act and that the solution adopted would be implemented promptly not years into the future too often discussion about LBJ gardens focuses on agencies and projects we must remember behind every report is a family behind every delayed decision is a resident living with uncertainty behind every postponed solution is another year that people continue to wait. I respectfully urge this committee to use its budgetary and oversight authority to ensure that the concerns of the LBJ Gardens residents are no longer deferred, delayed, or forgotten. I want to thank for your time and consideration. I want to give special thanks to Senator Maurice James, Senator Clifford Joseph, Senator Hubert Frederick, Senator Franklin Johnson, and Senator Angel Borges for assisting us with this. Thank you.

0:35:13 Thank you. Thank you very much, Ms. Centeno, for your testimony there. And at this time, that rounds out the discussion on Bill number 36-0274. And we'll open up the floor. And all of the bills before us, we have bill number 36.0045, a \$400,000 request from the Tourism or Advertising Revolving Fund to the TaxiCap Commission. We also have bill number 36.0273, an act amending 8464, redirecting appropriation from the first-time homebuyers to the Williams-Delight community, as well as the SLICE program. and we just heard on bill number 36.0274 addressing the issues of relocating the individuals from the LBJ housing community there. Colleagues, I'll go to a six minutes round and I'll go ahead and begin with Senator Angel Bouquez. I know you are a bill sponsor of one of them but we have about three bills before so i recognize you for your six minutes at this time one second sir point of information senator gittins yes mr chair uh quickly it's actually a point of personal privilege i just wanted to uh thank the testifiers uh for their testimony uh i'm not a member of this committee but i'm looking forward to acting upon uh the measures that's before us and i especially want to thank the last testifier for her moving uh testimony there as i understand and her statements really uh i i believe i can speak for many but we felt your your passion in this and look forward to addressing this this matter but i just wanted to apologize as i'm not a member of this committee i have to excuse myself as i have another

engagement at 6 15. so i just wanted to say thank you to the testifiers for your testimony and at the appropriate time i'm looking forward to addressing these matters thank you so much thank you very much uh senator gittins at this time

0:37:44 senator book as you recognize for your six minutes uh thank you so much uh mr chair uh good uh good evening are we mr chair good evening colleagues uh to the listening and viewing audience central staff my staff and the testifying panel here before us uh for the three measures in this block I wanted to start off with bill number 36-0273 and we know that the VI slice program has received 117 applications approved 87 applicants and exhausted it's more than recent two million allocation in approximately sixty days so what that tells me and I assume my colleagues as well is that the demand for homeownership assistance in the Virgin Islands is very high and I want to say that these bills in this block I am supporting all of them even though I'm not a member of this committee I do look forward to hopefully seeing them move forward so that i can support them but i wanted to ask a few questions um to the testifiers if these funds remain where they are today for this specific bill here concerning williams delight and the vi slice program really and truly how many additional homeowners will actually be created in the next 12 months because seemingly the funds have not moved from the Housing Finance Authority.

0:39:28 I understand that there are projects slated to come online with the urge to utilize those funds at that time, but it seems more prudent for us to fill a gap now than wait for tomorrow. So can someone help me understand why we shouldn't do what we're really requesting through this bill to do? Good afternoon, Senator. Freda Webster, Director of Home Ownership, VI Housing Finance Authority.

0:40:02 I think you need to understand, or this body, I should say, should understand the difference between the two programs, first and foremost. The VI Slice Program, as was mentioned by the EDA and mentioned in VIHFA's testimony, is a grant program that provides secondary financing in form, gap financing in the form of a grant for multifamily residences, for income brackets that are above mixed use of income brackets. The \$4 million program that VI Housing Finance Authority has was designed as a loan program, also gap financing, also secondary financing, but a loan program because the intent was to create a revolving fund for generations to come. So if you take our monies today and give it to VI SLICE, yes, they have people waiting because they have multifamily units to finance where VI Health and Finance Authority is still only financing single-family dwellings. That is our mandate as per the code. The individuals that are attractive to the VI size program are looking for a grant, and they're looking for multifamily dwelling. No fault of their own, that is what they want. That is what the program provides. At VIHFA, we're trying to put individuals' first-time homebuyers into single-family dwellings. And since there is a low stock of those properties in the territory, our Planning Construction Division is charged with the mandate to develop these homes. Mr. Pelke will speak in more detail about the process. It takes time, but the staff of VIHFA, specifically the Home Ownership Division, we market out all of our programs every day, whether it's by phone, through our outreach activities. I cannot make people apply, but we encourage individuals to come, get pre-qualified to understand where they are. Our programs are for very low to moderate income households. The four million dollar act was designed for moderate income households. We have made changes to our acquisition cost limits so that our acquisition cost limits were more realistic in terms of the cost of housing in the territory. But still, we require a single family dwelling And we require that our transaction be a loan. To say I could have 10 people or 20 people in the next 12 months, I can't guarantee that. But I can guarantee you that we will continue marketing our program, our planning and construction division will continue working towards building single-family dwellings, which is what our mandate requires.

0:43:04 I appreciate your very loaded response. And I don't, I'm not fighting you or arguing with you with what you have just stated on the record. However, it is imperative for this body to find opportunities for home ownership in the Virgin Islands because of the scarcity of housing in the territory. The intent of the measure is to utilize a program that is successful or fairly successful in putting individuals into homes.

0:43:40 So I see the intent and I appreciate and I support the intent. But one could also sit here and say, well, is it better to leave the funds sitting unused or to put them into programs that are already helping families get into homes, right? So for me, that's an easy win in the sense of I prefer to support something that is actually going to put people in homes, because as it stands right now, the market is unstable when it comes to home opportunities for Virgin Islands, for that fact. Time.

0:44:13 So, Mr. Chair, I know I'm sort of long-winded here, but I really would ask for your lenience. I appreciate it very much. So, the question at hand is, and I know you answered partially, what do we do now? We understand your position, but we're going to have to deal with the lesser of two evils in this case. And I hear you, but I want to remind everyone listening that the Housing Finance Authority is the government agency that has been charged with the responsibility to develop affordable housing products, homes for the residents of the territory, not the EDA. And if you take that money, then you limit our ability to do so. One could argue that that has not been happening in the Housing Finance Authority.

