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BIT Requests \$11.8 Million Budget, \$1.2 Million Less Than Last Year

The Bureau's reduced budget necessitates prioritizing critical projects and adjusting plans to fit within the new allocation

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**Rupert Ross, center, and his BIT team at the V.I. Legislature on Thursday, June 20, 2024.
By. V.I. LEGISLATURE**

The Bureau of Information Technology has requested [\\$11,799,620 from the general fund](#) for its FY2024 budget. According to Rupert Ross, BIT's director, the budget request is a "strategic investment designed to enhance the efficiency, security and effectiveness" of the Bureau as it carries out its duties.

Unlike many other government departments, however, BIT's FY2025 budget ask is significantly smaller than last year's appropriation - roughly \$1.2 million less. It's something that Mr. Ross told lawmakers is expected to impact their operations. "We now have to identify our priority projects differently... We always have a list of things that we're working on and we're going to have to adjust that list to be able to fit within the budget."

The Bureau is responsible for developing and implementing a comprehensive technology strategy for the Government of the Virgin Islands. It also has the task of "digitally transforming agencies, delivering innovative solutions to improve services, and coordinating emergency communication and interoperability efforts." Defending BIT's budget before the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance on Thursday, Mr. Ross explained that the recommended budget would allow his department to prioritize "critical areas" including infrastructure upgrades, software renewals, cyber security measures and employee training.

Of the \$11,799,620 budget request, \$1,950,480 will be allocated for personnel costs, with another \$827,807 toward fringe benefits for 29 individuals inclusive of 5 vacancies. The requested personnel funds cover overtime costs as well as salary increases for all staff.

A sum of \$122,000 was requested for supplies needed to "support our department's day-to-day operations and ensure the reliability and efficiency of IT infrastructure and services," Mr. Ross stated. This category encompasses equipment procurement, and "consumables and accessories necessary for the maintaining and operating of our IT infrastructure, facilities and vehicles."

BIT is also asking the Legislature to fund \$1,277,660 toward the "other services" category, described by Mr. Ross as a "crucial component of the overall financial plan." The category will cover services like facility maintenance, supporting the workforce, and ensuring the reliability and effectiveness of operations. Meanwhile, BIT has budgeted \$250,000 for utilities.

In addition to the requests previously detailed, BIT is seeking a miscellaneous general fund budget of \$7,371,573 for "supporting ancillary operations and addressing unforeseen needs." According to Mr. Ross, the solicitation covers a "range of essential expenditures aimed at enhancing operational efficiency, promoting innovation, and tackling emergent challenges."

Of that figure, \$3,202,915 will go toward renewing support contracts and enterprise licensing agreements. Another \$3,206,206 will "support critical areas of initiatives essential for the seamless functioning and advancement" of BIT. According to the FY2025, the remaining \$962,452 will be used for licensing fees for BIT's government-wide network, and "advisory services critical for the continued functionality and efficiency of our department."

The miscellaneous funding is expected to support the maintenance of ongoing projects including the VIPD camera surveillance project and the Public Safety CAD/RMS project. That same pool of funding will also be used for "new initiatives aimed at modernizing and upgrading our infrastructure," Mr. Ross noted. "Maintenance and upgrade of data centers and telecommunications towers, facilities, battery backup, system upgrades, repairs, IT network upgrades and security upgrades" are all among the lengthy list of uses for the miscellaneous budget.

As has been the case for several departments that have already presented their budget proposals, the budget committee has asked the BIT for a more detailed breakdown of their expenditure history and forecasted spending to better inform its decision-making process.