Fiscal Year 2027 Budget Testimony
President Safiya George
University of the Virgin Islands

Presented to the
Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance

EARLE B. OTTLEY LEGISLATIVE HALL
ST. THOMAS, U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

August 3, 2026

INTRODUCTION

Good morning, Chairman Francis, Vice Chair Blyden, and other distinguished members of the Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance, members of the Thirty-Sixth Legislature of the Virgin Islands present, other testifiers, our viewing and listening audiences.

I am Dr. Safiya George, President of the University of the Virgin Islands. On behalf of the University of the Virgin Islands, thank you for the opportunity to present our Fiscal Year 2027 Operating Budget and discuss the resources that continue to be necessary to advance academic excellence in our community. Joining me today is Vice President for Administration and Finance and Chief Financial Officer, Guadalupe Valencia, who will assist in answering your questions on the University's financial operations and this budget.

The University of the Virgin Islands societal impact continues to extend well beyond higher education. This Territory's University is a driver of workforce development, research, innovation, and an economic engine that breaks societal barriers. The University of the Virgin Islands is much more than an institution of higher education, we prepare future leaders such as yourselves to sustain governments, hospitals, schools and strengthen society. It is critical to highlight our impact as this hearing comes at a defining moment for the University of the Virgin Islands and our region. It is not a moment the University of the Virgin Islands can meet alone, and it is not a moment I intend to ask you to watch from afar. The University of the Virgin Islands was created by the Virgin Islands Legislature in 1962. Our university is an instrumentality of the Government of the Virgin Islands, and its accreditation is a territorial asset that belongs to every family, every employer, and every community these islands hold.

Today, my testimony is organized around four key points: first, to justify UVI's budget request; second to provide updates regarding UVI's academic mission, student outcomes, employee positions and needs; third, to demonstrate the disciplined work already underway; and finally, to outline the partnership required to finish the job together. I ask you to stand with us as partners. As always, I thank you for your continued support, investment, and leadership as we meet the challenges and also the opportunities ahead.

UVI: A MACHINE OF SOCIAL MOBILITY

For 64 years, the University of the Virgin Islands has been a catalyst for social mobility, a cornerstone of opportunity and prosperity for Virgin Islanders, graduating more than 11,000 alumni, 84% of whom have remained here in this Territory to build successful careers, raise families, and help shape the Virgin Islands. More than 1,130 UVI alumni continue to work in the Territory, many in leadership roles throughout our local government and public sector, strengthening the Virgin Islands economy forward. Two examples would be, Dr. Akacia Halliday-Isaac, a St. Thomas native who earned her B.S. and M.S. at UVI before completing a Ph.D. and a U.S. Senate policy fellowship, returned home to apply her expertise directly to the Territory. Yvette deLaubanque, a graduate of UVI's predecessor institution, College of the Virgin Islands, went on to co-found and lead the Virgin Islands Women's Business Center, building entrepreneurial opportunities for Virgin Islanders across the Territory. Their stories reflect UVI's enduring role as a catalyst for social mobility and leadership across the Territory.

UVI’s positive enrollment trajectory continues to gain momentum and signals confidence in the value of a UVI education and the opportunities it creates. Fall enrollment has grown for four consecutive years, from a low of 1,655 students in Fall 2021 to 1,863 students in Fall 2025, a 12.5% increase overall, including 4% growth from 2024. UVI Online grew 7.1% in that same window, from 169 to 181 students, expanding access for working adults and non-traditional learners. We have returned to pre-pandemic enrollment levels, and we continue working to fully recover from the long-term impact of the 2017 hurricanes.

These gains are the result of the hard work of our dedicated employees, especially those working in our Access and Enrollment Services offices and our Center for Student Success, among others and their outreach and engagement with our schools and the community. Additionally, UVI has made significant intentional student-centered investments: institutional scholarships, emergency financial assistance, proactive advising, and early alert systems that kept Virgin Islands students enrolled and on track. Investing in student support increases affordability and is reflected in our retention rates, which have climbed from 68% to 70%, and now early registration has also reached 83%, both signs of stronger alignment with student engagement and planning and strong recruitment efforts.