- 0:45:05 one could argue that the Housing Finance Authority has underperformed in that area. Rightfully so. But at this time, for us it was a timing issue. We got a lot of federal funds and using those funds, if you understand how you use the funds, we tried to stand, we had to stand up a program, stand up funding that was way above our capacities, We had to do staff, and we did a lot of things to get where we are today. So today, based on our planning, we're getting ready to implement several houses, several projects, getting with developers.
- 0:45:51 I mean, right now, presently, that's what we're doing. So I'll have Mr. Pell also say, if he can, during this time, say what we are doing right now to use our funding, which also includes our stamp tax funds. Before Mr. Pell responds, do you conclude, Senator, with your line of questions? Yes, Mr. Chair. Very well. Thank you. Mr. Pell, you may respond.
- 0:46:19 Good afternoon. Rupert Pell, Director of Planning and Construction. As Ms. Webster and Ms. Valdez had alluded to, we do have a total of 40-plus projects that are in the works. They are in various phases, and this is projects relative to all funding sources. Now, as we're talking about the CDBG funds, the mitigation funds, the home funds, and the \$4 million funds, Because when we execute these projects, which some are in starting construction, and some are in contracting phase, and we also have developers that have come in to put programs in place, Ms. Webster do have a list of mortgage-ready clients for single-family homes that are on standby waiting for these projects to be completed. For example, we have Mount Pleasant in St. Croix, where we just concluded the contracting for the construction of seven homes. We have an additional eight homes that's coming. We have the Queen Louise townhouse development on St. Thomas, which is going to be 16 townhouses. And like I said, there's a various list of projects, and I mean, I don't want to take the time and go to each of them but there's a lot of projects that are in the works at this time and as Miss Valdez stated there was a time period where there was a lapse because you had to build up and get certain things in place. Thank you for that Mr. Pell I just want to say that the intent behind of the identifying this particular four million dollars at the time was that we were seeing that obliteration of our middle-income, middle-class community, our police officers, our teachers, our nurses, and they were just leaving again because of the challenges that they were experiencing in terms of homeownership. We knew that there was an incentive for those individuals that had low and moderate income. There was an incentive for those individuals that was higher and could afford it, and we just had that void in between there. Hence, we came up with this initiative to be able to address and hopefully fulfill that so I wanted to ask you you know you see are you testifying are you saying that there was no interest whatsoever everyone always was more going towards the grant program there was no interest whatsoever from those middle-income individuals that may have been able to tap into that particular funding yes senator there was a lot of interest we
- 0:49:12 got a lot of phone calls and a lot of walk-in traffic regarding the program every time we market the program right the issue is they want grant financing there's a lot of discussion in the territory about grant financing so they and and they wanted multifamily units meaning at least a rental unit or two VI slice allows I think up to three units so that was more attractive for them than coming for our loan program single-family unit but it what our program was designed for the police officers, the correction officers, who have you know that sort of income. So it has to do with people were more focused and trying to get the grant program for us, some of them which were successful. So would you then admit that the fact that we're moving in that direction where there's an attempt to be able to meet those individuals where they're at, that we could in fact be number one stopping the bleeding of those individuals that's leaving the territory as a result of homeownership, as well as we're able to ensure that these people get a piece of the rock and make better use of it if we actually redirect this to meet the individuals where they're at.
- 0:50:28 At this given time where we're seeing that particular void. I don't agree with the movement of the money, because what you will do is totally destroy our \$4 million moderate income program. And there's no guarantee that the individuals that are waiting are going to find a product within their price point. You still have to qualify for the home of your choice, right, with us and with EDA. The difference is that we are creating a revolving fund for generations to come. So outside of the · because, again, at a later time we could revisit that and look for another \$4 million to address that particular issue.
- 0:51:09 But the void that we have in now, would you say then that you will be able to administer this under your HFA, not under EDA, but with the same ability to allow for grants to these individuals, these middle-income individuals? As long as the candidates apply far within our current guidelines, remember VIHFA is still single-family dwelling, EDA is multi-family dwelling, I can't compete with that, right? And then we want to utilize, if possible, to utilize some of the proceeds to relaunch the systems lab program which we have added the septic system to that because we see there is a need to assist individuals to start the construction of their homes and given the cost of construction we're asking that we could use some of that money two million at least to relaunch the system and slab including the septic to a cap of a hundred thousand dollars for our transaction I think that's something that's doable I think that's the same recommendation that have been made by director of Reimer and I think that's something that we should seriously consider point of information Senator Blayner Mike, thank you One second, Senator Blayden I have a point of information, I'll come to you right now Thank

you so much, Mr. Chair Based on my large line of questioning to you, Ms. Webster, because I need to clarify one thing, it's grant versus loan, not the bottom line and you spoke to my colleague spoke to the void that we did have, that's why we brought this bill up in terms of middle income, like my colleague Senator Farmer, Senator Service, etc. That's why we did our program, it was important police officers, etc. And the key is, it's a revolving fund, which means it will happen time and time again to help a lot of individuals. Of course you can't compete with a S.L.I.E.S.E. program, at this time you cannot, because if I go in for a loan to get a house, I go in for the money now, you know, I don't have to it's a no-brainer to me so the point is i can agree with it but it needs to be a different funding source that's my position

0:53:23 what's your thought in as to why many people have not come it would not be part of the problem also in your opinion correct yes absolutely senator yeah that'll be repeating the same thing i think that when there's options obviously individuals will go for what's the the better offer um available to them at any given time uh senator vla you recognize for your testimony uh for your point of information at this time thank you so much mr cheer mr chair the the real reality is is that mortgages are so expensive for individuals to bill so when you get in that four hundred thousand dollars it's thousands of dollars you have to pay every month and that's how individuals are opting towards a grant but but what i wanted to put on the record when we passed the first time homebuyers Act. Housing Finance Authority used to only get 30% of the sub tax. That exact legislation changed it to 50%. So for the last five years, you have received 2.4, you're supposed to receive 2.8 million more than you would have received because it is an average of 14 million. So now they're getting seven. Before they were getting 4.2. So you have received \$14 million additional as a result of the first home buyers act so the big question is where has the what are you doing with that 14 million dollars but part of the answer is going to be that it wasn't released the housing finance authority but the bill mandate that it's supposed to be released so now you can't get the money you're supposed to get by law by law to the housing finance authority but you don't want the four million dollars to be utilized to help individuals who can now move into homes and to be able to replenish some monies into the SLICE program because there are so many applicants. I have submitted an amendment, Mr. Chair, to change the way the money is broken down. The monies of Willam's Delight say the same, the \$510,000 to make sure that everybody is dealt with, \$1,745,000 to the SLICE program,

0:55:29 and \$1,745,000 to the system and SLAP program so the money could stay with the Housing Finance Authority. If I'm not in this body and the money is spent within two years, I'm going to reprogram that too. Because we ain't going to be keeping money and the money just sitting there, sitting there. So thank you so much, Mr. Chair. Thank you. I'll ask for your support of the amendment. Thank you. At this time, the Chair would like to recognize Senator Frederick. You recognize for your six minutes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, Pleasant, good afternoon, colleagues, testifiers, listening to an audience, my office, and of course, central staff.

0:56:09 This is a very interesting discussion, I've read the testimonies, and I see the dilemma with reprogramming money. I understand the complexities of construction because I've built a few properties myself commercial and residential and I understand the expensive cost of living that we deal with in a virgin house robbing Peter to pay Paul doesn't necessarily solve a problem I really don't like the fact that this is a legitimate housing program that we have as an agency that's that's their job to do what they're doing and then we're defunding them now because we feel they're not spending the money fast enough. I personally don't understand why we would do that, but we may not agree with the pace that this government spends money to get things done, but it's in a good place. They're making progress. And if we've got projects to show that there are construction single family dwelling, which is the most important piece of real estate out there, then we should support them and not undermine them. It's a revolving line of credit, basically. The money goes out and it comes back in to help someone else. So they could have sufficient capital to build. So personally, I think, colleagues, we should revisit this particular argument about just randomly taking money because they're not moving fast enough. I've heard it a few times since I've been in this committee that if money doesn't move right away then we feel it's incumbent for us as legislators to act fast and move it but then sometimes there's legitimate reasons like we heard today they were trying to spend the federal funds first and that's what we asked them to do so we don't lose those I wish they could do both though you know but here we are at this point in reference to um my friends at lbj gardens um in this case it's going to have

0:58:27 to be a payout because i don't know where we're going to find seven million dollars to make those people hold for right now and i will give my full assurance to hfa that i will work hard to with the with my colleagues in the budget appropriation committee to find some money to to put back in there but for for this unique situation that's been going on for a long time and you have to go there and see how those residents live it's it's it's very dangerous living within a blast zone it's not good and i wish it was wapa paying this money personally not not anyone else it's it's a wapa issue wapa plays the the tanks there the propane tax there and they should pay for it if you're going to displace people but you know they they didn't come with any money so now we have to make this uncomfortable decision uh and last um but not least a taxi commission director smith i know you've been here before and you've had this discussion about needing some money

to upgrade your agency because you're in the paper age still and we expect a lot from you but we're not giving you any funding and every time we try to find funding we can't reconcile the account you know sometimes they'll give us a fund balance of a hundred million dollars and we can't spend four hundred thousand dollars out of that well i'm gonna go ahead and take a chance i'm you're gonna have my support because we need to fix the taxi commission and you know hopefully we have the money in it that's all i could say i hope we do That's not my way of doing things as an auditor. I feel embarrassed to take money out of a fund

