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Legislature USVI

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- 0:00:00 Let's go. Thank you. To be continued... Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. The Committee of Budget Appropriations and Finance is back on record and out of recess and I want to thank certainly our media and public affairs for their patience and getting the system back up and running. And again, we want to continue to wish our WAPA linesmen that's out there in the field, you know, continued health and strength while they continue to risk their lives dealing with this electricity. I also want to thank the Bureau of Corrections for their patience in getting through this since we are almost three-quarters of the way through. So thank you for being there and sticking and staying with us.
- 0:03:45 At this time, Senator Clifford-Joseph, you're recognized for your six minutes. Not there yet. Okay, let's... There he is. Good afternoon, Senator. You're recognized for your six minutes. hey good afternoon to the listening public good afternoon thank you mr cheer first of all and good afternoon to the listening public good afternoon to the testifiers and first question to as far as correction i see you guys do water testing how often do you test the drinking water Yeah, let me wind that up.
- 0:04:40 What is it? Peter? Hello. Good afternoon. Peter Abrahams, Assistant Director of Support Services. Yeah, we have, it's contracted out. The water is tested every month. How much time a month? Once, twice? Once. Okay, thank you. And at the John Bell facility, even though we do test it, it's WAPA water, so WAPA tests the water. Okay, thank you. Director Testema, what is the cost of housing the inmates off island from 2024 to present?
- 0:05:33 i can give you a number for current fiscal year to date but to give you from 2024 i'll have to get that number to you okay because i the reason why i ask is because i'd like to know the difference between what would i cost if they were here okay because i would translate to what would would have been spent if the individuals were here okay i can tell you um that per day i can give you the per day charge a day for to house an individual here in the territory currently it is three hundred and twenty twenty dollars a day in the states on the core civic they are eighty nine dollars daily and Virginia Department of Corrections is a hundred and nine dollars and fifty something cents a day that is the cost okay well you could again

through the chair you could forward that information to the chair for me no problem it's also in my testimony okay and according to the post added report um you have you have honored professional service you have 11 million 351 000 205 in professional service contract, is that correct?

0:07:07 That is correct, sir. Okay, and what is the contract amount for the following? Taylor Trex LLC, Circular LLC, Larkin Communication Hospital, and this trust re-entry link what page are you on sir I'm just asking what is your contract amount for these what tell you tricks LLC give me a month for Teletrix LLC page nine okay those were the amount that was removed from the budget however Teletrix is about sixty six thousand dollars circular was fifty thousand lock-in that comes on the mental health I think we right now we in we have a contract that we're working with now and I think we were asked to secure I want to believe it's a hundred thousand. I'm not sure so don't quote me on that. I'll have to get that to you and Tetris re-entry How much was that? That was fifty thousand dollars?

0:08:28 That trust is fifty thousand you said? Yes Okay, and what services does um Inedible management solution What services they're providing for you guys? Indelible management solution. They provide services, nursing services, nurses and mental health, counseling, physician assistants, nurse practitioner, and social workers. So was this a one-year contract, a two-year contract for the \$2 million? How does this break down?

0:09:05 The contract, one second, I want to believe it is annually, and it's subject to be renewed annually thereafter. So are they spending a million a year, \$2 million a year? Because I see you had a total cost of \$4 million. So how does it break down in the time? Okay, I'll get that number to you shortly. Okay, and where are we with the medical portion of the consent decree? I know you had a good write-up the other day, but could you tell me? Yes. It's been terminated from the consent decree, November 2025.

0:09:45 So what portion of a consent decree is the BOC under right now? The other remaining portion is security, mental health, classification, well, security, operations. That's all inclusive. Okay, and through the chair, can I please, I'm requesting to provide this body with a detailed report on the other services and charges in the category which totals \$12,579,522. Sir, could you...

0:10:29 What page are you on? That's on page 7, and the general fund, and other totals. For 2027, you have \$12,579,522. That's professional services. One minute. The money that's left. No, no, no, for the current fiscal year. Oh, for current year. Yeah, that's professional services.

0:10:56 Okay. I like to get a breakdown on that. okay no problem and is there still a portion I know when I visited the John Bell facility you had a portion that of the facility it wasn't using is it still in that same condition when you say that we weren't using could you please elaborate you had like a I know they had a section I visit you had some 30 seconds um some some what to call them we had some housing units it used to be either e and g they had a section that was not occupied at all okay okay the old facility that's not usable yes that is still not operable that is correct So my next question to you now is, and for your mental portion of the facility that you're using right now, you made a room padded and you fixed a room or a section.

0:12:06 Do you remember the cost of doing the padding and everything else? I have that. I'll have to get back to you. You're speaking in reference to what we call ex-dom, and currently we have a juvenile that's being housed there because that juvenile is being adjudicated as an adult. Okay, but what I'm really trying to get to is, presently on the island, I know that we have some money set aside, like a \$19 million set aside. Mr. Chair, can I finish up?

0:12:38 Yes, Senator, you may proceed. we have money set aside for for for the mental facility but right now we we listening to all the time that there is no oh it's 200 and something million dollars to get done so i was just wondering when you did what you did in the facility down there right now to as far as padding the room and everything else, I was wondering if it makes sense for thinking outside the box. Since you're not using that portion of the facility, and I don't, like I said, you're not using it. I don't know what's the plans. But looking at our streets here and saying, right, we really need to find a place to use up some of that \$19 million so we could secure. I ain't saying that you're going to be responsible for this portion of the facility.

