



Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance

Legislature USVI

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0:00:00 We'll be right back. We'll be right back.

0:01:00 Let's get started. We'll be right back. We'll be right back.

0:02:30 We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. Oh, oh, oh, oh Thank you.

0:06:00 We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

0:08:00 Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you.

0:09:30 V to the world Three islands, one heart St. Croix, St. Thomas, St. John We're ready, start A one, a two, two, two, two You know the vibe Come on, come on From the morning when the sun come up over the sea I knew they're rising for you and for me Fifteen strong, they answer the call One legislature, standing for all Down in the chamber where the people have a city Hear the voices ringing brighter every day So let me hear you, put your hand to the sky For the ones who's showing up, who never pass, we buy Welcome to a legislature, hey Fifteen sunnets us in the mix, wave it Serving every island, doing it for me From the hills of Croix to the Saint-Thomas-y Welcome to the legislature Working for the people, that's the fix So wave your rag and sing it, let the whole world see This is we government, this is we family Build up the schools, give the young them a chance Help for the elders, give the workers them advance Roads getting better, the business getting strong Culture in the music, keep with Crucian's song Every district matter, every voice belong From the smallest little village we carry on So let me hear, put your hand to the sky For the territory rising, watch we reach for high Welcome to E-Legislature, hey!

0:11:19 Fifteen senators in the mix, wave it Serving every island, doing it for we From the hills of Croy to the Saint-Thomas-y Welcome to the legislature Working for the people, lots to fix So wave your rag and sing it, let the whole world see This is we government, this is we family No turning back No turning back One up, one up, one up, one up, one up, one up No turning back, one-up, one-up, one-up, one-up, one-up, one-up No turning back, one-back, one-back, one-back, one-back,

one-back, one-back, one-back, one-back, one-back, one-back, one-back One service of ourselves That's what we found Lift them up For the people we adore We legislature V.I. to the world Welcome to We Legislature 15 sonatas in the mix Wave it, serving every island Doing it for we From St. John's sunrise to 0.2 dollars Welcome, welcome Working for the people That's the fix Wave the rag and sing it Let the whole world see This is we government This is we family We legislature We good feeling For the people them The people them They're leaving Welcome to a legislature We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back.

0:18:45 Thank you. the Committee of Budget, Appropriations, and Finance of June 18, 2026, is hereby called to order.

0:19:23 Again, I want to say a pleasant good morning to all present, listening, and viewing. Today continues the budget hearings for fiscal year 2027, which, of course, you know, begins in October 1. Before the committee today, we do have the Bureau of Corrections, as well as the Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority. At this time, Madam Clerk, please read today's agenda into the record. The Committee on Budget Appropriations and Finance will meet on Thursday, June 18, 2026, 10 a.m. in the Earl Biotli Legislative Hall on St. Thomas to receive testimony on the fiscal year 2027 budget.

0:20:10 bureau of corrections invited testifier miss winnie test mark director this ends block one mr chair uh thank you very much madam clerk before we begin i just want to again remind my colleagues and those in the audience to please turn your cell phone off or in silent as to not to interrupt today's proceedings and um Director, good morning and welcome. Alright, at this time we'd like for you to introduce yourself and for the team to at least do a mic check. Do you have anyone appearing virtually? No sir. Okay, very well.

0:20:51 Let's introduce yourself and then we'll have all of your other staff. Good morning. I'm Winnie Testamot, Director, Bureau of Corrections. Good morning, Peter Abrahams, Assistant Director, Support Services. Good morning, Phyllis Hodge-Gums, Human Resources Manager. Good morning, Dr. Kaiser A. Colwood, Chief Strategy Officer. Good morning, Kathy Monroe, Fiscal and Budget Manager.

0:21:21 Good morning, Sandra Andrew Nesbitt, Financial Specialist. Good morning, Dr. Linda Colwood, Medical Director. very well good morning to all at this time directly you could go ahead with your testimony thank you good morning chairman noble e francis jr vice chairman marvin blighten esteemed members of the committee on budget appropriations and finance distinguished members of the 36th legislature of the virgin islands legislative staff and all those joining us in person and virtually via youtube and facebook my name is winnie testemark and i have the honor and privilege of serving as the director of the virgin islands bureau of corrections today i appear before you with deep respect and a renewed sense of purpose to present governor albert brian jr's fiscal year 2027 proposed executive budget for the bureau of corrections. Before we delve into the details of our testimony, allow me to introduce my committed management team, each a pillar in our daily operations and strategic vision. They introduced themselves already Peter Abrams, Dr. Linda Calwood, Dr. Kaiser A. Calwood, Kathy Monroe, Miss Phyllis Hodge-Gums, and Miss Sandra Nesbitt. Several other key members of our management team are also present in the chambers ready to provide insight and clarity where needed. The mission of the Virgin Islands Bureau of Corrections is to provide the fair and secure supervision of all individuals under our custody, support their successful reintegration into society, safeguard the public, and ensure the safety of our personnel. Our vision is to evolve into an accredited premier correctional agency recognized globally for innovation stability and operational excellence

0:23:24 the fiscal year 2027 budget represents a strategic investment in public safety underscoring our dual commitment to security and effective re-entry programming governor brian's proposed budget affirms that strong well-managed correctional operations are fundamental to community safety. This funding is part of a comprehensive strategy to build a safer and more resilient Virgin Islands. As we reflect on our accomplishments, I extend sincere appreciation for the dedication, professionalism, and resilience demonstrated by the entire staff of the Virgin Islands Bureau of Corrections.

0:24:10 Every team member plays an essential role in advancing our mission and serving the community with integrity. I am deeply grateful for their steadfast commitment, particularly during challenging circumstances, and it is through their collective effort that we continue to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those entrusted to our care. I also proudly recognize and congratulate our 2026 Employee of the Year honorees, Food Service Administrator Sonia Gansey, St. Croix District, and Administrative Officer Joan Thomas, St. Thomas District. Their exemplary performance, leadership, and unwavering dedication have established a standard of excellence across the organization. Their contributions have strengthened our operations and continue to inspire their colleagues to pursue higher levels of achievement. The fiscal year 2027 proposed budget totals \$36.4 million, representing an increase of \$462,000, 1.3% increase, compared with fiscal year 2026 revised budget of \$36 million.

- 0:25:32 The proposed budget reflects targeted investments in personnel-related costs while maintaining overall fiscal discipline across operational categories. This request reflects a discipline and strategic investment in public safety, institutional security, employee retention, inmate care, and operational sustainability. While maintaining fiscal restraint, the Bureau has successfully redirected resources towards critical mission priorities, reduce certain contractual expenditures, stabilize staff and operations, and improve accountability over public funds. Fiscal year 2027 budget demonstrates measurable returns on investment through continued reduction in overtime dependency from fiscal year 2025, actual expenditures, increased investment in employee benefits and workforce stabilization, enhanced inmate nutrition and health care, dental care, mental health support, sustained institutional operations without significant growth in overall appropriations, and continued compliance with correctional standards and public safety mandates. Every dollar requested supports the Bureau's constitutional responsibility to safely house, supervise, rehabilitate, and prepare incarcerated individuals for successful reintegration into society while protecting the residents of the Virgin Islands. The Bureau remains committed to operational excellence, fiscal accountability, transparency, and and measurable outcomes.
- 0:27:27 The personnel and fringe benefits accounts reflects a total workforce investment of \$21.9 million, consistent of salaries, fringe benefits, overtime, shift differentials, and employee uniform allowances. At the heart of our operations are sworn staff and support staff inclusive of clinicians, counselors, human resources, information technology, and maintenance work tirelessly around the clock.
- 0:27:59 Personnel costs are the cornerstone of our expenditures, with 223 positions budgeted for fiscal year 2027. Of these, 154 are currently filled and 69 remain vacant. Some positions are funded at 50 percent, 15, and 75 percent, too, allowing us flexibility while remaining fiscally responsible.
- 0:28:29 Among these positions, 163 are classified and 60 are unclassified, each essential to the functioning of a system that never sleeps. Personal positions account for 68.7% of our total personal expenditures. Vacant positions account for 23.9% of total personal expenditures only. Differentials account for 7.4% of actual personal expenditures. Fringe benefits total \$7 million, representing approximately 47.7% of salary costs.
- 0:29:14 This includes retirement contributions, health insurance, payroll taxes, and other employee benefit obligations. The addition of a 10,000 uniform allowance supports required employer uniforms and contributes to workforce readiness and professional standards. Combined personal costs are projected at \$21 million in 2026, increasing to \$21.9 in fiscal year 2027, reflecting an overall upward adjustment of approximately \$892,000. This increase is primarily driven by rising health insurance premium costs and statutory retirement contribution obligations, both of which continue to escalate independent of staffing levels. Additional pressure stems from ongoing workforce retention initiatives, as well as targeted salary and compensation adjustments designed to maintain a competitive pay structure and stabilize critical staffing within the correctional system. Collectively, these factors reflect a structurally driven increase in personal related expenditures consistent with the broader trends in public sector benefits and compensation costs fiscal year 2026 expenditures as of June 8 2026 for overtime management totaled 2.6 million dollars signaling a significant reduction compared to the previous two fiscal years expenditures thus far
- 0:31:04 decreased by 2.2 million from the fiscal year 2025 actual expenditures of 4.8 million and 2.5 from the fiscal year 2024 actual expenditures of 5.2 million dollars for comparison fiscal year 2025 expenditures 4.8 million was slightly lower than fiscal year 2024 expenditures of 5.2 million dollars reflecting a decrease of 371 000 dollars overall the overall trends demonstrate a modest decline between fiscal year 2024 and fiscal year 2025 followed by a much more substantial reduction in fiscal year 2026 because fiscal year 2026 figures are reported through June 8 of 26 expenditures may increase before the close of the fiscal year as additional obligations and payments are processed nevertheless the year to date spending level reflects a significant reduction when compared to the same period in prior years Notably, the current fiscal year, 2026, expenditure level reflects improved scheduling practices and workforce stabilization efforts while maintaining operational effectiveness and fiscal responsibility. Correctional officers and supervisors remain the backbone of the Bureau, representing approximately 43 percent of our workforce despite persistent staff and challenges they have continued to carry out our mission with professionalism dedication and resilience to recognize their service and strength workforce stability the bureau has fully implemented
- 0:33:07 negotiated salary increases under collective bargaining agreements and government pay plans This includes all negotiated raises for LESU for fiscal year 2019 through fiscal year 2023, the CIFARAS International Union for fiscal year 20 to fiscal year 2025, SIU Masters fiscal year 2018 to fiscal year 2023, and United Steelworkers fiscal year 2019 to fiscal year 2022. In addition, GS scheduled nonunion salary adjustments have been implemented through fiscal year 2025. All employees earning below \$35,000 annually have also been brought up to a minimum salary of \$35,000. Currently, we are working with the Office of Management and Budget to finalize pending salary increases for the Bureau's nurses. We anticipate that the review and approval process will be completed within the next two weeks. The Bureau continues to