1:00:22 that I don't know the true nature of what the balance is. But if we don't take a chance on this one, you'll never get this money. So you have my support on this one. Mr. Chair, thank you very much for the opportunity to speak my mind. Thank you. That you did. Thank you. um at this time i will recognize senator lewis for his six minutes good afternoon mr chairman good afternoon colleagues good afternoon to the people of verdant good afternoon to all the testifiers here and in st corey before i go to my line of question and i have two very important questions and this is one that really have been two of these questions have been troubling and you know every time i meet these folks i meet the people in the community is i like to say is that we provide the funding and it's kind of hard to say what's next step so let me turn um attorney sinclair sorry to put you on the spot you're representing the authority we we passed act 90 74 4 million dollars with street lighting we also passed bill number 36 at 0117. Appropriating \$300,000 to fix street lighting in St. Thomas. As well, could you tell me where we are with street lighting in the territory? Thank you, Senator, for your question. While I don't personally operate within the operations sphere, I will say that we have taken strides on both those bills to bring action to light as expeditiously as we can with respect to the

1:02:16 the first act you mentioned there have been purchases I believe two thus far of bucket trucks in order to enable the linemen to to do their jobs just because as I'm sure everyone in the territory knows there has been a shortage of these trucks and these apparatus in order to enable us to get to the areas that we need to get to to do repairs and to do installations there's also been a number of parts ordered and and fixtures ordered and we're still awaiting delivery on those when last i was briefed i believe it was about 1.6 that was expended to date and more is in the works with respect to the second act there's a request for a proposal that's live right now my understanding i i believe it was supposed to close this week but it has been extended in order to do further bases and mounts for street lighting in the area. So both of those are moving along at a rather quick rate. So how do I say, you know, while I hear your answer, and it's been taking quite some time, I really have to empathize and I'm, you know, telling the community for their patience it's been long overdue and what prompt me today really more that over the weekend was a bit frustration right in front of this legislature here Friday night my friend got knocked down

1:04:02 you know I don't want to be the one anymore when I was administrator when a young man got knocked down lower down the road by Vitaima the very next day lights went up I met we make calls the very With the next lights went up, I cannot, and I don't want to stand by anymore putting our people like my life and your life in danger. So I think we need to do this with some type of urgency in the three islands.

1:04:35 Please, I'm humbly asking and begging this time. I hear you, and first of all, I want to send my sympathies. I'm very sorry to hear about that. we just always have to be mindful the water and power authority understands the whole dilemma between dpw and and us and who put up the lights in terms of this waterfront these were not our structures we are moving to try and get all the information we can in order to support and to fix and maintain but not every light sorry but not every light has been established by wapa it just has not. When the elephants fight, the grass getting trampled on. I'm going to leave it there. Mr. Pell, good afternoon. Good afternoon. HFA had a program with replacement of homes with asbestos. Nearly four to five years ago, Ms. Freeman and them here around the field, the mother died waiting for this program. Not self, a block, a door nab, nothing. I've tried my best to get answers. Tell me you have some good news today for the families. I think about 12 homes identified. Tell me you have some answers for me today. Good afternoon, Rupert Pell, Director of Planning and Construction, VIHFA. You are correct.

1:06:13 There was a, at some point, a legislation that was passed and appropriated funds to assist 12, well, it was a fund appropriated, but 12 homes was identified as being asbestos laden. The program got started, and either the funding source expires or- 30 seconds. either the funding source expired or there was no funds left or not enough funds was placed in the program in the process a total of three of these homes were demolished when I came into HFA and I was told about it we started to move forward to address the situation if HFA demolished the homes I said HFA should rebuild the homes I'm happy to tell you today we have a request for proposal that's going out for the design of those three homes that were demolished is scheduled to be advertised this coming Friday. We are in communication with the three families that were affected and we have been working towards making making them whole with this process. Mr. Chairman I do thank you for your leniency. I know this wasn't germane to none of your bills but I really had to get it in my constituents. As I pertain to the three bills. I don't have a vote in this committee, but sometime in rules and in session, I'll address them

accordingly. I thank you and thank everybody.

- 1:07:44 Thank you. Thank you very much. Senator Lewis, before we go to the next senator, which would be Senator Blyden, Ms. Shelford, what was the last housing development done in the St. Thomas District as well as the St. Croix District? St. Thomas? Oh, yeah, it had to be Whispering Hills, which is Dunhu across from Koshulis, those houses up there. When was that done?
- 1:08:17 The last five years, last eight years, last ten years? No, we, the last one closed in fiscal year 2023, and right now we're working on, we have a contractor to complete two homes up there that had gotten started, but we already have a contractor to fix those two homes. Okay, but the development, the housing development, West Prairie Hills, what about, Medals was the last one on St. Croix? Meadows, which is Bonne Esperance.
- 1:08:53 We have a Mount Pleasant also, and I think it was Mount Pleasant because... Mount Pleasant was after Bonne Esperance. When was Mount Pleasant? We closed the last home in Mount Pleasant. I believe it was 2022. For that phase. When that development began.
- 1:09:20 Hmm. I think it started before the storms of 2017. 2017? Yeah. Okay. There we go. Senator Blaney, you recognize for your six minutes. Thank you so much, Mr. Chair, and good evening to everyone. And thank you for your testimonies. Let me start with Bill number 36.0045 in respect to the technical upgrades for the Tactical Commission. I just have one thing to put on the record. Commissioner McCurdy, you stated that it must be tourism-related.
- 1:09:53 And definitely, definitely, it is tourism-related because, as a matter of fact, we all know that taxi drivers are the first individual, those individual men are going to come here and when they leave, they're the last they see, so I definitely will be supporting that piece of legislation. The second being 36.0273, that deals with the first-time homebuyers program. and basically transferring those funds to the William Delight residence. For sure, I'm for that, 100%. For SLICE, I'm not for it at all. As was stated in my statement in respect to the SLICE program, it's a good program, but it's a grand program.
- 1:10:36 And I believe that program needs to go back under HFA, period. Anything that has to do with housing should be under HFA. that's who runs all of our housing programs I do not I'm not one to believe in management who are not fulfilling their duties to just scrap programs you change management and you put the right person there to do the job and do it the right way that's just the way it is you know so and HFA right now are putting forth a lot of good programs they are actually listening and adjusting which anyone should based on assignment, and I appreciate what they're doing at this time, and I look forward to working in conjunction with them to support them in their needs, because that's why I'm here. Lastly, bill number 360274 in respect to LBJ. I must say that one is, it hits me differently because my concern is not with the bill. My concern is with the bill, not the residents of LBJ gardens because their issues should not be ignored. Their homeowners, their families, their people who have lived with uncertainty and concerns about their homes, their health, their property, and the future. And if government action or government-related conditions have placed them in an unfair position, then government has a responsibility to respond and respond appropriately. but we must do it in the right way. And my concern with the bill which is that as written I have a problem with it first of all because of the funding source.
- 1:12:21 The funds cannot come from the source that they're asking us to get it from and secondly I must say that the way the bill is written the language is unclear in terms of who gets rewarded. Because it says that the homeowners have been required to vacate their homes due to government action, right? But I believe that based on testimony also, they were saying that they are not displacing the residents. But the residents are saying it's unsafe to live, is dilapidated. The ones in the private homes are not being demolished. Also the one that's an occupied home and not being demolished. But the activity itself have an issue. They have an issue with activity. So my question is who qualifies and exactly the language in terms of does require, who's supposed to vacate? What does that mean? In terms of an eviction, if they're going to be evicted, does it mean that finding that a home is unsafe or inhabitable, does it include what, for instance, constructive eviction? It's a lot of questions I have, and I want to say at the end of the ditto, I do agree that the residents must be made whole because it's no fault of their own and my only issue is the funding source we must find another funding source
- 1:14:09 and two different funding sources was recommended by Director Reimer in his testimony and I believe that's the way we should go but I do not believe that we should obligate the \$7 million in stamp tax because first of all we don't have no if that money is available because they have not received it. So I don't want to put a resident in a position where they are looking forward to that funding and it's not available for them, then we're going to put them in a quagmire. So I do not believe that we should tap into the funding source for that simple reason. But at the same time, I do support the residents, and we must find a way to work with them in terms of what they're facing in their current living conditions.
- 1:15:02 So I will be voting on the appropriate time. Mr. Chair, I want to thank you so much for the time. I want to thank the testifiers and the residents for advocating for the rights, basically. Thank you so much. Thank you very much, Senator Blyden. I don't want to leave the impression that the stamp tax... Have you received recently \$5 million in stamp tax? yes

we have I want a record to reflect that in fact you have received some money that was the first in a while that you have received it but you have received some money of recent it was already obligated to projects that we are ready to go that's fine I just want to make sure that we are hearing that you have not received stamp tax and as a chair I want to make sure that in fact there was a disbursement because that's what I was told that it was a disbursement of \$5 million recently for that.