0:13:30 I'm just saying that if it's possible that you think that something like that could have worked. Sir, I will get you that information and then let you all make that determination. What it costs us. Well, thank you for your response. Point of information. Thank you, Mr. Chew. Point of information. Very well. One second, Senator. Thank you, Senator Joseph. Real quickly before, well, let me just see what the point of information is. I know that we had a follow-up question for Senator Johnson, but we'll proceed. Point of information, Senator Johnson, you'll recognize.

0:14:01 Thank you very much. I want to follow up on that question that I asked, but even my colleague prior to me was speaking about it. On page 5, the Bureau said the most significant component of the vendor spending is associated with the housing or feeding of our island inmates, budgeted at \$7.9 million in FY25. My question earlier was, what's the cost for

the same services here in the Territory? The feeding and partly held costs. What's the cost for it? I asked that question earlier.

0:14:37 Currently, the Territory pays \$320 a day per individual. If you want a total cost... Excuse me, please. No, no, no, no. Please. My question is very clear. In your testimony, you said half-island inmates budget at \$7.9 million for FY25, and it included feeding and housing, housing and feeding. And I asked, what was that cost in the territory? Director Testamog, we'll provide additional information to you. however, is \$320 per day to take care of an individual in the territory.

0:15:18 Mr. Chair, I want to stop this mark for now. Because earlier when I asked that question, Mr. Chair, they said that they would get back to me, and it's been about two hours or more we've been off, and they have not brought that information. So that information they have, and they need to provide that information to this committee here, because it's surrounding the budget of the Bureau of Correction. That information should be And they should have it to give us to us They'll provide the information It's \$320 a day 365 days Times how many inmates that you do have on St. Croix Please do the calculation so you can provide it to the Senator Alright Again Point of information Point of information Senator Gittins Thank you also Mr. Chair Through the Chair I respectfully request that the director provide this body with a comprehensive list of all active and inactive professional service contracts entered into by the Bureau within the last three years, please.

0:16:28 Thank you. Very well, you got it, Director? Yes. Speak into the mic. Yes, no problem. All right, got it. point of information senator carla joseph and thank you so kindly mr chairman a pleasant good day to everyone now i believe all of us have access to this i did a really quick comparative analysis i know in your and i'm using as a reference your presentation from your fiscal year 2026 budget and i have it here so i could be able to ask these questions uh i noted that your state side per day at last year was 103 per day for state side kindly indicate to us why is it now has risen uh to 109 per day specifically for virginia as you had mentioned and it's now 89 dollars per day i mean it's considerably less than housing the inmates which is staying steady based on your testimony at 320 dollars per day for our on island inmates but i just wanted to understand what is causing the little jump it's just a little minor jump but tell us what what are some of the items that contribute to that thank you the jump in the couple of dollars in the contract it is stated it's usually like a three percent increase to the three percent increase which is already built in into the contract okay thank you that's understandable so that's a cost of living increase yes okay

0:18:14 thank you so kindly thank you very much senator Carla J Joseph next we'll We'll recognize Senator Milton Patterson. Senator President, you recognize for your six minutes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon, colleagues. Special good afternoon to Director Testamark and the members of her executive team. I wanted to start by asking, Director Testamark, you anticipate approval of salary increases for nurses shortly. What's the current Entry salary for nurses And what is the anticipated salary Once the new salary is kicking And that's the starting salary One second, let me look So the starting salary for nurses is about \$67,000 For the starting salary And those will be going up to \$74,000 \$74,000, okay Okay. Excellent. Is Iona, do you anticipate that helping you with your recruitment effort?

0:19:21 Well, we would hope that it will, but we also, again, our challenge is that everyone is vying out of the same pot for nurses, the hospitals and everything we come against. It's a challenge for us. Understood. Okay, the bureau notes that correctional officers comprise approximately 43% of the workforce. Is this staffing composition aligned with national correctional best practices? It all depends on the different factors that you look into.

0:20:00 When you look at what we have here in the territory, our facility, the individuals, the amount of inmates that we service, people will look at it and say the ratio we have is like three to one, whereas nationally, it's about a hundred to one, you know? So again, there's a lot of different variables that goes into it. territory is very unique our physical plant is very unique it's spread out so it's more labor intense from time to time yeah yeah okay what what do you attribute that vastly different um cost for housing an inmate on the mainland versus housing an inmate in the u.s virgin islands We said \$320 per inmate, per day, which is as low as \$80-something on the main line.

0:20:57 Yeah. When you look at that price and what it takes for us here in the territory to take care of these individuals, you have to look at the cost of food, the fact that we import a lot of things, our physical plant, which is very aging, and what it costs us to maintain those facilities. Whereas sometimes most of them in the States, they're more modern. The cost of living is lower. You know, there's a lot of different variables that goes into that number. I appreciate your response. Now, the Bureau budgets \$1.2 million annually for the court-appointed monitors and experts. What is the anticipated timeline for exiting the remaining consent decree obligations? I don't know if you mentioned that earlier.

0:21:45 Yeah. The territory, the Bureau of Corrections, we're working tirelessly to meet the mandates that's required to provide a constitutionally safe facility in both consent decree. So we're constantly working hard to do so, to achieve compliance, to be consistent. And, again, we've achieved that with medical and dental, and we're working towards those other

components, operations and mental health. Again, we have some time. We don't have a timeline.

0:22:20 The goal, we really would love to get out it before this administration ends, but we continue to chip away, but we've made great strides within the last seven and a half years. Okay. You quantified, have you quantified the annual cost savings that will result from complete termination of federal oversight? I have not quantified that cost. I could do so.