prioritize workforce development through expanded recruitment efforts, including radio advertisements, career fairs, continuous job postings, examination waivers for qualified applicants, and close coordination with the Division of Personnel to streamline hiring. These initiatives have contributed to an increase in correctional recruit applicants and new hires across both districts. The Bureau remains committed to maintaining a competitive compensation structure, improving employee retention, and ensuring a professional workforce capable of meeting the public safety needs of the Virgin Islands. We thank our correctional officers supervisors and support staff for their continued dedication and service vendor payments vendor payments total 14.5 million dollars out of the 36.4 million total budget

0:35:23 representing approximately 39.7 percent of the total expenditures this positions vendor obligations as the second largest budgetary category after personnel costs reflecting the bureau's significant reliance on external service providers to sustain operations and maintain facility functionality the most significant component of vendor spending is associated with the housing and feeding of off-island inmates budgeted at 7.9 million in fiscal year 2025.

0:36:01 This estimate excludes inmate health care costs, which represents additional variable expenditures and increase the total of costs off-island incarceration. As of the current reporting period, there are 39 outstanding vendor invoices, totaling \$3.8 million, which remains in various stages of review and processing. and \$957,000 of the overall total is in the payment stage within the ERP system. The Bureau continues to prioritize timely liquidation of obligations and has implemented ongoing measures to expedite invoice processing and reduce agent payables. While periodic delays in the broader government disbursement process, including within the Department of Finance, have affected payment timing.

0:36:58 All essential correctional services for inmates and staff have remained fully operational and uninterrupted. The Bureau maintains active coordination and communication with vendors to manage cash flow expectations, mitigate operational risk, and ensure continuity of critical services. settlement agreement update the fiscal year 2027 budget includes 1.2 million dollars for court appointed monitors and expert services representing a required and ongoing legal obligation under two active federal consent decrees governing john a bell correctional facility st croix and the Alexander Farrelly Criminal Justice Complex on St. Thomas. These expenditures remain mandatory for the duration of court oversight and are integral to maintaining compliance. The Virgin Islands Department of Justice serves as the lead counsel for both settlement agreements in a coordinated effort to advance towards resolution. DOJ and the Bureau have engaged, Butler Snow LLC, a nationally recognized firm with specialized expertise in correctional systems, litigation and consent decree termination strategies. The firm operates under DOJ supervision and utilizes a structured approach to assess and achieve sustained compliance and eventual dismissal of federal oversight.

0:38:36 Recent developments in St. Croix settlement agreement marks a significant milestone. Following more than 40 years of federal supervision, the District Court of the Virgin Islands has granted the territories joint motion to terminate the medical provisions of the settlement agreement as reflected in a declaration filed in July 2025. During the November 20th, 2025 status hearing, Judge Wilma Lewis recognized the Bureau's sustained and verifiable compliance with constitutional medical and dental care standards, noting that the long-standing deficiencies have been replaced with stable, modern, and compliant systems. Court-appointed monitors similarly reported continued progress across additional operational areas.

0:39:31 Determination of the medical dental care provisions represents a critical juncture and signals entry into the final phase of compliance. In parallel, a status conference in the St. Thomas Settlement Agreement held on May 14, 2026 before Chief Judge Robert Molloy reflected continued engagement and ongoing evaluation of compliance progress. These developments reflect a deliberate transition from compliance management to compliance sustainability. Positioning the Bureau for eventual termination of the remaining settlement agreement obligations. U.S. Marshall Service. The Virgin Islands Bureau of Corrections maintains a revenue-generating intergovernmental agreement with the U.S. Marshall Services, under which the Bureau provides secure housing and related services for federal detainees. This arrangement leverages existing correctional capacity to support federal detention needs while creating a reimbursable revenue stream for the territory. In exchange for these services, the U.S. Marshals Services compensates the Bureau on a cost recovery basis, providing a supplemented funding source that supports operational continuity and facility maintenance.

0:41:04 Under this framework, the Bureau received \$678,000 in fiscal year 2025 and \$204,000 to date for fiscal year 2026. This partnership enhances the Bureau's financial efficiency by monetizing available bed capacity, diversifying revenue streams, and strengthening overall fiscal sustainability while maintaining required standards of secure custody and inmate care. the bureau remains committed to meeting constitutional health care obligations while controlling costs through enhanced oversight and contract management as of june 2026 the bureau houses 180 181 inmates locally 70 70 at cjc and 111 at john a bell of the inmate housed locally 169 are male and 12 are female in addition the bureau houses 170 inmates off island at facilities in virginia 33 and mississippi 137. all 351 prisoners in bureau's custody including those housed off island must be fed housed transported and cared for at the bureau's expense. Later this year, we intend to visit our inmates