1:15:56 So I just want to make sure that that was done, right? You're saying, yes, you received that? Yes, we did. Very well. Thank you. Point of information, Senator Blyton. Thank you, Mr. Chair. You're correct. They did receive \$5 million, but I was stated it's already obligated. And my question is, Director Reimer, what's the outstanding balance when it comes to stamp tax for the House and Federal Authority? The amount that is outstanding on the account is about \$28 million. Outstanding. Yes. Thank you so much for putting that on the record. No problem. Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

1:16:30 Very well. Thank you. I heard, before we go on to the next senator, which will be Senator Fonseca, I heard under testimony, I think it was Ms. Michelle Ford, that mentioned that there is no real impact or damages associated with the demolition. at LBG right now and there was no I guess no reason to relocate those individuals there. Did you just kind of said something and to that extent? We did not require them to relocate them. No we didn't require them. We have since been out to the residents letting them know that we are going to start demolishing of the buildings again. There'll be green space and we do understand and like we said we did have get a buyout program to the health program we're willing to help the residents as much as we can but not using the stamp tax and one of the things that we have to recognize that when developers come in and we're talking to developers now they would like us they want you to have your infrastructure in they don't want to have that cost and the infrastructure cost is not turned over to our clients when we sell them the house we don't say okay this portion is for when we use STAM talks to. That is not given to us. Well that might be better for us because those are inferior infrastructures anyway that really becomes the burden of the government of the Virgin Islands in the future. I mean, it is. I spend a lot of time fixing roads, repairing electricity and all kind of thing as a result of the basic infrastructure that I put in by some of those developers initially.

1:18:08 We spend a lot of time finding that in this body. I'm telling you. But the point I wanted to make though, is that even with the demolition, and Mr. Pell, your engineer, even with the demolition, I have seen where surrounding residents have been impacted by a lot of cracks. Even though they may not be in that very immediate area, there is a lot of impact that does sustain, and I visited some homes where there was close demolitions recently, where there is some impact to those homes because of severe cracks and those things that develop as a result of the demolition. Have you seen that in your experience, Mr. Pell?

1:18:46 Good afternoon, Rupert Pell. I have not done any inspection of individual homes within that area, but I would beg to differ to think it had anything to do with the two buildings that were demolished previously. Those buildings were demolished using a JAR system that just crushed the building in place. There wasn't any blasting, any hammering, or anything to that effect. Okay. Is there any of that going to be done in these other buildings to be done? No, it's all going to be a claw-type system where it's just like chewing the concrete in order to separate the steel out of it. So foundation and everything is remained? You don't take that, you don't excavate that?

1:19:25 The foundation in this case will be removed because we have to restore the site to a green area. And that will be removed by claws as well? Yes. Okay. But even with your experience, I'm asking about even with demolition that you're seeing, because some of them actually involve blasting. We said that by the bypass and some of those other areas where there are severe damages done by residents within the surrounding areas, and we have seen some of the complaints that have come in on that. Have you seen that?

1:19:53 It's possible, depending on the type of demolition that's happening, but you also have to remember the homes that are surrounding the LBJ community more than likely are severely aged, just like the community that we are disposing of. And it's likely that there is crack or settlement that have happened in the community, but it's not necessarily as a result of any activity undertaken or planned to be undertaken by HFA. At this time, Senator Fonseca, you recognize for your six minutes.

1:20:28 Yes, good evening to everyone. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm in favor of all of these bills. I wanted to start with Ms. Centeno Wanda. How are you doing? We listened attentively to your testimony. And the bill right now, as presented, it would call for the replacement value payments to all within 18 months.

1:21:01 I noticed your testimony was stressing for it to be done as soon as possible. And I hear that. But I want to let you know that I'm a co-sponsor of the bill. they didn't mention Ray Popa Fonseca. So how do you feel about the 18 months? I think that's what the bill calls for now, because I notice, you know, you're in the blast zone, you know, they have the waste management, sewage. It's really a real, I don't want to say an old community, but it's past its useful life. so i definitely

think that this needs to be done um post peace i don't know if you had any other comments to say to me 18 months is too far too long of a wait we've waited too many years the first time we met with the governor that was 2023 actually august when i sent him an email directly to him, and we met with him. And we're in 2026. I think we have lost a lot of residents. And recently, last year, just last year, we lost two residents, one from cancer, young lady, Ms. King, that I grew up next to, and Mr. Torres. To me, it's very important because we have elderly. I have my mother and I have Ms. Branch.

1:22:39 These are our eldest residents right now, living there. Not on vacation, not living in the States. They are living there. We cannot even walk those streets. I had a knee replacement in January. I can't walk outside. just to my car that's it because i'm afraid to fall rocks everything the floor the streets are coming apart never it has been paid never and we were told they won't do that because we shouldn't be there so why waste the money yes and so to me 18 months that's a year and a half of more torture okay we we feel your pain and um we know this is very important i want to go quickly to bill zero two seven three um mr pell director pell you said you have a list of some 40 plus projects and you specifically mentioned um you have a list of mortgage ready clients. I know that list has been presented here. I think it was, um, how many, how many persons are on that list now? Um, hello, Senator Fonseca. As of end of May, we have 466 mortgage ready clients territory wide of that number, 267 in St. Thomas and 199 in St. Croix. Those numbers change daily based on pre-qualifications.

1:24:18 Give me a little bit more information on that Queen Louise townhouses, I think you said it was 16 of them. Where is that going to go? Not in Asetivay? It's not in Asetivay or next to the Queen Louise Boys and Girls Club at this moment. There was some apartments there that were previously demolished, and we are putting back some townhouses which will be put up for sale and not rental units. Okay good. I want to go to Bill 36-0-045.

1:25:02 You know, this is a good sign. You know, the Taxicab Commission, Senators, this used to be one of our real agonizing areas. I remember my first six months as a senator, we couldn't even get testimony from the Taxicab Commission. And this is one of those areas where there's progress. You know, we can see real progress.

1:25:33 So I think we need to do all we can to continue to help Director Smith to move it along. I want you to ask Julio O'Neill, I mean, sorry, McCurdy. McCurdy. I'm sorry. McCurdy, Commissioner of Finance. You were saying you did not support the \$400,000. because it hasn't been reconciled. How many funds do we have that's not reconciled?

1:26:13 Do you have an idea? 30 seconds! We have well over 200 funds, but I don't know. What we've started to do, we've gone 10 by 10. So you haven't got to this one yet? No. So what that means, right? maybe when you reconcile it, it might even have more money because you really don't know. No, you don't know because it's not reconciled. So you're giving a statement here subject to the reconciliation giving the assumption that it might be less, but if you have 200, it might be more. Mr. Chair, if I can just rack up quickly.

1:26:55 We have to go to the digital age. We have testimony from the Bureau of Information Technology while they take no position on it. This is an important measure. Remember, the Taxicab Commission, ultimately the goal is for it to become independent and come off of the general fund. So I support this measure as well. Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the time. Thank you very much, Senator Fonseca.