0:22:48 Okay. Definitely would appreciate that, Director. Okay. Now, the Bureau indicates approximately 40% of inmates receive mental health treatment does the territory possess sufficient psychiatric staffing capacity to meet these needs the bureau of corrections we provide the kid that we can provide at the bureau anything above that level the individual is sent away to those facilities away because we don't have that here in the territory. But we provide good, great medical and mental health services to the individuals here in our custody. One minute. Okay. Now, outstanding medical vendor payments exceed 1.2 million. Have delayed reimbursements adversely affected access to specialty care or provide a willingness to contract with the bureau no it does not delay access to care that's one thing I must say is despite the challenges sometimes with payment we work with finance and we work with the vendor and service 30 seconds always provided to our inmates in our care okay given a BOC has become as you mentioned really in many respects one of the territory's largest mental health providers. What discussions, if any, have occurred with the Department of Health, the Behavioral Health Unit, or Division, regarding resource sharing and coordination?

0:24:30 Director Testamark, we have worked, we've been collaborating with Department of Health and other stakeholders within the territory. The challenge is, again, and everyone apparently is strapped for resources. We share the same psychiatrist, Dr. Tseng. She's a psychiatrist for us, a contract, and she also works for DHS and DOAs. So we do our best to try to share those resources, and that's one of the reasons why Indelible also now services us with some of those clinicians that's needed so that we don't have to really share with anyone else.

0:25:09 Thank you. I know my time was calm. Mr. Chair, if I just, let me just wrap up with just one quick final question. You may proceed, Senator. Your testimony appropriately, I would say appropriately, emphasizes rehabilitation, technology, and compliance. Looking ahead, first of all, before I look ahead, what would you consider to be your greatest accomplishment during your tenure as director? And looking ahead, what would you say, let's say looking ahead five years, what does success look like for the Virgin Islands Bureau of Corrections?

0:25:49 So first, your greatest accomplishment as director for the last two terms of the administration and looking ahead, what would success look like? We're talking about for the next five years at the Bureau. Thank you for that. That's a great question. Success looks like, to me, number one, us fully coming out of the consent decree, the 40-year-old consent decrees. decrees. And again, I would say that we have great success because we were managed to come out, take medical and dental services out of it. And we also have made great strides in having most of the provisions. Well, all of the provisions are out of noncompliance. That is great strides compared to when I started. That's one. Two, increase the pay. We increased they pay for correctional officers.

0:26:47 When I came, it was 21,000. Under this administration, it was increased to 41,500, which is now comparable to the VIPD officers. That's two. And three, we were able to fund, put all the necessary tools in the Bureau of Corrections, whether it's vehicles, there weren't none. Now we have a fleet of vehicles that staff can utilize to transport inmates safely to and from wherever they need to go. We were able to complete the kitchen, renovate the kitchen so that inmates could come now down into the dining room and eat.

0:27:28 We were able to increase the quality of life, provide quality of life for inmates and thereby increasing it for the staff by quality air, putting air condition, Like you said, the water, we increase the water by testing it and, you know, ensuring that it's safe to drink. We also ensure that staff were able to get uniforms on a timely basis, give them all the training necessary to succeed. So, I mean, when you say what does success look like, oh, my God, we're there, but we still have a lot of way to go. But under this administration, we have done a whole lot, and in addition to that, we've done security enhancements enhancements and technology integration. You know, when I came, it was paper, paper, paper. So we definitely, we've gone to, for medical, we now have telemedicine. And I think some hospitals, when they come and visit us, they're really surprised that we have telemedicine. We have a state-of-the-art dental suite. You know, all those different things that we have done when you talk about, you know, security enhancement, re-entry, rehabilitation, we've done under this administration. We've reduced recidivism. I mean, I can go on and on.

0:28:47 As a matter of fact, I have 13 pages of accomplishments that I think is a part of my testimony. And if it's not, we could ensure that you have it. But definitely the workforce development and staff professionalization that we've done under this administration, the education the vocational training for the inmates look up in my tenure we've graduated a hundred and a hundred plus individuals and those are things again corrections that is what it's about rehabilitation that is what it's about so when you ask me about success that's what it looks like and for me I am proud to say the team that have worked

with me for the seven and a half years that I've been here, that the things that we have done and will continue to do, like I tell my staff, whether I'm here or not, the foundation has been laid.

0:29:39 So guess what? Carry on, because you have a great foundation. Thank you. Thank you very much for your response, Director. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for your flexibility. Thank you very much, Director Testa Mark, for your response there. Be careful you ask, all right? Thank you. Senator DeGraff, you're recognized for your six minutes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon, Carly. Good afternoon, Test Affairs. All of you listening, I'm present. Just drop the mic.

0:30:11 You skipped me? Oh, no, Kenny. Okay, yeah. All you need to drop the mic, but that mic will pass. You'll be followed by Senator DeGraff and Senator Gisnes. Yeah, okay. I came a little late. I do apologize. I had a previous engagement to address on St. John, so I took care of that. But me, all the great stuff you were just talking about, I'd like to hear about the employees first. I'm sure all my colleagues don't ask about the employees. They don't ask about them questions about wage increases and different things like that.

0:30:46 Minimal. You can go ahead. So how much unions do you have? Dr. Kaiser, Carl, what could he elaborate? So currently we have five unions. And all those unions receive wage increases? All unions receive wage increases except the nurses that just had an UMDES audit, so we are bringing them on to step. That will be completed within the next two weeks to 30 days in terms of going through the process so they could be on board and everybody else will be ready. So then they would have to negotiate then? No, no, so they're GS.

