

Staff Shortages Hindering Property and Procurement's Ability to Collect Payments, Commissioner Says

With a portfolio exceeding \$1.2 billion in insured government property, DPP faces significant challenges in asset management, collections, fiscal control, and procurement due to understaffing and recent resignations

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Dept. of Property & Procurement Commissioner Lisa Alejandro By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

Like several other departments and agencies within central government, the Department of Property and Procurement is facing critical staff shortages as it prepares for the new fiscal year.

“Our budget request supports the filling of 10 new and vacant positions,” explained Commissioner Lisa Alejandro, as she defended an operating budget request of \$20,850,998.

The department's vacancies include a position for a program manager, who DPP expects will "be instrumental in improving operations in the fiscal unit, which is currently understaffed." It's a move that will bring DPP closer to improving unit productivity, Commissioner Alejandro told lawmakers during Thursday's meeting of the Senate Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance. Hiring new staff is crucial, as DPP lost 8 employees in the current fiscal year – two retirements, one dismissal and five resignations.

Understaffing is also impacting the asset management unit, described by Ms. Alejandro as the "cornerstone of our operation." The unit oversees the acquisition, use, control and protection, maintenance, inventory and disposal of all fixed assets owned by the Government of the Virgin Islands. "Because of the small team of four employees, and historically, lack of resources, the unit has been unable to undertake its full responsibilities," the commissioner told legislators.

The Department of Property and Procurement currently manages a portfolio of insured government-owned property that exceeds \$1.2 billion. On rental properties, the DPP has collected \$3.5 million of \$4.4 million owed in FY2024. With only one month left in the fiscal year, lawmakers wondered whether the department will be able to complete collections — including outstanding balances from delinquent tenants.

Again, the realities of inadequate staff were brought to the fore. The fiscal division that holds that responsibility "is really understaffed," explained Ms. Alejandro. "We had one employee that was pushing collections ...[so] we have seen an increase since that time. "However, again, the shortages in staff severely impacted our ability to keep that momentum going."

There are three vacancies within that unit, including a fiscal control officer and administrative assistant. The last administrator retired after 33 years of service at the department, while the financial officer has resigned. "We are in the process with OMB of bringing on one of the GVI Fellows. He shadowed the now-departed financial control officer, "so he has a lot of knowledge in reconciling and assisting with the budget," Ms. Alejandro noted. The Fellow, described as an "asset," may join the staff complement by mid-September.

?Other divisions stymied by staffing difficulties include the procurement department where a senior contract administrator is needed. In the property division, DPP is seeking a property inspector and is working to replace their legal advisor as well.

While the Department of Property and Procurement continues to work with its partners to fill crucial vacancies, Commissioner Alejandro says they are "exploring the use of artificial intelligence to improve efficiency by automating simple tasks, leaving more complex and creative tasks to our employees."