Status of the Virgin Islands Higher Education Scholarship Program (VIHESP)/ Free Tuition Fund

Virgin Islands Higher Education Scholarship Program (VIHESP) Scholarship Recipients		
Metric	**Fall 2024**	**Fall 2025**
A. TOTAL HEADCOUNT ENROLLMENT - VIHESP (Free Tuition) Recipients		
Full-time Headcount	449	430
Part-time Headcount	72	79
Total	**521**	**509**

The Free Tuition Fund has been a critical access point for Virgin Islands students, significantly removing financial barriers that may prevent our talented students from pursuing higher education. In 2019, the Government of the Virgin Islands enacted the USVI

Free Tuition Scholarship/Subsidy Program to make attendance at the University of the Virgin Islands more affordable for residents. The program covers tuition costs for eligible students pursuing their first undergraduate degree and has served as a meaningful driver of social mobility across the Territory.

Originally designed for full-time, on-campus students, the program was expanded in 2024 to include part-time and online students. This expansion significantly increased access to higher education, particularly for working adults and non-traditional students.

Since its inception, the Free Tuition Program has expanded significantly in both reach and impact, serving a growing number of Virgin Islands students each year.

The number of students receiving Free Tuition support has increased steadily over time:

- **Academic Year (AY) 2019–2020:** 184 students
- **AY 2020–2021:** 170 students
- **AY 2021–2022:** 153 students
- **AY 2022–2023:** 291 students
- **AY 2023–2024:** 401 students
- **AY 2024–2025:** 548 students
- **AY 2025–2026:** 509 students

This growth reflects the program's expanding role as a primary access point to higher education in the Territory.

Correspondingly, the total financial investment in the program has increased substantially:

- **Academic Year (AY) 2019–2020:** $636,739
- **AY 2020–2021:** $573,719
- **AY 2021–2022:** $483,700
- **AY 2022–2023:** $1.23 million
- **AY 2023–2024:** $1.76 million
- **AY 2024–2025:** $2.39 million
- **AY 2025:** $1,586,966 million *(Fall 2025)*

These trends demonstrate both the growing demand for the program and its critical importance in supporting student access, persistence, and degree completion across the Virgin Islands. They also underscore the urgent need to align funding with demand.

As a result of expanded eligibility and increased participation, the University has experienced significant growth in program utilization.

For students within this VIHESP(Free Tuition) program, the graduation rate is 31 and the rate for students not receiving Free Tuition is 27%.

The Virgin Islands Free Tuition Program has been one of the most powerful investments we have made in our students and our future. By removing financial barriers and providing access to higher education, we have opened doors for more Virgin Islanders to earn degrees, secure meaningful careers, and contribute to the economic and civic life of the Territory. The benefits extend beyond individual students to families, employers, communities, and the Virgin Islands as a whole. The University is incredibly grateful for your leadership efforts this past year in securing additional funding for the VI Higher Free Tuition Program. This legislature's support is making student dreams come true and building a stronger foundation for our future.

HIGHLIGHTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS 2025-2026

Our faculty continue to elevate UVI's academic standing, publishing in peer-reviewed journals, presenting at conferences, and leading federally funded research that expands opportunities for our students in both research and workforce preparation. Dr. Marilyn Brandt, UVI Research Professor, led development of the first machine learning model able to distinguish between two of the Caribbean's most destructive coral diseases, research now advancing under a $7 million National Science Foundation award establishing UVI's new Virgin Islands Center for Autonomous Research. Dr. Suzanne Darrow-Magras, Director of UVI CELL, is extending continuing education and workforce-aligned training deeper into communities across the Territory, building on 25 years of experience in education and workforce development. That momentum extends to our students as well. Helen Holt, a graduate student in UVI's new Professional Science Master's program in Marine and Environmental Science, is leading the establishment of a territorial Sargassum Working Group in partnership with the VI Department of Planning and Natural Resources. Basheera Maduro, an undergraduate at UVI's School of Agriculture on the Albert A. Sheen Campus and an active farmer, is training toward a future in veterinary medicine while expanding her own poultry operation on St. Croix.