0:31:14 GS, okay, so we have the money for next year for their raises. The 27 budget is what they're going to GS employees. They just sent that recently, so we have the number. that we would need to ensure those are implemented. Good, that's good to hear. Now, is there any retro owe to anyone? Only the nurses. Retro owe to them? Would be retro, because once we implement their step increase, you'll have to get retro. Okay, okay, man, that sounds good. And we have the money to pay them? Yes. Good, we don't have to go and we ask for it.

0:31:45 Director, you have an army over here with you, man, so this is a whole money shift. Who run in the prison? We have staff. we have capable staff at both facilities. That's good. You know, for me, like I say, thank you to you and your team for what you do. Because I'm saying, I wasn't looking for perfect when I voted yes for you, but I just look at you to come in and do your job. And you put a staff around you. You have some young faces. Some of them, they're so young. You know, it's let me put it this way. today is june 18 2026 i joined the government of the virgin islands june 18 1979 what that's when i joined the government some of them weren't born some of them before the time that's why i say they so young but i'm glad to see that glad to see the succession goes on so i've been here a minute you know you know and i'm just proud to serve but now the facilities that they work in one thing i'm interested in is, do you have a sprinkler system in the prisons? That's the system John A. Bell, Peter Abrams could elaborate on. Because I asked about that last time, and are they functional? Do they have water? No, they're not functional. We've been working on getting the scope of work and the drawings and everything together to put it out for bid. So, excuse me, I was told her the last time, and I said that Because I'm saying you're in a confined facility, anything come down, you're going to need that system to work, to save lives.

0:33:22 Correct. And without that system, I've been hearing it too long that it's scope of work going out, going out, too long. We agree. We wholeheartedly agree with you also. A timeline? The issue that we were having, and it was presented earlier, is that we've been working with the Department of Public Works. um they've been having some uh issues with with employees when i say issues meaning that we've been assigned engineers but the engineers have um come they've gone they've left and so every time we we seem to have to restart all over again okay so thank you very much i i do apologize for but again i'll try and get a shorter version but again let's make that one of your priorities for at least the next six months. It's definitely a priority.

0:34:11 Do you have an Impress Fund? You never had one? Okay, cool. Just checking. Now, how many retirees or persons that can retire do you have? Currently, we have a total of 30 individuals that can retire. 30 that can. And how many have retired in 2025, 2026? Seven.

0:34:38 Seven. Okay, and all one discipline, all corrections officers, or across the board? We have most are correction officers, and then one civilian. Okay, okay. Now, I just want to make sure for, Director, what age your correction officers can go home, can work up until 2 before they retire? Up to what age they can work until they retire? Up to age? Yes. I know they have to do a certain year. I know they have to do 20, 25 years.

0:35:10 No, man. I passed the bill for them to walk up to 65. Oh, gee. Correction officers could walk up to 65 if they passed certain requirements, physical and psychological requirements. So see, that's one thing you got to make sure you know. Because the issue for that came out because you weren't getting people joining. So you have any class in presently or about to kick off? there's no post class there haven't been a post class for past year um they're hoping to get one started

and i think currently we only have one applicant one cat one cat a correction officer is a prisoner with a with a badge one minute right so you know so we need people to replenish so that's why it was allowed for that to be done yes okay and again i ain't saying it to be negative I'm just saying that's the reality of it. Now, do you have, how can I say, mental counseling for your own employees lined up where, because, again, all I work in prison are is prisoners. Yes. Until you leave, you're a prisoner, and you've got to come back to prison. 30 seconds. So that could be, I think, mentally stressful of all jobs. You know, so do you have designated counseling for them, or I should say mandatory counseling for them on a regular basis?

0:36:30 The agency contracts with Insight and staff needs additional counseling or they need to go speak to someone. Insight services provide for them and that we would pay for and then they also have the EAP. Okay, and that's one of your professional contracts? Yes. Okay, and that one is funded? Yes. Any money owed on that? insight do we have any I'll have to check and get back to you yeah we can't have money owed for professional services for your staff no okay they just said we don't have we don't know them now okay and finally for me wrap up mr. chair our medical supplies how are we with medical supplies cuz again I know that was an issue prior prior years oh weird with funding for medical supplies and how is our stock presently? Dr. Calwood? Dr. Linda Calwood, currently we're up-to-date with all our medical supplies including the dental supplies.

0:37:29 Okay okay and that's very good to hear. So again thank you Director, you know it's been a blast, you've done a great job and I support you to the end. Thank you. Thank you for the time Mr. Chair. Thank you. Thank you very much Senator DeGraff. director how is the morale at the bureau well you know you know my answer the morale as far as I'm concerned it is good I mean all depends on the day and who you speak into but for the most part I would say it's good the the any challenges that we have that staff have they are addressed and I always I have an open-door policy what are some what is one of the major challenge your feel it um and you have to correct in any way shape or form what is the complaint or challenge that have been brought to your attention well it was pay it's not they don't talk about pay anymore they don't talk about training anymore could they say i give too much training um i would say a facility a facility and a governor of course staffing more more officers that's what i would say thank you point of information so the graph yeah I actually missed it on my list over time over time was an issue um as we have we corrected the overtime issue with the personnel and is anyone owed any back over time no we don't owe anyone any back over time okay and it was corrected yes yes sir thank you thank you mr. chair so it's a kind of little get things you recognize for your six minutes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon to all. I want to go back to two responses I was listening to earlier first. Director, people still drinking WAPA water? We were talking about water testing. People still drinking water from WAPA, isn't it?

