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Senate Budget Committee Authorizes Over \$1 Billion Budget for FY 2024

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Funding to cover operations of central government, multiple agencies, and disaster-related projects

The Senate Budget Committee has approved a budget of just over \$1.017 billion for the fiscal year 2024. The funding includes \$960 million from the general fund and \$57.2 million from other funding sources such as the Tourism Advertising Revolving Fund. The budget also incorporates an anticipated \$61.2 million in revenue from disaster-related projects and \$69.1 million from the American Rescue Plan Act funds controlled by the executive branch.

"We did struggle somewhat with our revenues," said chair of the committee Senator Donna Frett-Gregory, as she presided over the committee's final session of the budget cycle for fiscal year

2024.

President of the Senate and budget committee member, Senator Novelle Francis, expressed confidence in the committee's work, stating, "All the heavy lifting has been done." Francis referenced multiple sessions over several months featuring interrogatory hearings with over 60 agencies and several with the government's core finance team. "Certainly, we have done our due diligence in making sure that we're holding these agencies accountable," he added.

The funding will cover the operations of a variety of agencies including the Office of the Inspector General, Virgin Islands Hospital and Health Facilities Cooperation, Bureau of Motor Vehicles, and Waste Management Authority. Senator Ray Fonseca noted that important agencies such as the American Cancer Society and Catholic Charities will continue to be funded. Senator Javan James Sr. highlighted a \$500,000 appropriation from the Education Initiative Fund for final editing, proofing, and printing of customized Virgin Islands history textbooks. A portion of these funds will also be used to complete the K through Grade 8 Social Studies curriculum.

Senator Diane Capeheart expressed concerns about the stability of the current level of spending, especially considering the reliance on American Rescue Plan Act funds. Senator Alma Francis-Heyliger agreed, emphasizing that revenue generation needs to be a priority moving forward.

Senator Javan James Sr. also focused on the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission, which had several no-shows and was unable to present a budget before lawmakers. Despite this, the committee passed an appropriation bill for the Commission, with Senator James promising further legislative action regarding the agency.

All committee members voted favorably for the funding package, except Senator Samuel Carrion, who was absent. The Committee on Rules and Judiciary is expected to meet soon to consider the package and vote accordingly.