UVI's growing network of strategic partnerships continues to elevate the University's leadership in education, healthcare, STEM, entrepreneurship, and community engagement. Through our partnership with Arizona State University's University Design Institute (UDI), UVI convened a multi-month strategic consulting series that brought national transformation expertise directly to our Board, faculty, and staff, sharpening institutional strategy and accelerating our capacity for innovation.

We have strengthened the digital backbone that supports all this work, modernizing infrastructure, expanding analytics, and reinforcing cybersecurity, so that our systems are as reliable as our people. We launched Banner Experience, giving students and employees a single more user-friendly information system with a simplified entry point to key academic and administrative services. When coordinated phishing campaigns targeted the University, our Information Service component responded swiftly, removing malicious emails, securing affected accounts, and issuing campus-wide alerts, and reinforcing those defenses through National Cybersecurity Awareness Month training, phishing simulations, and ongoing awareness messaging.

These investments extend into how we support student success. Institutional Research developed a new retention dashboard that gives Deans and academic leadership earlier insight into students who may need support, enabling more timely intervention. And through the expansion of the use of digitized workflows via Softdocs, we have automated key administrative processes, including Employee Separation, Change in Employee Status, , and Tuition Remission, reducing manual paperwork and improving processing efficiency across departments, with additional designs identified for digitization ahead.

UVI has been the Territory's only public university and one of its most important public investments, educating the teachers, nurses, engineers, entrepreneurs, scientists, and public servant leaders who carry the Virgin Islands forward. That mission has not changed. What has changed is the urgency with which we must strengthen the institutional foundation beneath it.

Over the past two years, under my and my team's leadership, this University has kept moving forward. We have advanced our G.R.A.N.D. Momentum Strategic Plan, grown enrollment and student retention efforts, increased philanthropic giving through the UVI Foundation, advanced capital projects, expanded partnerships across the Territory and beyond, and in the first half of Fiscal Year (FY)2026, we submitted 27 proposals and received 41 awards, reflecting the confidence federal agencies place in our faculty and researchers. And through all of it, we kept serving our students every day.

Institutionalizing Systems

I share that record not to distract from the challenge before us, but because it proves something important: UVI has the capacity to execute, even under difficult circumstances. We are applying that same discipline now to the institutional systems that support everything else we do in planning, governance, fiscal management, internal controls, and timely decision-making. These systems rarely make headlines. Students rarely see them. But they are the foundation every successful university is built on, and UVI is rebuilding that foundation with urgency. Some of the operational infrastructure challenges we are addressing are the result of significant organizational growth that outpaced the development of supporting systems and processes. I will not spend the Committee's time rehashing how we got here. Our responsibility is what happens next, and that work is already yielding positive measurable outcomes.

MIDDLE STATES COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION: Show Cause Notification

On February 8, 2026, the University of the Virgin Islands submitted a comprehensive self-study to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) as part of the accreditation process. The self-study is a rigorous, institution-wide assessment that evaluates every aspect of the University against nationally recognized standards of quality, governance, student success, academic excellence, financial sustainability, and continuous improvement. The self-study serves as both an accreditation requirement and a strategic roadmap for strengthening institutional effectiveness and ensuring accountability to our students, community, and stakeholders. As part of our self-study, we hosted a site visit by the MSCHE evaluation team comprised of higher education peers on both of our campuses and an institutional readout of the self-study site visit by the evaluation team chair on March 25, 2026, which the visiting team we met with six out of seven MSCHE standards. We were informed that we did not meet Standard VI due to missing/delayed financial audits, and particularly focused on growing concerns about cash liquidity to cover current operating expenses. Unfortunately, delayed allotments have contributed to outstanding weekly operating payables, averaging between $12-$14 million thereby affecting financial performance ratios reviewed by MSCHE.