1:27:25 Go ahead, Commissioner McCurdy. I agree with you. We need to bring TaxiCab into, but part of what Director Reimer and I are doing is not just talk about it. We have this vendor that we're quoting that we've already connected with TaxiCab to where tourism is not finding the money. We're trying to come up with the funding so that they do get some of those automation and modernization in place. So there are efforts right now on the way to ensure that that is happening. My concern is the tourism fund, and the fund balance could say a billion dollars. Bank balance is what is important to all of us.

1:28:08 It's collected \$34 million, tourism has spent \$32 million, and based on our efforts with the CFO, we know there's \$12 million in the line coming to finance. So unless there is additional revenue to offset that, \$2 additional to it is funds that we don't know that will be there. So that's my only concern. Not that modernization isn't important. We're living that. We're doing that right now, working with TaxiCab and TaxiCab has been very helpful in providing information to get them to a better place. But tourism dollars, I don't know that that is the place that we want to take it from.

1:28:50 That's all. Real quickly, Commissioner McCurdy, I hear you make reference. Have you had that communication or discussion with Ms. Smith, the Executive Director, in regards to your plans or your efforts to support the automation and modernization of the TaxiCap Commission? Absolutely. And Ms. Director Smith has been very helpful in, you know, getting that off the ground as well. Meeting with the vendors, providing information so that we can have this presentation and then figure out how, you know, you can make those efforts more pointed. And, you know, we're moving. We're not, you know, just saying it. And I just don't think tourism is · that's my only contention. We're helping taxicab to get to a point of automation. Tourism dollars is just not.

- 1:29:38 So you said that this funding could very well be a redundancy of it. There is already an attempt for you to address this particular issue. So, Senator, let me make for a further clarification here. We met with a vendor, and the vendor, basically, we have a platform we can use where it's a cashiering function that actually now automates basically all her records, all everything that's encompassing. They just provided us a quote. We just approved the quote. And this will be redundant in regards to actually putting 400,000 on top of it. So what we basically need to do here now is lead a vendor to go forward, and if there is additional items she might need after this, we can actually move forward. Thank you.
- 1:30:24 We will come back to the body. You're good. You need a point of information, Senator Bulka? Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair. But while I appreciate OMBs and finances' responses, it has been three years, and we have been trying to get this situated for quite some time. Many discussions, and I want to publicly commend Ms. Melissa Smith, the director, for all of her efforts on communication and collaboration. But government funds are reconciled continuously is what I'm hearing. And that alone is not a valid reason to halt any appropriation.
- 1:30:59 If that was the standard that was applied universally, then the legislature could really appropriate from any special fund. Until evidence demonstrates that the fund lacks sufficient resources, the legislature should not act upon the information currently as available. The post-addit division is saying that there is \$64 million in there. Yes, we've had discussions about the fund needing to be audited and reconciled. So I'm just happy to hear, if we walk away from this here today and nothing happens for whatever reason, I'm happy to hear that there is collaboration between OMB Finance and the Taxicab Commission. And of course, BIT has helped in any way that they could. I believe that they donated some equipment to the Taxicab Commission recently to try to help in the efforts of modernization. All we're looking for here is collaboration with our departments and agencies. We have to work together. We are all one government. So I'm happy to hear that. And I'm sorry for being so long, Mr. Chair, but thank you for the time.
- 1:32:05 Thank you very much. At this time, the Chair will recognize Senator Maurice James. You recognize for your six minutes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon to my colleagues, testifiers, everyone inside and outside the room. And welcome to the residents who are here with us. How we treat people is a direct reflection of our true feelings and values. How we treat people.
- 1:32:45 tells people what we think about them, and that's what we're doing here today. I want to commend the sponsors of the bills to address the injustice that has been done to the LBJ residents. My family lives in LBJ, so I speak from direct experience. I do want to point out some things first of all. I found a newspaper and this is what's interesting about the VI. Nothing nothing really changes it seems. We're dealing with problems for too long. In the daily news via the virgin islands daily news for thursday october 38 2014 the headline says senate committee considers bill to sell houses for ten dollars in williams delight and right below that it says ger s director ready to apply for gaming license for carambola it is amazing how we somehow can't get past the challenges and reach solutions. I want to say to both the OMB director Julio Raima and the interim executive director Valdez Shelford that Brown's field does not apply to LBJ because we're talking about an area where people lived we're not talking about an area that was used for industrial or commercial purposes that's the first thing I want to point out unless you can find an exception that would be great if you can I also want to point out to the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority your purpose is to really create homes and houses for people our people to live in in 1987 the powers duties and functions of the Virgin Islands urban renewal board were
- 1:35:03 transferred to the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority and one of the powers and duties of the authority in under section 85 is to prepare plans for the relocation of persons including families business concerns and others displaced by an urban renewal project and make relocation payments to or with respect to such persons for moving expenses and losses of property for which reimbursement or compensation is not otherwise made, including the making of such payments financed by the federal government. The people of LBJ have been from, I think Ms. Centeno said in August 2023, they met with the governor of the Virgin Islands and were told that they would be given a certain amount of money in compensation for their homes. In a sense, I wish that the governor at that time had used ARPA funds because he had liberty to use those funds as he's used them when he started by giving a 20 million to the VI slice program and then took back 10 million in fact that would have been a perfect time to compensate the people of LBG because then we wouldn't be having discussion about not using funds stamp tax that comes from the sale of homes to make people whole again in their homes that we have destroyed and and diminished the values. To the interim executive director, on page four of your testimony you speak about that you and the Virgin Islands Housing Authority are presently in discussions to provide
- 1:37:00 funding for potential homeowners in the Williams E. Light Home Ownership Conversion Initiative, and that you have identified home funds, which are federal funds allocated for low-income households to be used to provide gap financing and buy-down assistance to the residents of Williams E. Light who are qualified for home ownership conversion. My question to you is this, in 19 uh not 19 um in September of 2024 when the governor did the initiative um that I had asked him for the \$15,000 grants one minute to the white residents why at that time did not um were why didn't the the VA

Housing Finance Authority and the Virgin Islands Housing authority begin to um well quite frankly if in 1987 you were created in 1995 the housing authority williams delight initiative started we're now in 2026 and you are only presently in discussions You know, I don't really, I really don't, and I'll say this, my understanding is the home funds are grants to governments that can issue them as either grants or loans.

1:38:28 So clearly, under your authority, you can, in fact, issue grants. Is that not correct? The home funds? Yes. The home funds. To begin, we were actually recently approached by VI Housing Authority about additional funding for Williams Delight and that's why we're in discussion with them.

1:39:01 Okay. Recently. Yes. All right. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you for that. Thank you for that. So, well, and I said this, I said it the other day to my colleagues, that while you can be honest without being transparent, being truly transparent requires you to be honest. Mr. Director Alexander, I have one last question. Mr. Chair, may I continue? You may continue.

1:39:32 One last question. One last question for the Director Alexander. What is your understanding of the \$510,000 that Senator Viallay has, well, he is trying to get Ford passed for the Williams Delight. What is your understanding of the use of those funds? Thank you.

1:40:01 Thank you. Dwayne Alexander, Executive Director, Virgin Island Housing Authority. That \$510,000 will go to the 34 individuals that has already paid their \$500 to go towards their closing. So they will each receive the same \$15,000 grant that had begun before that Senator Viallis now, thank you Senator Viallis, continuing, correct? That's correct. The \$500,000 we received before went to 33 families that all closed. So this new \$500,000 and \$10,000 would go for the next 34 families.