- in Virginia and Mississippi to ensure that they're properly treated and to respond to any concerns they may have, along with meeting with key prison officials, review inmate files to ensure that they were up to date and hold one-on-one
- 0:42:51 discussion with each inmate. The expense of incarcerating a prisoner in the Virgin Islands exceed twice the cost of them on the mainland currently the Bureau estimates maintaining an inmate in the territory amounts to three hundred and twenty dollars per day compared to the approximately two approximately eighty nine dollars a day for core civic and a hundred and nine dollars for Virginia per day in the mainland correctional facilities. In fiscal year 2026, the Bureau spent a total of \$340,000 for inpatient and outpatient services comprising of \$109,000 for local medical care and \$231,000 for off-island medical care. Note that there are outstanding vendor payments for medical care totaling \$1.2 million.
- 0:43:55 In fiscal year 2025, the Bureau spent a total of \$1.1 million for inpatient and outpatient services, comprising of \$836,000 for local medical and \$301,000 for off-island medical care. Mental health care remains a critical component of correctional health care. Consequently, the Bureau of Corrections has become and continues to be the primary providers of mental health services in the territory. Presently, approximately 40% of inmates within the Bureau facilities receive some form of mental health treatment. The Bureau has adopted a deliberate strategy to expand and optimize federal grant funding as a mechanism to offset general fund expenditures associated with correctional operations, including offender programming, medical services, and infrastructure investments.
- 0:45:05 Each dollar secured through external funding sources directly reduces reliance on local appropriations while strengthening program programmatic capacity and service delivery the bureau maintains an active and diversified federal grant portfolio with no grant funds currently expiring at fiscal year end 2026. the portfolio is anchored by multiple awards under the state criminal alien assistant program known as scap and complementary federal initiatives supporting territorial development and institutional capacity building current grant activity is as follows reflecting a stable and scalable external funding base current period funding 1.2 million dollars active grant funding 400 000 total cumulative project funding \$1.6 million. This diversified grant portfolio enables the Bureau to enhance correctional programming, expand rehabilitative services, and strengthen operational infrastructure while mitigating pressure on the general fund. Continued emphasis will be placed on maximizing federal reimbursement opportunities and aligning grant utilization with strategic priorities that improve public safety outcome, reduce recidivism, and support long-term system sustainability.
- 0:46:47 Accomplishments and initiative during the last fiscal year. Under the Brian Roach administration, BOC has continued to record concrete accomplishments that improve the agency's outlook and make it better able to achieve its core mission objectives in the long term. BOC's many accomplishments include designing and implementing an effective re-entry program. The program, the Bureau remains committed to reducing repeat involvement in the justice system by focusing on evidence-based rehabilitation and re-entry programs.
- 0:47:22 programs. These programs are designed to support individuals as they transition from custody back into the community, with the goal of reducing the likelihood that they will commit new offenses after release. In 2025, a total of 161 individuals were released from custody across St. Croix and St. Thomas districts. After release, these individuals were followed over a three year period to see if they were arrested again for new offenses. This type of follow up commonly used measure is what is measured known as recidivism. The result of this three year review showed that 30 individuals were rearrested during the period studied. This means that about 19 out of every 100 people released were arrested again, which equals a recidivism rate of approximately 18.6%. The remaining majority of 131 individuals did not have a new arrest during that three-year follow-up period. When compared to the 2022 cohort recidivism rate of 11%, the 2023 cohort experienced an increase of 7.6% points. One contributing factor to re-offending is the lack of stable housing upon release. Many individuals return to the community without a permanent resident, transitional home, or adequate family support.
- 0:49:02 The absence of safe and stable housing can create significant barriers to securing employment, accessing services, maintaining compliance with supervision requirements, and successfully reintegrating into society. Addressing housing instability through coordinated reentry planning and supportive housing initiatives may help reduce recidivism and improve long-term outcome for returning citizens. To understand, it is helpful to compare to the national trends in the United States. About 68 of every 100 people released from state prisons are rearrested within three years. Compared to the national benchmark, the rate observed in this cohort is significantly lower.
- 0:49:54 while this comparison provides useful context it is important to note that differences in population supervision conditions and program support can all influence outcomes the bureau continues to invest in rehabilitation and re-entry services to support long-term public safety and reduce repeat involvement in the criminal justice system chaplaincy program the Bureau's chaplaincy program provides voluntary faith-based services that support the spiritual growth emotional well-being and rehabilitation of incarcerated individuals services includes Bible study worship and prayer services

individual and group counseling and family in outreach initiatives these These programs contribute to a positive correctional environment and support successful rehabilitation and reentry outcomes. The Bureau employs a full-time chaplain, Mr. Burkett, and we thank the numerous faith-based organizations that their time to our offender population. Vocational and educational programs.

- 0:51:11 The Bureau continues to expand educational and vocational opportunities that support rehabilitation and successful reentry. In partnership with the University of the Virgin Islands Excellence in Leadership, UVICEL, the Bureau celebrated graduates of the Transforming Lives Academy, a first-of-its-kind initiative that enables incarcerated individuals to earn high school diplomas and industry-recognized certificates. The Bureau has also partnered with promising people and have implemented the innovative virtual reality VR based training, providing immersive self-paced learning experiences that enhance workforce readiness and skill development. In fiscal year 2024, 38 inmates participated in various educational program. In fiscal year 2025, participation increased to 83 as of June 2026 a total of 76 inmates 46 John A. Bell and 30 at CJC were enrolled in educational vocational and rehabilitative programs across both districts including high school completion ged preparation re-entry services computer literacy and cognitive behavioral programming overall this reflects a cumulative a total of 197 program participants across fiscal year 2024 through 2026 the inmate graduation ceremony at John A. Bell and the CJC complex was held on June 17 2026 and the family fun day event will be held June 19th and June 20th respectively, 2026.
- 0:53:03 Graduation outcome. At John A. Bell facility, 37 individual program completion was recognized, three inmates earned their high school diplomas, 23 inmates completed vocational training programs, 27 inmates completed rehabilitation programs, and three inmates received special recognition for achievement and progress in tutoring. At CJC, 13 program completions recognized, one inmate earned a high school diploma, and 12 inmates completed rehabilitation programs. These accomplishments reflect the Bureau's continued commitment to education, rehabilitation, and successful re-entry initiatives that support positive inmate outcomes. Inmate work programs.
- 0:53:54 The Bureau's inmate work programs provide meaningful employment opportunities that support rehabilitation, skill development, and successful re-entry while contributing to facility operations and generating cost savings for the government. Participants engage in maintenance, agriculture, horticulture, and public works projects, including assignments supporting various government agencies to include Department of Agriculture, Department of Public Works, Virgin Islands Department of Education, Department of Sports Park Recreation, Government House, WTJX, and Virgin Islands Department Property and Procurement. Currently, 56 inmates, 43 at John A. Bell and 13 at CJC, are actively participating in work programs that promote accountability, workforce readiness, and productive community engagement.
- 0:54:51 During fiscal year 2026 to date, inmate work program has generated an estimated \$120,000 cost savings to the government of the Virgin Islands, equating to a total of 500 hours for approximately 20 individuals who participated in external work programs. SWAN Annex, in coordination with the Office of Disaster Recovery, BOC finalized architectural designs for a new facility, and the project is now with ODR as the lead on the project. John A. Bell, in coordination with Whit O'Brien and the DLR group, We continue to work on the development of the drawings for the security fence.
- 0:55:44 The design process is progressing as we collaborate with all stakeholders to ensure the project meets operational requirements. Upon completion of the drawings and necessary reviews, the project will advance to the next phase. Upgrades at John A. Bell and CJC. The Bureau continues to make targeted capital improvements across both facilities to ensure uninterrupted operations, enhance security, and improve inmate care. Security systems, 100% completion of energy-efficient perimeter lighting at John Bell. We are currently collaborating with D&B Engineering to review and refine the draft design for the new fire alarm and fire suppression system at John Bell Facility. Expanded medical, mental health, and mental health units to provide comprehensive inmate care. Completion of parole hearings.
- 0:56:48 The parole board conducted its biannual parole hearing in December of 2025. Reviewing applicants from eligible inmates. Of the cases considered, four inmates were granted parole, 35 were denied, and one applicant withdrew prior to the hearing. The Bureau extends its appreciation to the Parole Board for their dedication and commitment to ensuring fair and thorough review process while balancing public safety considerations. The next parole hearings are scheduled for June 2026 for offenders eligible and recommended to the board, the parole board. In recognition of dedication and professionalism of its workforce, the Bureau hosted a series of employee appreciation activities from May 3rd to the 9th, 2026. The observation celebrated the invaluable contributions of correctional officers, nurses and support staff whose efforts are essential to the Bureau's operation and continued progress. On May 8, employees were recognized through awards, certificates, commemorative gifts, and a special appreciation luncheon for their contributions to the removal of the medical dental care provisions in the St. Croix consent decree. The Virgin Islands Dignity Bus Initiative.