On June 29, 2026, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education directed the University to demonstrate compliance with Standard VI (Planning, Resources, and Institutional Improvement), related to delayed financial audits, fiscal stability and Standard VII (Governance, Leadership, and Administration), related to board oversight of those audits and fiscal viability through a Show Cause process. Under Show Cause, the University remains accredited while it submits evidence that it has addressed the Commission's concerns. We have until September 1, 2026, to do so.

As President of this University, I guarantee this legislature that this Show Cause notification is being treated with the severe importance it deserves as it has broad reputational consequences to the Virgin Islands community. Although we have received this notification, I want you to know that the University of the Virgin Islands remains accredited. Although we have received this notification, I want you to know that the University of the Virgin Islands remains accredited. It does not mean our degrees have lost their value; and our university has most definitely not lost its academic credibility. This also does not mean this great University has lost its capacity to lead.

Show Cause Timeline:	
6/29/2026	UVI notified of Show Cause
By 7/31/26	Commission Liaison Guidance Visit
9/1/2026	Submit Show Cause Report that addresses specific evidence of Standards VI and VII and will submit the required comprehensive Teach-out Plan and associated agreements to the MSCHE, a procedural requirement for every institution under Show Cause and not an indication of closure
By 10/30/26	Commission Liaison Guidance Visit
By 11/30/26	UVI will present to the MSCHE board

Under the leadership of our Chief Financial Officer, Guadalupe Valencia, the Division of Administration and Finance has already completed the University's Fiscal Year 2021 audited financial statements. As part of that effort UVI completed subsequent events procedures for Fiscal Years 2022 – 2025. The Fiscal Year 2022 audit has also moved into the execution phase, and audits for Fiscal Years 2023 through 2025 are now in the planning phases with our external audit firm. The subsequent events procedures work that has already been completed will help speed the process of issuing the remaining pending audits. Alongside that work, we expanded institution-wide training in our Banner financial system and procurement processes, continue to establish standard operating procedures and processing documentation where none existed before, and engaged nationally recognized higher education finance experts to train our staff and strengthen internal controls. This is not one office working in isolation. It is a university building the financial infrastructure it needs to sustain this progress permanently going forward.

To strengthen our financial position, the institution has also pursued a combination of cost-containment and revenue-enhancement strategies. These efforts include reducing non-essential travel, implementing tighter controls over service contracts, purchasing card limits, and limiting non-essential expenses. The institution has enforced purchasing policies and more rigorously monitored hiring practices. Additional cost-saving measures continue as we review physical plant and information technology maintenance contracts to identify high-cost agreements and evaluate opportunities to outsource certain functions that are financially advantageous. As you are well aware, our energy costs continue to rise annually. Accordingly, we remain committed to identifying and implementing strategies to reduce energy consumption through the ongoing evaluation of course offerings and the efficient utilization of campus facilities.

Compared to the same time during last year's testimony, we have decreased our overall operating expenditures by $3.3 million, underscoring our commitment to fiscal discipline and responsible resource management.

As we invest in maintaining excellence in education and enhancing student support services within our Territory, a tuition adjustment was necessary. Despite this change, we are proud to continue offering one of the lowest tuition rates in the nation, ensuring exceptional value for our students.

We are also continuing to evaluate our fee structure to better understand net margins and identify opportunities for long-term sustainability.

While completing the remaining audits is an important milestone and top priority, our greater focus is on building a culture and framework that will ensure continued excellence, compliance, and accountability well into the future. This effort is being advanced collaboratively across the University by the President's Cabinet, academic leadership, faculty, staff, and the Board of Trustees. Institutional effectiveness is a shared responsibility and commitment across the University, and together we are creating a foundation for sustained success.

