

THE OFFICE OF GOVERNOR, JUDICIARY OF THE V.I., OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER, AND THE V.I. TAXICAB COMMISSION SHARES FY 2020 BUDGET

Date : September 5, 2019

St. Thomas- Members of the Committee on Finance, chaired by Sen. Kurt Vialet, convened in a meeting at the Capitol Building on Thursday, to receive testimony on the proposed FY 2020 Executive Budget for the Office of the Governor, the Judiciary of the Virgin Islands, the Office of the Public Defender, and the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission. Lawmakers also considered two Request for Appropriation Transfers. Senators will vote on the transfers at the next meeting held on Friday, September 6, 2019.

The Office of the Governor, Director of Business and Administration, Joycelyn Durant stated that the FY 2020 Budget is \$10,242,660. In comparison to FY 2019 of \$10,117,526, this is an increase of \$125,134. Durant requested a lump-sum budget because it allows for the reallocation of funds to address the “often-shifting needs” of the Office of the Governor. The budget breakdown is as follows: \$4,937,830 or 48.22% is for personnel services, 4.29% or \$450,000 for utilities, 3.18% or \$326,030 for supplies, 17.62% or \$1,804,876 fringe benefits, 6.93% or \$710,000 is for capital outlay, and 19.66% or \$2,013,924 is for other services.

Furthermore, Durant mentioned that the monies are required to fund the mandatory costs and planned initiatives for the central operations of the Office. Some of the goals/initiatives for FY 2020 includes repairing post-Hurricanes Irma and Maria structural damages to government buildings such as Government House in both districts, the St. Thomas Annex, and the St. John Battery. Additionally, reigniting participation in the inter-Virgin Islands Council with the British Virgin Islands, creating ADA accessibility awareness, and lobbying on Federal matters affecting the Virgin Islands in Washington D.C. are amongst top priorities for the Office of the Governor; according to Durant.

The FY 2020 governor’s recommended budget for the Judiciary of

the Virgin Islands totals \$35,246,781. However, Judiciary of the Virgin Islands Chief Justice Rhys Hodge indicated that an appropriation of \$43,235,998 for the Judicial Branch and \$115,436 for the Judicial Council is an ample amount. Hodge's request is a reduction of \$3.4 million in comparison to the FY 2019 request. "The underfunding has real-world consequences. The Judicial Branch has lost its ability to retain qualified personnel because its salaries are simply no longer competitive," said Hodge. He added that the FY 2020 request of over \$43 million, will allow the Judicial Branch to fill 52 out of 92 existing vacancies.

The Office of the Territorial Defender Chief Public Defender Samuel Joseph indicated that the FY 2020 budget request is \$5,310,000. "This work involves a tremendous number of hours in and out the courtrooms. Working evenings and weekends are necessary based on the workload and trial schedules. Attorneys carry home the work and burdens of difficult cases," said Joseph who defended the proposed budget. Furthermore, Joseph noted that to-date there are 759 cases Territory-wide and that number may increase. Annually, the average caseload for trial for an attorney is 50 to 100 per month.

Levron Sarauw Sr, Executive Director of the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission stated that the FY 2020 recommended budget is \$830,841. The breakdown is as follows: \$504,974.00 is for personnel service, \$238,066.00 is for fringe benefits, \$20,500 is for supplies, and \$67,300 is for other services. Sarauw mentioned that the main funding source for the Taxicab Commission is the Taxi License Fund. Revenues are generated from monies collected for various services as it relates to the Commission.

Separately, senators considered the following Request for Appropriation Transfers:

- **NO. 001-19 DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & NATURAL RESOURCES** "To utilize projected savings in Capital Outlay to cover projected deficits in Personnel Services, Fringe Benefits and Other Services & Charge." This appropriation transfer will allow

payment of outstanding compensation for PERB-GSA-01-09 Sec. 530 “Remand”
Cooke vs Government of the Virgin Islands.”

- **NO.**

002-19 BUREAU OF INTERNAL REVENUE

“To request the transfer of vacancy savings from both personnel and fringe benefits to operating expenses in order to facilitate the following housekeeping initiatives: the purchase of equipment (2 – 20 ton A/C units, 9 vehicles, 30 desktops, 2 industrial shredders, and 145 ergonomic chairs), repair and maintenance services for the removal of carpet and the installation of tiles (22 office spaces, 1 conference room and adjoining corridors), air quality cleaning and subsequent testing, painting of the Bureau’s lobby areas and the purchase of the requisite supplies to facilitate these projects as well as to create a reserve with the necessities needed for day to day operations.”

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