- 0:58:16 On February 12, 2026, the Bureau hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Territory's first Dignity Bus on St. Croix. This innovative mobile supports unit provides temporary assistance to individuals experiencing homelessness, transitioning from incarceration, or facing personal crisis. Equipped with a shower and laundry facility, a kitchen, sleep and accommodations, and connections to meal and supported services. The Dignity Bus reflects the Bureau's commitment to promoting successful re-entry, restoring dignity, and strengthening community support systems. To date, we have serviced 85 individuals and connected them to various services.
- 0:59:02 We also partnered with My Brother's Table in Frederickstead. Transitional Home. To date, the program has served 15 individuals. While the transition home provides a structured and supportive environment design to assist participants with their successful reintegration into the community, several individuals have chosen to leave the program shortly after admission. Feedback received indicates that some residents perceive living on the correctional facility ground as an extension of incarceration, making it difficult for them to embrace the transition process. Despite this challenge, the program continues to provide transitional housing to individuals seeking successful reintegration into the community. Conclusion, Mr. Chairman, under the leadership of the Brian Roach administration, the Virgin Islands Bureau of Corrections continues to advance a modern, accountable, and result-driven correctional system focus on public safety, rehabilitation, and operational excellence through commitments that have not only been made, but meaningfully delivered. Through strategic investment in our workforce, infrastructure, inmate programming, and compliance initiatives, the Bureau is delivering measurable outcomes while positioning the territory for long-term success. The Governor's fiscal year 2027 budget provides the resources necessary to maintain safe and secure facilities strengthen rehabilitation and re-entry efforts supports our dedicated employees and continue progress towards a sex the successful resolution of long-standing challenges these investments are not merely expenditures they are investments in safer communities reduce recidivism and a
- 1:01:01 stronger Virgin Islands. The Bureau remains committed to innovation, fiscal responsibility, and continuous improvement, and we welcome constructive partnerships and solutions that further our mission. I respectfully request your favorable consideration of the Bureau's fiscal year 2027 budget request. Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony. My team The team and I stand ready to answer any questions you may have. Thank you. Thank you very much, Director Testamark, for your presentation and testimony to defend your budget of \$36,476,665. At this time, and before we go to open for questions, I'll ask the Madam Clerk to please call the roll.
- 1:01:54 Senator Marvin A. Blyden, Senator Blyden, present. Senator Dwayne M. DeGraff, Senator DeGraff, absent. Senator Ray Fonseca, here. Senator Fonseca, present. Senator Novell E. Francis, Jr. I'm here. Senator Francis, Jr., present. Senator Hubert L. Frederick, Senator Frederick, present. Senator Maurice C. James. Senator James, absent. Senator Kurt A. Valey. Here.
- 1:02:31 Senator Valey, present. Mr. Chair, by present, two absent. Thank you very much, Madam Clerk. Any correspondence? Yes, Mr. Chair. You may proceed. Letter dated June 18, 2026. Dear Chairman Francis Jr., please be advised that I will be late to today's meeting of the Committee on Budget Appropriation and Finance, scheduled for 10 a.m. in the Earlby-Otley Legislative Hall, St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. I look forward to joining the meeting upon my arrival. Thank you for your understanding. Respectfully submitted, Maurice C. James Esquire, Senator 36, Legislature of the Virgin Islands.
- 1:03:16 This concludes the reading of today's correspondence, Mr. Chair. Very well, thank you. We'll mark Senator Maurice James' excuse for now, and we'll acknowledge her as soon as she gets here. We'd also like to recognize non-committee member, Senator Franklin Johnson. Good morning, Senator. Thank you for joining us, as well as Senator Clifford Joseph. Good morning, Senator. Thank you for joining us as well. So, Director, I want to also join you in acknowledging your Employees of the Year, Ms. Sonia Ganzi, as well as Joan Thomas, and congratulations to them on being recognized as the Employee of the Year. I also want to recognize the graduates of the program outcomes, those individuals that graduated recently, the inmates.
- 1:04:12 I saw some of it on Facebook there. I wasn't able to attend the program because, of course, we were here during the budget, but it was really good to see that graduation and our inmates receiving their education degree and project completions and training and skills completion. So that was definitely a plus. I note and observe in your budget presentation that there was no funding for utilities. What is that amount in terms of utility under the single payers? That is \$600,000. \$600,000.
- 1:04:54 Okay. Let me just get through a couple of these things and then I'll open up for that. Personal costs. Where are we with you today to your personal costs? Good morning, Dr. Callwood. I can give you up to today. So for personnel services, our actual, as of right now, is \$9,534,196.92. For fringe benefits, the current actual is \$3,463,039.20. Supplies is \$1,033,373.35. other services is \$8,734,801.87 let me get a number again please for other services \$8,734,801.87 utilities \$600,000 utilities will be as of right now um 279 728 and 72 cents 279 728 and 72 cents capital outlay Capital Outlet is

\$115,427.99. And your outstanding vendor's payment, you say, is pegged at \$3.8 million. And what is the agent on that? It'll be 60 to 90 days. 60 to 90 days. and then i see that you have an obligation outstanding obligation of 2.8 million dollars that's correct what is your vacancy savings amount vacancy savings what do you believe will be your savings at the end of the fiscal year from vacancies i'm thinking about 2.5 million

1:07:20 so would you be able to cover or you should be able to cover your obligation, outstanding obligation with that savings? Yes. Point of information Senator VLA first and then Senator Blyton first and then Senator VLA. Thank you Mr. Chair. Good morning to all. In respect to Director McEntire in respect to your budget book right on page five is, in respect to your personnel and French, there's nothing budgeted for the 27 budget season for vacant position. Your vacant position, you say you're gonna have a saving of at least \$2.7 million, but it's not, there's nothing there in a budget book in terms of vacancy, so are they funded?

1:08:17 And what percentage are they funded at? So just to clarify, I think what happened is The last budget, I think the Legislature separated the vacancy savings. But our vacancies are included in personnel services. So right now, based on what we have, we have 69 vacancies. Of course, when you deviate up based on if some are funded at 100%, 50% and 75%, I think you'll get about 61.

1:08:45 But it's a total of 69. Okay, so you have 69 vacant positions? Yes. Yes, sir. how many of them are well you know what thank you all that um my colleague do this point and then i'll come back because i'm the first thank you very much senator blight and senator veille recognize your point of information thank you mr chair good morning to the people of the virgin islands how did you come up with a 600 000 figure for utilities what mechanism you used to come up with a number good morning senator veille um that's just the average that um we've been going when you look at past the past few years that's the average you're currently paying your two hundred and seventy nine thousand seven hundred and twenty eight as of eight months if you divide that by eight and then multiply for the next four months and add it on your utilities is estimated to be four hundred and nineteen thousand five hundred and ninety two dollars if you even add on that you had laid bills you had the next uh 33 000 your utilities definitely gonna pass 450 000 hours well if i would add senator also i think within the the last fiscal year that we spent 550 559 000 208 in terms of um electric costs um of course within the the confines in the 600 000 of course we're not going to exceed 600 000 we have to be very responsible when we're budgeting the money so every savings can be utilized for the next category apparently from your numbers now you're doing a better job in terms of efficiency of the utilities and electricity so that that's that that's a commendation that would allow us to decrease

1:10:35 your budget a little bit for that moment thank you thank you sir the point of information Thank you Mr. Chair, Director on page 5 you mentioned that you're working with OMB pending the salary agreements for the Bureau of Nurse, for the nurses. Is this the testimony or the post-salary report? No, this is page 5 of the testimony. Got it. Two weeks you're going to be able to bring the nurses up on the pay schedule. Yes, Director Testamark. The nurses were approved for raises, however, in order to, one raise was given, one level was given, however, we had to go back to get additional funding for 22, 23? 22. For 22. So that had to be sent back to OMB for approval. It's been there with them for a couple of weeks now, so hopefully we should get that back, hopefully within the next two weeks. Once that's completed, then we'll be able to submit it, and they should be all brought up to where they need to be.

1:11:44 And the NOPAs have already been done? No, we can't do the NOPAs until OMB approved. Approved. Okay, so after OMB, so figure in four weeks they should get, so it'll be a raise and retro or just a raise? It'll be a raise and retro. Awesome. Congratulations. I've been pushing you this for a while. Congratulations. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you. We've been working very hard. Thank you very much, Senator Fonseca, for your line of question there. Before I open up, in regards to the funding that you received from the U.S. Marshals Service, and I know of note you had \$678,000 in FY25, and you said so far this year you have gotten \$204,000.

1:12:31 How was that funding deposited? How was it used? the funding it goes into the general fund um yes goes into the general fund currently and we use it for it made services so no specific earmark once you receive the fund it just goes into the general fund and then you just roll into your your your funding yes what is your Are your current allotments to date?

1:13:02 Up to date? Yes, they are. So you have already gotten June? We have up for eight months, up to May. Up to May. Very well. We will do a six-minute round, and the order, so far, we have Senator Blyden, Senator Johnson, Senator Frederick, Senator Fonseca, Senator Viale, Senator Joseph. Senator Blyden, you're recognized for your six minutes at this time. Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. Good morning to my colleagues, listening and viewing audiences. Staff central staff, good morning. Director, Testamark and your supporting management team there with you. And thank you so much for your testimony. Let's go to the post-out report, quickly, page 7, the professional service contract.