That is the spirit in which we bring you the Fiscal Year 2027 budget. This is not simply an annual operating budget. It is the Financial Blueprint for institutional sustainability; it provides the resources that enable us to invest in our future while continuing to provide high-quality education. These resources will help us keep strengthening our foundation while we educate students, conduct research, and prepare the workforce this Territory depends on.

Every element of this request maps directly to our G.R.A.N.D. Momentum Strategic Plan, from **G**iving, **G**rowth and Financial Transformation to **R**esource Management, to **A**cademic Achievement, to the **N**imbleness this moment demands, and to the **D**ata and Distinction that will prove we are delivering on it. This is not a budget built in isolation from our mission. It is our mission, translated into numbers.

FISCAL YEAR (FY) 2026-2027:

BUDGET REQUEST

The University is grateful for the support Governor Albert Bryan Jr. provided in the budget he recommended to this body for the FY 2026-2027 for the University. We appreciate the Governor's continued commitment to higher education and recognize the importance of this investment in the University of the Virgin Islands and the students we serve. We are grateful for the continued partnership in a recent meeting with Governor Bryan, Commissioner of Finance Kevin G. McCurdy, and OMB Director Julio A. Rhymer Sr., who both offered their support in helping the University secure its remaining allotments, a collaboration we deeply value as we work to strengthen our financial footing.

At the same time, there are several critical priorities and funding needs that were not fully addressed in the proposed budget and warrant consideration as the Legislature finalizes the University's Fiscal Year 2027 appropriation. These requests reflect essential investments in student access and success, workforce development, educational excellence, and programs that directly support the economic and social advancement of the Virgin Islands.

Presented below is the University's Fiscal Year 2027 budget request, which includes the FY 2026 recurring base appropriation together with a supplemental funding request outlined in this testimony. We respectfully ask for your consideration and support of these priorities, which will enable UVI to continue transforming lives, developing the Territory's workforce, and serving as a catalyst for opportunity and prosperity throughout the Virgin Islands. The breakdown of the request is as follows:

FISCAL YEAR 2026-2027 BUDGET REQUEST	Governor Approved Ceiling FY 2027	Supplemental Request
General Operating Requirements	29,550,958	
Health Insurance Premium Increases - Employer Related Costs (CIGNA)		800,000
CBA and Employee Salary Increases		1,450,000
Additional WAPA Expenses & Related Equipment Replacement Funds due to Power Surges		1,000,000
Agricultural Extension & Co-op Extension Local Match Requirement		1,337,858
Debt Service - SoN for St. Croix Campus	1,800,000	
SBDC Local Match Requirements*	300,000	
Senior Citizens Tuition Requirements and Increase	100,000	150,000
Valedictorian and Salutatorian Scholarships	100,000	400,966
Center for Excellence in Leadership & Learning	100,000	
Caribbean Green Technology		200,000
University Bound Program	355,901	140,000
John Brewers Beach Security & Maintenance	100,000	
Bachelor of Science in Nursing Degree Program - St. Croix Campus	400,000	
Hospitality and Tourism Program	450,000	
Master's Program in Social Work - Albert A. Sheen Campus		500,000
Summer Bridge Program	115,000	
UVI Labor Force Survey	110,000	
VI - EPSCoR Local Match Requirement (No Cost Extension)	250,000	
School of Education Dept. of Education Early Childhood Education Partnership and Professional Development		27,500
Office of Self-Determination and Constitutional Development	85,000	
UVI Simulation Center Maintenance and Supplies	175,000	
EMS Program UVI Cell/UVI Simulation Center	286,103	
UVI Cell Surveyor Program	200,000	
UVI Medical School Reserve Fund	500,000	500,000
UVI Accreditation Funds		100,000
VI Free Tuition Scholarship		3,000,000
Grand Total - General Operating Requirements, Medical School Debt Service and Miscellaneous Section = $44,584,286	**34,977,962**	**9,606,324**
**Contingent on completion of pending Single Audits (FY's 2022 - 2025)*		