1:40:46 Okay, so 33 have closed under the grant initiative that was issued under the ARPA funds. That's what you're saying? 33? Yes, yes. That's correct. 33 families close underneath the \$500,000 from ARPA funds. That's correct. Okay. Thank you very much. And again, I want to thank Senator VLA for... Well, let's hope it passed because I support it. I support the Williams Delight residence. I support the LVJ residence. And I want to get some more information about the VI Slice program, but i also support what senator vla is doing with now breaking it down even further to the system and slab so you have my support um and those bills that deal with the residents of st croix thank you uh thank you very much senator maurice james uh next we recognize senator digraf you recognize for your six minutes i thank you mr chair good evening colleagues good evening testifiers all of you listen at present i think i'm gonna bring it home real simple you know we have a responsibility as a body to address certain things which we have before us right now and housing finance authority was given their four million dollars by us because we saw a need that we needed to address we gave it to housing finance authority for something specific you put it out into it. We have some suggestions from the OMB director. We hear a lot of good testimony from people giving suggestions and everything. But the bottom line is we're going to vote

1:42:37 our conscience. I hear long enough. Ten years I'm here. And I've never, ever heard Department of Finance or no budgetary government entity give an accurate account of what money we have or don't have. They've given us numbers and we have questioned those numbers and we have found issues. With that being said, it's like Commissioner McCurdy, you mentioned in terms of audits. This is your last six months. you are here as the commissioner addressing something. You're going to fight hard, you're going to do your do. But the fact still remains, when you look at the budget book and you compare one book to the next, I see numbers are right. It's when we get down to the nitty-gritty in budget markup and we go through all these meetings and we hear diligently and we go through this and we rob Peter to pay Paul. so I think we gave the money to housing finance authority in regards to achieving a mission the only issue I have in terms of taking it is once the 4 million dollars done then the dark dead for the VI slice program that we're talking about but into perpetuity what we're trying to do through housing finance is what we would need to put money back to try back them to assist because this is in the end we have 80 something we may do another 15 that's not the end we got a lot of people my chair and my grandchildren all of us want to to own where do we go from here uh vi taxi commission you have how much money have you

1:44:29 generated thus far from the last thing this bill this bill was heard to now from november last year to know how much money have you generated? Use the mic, please. Director, I apologize. According to my ERP records to date, \$171,950 to date, according to my records. Okay, so if we give you \$400,000 now and generate a system for you in a year time, will we generate another \$100,000 or does this system Is that system paramount on revenue generation more than the \$100,000?

1:45:11 Yes, it would support revenue generation. Okay, speak so we can hear you. It will augment our efforts, and it directly reinforces revenue generation. It expedites it, and it also encourages additional operators to visit our commission. We have recently onboarded through our classes, and we've had three cohorts so far, new operators. So we desperately need

the system to manage our operations.

- 1:45:45 So thank you for that. So the OMB director stated that they're in consultation with you. They have identified an actual potential platform to address it. And what was the cost of it? \$125,000. \$125,000. Would that, are you aware of that, Director Smith? So what I am aware of, and I do believe in collaboration, I received a call, a telephone call through the OMB director and also the finance director. And I distinctly remember it was, I think, on a Friday. And they did have a vendor that may have been interested in assisting the Taxicab Commission with a POS system. And of course, we graciously welcomed that option. However, we have had other options. I'm not aware of additional funding sources.
- 1:46:48 Okay, so excuse me. In regards to the option that they mentioned, would that suffice to what you're trying to accomplish? What I would say so far and what was introduced to me, it may suffice. I would like the opportunity to engage the conversation further. and work to the bottom line of that option, meaning how does it link to our other governmental reporting requirements? But I'm gracious and I am open to that option. Excuse me, so we got my time. Again, so the conversation needs to be had some more. Correct. \$125,000.
- 1:47:32 OMB director, do we have that money to pay for that system? Yes. Are they here for you, sir? yeah yeah you want to hear i want to make sure it's on the book on the record say again um if you don't mind yes yes okay good that settles that like they say you know wheel bend okay for that one now for housing finance authority i think you said 12 percent of your no you see something is attached to the four million that you got and I think you mentioned 12% for operations that's a stamp tax fund no by the time of the four million dollars was four million dollars used for the administration of it or all four million would go towards the program and prospective homeowners Okay, so then the difference of what you were getting before we added to, bumped it up to \$4 million was what?
- 1:48:40 No. You weren't getting zero before? Yes. Okay, so I heard you mention they were getting something percentage of it, but you haven't received it. The stamp tax funds is where we use 12% for our operating expenses. Okay, so and then And I guess in closing, so for OMB director Reimer, the LBJ, the idea that you put forth, what type of a time frame would that take?
- 1:49:18 There's \$3 million according to HFA that's been approved on the mid-side. So that's \$3 million. Based on the legislation, you want to do \$2.5 million this year, and then \$4 million over the following year. But that gives us enough time if we're using the \$3 million from the MIT program to go back to amend certain processes. When you go to HUD and you start talking about grants, there's certain things they can amend and basically tailor to you. And that's where you ask them when you go back to say, here's my grant, here's what I want to do, here's the extenuating circumstances. How do we now approach this? And they normally give you guidance, and that's how we got the \$3 million to meet in terms of the initial funding source.
- 1:50:01 Okay, so in terms of 30 seconds, if we use the money from the stamp tax, it addresses the residents one time. Correct. Doing this process takes a longer time, and the question still remains how much money is in the stamp tax overall. I mean, this fund, how much money are we talking about? As my colleague mentioned, he mentioned, what, 60-something million? What would be a ballpark figure? Since you don't have the accurate numbers now, what would be a good ballpark? Time.
- 1:50:37 What is owed to the Virginia Housing Finance Authority is \$28 million from stamp taxes. Right. We recently gave them five. So they have that already in cash. What the bill is proposing is to give two and a half before the fiscal year has ended. That's something myself and the commissioner need to actually go address to see if it's available and it's probably there, but that's not the case. The case, what we're trying to tell you is we have \$3 million in MIT right now, which is federal money, that we prefer you to start there. Spend the federal money first and then go backwards and say, hey, if we don't get a Brownfield grant, we could address, hey, \$2.5 million or \$4 million from stamp tax going forward. But we're certain that we can actually get additional federal grant to cover the whole program. So that's what we're working on now. Okay, so in closing, if I may, Mr. Chair, what's your best overall, you gave some great suggestions.
- 1:51:30 I listened to them, but now what's your best overall suggestions for these bills in regards to six months? June to December is all the time you have going forward in this administration. We have to put it on the record. So just give the best six-month advice that we could accomplish these missions here. So in the first item that the Senator VLA actually, we actually discussed it and actually we came up with basically splitting the baby down the middle, which means give the 1.7-whatever-million to the SLICE program, the 500,000 to LBJ, and 1.7 to Housing Finance to do the system and SLAP program. This now helps both sides. You have homeowners that you can help instantly, and you have other homeowners that have land but just can't get off the ground, that you need to help them with a system and slab. Because after you pass the system and slab process, it's easier to go to funding to the bank to say, hey, I have this system and slab. We can build from there. And they'll take it because here it is. They have more collateral. They have more skin in the game. The

homeowners have more skin in the game. In regards to this other one, where we're looking \$7 million from stamp tax, What I'm informing you is you have \$3 million in MIT available now, which is a federal proceed. Let's start with spending the federal funds first while we work on getting additional federal grants. If we don't, then we could go back to stamp tax. But that's the approach. We should be spending federal funds first, not local tax dollars. Okay, so we have a six-month window.

1:53:06 I think that's feasible, and it makes sense to me. Thank you for the time, Mr. Chair. Thank you. Thank you very much, Senator DeGraff. Let's be mindful of the time. Some of these individuals have been here since 9 o'clock this morning. Senator Booker, as you recognize, for your point of information, that we're coming to Senator Balea for his round of questions. I'll make it really quick, Mr. Chair. I don't take the statements of the director to be the person who mamagies anybody, but I want to make sure that what I heard is correct. You're saying that at 100 plus thousand that you've found, one what? 125 that you can you found an option that will do what is necessary to to bring the taxicab commission into a modernization state correct the funds are available where is it coming from how long will it take does that require appropriation by this body could you please just fill us in so that we understand so between myself and commissioner mcurdy we could come up with 62 508 all budgets to cover the cost that's what we're doing so what we're basically doing here is assisting her by having this two-fold here that benefits us in the long run. We're going to spend the money now, but of course she's only generating \$240,000 a year when she's generating a million dollars a year. If she generates a million dollars a year, I can take her completely off the general fund and run her operations through her revolving fund. That's what we're trying to get to. So this software, this vendor is actually providing an option that actually takes her to the 21st century instantly that you can pay online. You could pay with different types of sources, PayPal, Venmo, et cetera. So they have all those platforms to the point where they have an AI module that actually she go in and type in here is give me an analysis of the last X, Y, and Z years of what revenues did I generate. The AI model was sent. I actually spit it out for her. So that's the point where, too, that we're trying to help her, not just sitting here as the commissioner of finance and the director of OMB saying, well, don't give her the money.