- 1:13:45 I see you have a chart with many professional service contracts, and you basically stated on page 9 that you have paid the annual payment of 11.4 million, and the amount was the same amount. But let me ask you about these four pending contracts, though. The first one in term of Teletrex LLC, Electronic Monitoring Program, Pilot Program. Can you tell me briefly about a pilot program, please, and what they intend for that? That particular program is intended to hopefully individuals that is not of a high security risk, providing the courts agree, will be able to have them out on home confinement, utilizing that particular system. That, in addition to the mentally ill, those individuals that's able to be released into the community, again, this is all contingent on the court's approval, that they will also be able to monitor them utilizing this particular software.
- 1:14:48 Okay, very well. Let's go to the federal grant on page 10. I know what you said in your testimony that you have been responsible when you come to your federal grants and you are spending those funds. but I would have liked to see in terms of the fellow grants how much have been expended I know you see you have the actual but I would love to know how much have been expended and what they are for for instance let's go to the economic, social and political development of the territories what's that grant about basically okay i'll let mr peter abrams expand upon that but there was nothing recommended for 2027 what i would like to know what it's for okay go ahead peter how much have you expanded as far this is the one that's for 400 000 yes okay that um is to develop uh to continue to develop our transitional housing program we wrote that um through the department of interior and it was awarded so that we wanted to procure like two additional transitional homes develop a program provide therapeutic services so it'll be like a it'll be like a group home program and so that was like a pilot program to to get that off the ground and moving and then our hope is to develop a package where that anybody you know like they can take it from the bureau of correction and use it in the community and when did it expire 28 for 28 it's a three-year it's a three-year grant it sounds like a pretty good program to me um congratulations okay you let's go to the outstanding vendor payment um total of 2.8 million dollars that is correct sir three three point eight three point eight million dollars yes so what are we doing in that in that space in terms of um basically getting caught up on especially small vendors who really really
- 1:16:54 depend on those funds what are we doing just to respond the of the 3.8 we have 900 and um change right now waiting a check run by um finance most of the small business um vendors have been paid those are more large-scale vendors especially as we take care of the inmates for medical or dental care, that's the balance of the payment that is owed. Okay, very well. In terms of your testimony, page five, you spoke to recruitment efforts and initiative you have brought forth in terms of contributing to increase in recruitment when it comes to application and no higher the quote of both districts.
- 1:17:36 Do you have a number to say, like, what number have you seen in terms of increase, and when did you start those efforts? I'll let Dr. Kaiser Cowart and Ms. Gumbs, they could respond to that. Thank you. So I would say overall we have had a good number of individuals that we have brought on board to the tune of 25 individuals that we have increased approximately 25, it could be a little bit more, where we have worked around the clock with radio advertisement, every single career fair that the government of Virgin Islands have. We have done it. We have even attempted to do our own virtual fair. We promoted that. We have even strengthened in providing the testing requirements, paying for all the testing requirements for the applicants when they apply to be correction officers. We pay for their assessments, that they have the medical assessment, the physical agility assessments, those things we pay for in-house to ensure that we get more individuals to apply to work at the Bureau of Corrections.
- 1:18:44 Okay, very well, and also on page five, you spoke to the \$7.9 million in fiscal year, 2025, that was spent on feeding of island inmates and lodging. But how much was spent on healthcare? Because you mentioned healthcare costs also, but you didn't get a price tag. How much did we spend on healthcare costs? Got that in addition to housing and feeding them, correct? yes yes can we get a one please i'll let miss monroe let's go hi uh kathy monroe for 2025 off island health care we spent 301 949. okay thank you for that number also you spoke in the testimony about still being under the consent decree and even though you're you have have one area suspended you still under the consent decree what's the price tag for that consent decree how much are we paying annually 30 seconds we budget 1.2 million 1.2 yes okay and lastly before my time um uh it has expired i want to say congratulations to the both uh employees from the same time as i'm saying quite district for being employee of the year and i want to say also congratulations to those individual that actually completed um the high school diploma those that did the training in terms of CTEC and also those that actually have completed the requirements to move forward, to rejoin our society. But at the same time, I want to say congratulations for all you're doing in respect to the programs and to all of the employees of the if you continue to look out for those individuals so they can actually rejoin the community in a positive manner. And again, thank you so much for the time as a chair. Thank you.
- 1:20:39 Thank you very much, Senator Blyden, for your line of questions. Real quickly, before we go to the next senator, we're hearing that the Dignity Bus was having some electrical hookup issues when they go to Frederickstead. Have you been

able to resolve that issue? Is that still a concern? That's not a concern. We have a generator. You have a generator powered. So it's powered when we do. We are working with WAPA because we want to install a... Peter and them could talk about that, but it's not an issue. It's not an issue just to be able to have a hookup.

1:21:15 Right, have a hookup, but we have a generator on board. Thank you. Peter? Yeah, we did reach out to WAPA, and we sent them pictures of the location and of the poles and everything that we wanted to have a drop put on and that they said they're going to internally review it, see what accommodations they could make for us because we'll save money on gas with the generator by having it hooked up directly. So that's a work in progress. Okay. And what is the other location that you believe that the Dignity bus would be deployed to? you have any planned um deployment yeah we really and truly we we there's a there's a vast concentration of individuals in that area so that's why we wait there but eventually we want to venture out into christian stead also right because there is you know so we're just trying to manage our resources with the one bus yeah there's definitely a need for it i mean just about every single day, just seeing a new face popped up throughout. I've even seen them here in St. Thomas, even in St. Croix as well. You've just seen new faces popping up in our location.

1:22:26 The recent one that I saw was in the Honors Hope area, walking around that site. I'm hoping at some point we could really do a better job in addressing that particular issue. I also think that the Bureau of Correction will be a good place for us to be able to have an alternative energy, a solar farm, solar plant or whatever have you had any discussion with the energy office um in that in that respect i'll let mr peter abrams elaborate on that thanks we have um we have done several projects with the with the energy office as as as um senator vla noted it in the electrical bill the reason why it was dropping is because we've been switching from our energy systems you know air conditioning systems to more energy efficient lighting such forth and we have tried to do a Department of Interior grant to fund putting solar panels on the roof of the facilities but we're still working on putting together the scope of work for something like that so that we can submit that to the Department of Interior to see if we can get funding through the Energy Office very well I see that Senator Potter has joined us. He'll be virtual online, so you'll be added to the line-up. Senator Potter, good morning, welcome. Senator Ray Fonsek, you'll be recognized for your point of information.

1:23:50 Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. Director, test mark on page 12 of the post-added report is showing that there's Wang Lui Hospital, there's a \$900,000 bill and it's verification. What's happening. Do you owe Wang Louie \$900,000 or are you contesting that amount? No, we're not contesting that. Wang Louie came to us, told us that we owe them \$4 million and we provided all our documentation to them to show that we don't owe that. We only owe a balance of \$900,000. So right now they are verifying the information there. We gave them with all our receipts. So that's why we say that's what we owe them with our documentation. So we're waiting for them now to come back with us. But if you agree you owe them \$900,000, they say \$4,000,000, but you don't just pay the \$900,000 and then you deal with the other \$3.1 million later.

1:24:43 It seems like if you agree you owe them \$900,000, that \$900,000 is related to the \$4.1 million. Some of it is contested or is uncontested. The documentation that they provided to us after the budget unit reviewed everything, we owed \$900,000. had communication I've been in communication with the CEO and her team and they took the information and she said that they will get back to us I don't think that we can just pay nine hundred thousand without us both agreeing oh so they don't they don't accept nine they accept at this time they have what was what's the timeline to get it resolved do you know you'll have to ask Juan Luis we did what we were thank you thank you mr. thank you thank you very much at this time the chair will recognize Senator Franklin Johnson you recognize for your six minutes let's let's try that again we're not hearing you Senator Johnson media can you hear me now we can yes go ahead you might proceed good morning for time sake before my time start I would appreciate if the warden and st. Thomas if they're there and they could come into the world because I need to ask some question in reflection of this over time but i'll proceed asking question until they arrive i i also want to talk about one second one one second senator one second is the wardens here and available too if they could have them go ahead and make their way to the well but but i'll go ahead with my line of question until they settle in yes you can start your time now and then we'll go ahead and you may proceed i i also want to piggyback on what my colleague just spoke about that \$900,000 for Wang Lu. There's a \$326,000 for Roy Snyder Hospital. What's the status on that?

1:26:42 Kathy Monroe. Basically, it's the same thing. Both parties are advising to come to a concluded amount. No, no, no, no. When you said the same thing, you said that what Louis said was \$4 million and you said \$900. So I'm saying that Roy Snyder said \$326,000. So did Roy Snyder said it was more than \$326,000? No, no, no. Those are current actually. Those are current bills and we're actually in the process of auditing them to make sure that it's our bills and the amounts are correct, yes. So we're actually in the process of auditing those.

1:27:24 All right, let's go to this \$7.9 million for FRI for mainland. In that 7.9, we spoke that 7.9 had to do with feeding and medical expenditures, but yet we talk about it costs us \$300 a day in the Virgin Islands versus 101 facility and 80. What's

the total cost of feeding in the Virgin islands? We'll have to get that back to you in a second, Senator. We have to get back to you with that, Senator. We'll look for it while you ask your other question. Let's try to move on for time's sake. Out of the \$3.85 million in outstanding vendors application, how many of them are more I also saw where they're talking about inmates re-entering to the facility. They talk about some 19 came back. How many of the prisoners that was released actually died and never came back? What's the status on that? In other words, got into violent crime and lost their life.