0:39:33 What I will tell you is the water that comes into our facility, it's tested and it's safe to drink. If somebody wants to buy water or they need water, we supply water also. So I don't know when you ask that question, what does that mean? I don't know. You don't know what? No, I said when you ask that, I don't know. As far as I know that the water is safe and they drink the water. Okay.

0:40:01 and it's also filtered and there was a response that only nurses are owed retroactive monies is that a true response only nurses yes it is senator that's correct so none of the corrections officers who have been there from in the 90s if you have them still are owed any retroactive monies none of our current officers are owed based on a cba they were paid if we have persons that have retired have left they will need to reach out to us but everyone that works for us on staff has been paid every last one okay and your contracts are up to date yes to include the land enforcement supervisory union oh i'm sorry when you're saying contract i'm talking professional contracts no in terms of all the union contracts they're all expired we're waiting for them to be renewed okay i want you to hear me good before you all respond okay um director i need you to convince me here a little bit um because as i look at this despite the um a reduced inmate population due to off island transfers why should we look at increasing funding at this time how are you measuring a success beyond simply moving inmates off island director just to mark moving inmates off island is not the only that's not the only um reason why the population has been I understand. So that's why I say convince me.

0:41:44 Well, what I will do is give you my facts. And the facts are individuals are released from jail daily. The court has now embraced more so alternatives to incarceration. so with those variables our count is down so it's not necessarily that sending people away since being here I only sent about 30 people away so so you said only 30 people were transferred under this administration only about 30 estimated. 30 is no more than 50 people that was transferred under this administration.

0:42:36 I could get the exact number. 30 to 50 is a big margin. So what are three most significant operational deficiencies you'll tell me remaining within the Bureau today? The physical you said deficiencies? Yes. I would say the physical plant because we have the aging facilities at CJC. Currently, we have to relocate our inmates.

- 0:43:08 So, physical plant being one, what's two? Mental health, the challenges of dealing with the mentally ill. And three? And security because, again, of the physical plant. So then that's same as one? So, let's look at your personnel cost distribution section. Your testimony says that vacant positions account for about 23.9% of personnel expenditures.
- 0:43:45 So, how many funded positions are currently vacant territory-wide? So, funded territory-wide, we have the funded, it will be 69. and i can break them down for you if you need 69 yes sir and what specific positions remain uh hardest to fill correction officers and mental health um professionals see you on mental health specifically what type of mental health uh position so these will be like coordinators social workers and counselors. So what are you doing for recruitment?
- 0:44:37 Well, in terms of recruitment, we're doing several things. We are, of course, always on the radio. Every single career fair we have done, we have even traveled off-island to Florida, to Atlanta, to even to recruit individuals. um we try to ensure that for uvi graduates that we are there to get them to come on board i think the agency does a whole lot in terms of trying to recruit individuals okay even holding their hands all right uh how many employees have resigned or retired or transferred out of the bureau during uh fiscal year 26. five five yes sir five that's from which district um between st thomas and st croix so two st croix three st thomas or vice versa so you and st croix i mean sorry st croix you have three st thomas two Okay. Mr. Chair, I think time was called.
- 0:45:47 You can by proceed. Thank you. So under the settlement agreements, the Virgin Islands have been paying some significant amount of money for federal oversight for decades. We need to know what's different today. What specific benchmarks remain before the federal court that will terminate this oversight entirely? We have, well, there's two consent decrees. In St. Croix, we have now that's left for oversight is security operations, mental health.
- 0:46:36 St. Thomas. Security and mental health. What specifically for security? Because since we've been transferring inmates, I haven't seen where we've been rehabbing any of the buildings there or even building new ones. So what specifically with security you're talking about on St. Croix?
- 0:47:06 Well, I mean, when I speak of security, Senator Giddens, I'm speaking of a lot of different things. We're talking about classification of individuals? So that's why I'm trying to get you to explain it to me. Okay. Let me have my quality assurance manager. She could come, and she could break it down for you. Her name is Tamara McIntosh-George. One second, please. while she come uh what's the estimated annual cost of uh the court monitors and consultants 1.2 senator 1.2 million dollars annually yes sir do we see the light at the end of the tunnel uh with ending this oversight we definitely do see the light we've made great strides under the brian roach administration sir okay so what when are when are you looking at good afternoon um tamar mcintosh george wait wait wait wait one second one second let her finish and answer that question since you see the light at the end of the tunnel i want to make sure it's not an oncoming train So how soon are we looking at?
- 0:48:27 So I can't give you a date and time, but what I can say is that we have made. I don't want a specific date, but when are we looking at? Because if we're making significant strides, you're getting ready to tell me what specifically with security. And I haven't seen any rehab or no build going on. So I just need to know a year out, five years out, how long? I really can't answer that question. When you talk about the new build, if you appropriate some funding to build something, that's my point. We can't see the light at the end of the tunnel. It might be an oncoming train, and that's my point. So let me just hear from Ms. McIntosh-George, and then I'll just wrap it up.
- 0:49:17 Good afternoon. Tamara McIntosh-George, Quality Assurance Manager. There have been significant strides in the settlement agreement, especially for John A. Bell. As of our 30-second report that went out, I want to believe, two months ago, We increased provisional compliance from 55% to 66% of the settlement agreement. With the removal of medical and dental, there is only a remaining of 115 points to be achieved for compliance. So we do see the light at the end of the tunnel.
- 0:50:00 And the reason why you can't give an estimated projection as to when one is going to come out of the consent decree is because it doesn't just take the individuals here to do the work, it's everyone within the Bureau. So any policy violation, any corrective action, any renewal of policy implementation, it tends to push back that benchmark because it has to be sustained compliance. So while they're not measuring for perfection, they're measuring for consistency. And under this administration, we have definitely seen a consistent increase in the settlement agreement moving forward for termination. So honestly, I wasn't looking for a date, a pinpoint date, because I know you all can't give me that.
- 0:50:46 But when you're going to tell us that there's light at the end of the tunnel, I figure you could tell me that if you have three more benchmarks from the 16 you might have had, we're down to three, and basically convince this body that, you know, we think that we can meet these three benchmarks. we could see this closing out at least within the next three years or so. That's what I expected. I didn't expect you to give me a date.