The sum of $29,550,958 is for general operations for Fiscal Year 2026-2027. This includes salaries and benefits for our regular and temporary employees, as well as operating expenditures, in accordance with the provisions of Title 17, Chapters 33 and 35 of the Virgin Islands Code. It also includes the amounts legislatively required to ensure implementation of Act No. 8995 which provided a much-needed increase to workers in lower-pay positions. Additionally, it includes the negotiated increases for faculty members implemented in FY 2026 as part of the University's Collective Bargaining Agreement including the related Retirement System mandated employer matching contributions for both required increases.

As you are aware, our employees continue to be the foundation of our university's success. Daily, our dedicated employees provide essential services, support our students and patrons, and ensure that our operations run smoothly and effectively. In an increasingly competitive labor market, investing in our employees is both a recognition of their contributions and a strategic necessity. That competitive pressure is not abstract, UVI currently has 24 vacancies across executive, administrative, professional, and regular staff, as well as faculty positions, underscoring how difficult it has become to recruit and retain talent in this environment. Supporting a salary increase helps maintain competitive compensation, addresses growing cost-of-living pressures, and preserves equitable pay relationships across the higher education industry. As we continue to monitor trends across higher education, we find the FY 2025 Higher Education Price Index (HEPI) rose by 3.6%, marking another year of rising costs and reinforcing the mounting pressure on university operating budgets. Given recent events, it is imperative that we improve morale and provide our employees with a salary increase to ensure their economic security. As such, we respectfully request a conservative $1,450,000 to provide some relief to our employees and support their financial wellbeing. As costs continue to increase, sustaining and attracting high-caliber human capital remains essential to preserving our competitiveness and institutional excellence.

Other essential expenses that continue to rise as part of our general operations are our health insurance premiums. This unfunded, although necessary mandate is a heavy lift that ensures our employees have access to appropriate healthcare. Unfortunately, this past year this cost has contributed to our structural deficit, and we need your support to not pass this cost on to our employees. We seek an additional $800,000 to cover these employer-related costs. We also seek an additional $1,000,000 to cover additional VI Water and Power Authority expenses that we have incurred this past year. This cost includes additional energy consumption costs and the cost of equipment replacements that have been borne due to high voltage fluctuations.

Additionally, **APPENDIX I** provides details of the University's Fiscal Year 2025-2026 operating budget inclusive of revenues and expenditures as of July 17, 2026.

UVI also continues to request $1.8 million to fund our debt service obligations and are requesting an increase towards the UVI Medical School Reserve Fund in the amount of $500,000 which is critical for the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) to accredit the UVI Medical School. This restoration of funds would bring the annual contribution toward this reserve fund to $1 million a year.

To sustain our accreditation work beyond the current Show Cause process, we are requesting an annual allocation of $100,000 to fund a dedicated accreditation specialist responsible for compliance and continuity going forward.

Additionally, our appropriations requests include continued appropriated restricted funds which are targeted investments designed to improve academic preparedness, support low-income students, improve engagement within our territory, and contribute positively towards workforce outcomes.

Within this request we have included funding for legislatively mandated programs and services such as Agricultural Experimental Station & Cooperative Extension Service Local Match, Small Business Development Center (SBDC) Local Match*, VI Senior Citizens Tuition Program, Valedictorian and Salutatorian Scholarships, Caribbean Green Technology Center, Center for Excellence in Leadership and Learning, Hospitality and Tourism Program, Bachelor of Science in Nursing Degree Program, VI-EPSCoR Local Match (No Cost Extension), University Bound Program, John Brewers Beach Maintenance & Security, Master's Program in Social Work, UVI CELL Surveyor Program, Summer Bridge Program, the School of Education Department of Education Early Childhood Education Partnership and Professional Development, UVI Labor Force Survey, Office of Self Determination and Constitutional Development, UVI Simulation Center Maintenance & Supplies, and the EMS Program UVI Cell/Simulation Center Funding. Together, these initiatives continue to sustain the critical resources needed to serve our students and our local community effectively.