- 1:28:58 Director Tessama, could you repeat your question, Senator Johnson, in reference to individuals that passed away? You said that out of 100, only 19 reentered. And I asked, what's the status on the remainder? how many of them got into violent crime and lost their life because you say you're doing a following for prisoners that was released well what i can tell director testament what i can tell you senator johnson is from during my tenure from 2019 to present we have lost 10 individuals that died to gun violence since being um released from jail they would not be counted as recidivism because they did not come back into the facility i understand that i'm just asking you these are people that you should have been looking at so then that should be in your numbers to say that those that did not come back end up in in a criminal activity and lost their life okay thank you going down that line you have you say you have 170 prisoners are filing am i correct with that? Yes, Senator. Now, we're speaking about this, prisoners being released, and you're running check on them, and I've been in contact with many prisoners that got released from the mainland. What is your checking or your scope of those that get released from mainland because as late as last month i've spoke to a prisoner that said if it wasn't for his family member the bureau did nothing for him what's the status on those that are being released from the mainland back home to the territory director testamark um what i can tell you senator johnson
- 1:30:47 is that when an individual is released from the mainland staff go and they escort them back now if they're on parole probation or whatever then they check in with that particular office if they need assistance they let us know other than that that is not our responsibility the bureau of corrections response our prisoner director i disagree with you the same way we release a prisoner here in the virgin islands when you send them to the mainland they're still ours and they should be tracked and assisted just as much as those here in the territory i'm going to go a little deeper with this since we're talking about mainland prisoners because when our prisoners get killed on the mainland what kind of tracking system you have to make sure the family is notified director testament um if an inmate passes away while they're on the mainland their their family members are notified our medical director makes the notification and takes it from there well i'm going to correct you right now the last inmate that was stabbed if the family mother didn't call you no one would have found out because you have not updated their file as i speak in here an individual died from a heart attack and he was cremated because no one can take his family members these are our prisoners we are responsible for them are you Are you aware about the individual that died in one of your facilities in the mainland and was cremated? Senator Johnson, what I will not do today is go through these individual cases, but what I will tell you that any individual that's entrusted in the care of Bureau of Corrections, You have to be one at a time so that the recorder could probably record the procedures. Any individual that is entrusted in our care, whether they're here in the territory or they're in the mainland, they are treated with dignity and respect period thank you well my my information is very solid
- 1:32:51 and we don't have to do some more deep dive because we are sending our inmates away and we are not being responsible we are not and it's a shame when a family member has to check and their loved one to find out that they had passed and was cremated. What are you guys doing for upgrading these individual files and records with family members here? We're paying a whole lot of money to the mainland.
- 1:33:20 Excuse me, this is Dr. Linda Callwood. I'm Senator Johnson. I am personally responsible for notifying the family members when someone has passed away. so I personally look into making sure that the next of kin that is listed by the inmate be notified the last one yes oh that gentleman had a next of kin that was listed and that individual was notified immediately that individual immediate family did not want to have anything to do with him. Therefore, he had a non-family member listed as his next of kin. They were notified immediately about the cremation and the burial of that individual. It's only this week, one of his sisters on his father's side contacted the Bureau of Correction, and I returned her call, and I told her we're going to respect his wishes, to notify the next of kin that was listed, and we follow that policy.
- 1:34:31 You know, this government will have to do a serious deep dive as to what's going on with our prisoners on the mainland, because it's a travesty as to what's happening. The last individual that was stabbed to death, if his family didn't have the director number, would have never found out they found out from prisoners in that facility i would like to speak i would like to speak on that also senator no no no ma'am well don't bring up a subject and then you don't allow people doctor doctor we can't have that you will allow him to finish his time and then you could respond but you can't if the warden and if the water for the facility they're there they're seated here in the well uh senator do you have a question for either one of the water both of us my question i want to ask them because they talk about the saving of over time has security been

compromised on the shift while saving this over time have you been on the staff on many occasion for the process of saving over time whichever warden is there can they answer that good morning warden dana grant for john abel facility no we haven't the warden for for St. Thomas. Good morning, Roberto Monsanto waiting for St. Thomas CJC, no. So I'm going to stick with CJC because I got a lot of complaints about that. You're saying that you've been fully staffed and you have not been cutting on staff, breaching security for overtime? No. Thank you very much. I want to remember this testimony because we're going to find a list of how many staff have been working in the facility. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I just hope that we would, as legislator, we go deep diving on what's going on on the mainland with our

1:36:33 prisoners, the mistreatment of our prisoners, and our families that we have been sending to the mainland. Thank you very much. thank you very much Senator Johnson Director what do you attribute to the reduction of the overtime hours well number one the population has dropped if you look at the numbers the population is much lower matter of fact because the lowest has been in my tenure here that and also again we have correction technicians that is a position I told you we created to assist security staff in doing some of the clerical duties to and just basically enhance security technology to assist staff in doing their work. So that's what I'll attribute to it.

1:37:26 Thank you. And what's the situation? I see your testimony where you talk about that the security design is still being built out. Why is it taking so long for that design to completed this one is for the the john abel yes that's for the perimeter fencing well one of the challenges i was told and um i know that mr abraham or my facility manager could expand upon that but apparently dpw we were working with one particular engineer that person retired and someone came on then they retired or they left so it's just an ongoing with staff personnel um in that particular shop so this is there should be a priority measures uh so yes again so yes it is so what is the next phase instead of the upon completion of the drawings and necessary reviews the project will advance to the next phase do you have a timeline when the next phase will engage on that with the question mr abraham or mr walker can elaborate there there are several projects that are going on right now which one are we referring to the defense okay so with respect to the security fence the um the documents were 30 complete this month they're going to be 60 complete and then the final completion of the project will be december 15th according to the architects and designers that that's the date that they should have us delivered 100 percent of the construction documents very well um we'll continue to track that because i would imagine that it's a priority and uh um that we should get this going so yeah it is we consider it a priority because it's it's our perimeter it's our perimeter fencing and that we've been working very closely with um The architect and engineer, Wood O'Brien, DLR, the architects, and ODR, which is the entity that's working with us on moving this project along.

1:39:28 What other disaster recovery project do you have going on, Director? Yes. Mr. Abraham. So pretty much the John Bell facility project, the next part, the next phase of the John Bell facility project is what they call the wind retrofit phase, which is taking a look at windows, doors, roofs, things like that. But they wanted to get the fencing part done first because that was the security fencing was the priority. And the only other project we have going on is the Swan Annex in St. Thomas. But the majority of all of the FEMA-related emergency projects have been pretty much completed. And the status of the Swan Annex, I know some time back we had moved legislation to allow for the property to be property zoned and marketed? What's happening with the Onyx?

1:40:28 Currently right now, that is in the hands of ODR. ODR is the lead on that, and they're the ones that are giving us the instructions as to where we are with the project. And where are you? And Director Testamon. So where are you with that project? Right now, that's on hold. There was a client, someone who lives on the property that took the government to court and there was a temporary restraining order. So that's in litigation right now.

1:41:01 All right. Dr. Calwood, you wanted to say something? You're good. Dr. Linda Calwood, Medical Director, Virgin Islands Bureau of Corrections. I just wanted to clarify the statement concerning the individual that was stabbed. The Bureau of Corrections myself personally called every available phone number that we had on file locally. I also spoke to the HSA at the facility and they provided the telephone number that the gentleman that passed away provided to them.

1:41:39 We called the incorrect phone number. So that's how everything took place. We try our best to notify the family, however, the numbers that we had on file, which was provided by the patient that passed away, they were incorrect. Do you have a written policy or procedures by which you follow for individuals that's injured um you know the demise as a result while in custody is there a policy and procedure in place to how you handle the processing of that information yes we do director testament yes we do and most often too sometimes the challenge is when we visit those individuals oh well anyone come into our custody we try to get information from them the next of kin for reasons such as this and sometimes some individuals don't want to give any information sometimes they say they don't have anyone however we still continue our classification unit access information and they get it sometimes they get it sometimes they don't sometimes medical may get it again either way it goes into the same system when we go away the last time we went away we updated the records i have pictures with the inmates holding the card their name and their next of kin because

that's very very important so again sometimes we go with what the information that the inmate gives to us and that's what we utilize very well at this time the chair will recognize senator frederick hiva frederick you're recognized for your six minutes thank you very much mr chair of pleasant good morning colleagues testifiers listening and viewing audience my office central staff um director testament how you doing i'm good thank you i want to start off because i I was so excited to see that your agency is doing something. I've been pleading with all the agencies to do is save money.