1:55:07 where we are already providing a solution that's what we try to do okay very well thank you for the time mr chair thank you very much senator bolquez at this time i recognize senator viola you recognize for your six minutes thank you mr cheer uh taxicab commission we recently passed legislation that all taxi drivers must utilize to form a payment has it been enacted yes it has Could you repeat your question, please?

1:55:40 So what did you answer, yes, it has to. Because I briefly heard a portion of your question regarding the bill. Has it been enacted in 1967? Have we made any strides toward enacting it? And we have. But I think that I may have missed another part of your question, so I want to make sure that I completely answer your question. Okay, hold on. I just wanted to know, is there compliance among the taxi drivers? Yes, there is compliance and there is conversation amongst the taxi drivers. And the way we've gauged that so far is by working along with the associations and also questioning our operators as they visit us daily.

1:56:23 I don't want to go so long because I have a lot of questions. I just wanted to know what percentage of the taxi drivers are complying? It appears to be at least 80% of them, contrary to popular belief. They are compliant. The second form of payment option, more than often, appears to be there. They are compliant with the onboarding of our new operators. We would have 100% compliance with that group because it is requested. I will find out as to the compliance, because I receive a lot of complaints from the Bell We'll serve at Frenchman Reef that we'll bring in passengers on a regular basis, so I will find out.

1:57:02 The issue I have with the Taxicab Commission is that when I came into this body, the Taxicab Commission was collecting \$900,000. Now they're collecting barely over \$300,000 and they want the government to subsidize everything. If they want the \$400,000, begin to do your job so that you can collect that \$600,000 void that we presently have. We are looking for a bells and whistles system for \$400,000. Bells and whistles, we need enforcement officer, and we need to go back to when we are able to charge the fees, account for most of everything, and be able to realize \$900,000 into the account. Until then, we just subsidize it. Now, the home program, I'm reading here, the main purpose of the home program is to expand the supply of decent affordable housing for very low and low income families through the provision of grants to state and local government jurisdictions have great flexibility in designing the local home program in the territory home funds are primarily used to provide direct subsidy assistance to first-time home buyers what's the balance in the home account Presently, we have in home like \$8 million, but that we can't draw down. It's not in the account.

1:58:26 It's based on... Hold up, hold up. \$8 million. It was 10 of the last budget when we spoke, the budget markup last year, or the budget hearings. You have \$8 million that could be utilize for assistance to first-time homeowners. The monies that we get into that country, you said eight last time, you are right. The monies that we get into that country on an annual basis is around \$796,000, \$475,000. So that means for 10 years, we haven't spent money from that account. Why can't

you utilize the entire \$510,000 now for the homeowners in William's Delight? and i could take that 510 and put it towards your slap program can you commit that because this is money that we could draw it on this money's us there you could give them you could have designed that however you want are you going to try to utilize any other eight million dollars for the williams delight program yes we are i we are in discussion we haven't had a discussion here all over the place today this money's been sitting there for years that could be utilized as a subsidy i was in the senate last legislature and i heard the cry for williams delight consistently consistently nothing was done now we bring in a bill you're hearing all different types of stuff don't want the money to be removed but i wish you the the housing finance authority would have the same energy to request that they buy a lot build a home program go back under the housing

2:00:13 finance authority where it's supposed to be and not to odr i wish you'll go and say i want back the vision program because it's supposed to be under the housing finance authority but you lost all of those programs because of inefficiency and non-performance by the housing finance authority and now all of a sudden with six months left in this administration you guys know how to spend everything we have a plan to spend this you have a plan to spend that but all the monies are being spent right in the sister island of sintomas for housing some 70 something million dollars everything else that was a good investment perfect investment we're going to sell it back to them we're going to provide subsidies we're going to give the contractor i can't find my paper now we'll give the contractor 21.4 million dollars for renovation but when we're talking about 500 000 for st groy is an issue we're not talking about seven million dollars for lbg seconds when it comes to buy purchasing over a hundred and something homes that's going to be available to people to purchase on st thomas all is good to a private developer i am just amazed consistently amazed as to what takes place when they come to this island of St. Croix. And when we ask the question about the Virgin Islands housing finance authority, their future plans, a lot of the plans of St. Thomas, we had a meeting and we had to question the director as to what is going to happen to St. Croix. You think St. Croix is going to stay laying back here, ain't complaining about what we deserve? And we just supposed to come to these hearing and you guys are now trying to figure out whether or not you're going to vote for this we have two dysfunctional entity before us housing finance authority bringing somebody big money pay somebody there's 200 000 that was fired before not fired demoted pay 200 000 and then you come in here walking a justification when you barely build any house in the last seven years you can

2:02:14 count them at one hand at some point they got it done they hired a bunch of individuals at the hundred and five thousand dollars the term before in the 34th legislature and nothing to run over look at the salaries and we can't get nothing done today colleagues we gonna stand up for one big island that they don't make a little island we're gonna stand up for it thank you so Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Senator Viola. I think that rounds out the rounds on this particular block number two. Senator Joseph, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I couldn't see in the screen shot. I'm sorry. All right, Senator, you're recognized for your six minutes.

2:03:07 I'm trying to catch a flight. No problem. You go ahead. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon to the listening public. Good afternoon to everybody in the two chambers, central staff, and all my colleagues. This question is for VIHFA. You stated in your testimony that the legislature appears to be permitted and the assumption that the current demolition activity in LBJ wouldn't cause any issues. I would like to ask you, Director Shelford, Shelford, are you going to be there when the demolition starts? because it's easy you're not none of you guys live down in that area and if you go down there yourself you yourself don't want to know like wow i wouldn't want to be in here so if you're questioning the individual of them who live in this place i'm gonna ask you right now are you gonna be around now that you're the acting executive director are you gonna be around when they when the demolition start don't stay in st thomas i want you to sing croy when the demolition start senator i don't have a issue being on sinkhole when the demolition starts we are not incentive to the needs of the people in the area all we are saying is that we never ask them to move we have discussions if people need to be moved if we need to we believe in safe and sanitary housing we don't just sit back and say oh those people and we are in a different bracket we don't do that it's hard for me to sit here and hear you bash the agency because we work hard every day every day we use funds we use federal funds we use local funds to do our mandate every day so i'll come to st corey when the demolition starts good because i want you to witness it so you can feel the vibes in the afternoon when it comes like you you guys said you can put stuff

2:05:23 in place to deal with dust and different issues but regardless of what you can imagine natural dust right now cloam in our place and everybody got some sign that issue the ice burning this rang that rang and that's natural i know we're getting ready to knock down a place and i can listen to how you say nothing they're gonna be hiring who is they gonna be hiring who is they gonna be hiring let's be real if nature right now blooming over our place and your eyes burning you you're cheering and can't go say all these issues and this is nature much less to a place that are testing for our best us that i say clear somebody else say clear because around here we don't listen and then we'll hear different later and again you guys responsible for building house seven we said 400 people waiting for homes if it's that amount and if they're waiting if you guys were responsible for single homes just build a house then i come out among with you when they build them house

they're building three bedrooms they're building four bedrooms they just build houses inside farm they build houses from the jews they build houses with them delight and then people will move right in you think you're right you're done waiting and i wait unless for two years and i am building one house so when you build a house now you still got to wait for them to build your house so you can't say we bashing the agency and it ain't happening ain't happening you have the money if you have the money build a house because if you build a house somebody else will pick up the house i guarantee you right now we've had empty homes and we came to do the same thing for lbj we'd have had places to send the faucet they're ready to move again in lbj we want to make sure we put money aside for the attorney to work the probate cases cardiac probate cases