- 0:51:21 But thank you for your response. And, Mr. Chair, I'll close out with the Dignity Bus Initiative and the Transitional Homes because my office has received complaints from former inmates who indicate that they were released with nowhere to go and no immediate support. I even had a visitor here one day while I was here in the chambers in the middle of a hearing who was released, and this was the case. So I wanted to know what's the specific purpose of the Dignity Bus, how much we paid to procure this, and where did we get it from? The Dignity Bus is here to provide temporary assistance to individuals that's experiencing homelessness and needs additional assistance in relocating back into the community. To date, we have serviced 85 individuals. We can't make them stay.
- 0:52:37 We provide the services for them. If they want it, we're there for them. And we also connect them with the services long term. Relative to the transition homes, we have serviced 15 individuals to date. Again we cannot make them stay. Some of those individuals don't want to stay. So we service them. We do the best that we can for them. connect them with the services and then they're free to go they're not mandated to stay i don't think you understood my statement you know i i didn't tell you about mandating that they stay or whatever i told you i had a actual visitor here at the office saying that he had nowhere to go and was released after hours from the bureau he was let out no place to go no money in his pocket so he's homeless so if we have the dignity bus and we have these transitional homes i'm wondering why didn't he have that option but we could uh speak of this offline or in another setting but but I think that I needed to bring this forth as we're here looking at your budget, and I want to see how we're going to justify every dime to include the usage of these homes and the buses. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for your responses.
- 0:54:18 Director Testamark, can I? You may. The Dignity Bus and the Transition Homes, we apply for grants, and that's how we purchase those, the Dignity Bus and the Transition Home. We try our best not to rely on a general fund, because we know that's very limited. So we seek grants to be able to provide these additional services for the individuals in the community. relative to in the gentleman that you said came to your office again when they leave us before they leave us we asked them do you have somewhere to go I even have officers that will take them take them to wherever they need to be so if that person came to you and again we are not the only individuals in it in the territory you have all these different charities that is supposed to provide housing for these individuals the dignity bus and the transition home we have one that was just an additional step that we felt the Bureau of Correction felt necessary because many times when the individuals leaving our facilities those charities don't have no place for them because they don't want the ex-inmate they don't want those individuals in their place so we just took it upon ourselves to do that but this is all grant funding that we did So thank you, and I look forward to continually working with you to come up with a solution to the challenge that the territory has.
- 0:55:49 uh mr chair um alas through the chair uh for information on this dignity bus initiative uh with regards to the grant funding information uh where we got the buses from and the amount that we paid for these buses thank you very well i think there's only one bus uh one bus one bus and one house yes yeah um but you know to just to um add to the conversation i still think that even though we have the non-profit organization that support and assist with our homelessness we still have a responsibility as a government to ensure that we're supporting whether through human services or some entity um in individuals that even the transitional home for individuals that's moving from one step to the next, because obviously when you talk about recidivism, that's the same situation that you mentioned in your testimony that these individuals are placed right back in the same environment that got them into jail in the first place. So we want to make sure that we are affording them some structure that after you have done all of this wonderful rehabilitation and preparation for re-entry, you want to make sure that there's a smooth transition so you don't find themselves right back into the prison environment.
- 0:57:12 agree thank you senator college Joseph you're recognized for your six minutes thank you so kindly mr. chairman a pleasant good day to everyone I want to first commend the Bureau of Corrections each one of you you're doing a very good job I'm going to tell you because this population you're working with is no walk in the park population. I just want to encourage each of you. You under this administration I have seen a shift in a positive way. You're leveraging federal funding to help assure that when our people because they belong to nobody else but us, they leave the Bureau of Corrections, they are rehabilitated. How do you get them to be rehabilitated? They have to be educated. Education, I would always say education is the greatest equalizer. When our community becomes educated and when we become educated, our community becomes elevated.
- 0:58:28 Education does that. And the work that you do in providing This is innovative work. I hope that nationally you are on the radar because if you're doing tiny homes, you're doing transitional bus services for homeless individuals, that is trying your best to meet the needs of your population who you serve and to reduce your recidivism rate. Now, I was trying to read through and see what your recidivism rate is.