1:43:35 And I see specifically on your testimony page four, where we spoke about overtime being substantially reduced at the BOC by \$1.9 million. I am just ecstatic by that number. So please tell me the magic in doing so. And after that, tell me the magic that you guys found in getting such a huge appropriation of federal funds all of a sudden, because this is reasons for us now as a territory to save money. Director Tessa Mark, relative to the overtime, we've had a staff, what we call a staffing analysis, and in that staffing analysis, we recognize this post that we can consolidate safely and mandatory versus optimal so you have some posts that you could like day time you have a lot of different activities going on on a day shift so you'll have more staff yes on day shift versus nighttime so we look at our overall operations and in doing so we were able to consolidate some things and again in addition to that technology we employ technology the use of cameras it doesn't take the place of a human being but it assists the individual doing that job and in addition to that correctional technicians correctional technicians is something is a position that's been utilizing the correctional professions for the last 20 years it's just new here to the territory and those individuals are able to do the jobs clerical jobs that oftentimes correction officers will find time doing however we concentrate on getting the correctional officer to basically focus now on security and have those correction takes take

1:45:24 those those media tasks away from them basically that was a lot of time they were spending on clerical duties yes okay like booking someone you send that a computer putting the stuff in this a correction tech could do that when it comes to head count when you talk about calling individuals they don't physically go and count the inmates that's what security staff will do but then they They could call that person in central control and they could record that information. So things like that. Again, it's all about looking at our overall operations and see where we could be more effective and efficient.

1:46:00 So does any of the vacancies that you currently have listed include more of those type individuals? I think we only have like two positions for corrections tech. Most of our positions is for correctional officers. again our aim is to fill our correctional officer's position that's what we want to do that is the goal however we're challenged with filling those positions with qualified individuals glad you mentioned that because um in 2024 you only recruited two yeah the prior year 2023 you had seven yeah and it's never been more than nine i see over the last eight years nine so what was 2025's number miss gums 2025. and if you can tell me what 2026 is of as of this month 2025 oh i'm sorry phyllis hodge gums um three we promoted three three and can i clarify you're saying recruit we recruit a lot of individuals well the ones i guess that were retained right again is that what was retained here yes yes sir right so yeah we recruit a lot of individuals but they go through division of personnel to take the test and um due to the background and the medical you know it means them out and is this is like a 20% rate this is yeah director testimony unfortunately sometimes we have a lot of applicants we have a lot of applicants they will come they will be interested they go to personnel they will sign up they put an application sometimes they're weeded out by their background sometimes they can't pass the exam so if we have a pool

1:47:54 of 19 people that applied sometimes you only end up getting one person at the end of the day because you read them out the background or some of them can't pass the exam so it's a challenge it's been a challenge for years is there anything we could do in terms of workforce development to help with this process I mean it's not a job right yes I mean we're always open to whatever we do to assist them but bureau of correction what we have done to assist the app one minute is that we have we pay five dollars for each test a practice test to help the individuals to pass these exams that's one thing that we do bureau of corrections because we know it's a challenge the next thing too is um i can't help them with the background we can't help them with the background the background is the background but we could weed those out initially so we don't even waste any time with those people yes so don't even count 19 if you know seven of them 30 seconds criminal background or whatever or drugs or whatever just don't even count those they shouldn't pass the initial screening well the the process in which the government of the virgin isles has is once they go to personnel they they say that they're they're okay to apply if they pass the test if they apply to pass the test when we do in the background is where we find some challenges some obstacles and that's why sometimes they're weeded out you know what's scary to me your graduation rates at the year of correction is it's 54 year over year but for us to hire correction officers we can't even get a 20 rate so the inmate inmates are smarter than the applicants time no that's not what i said i'm just saying i'm just saying you look i mean that's that's not good so we got some smart inmates that's a good thing we just need to get some smarter applicants

1:50:04 here you know well i mean again we just we continue to work with the applicants and again too i want everybody to remember that the bureau of corrections also competes with other agencies okay we compete with police we compete

with the airport and bottom line is Bureau of Corrections is not glamorous in the eyes of those individuals you understand so more often they will prefer to go to VIPD or other agencies versus Corrections I quite understand I was having fun with that anyway thank you very much mr.

1:50:40 chair I appreciate the time thank you yeah I just wanted to respond in terms of an example we had maybe a couple months ago we had 10 solid candidates that we selected to go through the process begin the medical begin agility tests we we had 10 people first time ever we have had 10 people went through all the processes miss gums does a good job between a grandfather and a grandmother figure holding their hand reminding them about the appointment don't forget you have the to attend this place you know if you need a ride let us know we'll take you these kind of stuff we've been doing we will only be out to the 10 we only got one so it's ten people was ready to go one person because the others don't want to I guess give the doctors information those other in terms of background check don't really want you to get the information they like oh well I forgot I got in trouble with my with my parent and I got a record I forgot about that you know those kind of things that they don't think that would come up on their background is the issue so I would say the agency we hold hands too long you know director says eventually take them off the list she's not gonna go back and we call them three times text in email calls or even like when we have candidates what Miss Gums do we call on the phone they don't answer we send an email they don't respond she go ahead and schedule them anyway we have gotten candidates when they saw the calendar invite they came and Joan well I didn't know how to interview but I saw it so I came so we tried different ways to ensure and strategies and tactics to get people on board so I would say in the HR division she goes over above and beyond sometimes it's too long you know but we try to get candidates and we do everything possible to get qualified candidates not just a checker box but to get candidates that come to workshop to work on time come on time do their job and ensure that we can rehabilitate those entrusted to our care.

1:52:42 Thank you for putting that on record because you're preaching to the choir. A lot of times I've been engaged with trying to develop this recruitment and retention policy to be able to assist our applicants. But I know of many instances where you bring these individuals right to the trough and you still have to pay in stake. I even had to take money out of my pocket to pay for psychological to be done, to pay for medical to be done. I mean, they want the job, and you won't believe the extreme, and then they still don't show up for the appointment after going through all of that. So I understand and I'm very familiar with the challenges. It's almost they want a job, but they want you to go through the process of giving them the job without them having any requirements or being able to meet any requirements. And it happens in public. It happens in private sectors. The chair will now recognize Senator Ray Fonseca. Can you recognize for your six minutes?

1:53:36 Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. and good morning, colleagues. I bring warm greetings to all those viewing and listening. Okay, Director Testamark, you know, I've seen some improvement. I wanted to go, I got a couple questions, so I ain't going to let you talk too much. You can answer on the chair's time. You know, the expense of incarceration, you know, \$320 per day, that's like \$116,800 locally. You know, it amazes me how the construction and things are just so inflated in St. Thomas. We have a housing development that's being constructed, and it's about \$800,000 per unit. Can you imagine that?

1:54:22 Housing, low-income housing, \$800,000 per unit. Okay, so, oh, congratulations. I've seen you have good staff. You have Dr. Kaiser Calwada. I like that bow tie. You got Dr. Linda Calwada. I know she's a dedicated professional, and also Dr. Victor. So I can see the increases in your attention to the health care in the Virgin Islands. And I noticed your budget, page 7, was \$836,000 for local medical care. Off-island, it was \$301,949. Now, in the consent decree, adequate medical care was an issue. So, are you saying that the medical care locally matches the off-island medical care?

1:55:11 Give me your statement on that. I will let Dr. Calwood speak on that. She's the expert in that area. Dr. Calwood? Dr. Linda Calwood. Yes, the services that the inmate patients receive on the mainland is equal to that that we provide here in the territory. Okay, good. Okay, I wanted to go to, I noticed your statistics. I track this all the time because it's very important. Total last year when you came was 351. You had 191 local inmates, 160 off-island. Now it's still 351.

1:55:52 You have 181 local and 170. So you have 10 more off-island. It's \$2.1 million for the court-appointed monitors and experts required by the consent decree. I think that's the number I have here. Give me a little narrative on how we're doing with the court-appointed monitors and experts. How we're doing with them? Yeah. Well, in the St. Croix case, it's a collaborative effort.

1:56:26 we work together jointly to help us achieve compliance in the st thomas case is the aclu that brought the case against the territory so it's a little different um we have our next status here and there was there haven't been much movement in the st thomas case it's now beginning to ramp up um judge malloy is now the judge in that case so we look forward to we're scheduled for a tentative site visit in September of 2020 this year I was just had a little sidebar with the majority chair we did a fact check on your statistics with the the recidivism rate the 68% nationally you're right so at locally we're at 18.6%

for three years what why why are we doing so much better than the national average well i would direct a testimony i would say again our population is different our culture is different so when we look at the and the things that we're doing here in the territory to help prepare our individuals is different um you know i've worked in the states for 29 and a half years a lot of things that we are doing here it doesn't exist in the mainland because they just have more people they have more the population is much bigger you're talking about 60 50 000 people inmates that a facility may have to deal with versus our smaller population so i would say the fact that our culture the population is much more manageable and we're able to definitely have more programs where we could reach a broader variety here in the territory because of the smaller population versus in the states.

1:58:15 Okay, and was my time calm, Mr. Chair? No, okay, good. Last year, you said the average age of prisoners was about 24. I think it was 24, 25. Lately, we've had some serious incidences with minors. What's the average age now? The average age is still 24. 18 to 24 but it's 24 we have one juvenile that's being tried as an adult that's now in our custody that person is 16 years old. Okay so you have that AI program that training program that I thought was very good with Sherry and Gilbert One minute Did I say congratulations to Joan Thomas your employee of the year?