2:07:20 involved and i want to see that happen i listened to the young lady and she talked about six months but other folks who doesn't have a clear title or deed have to go through some kind of probate so it will take some time but this money needs to go forward i don't know that listening now to finance i don't know that i had plans for 28 million dollars i had plans for the seven i had plans for five now we know it's 28 so again we're willing to start with the three thousand not three million dollars that's what we need i don't want to make no mistake for lbj three million to start up and we want it to happen and happening now these people need their relief everybody here from williams like you see the folks still staying they stay here because they want home ownership that's where they want everybody dissolved the american dream we are part of america that we don't enjoy the dream we got people waiting waiting money's coming waiting how we got to hear from cover to now how much money going back that make any sense money is going back people are in place and money's going back and feel the pain for the next person i ain't here speaking because i want to speak i hear speaking because i went and i meet folks that i know as a child i know as a man past 50 and still seen same people and now suffering the parents one of the one one of the individuals she called earlier was a teacher's aid for me for years at paulby larson and again

2:09:10 pass away waiting to move imagine thank you mr chair for the time are we standing for st croix all the way uh thank you very much um senator clifford joseph a senior at this time do i hear a motion oh we'll take a we'll take a two minutes recess the committee of budget appropriation and finance stands and recess for two minutes Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I love you. Thank you.

2:12:57 The Committee of Budget, Appropriations and Finance is out of recess and back on record. Do I hear a motion? Motion. Motion, Senator Blighton, you recognize your motion? Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I move to hold Bill No. 36.0045 and act appropriating a sum of \$400,000 from advertising revolving fund to the Virgin Islands Taxi Cap Commission for the implementation of technological upgrades. Be held in this committee for further consideration. Motion properly made by Senator Blyden, seconded by Senator DeGraff. Roll call. Senator Marvin A. Blyden. Senator Blyden. Santa Dwayne M. DeGraff Santa DeGraff Santa Ray Fonseca Santa Fonseca Santa Novell E. Francis Jr Santa Francis Jr Santa Hubert L. Frederick Santa Frederick Santa Maurice C. James Santa Maurice C. James Santa J yes senator james yay santa curt a veille yes santa veille yay mr chair six yay one yay thank you very much motion to hold bill number 36.0045 and act appropriating the sum of four hundred thousand dollars from the tourist tourism advertising revolving fund to the virgin annals taxicab commission for implementation and technological upgrades will be held in the committee at the call of the chair point of information do i hear a motion point of information

2:14:51 one one second senator motion senator uh vienna you recognize your motion thank you mr chair mr chair i move that bill number 36 as 0273 and i commanding act number a465 redirecting the appropriation to the first time home bias program to the williams delight Community Home Ownership Program and the VI Slice Home Ownership Program be voted unfavorably in this committee and sent to the Committee of Rules and Judiciary for further consideration. I so move. Second. Motion properly made by Senator VLA, seconded by Senator Maurice James, Senator Frederick, Senator Blyton no you didn't you didn't second roll call senator Marvin A. Blyden Santa Blyden yee Santa Dwayne M. DeGraff Santa DeGraff yee Santa Ray Fonseca Santa Fonseca yee Santa Novel E. Francis Jr. yee Santa Francis Jr. yee senator hubert l frederick yes santa frederick yay santa maurice c james yes santa james yay santa curt a veille yes santa veille yay mr chair seven years thank you very much madam clerk bill number 36.0273 and act amending act number 84 65 for redirecting the appropriation from the First Time Home Buyers Program to the Virgin Islands-Williams Delight Home Ownership Program and the Virgin Islands Life Home Ownership Program has been approved by the Committee of Budget, Appropriations and Finance and will be sent to the Rules and Judiciary Committee for further consideration and bet in.

2:16:40 Do I hear a motion? Amendment. Amendment, Senator Marisa James, do you recognize your amendment? Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move amendment number 36, that's 796 amendment in the nature of a substitute to bill number 36-0274 offered by Senators Clifford A. Joseph Senior, Marie C. James, Kurt Vialli. Bill number 36-0274 is amended by striking the language after the enactment clause and insert in the following language section 1a for purposes of this act one

comparable motion set of early recognize your motion thank you mr chairman the chair move to wave the reading of amendment number 36 that's 796 i still move motion to waive the reading motion to waive the reading of uh the amendment has been made, seconded by Senator Blyden, Senator Maurice James, hearing no objection, so ordered.

- 2:17:56 So moved. So moved, seconded by Maurice James, seconded by Senator Fonseca, as well as Senator Blyden, roll call. Amendment in the nature of the substitute to Bill 36.0274. Senator Marvin A. Blyden, Senator Blyden, yay senator duane m de graf yes senator de graf yay senator rain senator ray fonseca senator fonseca yay senator nova e francis jr senator francis jr yay senator hubert l frederick yes santa frederick yay santa maurice c james yes santa james yay santa kirk a vely santa kirk a vely santa vely not voting i'm saying yes yes yes yes yes santa vely yay mr chair seven ye Thank you very much, Madam Clerk. Bill number 36-0274, an act requiring the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority to pay the compensation to the homeowners of the LBJ Gardens community who have been required to vacate their homes as a result of the actions related to the demolition of properties owned by the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority and associated with the operation of the Virgin Islands Water and Pool Authority and the Virgin Islands Waste Management, as amended by nature of substitute, has been approved by the Committee of Budget, Appropriations and Finance, and will be sent forward to the Rules and Judiciary Committee for further consideration
- 2:19:42 and vetting. I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone in the essence of time. I really had to move. Again, thank you for being here today. A special thanks to our media in being able to get our system up and running. Thank you to all our testifiers, to post-audit staff central staff and everyone involved in today's hearing um god bless and have a great the committee of budget appropriations and finance is hereby adjourned We'll be right back. Let's get started.
- 2:21:28 We'll be right back. Thank you.
- 2:22:28 We'll be right back. We'll be right back. I love you I love you I love you Oh, oh, oh Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh I love you Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I love you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I love you. I love you Thank you.
- 2:31:58 Thank you. Thank you.
- 2:32:58 Thank you. Let's go. We'll be right back. [3 such phrases repeated 12 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]
- 2:38:58 We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back.
- 2:40:28 We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We run, we run Thank you.
- 2:42:58 Thank you. Oh, oh, oh Thank you.
- 2:44:28 Thank you.

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.

- 14x **Senator Marvin Blyden**
heard in this transcript as: Blayden, Blyden, Blyton, Marvin A. Blyden
- 6x **Senator Marise C. James**
heard in this transcript as: Marisa James, Maurice James
- 6x **Senator Ray Fonseca**
heard in this transcript as: Fonseca
- 4x **Senator Clifford Joseph**
- 4x **Senator Hubert Frederick**
heard in this transcript as: Frederick
- 4x **Senator Kurt VLA**
heard in this transcript as: VLA
- 4x **Senator Novelle Francis**
heard in this transcript as: Navelle Francis Jr., Norwell E. Francis Jr., Novell E. Francis Jr.

- 3x **Senator Dwayne DeGraff**
heard in this transcript as: DeGraff
- 2x **Senator Angel L. Bolques, Jr.**
heard in this transcript as: Angel Bouquez, Angel L. Bolques Jr.
- 2x **Senator Angel L. Borges Jr**
heard in this transcript as: Angel Borges
- 2x **Senator Avery Lewis**
heard in this transcript as: Lewis
- 2x **Senator Carla Joseph**
the surname alone also matches: Clifford Joseph; Karla J. Joseph
heard in this transcript as: Joseph
- 2x **Senator Franklin D. Johnson**
heard in this transcript as: Franklin Johnson
- 2x **Senator Kurt Viola**
heard in this transcript as: Viola
- 2x **Senator Marvin A. Blighton**
heard in this transcript as: Blighton

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.

Referred to but not found in our acts corpus: Bill 36-0274, Bill 36-0024, Bill 36-0273