

## "Pitiful" Salaries Causing Severe Staffing Issues at Dept. of Sports, Parks, and Recreation

**Commissioner Calvert White appeals for higher salaries and more staff to alleviate 'pitiful' conditions at DSPR, citing high turnover and increased workloads**

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**Sports, Parks and Recreation Commissioner Calvert White. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE**

Department of Sports, Parks, and Recreation Commissioner Calvert White stated on Monday that increasing staffing levels is something requiring “immediate attention” within the department. “Adequate staffing is vital for the smooth operation of our department,” Mr. White told lawmakers on the Senate Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance as he defended DSPR's FY2025 budget request.

He explained that while DSPR had hired 10 new employees across both districts in the past 6 months, the department has also recorded 9 resignations and 2 retirements. Current staffing levels “lead to increased workloads for existing employees,” he lamented. The DSPR has 119 active employees, down from 200 in years past. “Many employees appreciate working for the department, but find it challenging to sustain due to inflated cost of living,” Mr. White said.

The decreased staffing numbers have been blamed on a series of factors including “the lack of upward advancement opportunities” and “comparatively low salaries” that contribute to “difficulties in retention and recruitment,” he said. In Mr. White’s assessment of his department’s reality, the DSPR commissioner told lawmakers that it is “crucial to increase salaries” to “motivate our current staff, but also attract individuals with the necessary skill set and expertise.” Agreeing with the commissioner, Senator Novelle Francis described the department’s salaries as “pitiful.”?

Recreation leaders, for example, start at \$27,000 per annum. “We have lost a number of good employees ...solely because of the salary,” Mr. White admitted. Many have become firefighters. “You’re talking about the difference of \$10,000. It’s a no-brainer for you to choose to work with Fire EMS.” Wage increases have not been offered within the department since 2019. “That’s not looking good,” chastised Senator Ray Fonseca.

Meanwhile, Senator Samuel Carrion was interested in learning how DSPR intended to move employees further up the employment ladder. Where possible, Mr. White explained that the senior team has been working to place low earners in new positions with similar job descriptions where they would earn more. Such examples include promoting a Recreation Leader I to a Recreational Specialist “which is kind of doing the same thing, but at a higher salary.” It’s a tactic that Mr. Carrion described as “creative.”

Groundskeeping and custodial services are among the many roles needing to be filled within DSPR. The commissioner has suggested the creation of more part-time positions to bridge the staffing gap.?

Part-time employees, however, won’t be sufficient to build out an enforcement division, another ambition shared by the commissioner. “Relying solely on external agencies such as VIPD, Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs and others, has proven not to be as effective in meeting our enforcement needs,” Mr. White bemoaned. According to the commissioner, establishing such a division would allow DSPR to “respond promptly to issues, maintain better control over enforcement procedures and ensure the safety and security of our facilities.”?

Despite the desire, there is no funding to create an enforcement division within the Department of Sports, Parks, and Recreation’s FY2025 budget request. In fact, the Office of Management and Budget’s [budget book](#) only lists two funded vacancies: a lifeguard/instructor, and a receptionist/messenger.?

DSPR is asking the Senate to approve a FY2025 budget of \$9,272,040 from the General Fund and \$1,000,000 from the Tourism Advertising Revolving Fund. The largest chunk of the General Fund allocation - \$4,916,980 or 53% - will be spent on personnel costs.

Of the \$4,916,980 for personnel, DSPR expected to spend \$3,846,792 on classified workers, \$972,688 on unclassified workers, and \$58,009 for overtime, among other costs. Personnel costs will be complemented by \$2,822,209 for fringe benefits. The Department intends to spend \$248,945 for supplies, \$478,906 for other services and charges, and \$805,000 for utilities.

Mr. White has promised that his department is “committed to improving quality services to the people of the territory,” but the aforementioned issues (staffing, salaries, and enforcement) “must be addressed to ensure the continued effectiveness and well-being of our department and personnel.”

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