- 0:59:02 I see it here. It's 18.6%. How has that reduced over the years? Tell us, how has it reduced? Has it been reduced, or are you seeing a fluctuation up and down? Well, with the new cohort, compared to the last one we did in 2022, It's a 7% increase in the rate. And as stated earlier, some of the variables are individuals just don't have anywhere to go for services. So sometimes they offend, re-offend, and they come back. Yeah, because they are in an area where they know they're going to get food, shelter, medical care, for free. Yes, yes. For free. That's the issue. And because of that, I wanted to really zero down on how much it costs the people of the Virgin Islands, the taxpayers, to pay for individuals to be rehabilitated.
- 1:00:07 First, you said \$320 per day. Based on your testimony, on page 7, you have a total of 181 inmates locally. so you times the 181 times 320 it takes times 365 days you know how much that comes up to 21 million let me just break it down for everybody 21 million 140 800 that's your that's those if we would put in some of these human beings off island, we would be saving a significant amount of money for the government. Those individuals are persons who have violated our laws. They need to be rehabilitated and we don't have the capacity, based on what you've represented, Ms. Tester Mark to treat them not at \$320 per day per inmate 365 days a week some of them living in AC AC they have air conditioning you have a backup generator at both facilities yes ma'am under this administration Brian Roche Administration, we purchased a generator, CJC, and one for John A. Bell.
- 1:01:49 Okay, so when we experience that little power outage here, do the Bureau experience that? Your generator goes on automatically? Yes, ma'am. The generators automatically goes on. Telling you. At both facilities. people is having luxury uh for violating the laws um and i am not too much into having people have luxury for doing that they have to have some level of discipline and be disciplined one minute rehabilitated now i want to ask you i see here on page seven that you have for fiscal year 25 the Bureau spent a total of \$1.1 million for inpatient and outpatient services. But you still have an outstanding balance now for medical care totaling \$1.2 million.
- 1:02:51 You see? 30 seconds. So how is this outstanding balance coming from? this outstanding balance is for local not not uh off island care no that's for local that's all local so we don't have outstanding balances for off island care not medical care no ma'am so it's for here in the virgin islands you see this again ma'am this is going into this \$21,140,800 it takes to house and care for inmates and I'm using 181 inmates here in the Virgin Islands. That's a lot of money and we got to reduce it. Um, Mr. Chairman, I want to also really compare how much we spend, uh, to house those inmates off island now in virginia based on your testimony miss tester mark you mentioned virginia only is about a hundred and nine dollars and you have 33 inmates there yes ma'am and that gives us a total for \$365, 365 days, \$1,312,905.
- 1:04:15 What a reduction. You see all of this, if we sent more people off-island, we could get money freed up to guess what? Pave the roads then. You have a road right here in St. Thomas. coming up the street by GERS that need to be paved. The hospital needs the money. We have urgent care for people who are law abiding here in the Virgin Islands who need hospital care. That's what they need. We could have gotten a sizable amount of savings here. So I am one. We need to save the money and put the money where it counts to our people who are paying the taxes them on law abiding. If you want to not be law abiding, you're going to get shipped off island. We are a small community. We don't have the time for people to be doing all this lawlessness. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman for the time. Thank you very much, Senator Calder, Jay Joseph. Alright, Director that testimony do you have anyone that's doing remote working remote yeah work from home work from away no sir what about do you have anyone that's an extended leave um without pay i think we have a someone on medical we have someone on medical and they're right now they go in in they they trying to apply for some medical situation yeah what about flex time do you allow for employees to do work flex time no sir no sir is that something that you consider doing if there's a need for it no no sir not at this time that inmates are in jail and they need to be there we have individuals when you say flex time what do you mean let me ask that flex time is where an
- 1:06:12 employee because of circumstances that they may have they could work you know a certain amount of hours or maybe go to school come back and finish their work or they come in a little bit later and schedule time and then work beyond their shift to make up the time difference. Again, just kind of working with employees to meet them halfway in those instances. Yeah, that's something I have to look into because, again, the population in which we serve and the requirements for them. Well, what that does is at least present an opportunity rather than individuals resigning, relocating, or seeking a job elsewhere. You know, they're able to still fulfill their role. And, you know, there. So what about hurricane preparation? Generators are charged up, fueled, and ready to go?
- 1:06:55 Yes, they are. Food and medicine inventory is checked and stable? Water, yes, they are. Okay, very well. I want to commend Chaplain Burkett. I heard you mention him in your testimony. But I don't want to call it a shakedown, right? But I know that he comes around at times just to make sure that he's meeting the needs of our population, and getting the pastors and others going there. So I want to come in, as well as the other ministry that comes into the prison, come into the facilities to assist and support them. I'm going to allow for a burning question to wrap up. And we'll start off from,

let's see.