Over the years, demand for educational services among our senior population has remained consistently strong. In 2022, the University absorbed a deficit of $717,678 in this restricted appropriated fund, driven by sustained participation in the program. At that time, we did not seek reimbursement from the Legislature. However, increasing demand now requires additional support to ensure continued access for this important segment of our community. We respectfully request an annual increase of $150,000 to the current restricted appropriation, bringing the total annual allocation to $250,000. This increase would help offset the cost of tuition assistance and ensure that educational opportunities remain available to the Territory's senior citizens.

We are also very proud that the University of the Virgin Islands continues to be the first-choice institution for many of the Territory's valedictorian and salutatorian graduates. This commitment to academic excellence is reflected in the significant growth of our Valedictorian and Salutatorian Scholarship Program. Over the past three academic years (AY 2023-2024 through AY 2025-2026), the number of students receiving these scholarships has increased by 70 percent. During the current academic year, 39 students participated in the program, with annual expenditures projected to reach approximately $588,000. Looking ahead to FY 2027, we anticipate serving 47 scholarship recipients. To continue supporting this great initiative we ask for an increase in the current allotted appropriation in the amount of $400,966 to bring this program back to the 2011 funding levels provided in Act No. 7222.

University Bound is also one of the University of the Virgin Islands' longest-running college access initiatives, serving Virgin Islands students since 1966, more than 60 years of continuous service. Formerly known as Upward Bound, the federally supported program prepares academically promising high school students, particularly those from low-income families, first-generation college-bound households, and students with academic need, for success in higher education through year-round academic instruction, tutoring, counseling, college readiness, SAT preparation, leadership development, and a summer residential experience. Since its inception, University Bound has helped generations of Virgin Islands students enroll in and successfully complete post-secondary education, strengthening the Territory's future workforce and expanding educational opportunities. Continued investment in University Bound represents an investment in the Virgin Islands' educational pipeline. By increasing college readiness, improving access to higher education, and supporting students who might otherwise face significant barriers to college enrollment, the program helps develop the local talent needed to meet the Territory's long-term workforce and economic development goals. Over the years, UVI has supplemented this program from other funding sources due to dwindling appropriations. At one point in 2022, the University covered a deficit of $352,000 to ensure continuity of this program. Today, we request an additional annual allocation of $140,000 to support our college bound Virgin Islanders.

While UVI has made significant progress in advancing its mission and expanding opportunities for students, sustaining this momentum will require the restoration of resources that have been instrumental to the University's continued growth and success. Continuing investment in key initiatives is essential to meeting the evolving needs of our students, the Virgin Islands workforce, and our broader community. Because of this, we are requesting the restoration of funding for several critical programs that were not included in the Governor's proposed budget. These initiatives have demonstrated tangible value and align closely with the Territory's educational, workforce, and economic development priorities. Your continued support is needed for the following programs:

- Green Technology Center
- Master of Social Work Program (Albert A. Sheen Campus)

- School of Education – Department of Education Early Childhood Education Partnership and Professional Development Initiative

Restoring funding for these programs will enable UVI to continue building capacity in high-demand fields, strengthen educational outcomes, support workforce development, and enhance the University's ability to serve the people of the Virgin Islands. We respectfully request your partnership in ensuring these valuable initiatives remain available to current and future generations of Virgin Islanders.

We are deeply grateful for the Legislature's support this year in securing an additional $2.3 million for UVI's Free Tuition Program. This investment has been transformational in breaking down financial barriers and expanding access to higher education for Virgin Islanders. The program continues to distinguish UVI from institutions across the nation by demonstrating our commitment to educational access, affordability, and opportunity. Through this initiative, we are opening doors for students who may not otherwise have the means to pursue a college degree, while creating pathways for the future leaders, professionals, and workforce of our Territory.