1:59:05 No you didn't say that. Oh congratulations to Joan Thomas, I can't miss that at all. Of course, you know, we had the master of ceremonies here, Dr. Calwood, for the whole big belong last week. So, awesome. Okay, so tell me about that. Tell you about what? No, the Sherry Ann Gilbert, the AI training program. The VR training. Mr. Peter Abrams, I'll let him collaborate. 30 seconds. He keeps saying Sherry. She is just the She's the officer that works the program in that. Okay, okay.

1:59:38 I had a bad note. Yes. Yes. Tell us about that, please. Go ahead, Ms. Abrams. So what we did as part of our educational program was we looked at various challenges that we had. And we developed a proprietary system, which we created a tablet program. And then as part of that tablet program, we created a virtual reality. And the virtual reality, we're proud to say that we're the first correctional facility in the United States to utilize that technology. And the technology works where that currently right now in the VR program, we provide 15 vocational programs that are not decertified. That's a national accreditation. So when they complete the class, they get a national accreditation. And the certificates come from Valley Forge Military College. So they get a certificate of completion from a university in the States, and they get the certifications here. And the greatest part about the VR program is that it's in the headset, and if they are on lockdown or if they are confined to their housing unit, they could still take the class. So it doesn't matter where they're at, they can still take the class. Even though they come to the education building and they do take the classes, this gives them the opportunity. but I also if you give me an opportunity you had mentioned you had spoke to the director about the recidivism rate so I just wanted to add the biggest difference that we have done at the Bureau of Corrections as we have developed our own personalized case management system so that when an individual comes in we assess them in four respective areas we tape test it the test of adult basic education to determine their educational levels we do a psychosocial assessment the strong r assessment which is the people know it as the lscmi then we do the o-net which is um a job determination based on your interest and then lastly we do accu vision which is a soft skills personality test the individuals go through this process and the case managers develop a case plan that's specifically directed to that individual and then they also meet with the mental health unit right which then also works with the inmate and if need be create a treatment plan for that individual so what we're finding out which is different is that that individual is getting a lot of personalized attention and that's what's causing the racism rate to go down because by the time they go through our process we know

2:02:21 what they want we know what they need and if you've heard um through the conversation of yesterday's graduation if you watch the um the facebook thing you and you heard the testimonies of the individuals it's because we are paying attention to what their needs are that's the reason why um the recidivism rate is where it's at now the reason for the increase that we recently that we saw the jump is because as was mentioned in the testimony here is that transitional housing is a problem in the territory as a matter of fact it wasn't a couple months ago we came in here because an inmate had committed a crime to come back into the facility because he was not receiving the services on the outside. We provide fantastic behavioral services programs. Dr. Collwood, the medical director, does fantastic with the medical. One guy calls me all the time, says he needs to get teeth fixed. That's the reason why he had to come back to prison, because he can't get teeth fixed on the outside. And so there's all of these programs that we're providing in the facility. I mean, if you get an opportunity to come, we have a state-of-the-art dental unit with panoramic scan. We do telemedicine, we do the health services that Dr. Caldwell provides, bar none.

2:03:38 And that's the reason why the inmates want to come back. And we're trying to tell them that, no, we're preparing you to become better returning citizens so you can become contributing members of the society and give back. So at the end of the day, our main focus is to get them healthy so they can get a job. Awesome, awesome. So with the AI certification, is

that open to the public? So can I sign up for that? As a matter of fact, the only facility that I know that offers the same program that's open to the public is in Orlando, Florida.

2:04:12 where it's been working so well in Florida that the Florida State of Corrections has decided that they are adopting the same program that we have for the entire state of Florida because it's working so well. Not only is it not only using the VR program, it takes the educational part of it, you know, like when you used to go to class, it cuts the educational part by 50%. So it takes less time to train these individuals and they receive the same certification. In the city of Orlando, every person that completes the electrical helper program is automatically employed by Tri-City Electric, which is the big electrical company up there, because it has been a proven program that works very well. Awesome. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the time.

2:05:06 Thank you very much, Senator Fonsick. It sounds like we have these institutional services that's provided. we have the same situation with the borders at the hospital they don't want to go home you know they're stuck there because they're getting better service in the facility so that is something that we certainly have to take a look at uh we're about to go to a break but i see that senator joseph is asking for point of information so we'll have um we'll have him do his point of information and it will take a two minutes recess joseph you're recognized for your point of information yes uh pertaining to the same line of question and good morning everybody thank you mr chair for the time the what happens here on in the in the territory when somebody complete the training what what do you do i listen to what you're saying on the state side because i know with trade work i don't care how much you train and you get your certification if you don't get a chance to put your hands on it it kind of leaves you so i'm asking what we're doing with the ones here in in the territory good morning Peter Abrahams assistant director support services we we as part of the tablet program we have a connection with the Department of Labor and so we work with the views the Virgin Islands employment workforce system and we get the individuals and onto the into the Department of Labor system and so you know as the as we pointed out before you You could do everything you can do, and you can provide all the training. You could bring the horse to water, but you can't force him to drink.

2:06:39 So we go to the point where a lot of times we get them set up on an appointment. We reach out to the director. But if they don't show up, you know, they're outside the prison, no. If they don't come, but they receive the training, I can speak to a couple of individuals because we've met them. We've met them in the States where a lot of individuals that have left here travel with their portfolio of certificates that they receive from here and they get employed immediately we have a testimony from an individual that said that he went in to look for a job you know unsolicited went in asking this automotive place for a job and he showed them the portfolio the guy sent him straight to HR you know this was an individual that received all his certificates from here. He used to work in the motor pool department here, so he knew about body work because he was doing it hands-on here. Plus, he took the course training and became certified in these areas, and they're being employed. So a lot of the individuals here that receive their certification leave and they go to the states. We have worked with the ones here because we are developing programs where we're trying to develop relationships, community relationships with the businesses to say what is it that you need what is so we're trying our best to make the connection but you know it's at the end of the day it's also dependent on the applicant because if the applicant doesn't want to work I can't force them to work. I understand Mark I wasn't really so I was wondering what kind of traction are we getting after the train here locally I mean yes I'm happy to hear that there are individuals that are going out to work but can you say at least you know of three individuals that were released from the prison that actually working today because of one of the trainings that's my point yes definitely um and i can give you one

2:08:33 quick example we had a gentleman that was released here and um i just happened to drop into um one of them uh little uh site stores where that he came walking in and he saw me he said mr abrahams that's you i said yes and he said man i can't um thank you enough for the stuff that you did for us inside and i said what was that he said come let me show you and he went outside and he showed me this secondhand car that he bought and he said because of the electrical training that i got inside right i started working for these people and um i continue doing my electrical work but no i'm getting so much outside work you know from from the company that i'm doing so well that i a car and so it the system the system works and if the person has the drive and the initiative it continues so yes i do have testimonies from individuals that have said that they're very grateful to the work that the um the director has been doing um in promoting you know these uh vocational programs and we're going to continue to add more programs onto our system because we've we've developed the mechanism to provide additional courses i have we have individuals that constantly take classes where that they could do you know during the course of a couple months they could finish 30 certifications the one graduate over here in saint thomas we were so proud of him he went and took every single vocational program that was available on the the VR headset which is 15 of them he received in his graduation 15 certificates where he's nationally certified and he got a certificate of completion from the university to provide it these are individuals that took it upon themselves to want to do it and so when they leave here yes they're there they're getting we work with them and the department of labor to to

heard in this transcript as: Fonseca, Fonsick, Ray Fonsek

7x

Senator Marvin Blyden

heard in this transcript as: Blyden, Blyton, Marvin A. Blyden

6x

Dr. Linda Calwood

heard in this transcript as: Linda Callwood, Linda Colwood

4x

Senator Hubert Frederick

heard in this transcript as: Frederick, Hubert L. Frederick

4x

Senator Kurt Violet

heard in this transcript as: Kurt A. Valey, Valey, Viale

4x

Senator Marise C. James

the surname alone also matches: Javan James; Giovanni James Sr

heard in this transcript as: James, Maurice C. James, Maurice James'

4x

Senator Novelle Francis

the surname alone also matches: Novel E. Francis Jr.; Navelle Francis Jr.

heard in this transcript as: Francis Jr, Francis Jr., Novell E. Francis Jr.

3x

Senator Dwayne DeGraff

heard in this transcript as: DeGraff, Dwayne M. DeGraff

3x

Senator Kurt VLA

heard in this transcript as: VLA

3x

Senator Milton E. Potter

heard in this transcript as: Potter

2x

Senator Avery Lewis

heard in this transcript as: Wilma Lewis

2x

Senator Carla Joseph

the surname alone also matches: Clifford Joseph; Karla J. Joseph

heard in this transcript as: Joseph

2x

Senator Clifford Joseph

2x

Judge Robert Molloy