- 1:07:39 Santa DeGraf, you recognize for your burning question? Thank you, Mr. Chair. When you look at me, you ain't going to be scared. You ain't going to be scared. Two things. the actual that were given they were for what month actual so the we give updated actuals yeah they already gave them so just i i have to say that it's june 17th june okay yeah so the ones in the testimony is june 8 but i before you came we give the actual okay today and then in closing um your ask this year is or increase or decrease or what is your ask this year what is your actual axe for your total budget 36 million four hundred and seventy six thousand six six five he had an increase of one point three percent four hundred and sixty two thousand one seventy one okay and that's basically sufficient for what it is to get you to 2027 yes definitely not perfect but sufficient okay thank you thank you for the time mr. chair this increase and the 1.3 percent increase of four hundred and sixty two thousand one hundred seventy one dollars is for what what is that going towards its personal cost over so it's personal cost specifically and then some of other services like professional services contract well I'll give you um 30 seconds to wrap up And, oh, I'm sorry, burning questions. College of Joseph, you recognize me. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.
- 1:09:24 I do have a burning question. It goes back to the overall cost of housing inmates. If your director test mark was to reduce the number of housing inmates that are being housed locally to, say, Mississippi, Do you see that you would have to reduce your staffing by any amount? Repeat the question.
- 1:10:02 For instance, you have 181 inmates currently being housed between John Bell and Alexander Farrelly Facility. If you reduce that amount by 25% and you actually relocated some of those inmates to the off-island facilities, do you see or do you anticipate that you would have to reduce staff? When you look at the overall, if you reduce the only individuals we can move out is sentenced individuals. So that's one unit. So that's really just decreasing at three.
- 1:10:43 oh only three of them staff yes officers it's just the officers it's just the officers yes ma'am okay all right thank you so much you're welcome i have one more final question mr chairman sorry um i do have one final question i wanted to ask you because i read your compliance governance and strategy planning and i paid that's on page 17 number eight how are you rating what is your rating for introduce kpi driven performance management across security operations staffing and training maintenance and infrastructure re-entry and programming outcomes and mental health service delivery how how are you rating those how are those items rated so they're the different ratings so we have a total of um for instance in administration we have two they are rated across um for instance vendor payments and invoices that's about 50 the target the um compliance in terms of monetary training is at 85 which we always exceed Institutional facilities, we have a total of five. For the percentage of required cell checks per shift, we try to get to 100%. The incident report submitted according to policy, 85%. For contraband cease, we try to ensure it stays at three. Number of evacuation fire drills, we do it by quarter, so the target is one. Average time for critical maintenance requests, the average time should be eight hours that we look at. In terms of health services, we have one. In terms of the number of weekly mental health rounds, we try to have a target of eight. In program and treatment, we have two areas. Eligible inmates participating in re-entry program, the target is 90%. And percentage of inmates and detainees participating in educational vocational programs, the target is 65%. For the most part, with those targets, we meet the needs of the target. The only one that we have the issue with will be invoice processing.
- 1:13:03 And why is that? Because it goes based on funding available to the government, and we make sure we submit our bills on time and work with finance over and over and over. We have the staff there that's very dedicated. We also set our listing of priority and critical payments, and we follow up and follow through. So that would always be a low figure, you think? And that's not only to our agency. All agencies are affecting that. but for the most part, BOC bills are paid on time. Okay, thank you so much, Mr. Carwood, very well. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, for your leniency. Very well, thank you. At this time, Director, just to mark, I'll allow you to close out. And, well, let me ask you, first of all, what about this budget that keeps you up at night? What gives you a reason for pause?
- 1:13:53 It's funny you ask me that. My staff said it to me on the way here. they're gonna ask you that thank you for that what keeps me up at night to be honest with you where we are today I sleep comfortably my biggest challenge again is taking care of the the mentally ill that's within our facilities that keeps me up at night just trying to find ways that we can work together to achieve that goal but we continue to do so but other than that I sleep comfortably knowing that we're in a good place we're not perfect but we've come a long way and I'm grateful to the staff to the people of the Virgin Islands who has stood by us in this administration to get the work done hasn't been easy but we have made great stride we have made we have three we have turned it around I'll give you 30 seconds to wrap up at this time. Thank you. So the Virgin Islands Bureau of Corrections continue to advance a modern, accountable, and results-driven correctional system focused on public safety, rehabilitation, and operational excellence through commitments that have not only been made, but meaningfully been delivered. Through strategic investments in our workforce, infrastructure, inmate programming, and

compliance initiatives, the Bureau is delivering measurable outcomes while positioning the territory for long-term success. I thank everyone for all their hard work, like the staff, the correctional officers, the support staff, everyone for the Bureau of Corrections. We thank you. And it's just, yeah, we thank the agency is better positioned now to continue to move forward. Also, I want to extend to the public, I know tomorrow we have our family fun day, and I want to encourage the individuals in St. Thomas and the individuals in St. Croix, if you come, you need to update your loved one contact, please do so.

1:16:14 we'll have forms there please update your individual contact so when you come so we look forward to having you all thank you all very well thank you very much and I do want to join in commanding the Bureau of Correction I certainly could sell home I've been around for six terms since the 31st legislature and we have seen remarkable strides and improvement there and that's commendable um so i want to equally thank them for their contribution and of course you know ask them to continue to put in the hard work so that we can really get to where we would like to be which is perfection and um so tomorrow is juneteenth it's my colleague college joseph birthday happy birthday in advance happy birthday senator carla joseph she's so good they even gave her a whole holiday for her birthday so we'll be closed tomorrow however we resume on monday on st croix where we'll be having a nurse licensure steam cnc as well as project said health center and we'll be in the st croix district for that um so we hopefully we get the power to stay up i want to thank our facilities management today um for assisting us in getting this power going i know that they worked on a generator. We had some challenges there as well, but they put in some work to get us where we're at, so I truly want to appreciate our central staff in terms of today's event. I want to also thank my personal staff. A lot of times, my senatorial staff, a lot of times I neglect to mention them, and they have to do all of the juggling and scheduling and everything else. Sending out text, testimonies in the wee hours in the morning, when they come in late, post out a report. Yes, Dr. Kaiser Caldwell, when they're sending their testimonies late, they got to stay up in the warehouse in the morning

1:18:11 to get those out so that my colleagues could be able to get this information and read over them there. But thank you all. Have a great weekend. And again, the Committee of Budget Appropriations and Finance is hereby adjourned. Happy Juneteenth. I celebrate my birthday on the day after, which is June 20th as well. So, I'm right after all the good senators out there. All right? Committee is hereby adjourned. God bless.

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.

- 4x **Senator Dwayne DeGraff**
heard in this transcript as: DeGraff
- 3x **Senator Franklin D. Johnson**
heard in this transcript as: Johnson
- 2x **Senator Carla Joseph**
the surname alone also matches: Clifford Joseph; Karla J. Joseph
heard in this transcript as: Joseph
- 2x **Dr. Kaiser A. Calwood**
the surname alone also matches: Linda Calwood
heard in this transcript as: Calwood
- 2x **Senator Kenneth L. Gittens**
heard in this transcript as: Giddens
- 2x **Dr. Linda Calwood**