While considerable progress has been made, sustaining the success of this program requires a long-term funding commitment. Maintaining adequate annual funding levels is essential to ensure that eligible students continue to benefit from this life-changing opportunity without interruption. Therefore, we respectfully request that the Legislature establish an annual appropriation of $3 million for the Free Tuition Program. As always, UVI is sincerely appreciative of the Legislature's continued support and looks forward to strengthening our partnership as we work together to expand educational opportunities and advance the economic and social well-being of the Virgin Islands.

Finally, beyond the amounts themselves, we respectfully ask this body to address how appropriated funds reach the University. Delayed allotments have disrupted our cash flow, contributed to the payables balance mentioned earlier, and weakened the financial ratios reviewed by our accrediting body. We ask the Legislature to provide for the release of the University's annual appropriations in a single lump sum within 30 days of the effective date of the enactment of the fiscal year's appropriation, or the alternative, in two semiannual installments, consistent with the treatment this body has already provided to the Virgin Islands Department of Education. This proposed change requires no new appropriation, and it directly strengthens the financial sustainability evidence due to MSCHE on September 1. We also seek the ability to be able to allow the University to make restricted appropriations available until expended to allow for full execution of legislatively mandated program outcomes.

In conclusion, we know that UVI is a source of tremendous pride for the Virgin Islands, and that expanding access to high-quality education requires sustained commitment from all of us. This past year has brought significant challenges, but it has also highlighted the resilience, determination, and innovation that define our university and its community. Through the dedication of our students, faculty, staff, alumni, and supporters, UVI continues to serve as a catalyst for educational achievement, workforce development, research, and economic growth, an impact that reaches far beyond the classroom to build a stronger, more prosperous Territory. As we look ahead, we remain committed to expanding our service to the community while maintaining the high standards of excellence that have become the hallmark of this University.

The University of the Virgin Islands stands at an important moment in its history. Reaching our goals will require continued solidarity and investment. With your partnership, UVI can continue transforming lives through the power of education. Together, we can ensure that the University remains a beacon of opportunity, innovation, and hope for generations of Virgin Islanders to come.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and to share the University's accomplishments, priorities, and vision for the future.

I welcome your questions.

APPENDIX I (Please DO NOT POST to LEGVI website)

UNIVERSITY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS FISCAL YEAR 2026 OPERATING BUDGET			
REVENUES	**FY2026 Adjusted Operating Budget**	**YTD 07.17.2026**	**Variance**
Tuition & Fees	$9,286,872	$9,436,159	$149,287
Appropriations	$29,550,958	$15,430,378	($14,120,580)
Government Grants & Contracts	$1,933,874	$1,119,926	($813,948)
Private Grants & Contracts	$1,646,700	$415,689	($1,231,011)
Sales & Services Auxiliary	$3,519,113	$2,054,747	($1,464,366)
Other Revenues	$0	$111,619	$111,619
Total Revenues	**$45,937,517**	**$28,568,519**	**($17,368,999)**
EXPENDITURES	**FY2026 Adjusted Operating Budget**	**YTD 07.17.2026**	**Variance**
Instruction	$11,930,342	$9,118,615	$2,811,727
Research	$1,007,904	$806,655	$201,249
Public Service	$842,138	$691,934	$150,204
Academic Support	$3,298,060	$2,655,313	$642,747
Student Services	$3,787,691	$3,330,392	$457,299
Institutional Support	$13,064,671	$9,950,374	$3,114,297
Operations/Maintenance of Plant	$7,248,277	$5,716,447	$1,531,830
Auxiliary Enterprises	$3,480,633	$2,913,060	$567,573
Transfers Match (AES & CES)	$1,277,801	$0	$1,277,801
Total Expenditures & Transfers	**$45,937,517**	**$35,182,790**	**$10,754,727**
Net Operating Position	**$0**	**($6,614,271)**	**($6,614,272)**