

Lawmakers Begin Process of Approving \$1.1 Billion Budget for FY2024/2025

With fiscal year 2025 around the corner, the 35th Legislature restores vital initiatives for youth, elderly, and veterans while preparing to fund key government operations

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With less than one week until the start of a new fiscal year, the 35th Legislature has begun the work needed to ensure government departments and agencies have access to funding for the next 12 months. On Wednesday, the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance met to begin approving the raft of pending appropriation bills totalling approximately \$1,100,000,000.?

Wednesday's meeting followed significant "clean-up work," reported the committee's chair, Sen. Donna Frett-Gregory. "We've put in a lot of work in the FY2025 budget," she said. She lamented that while the executive budget sent down to the Legislature was delivered on time, it "required a

lot of work.”

“The projections that came to us were very aggressive and not necessarily in line with what we've seen historically or... with our current conditions,” Senator Frett-Gregory noted. She expressed disappointment in the decision by the Office of Management and Budget to reduce funding for “some very important programs that were vital.” Youth and the elderly, in particular, were at risk of losing access to critical initiatives, something which Frett-Gregory said her fellow lawmakers refused to accept. “We kept the faith with our community in this process by adding back the youth and elderly programs that were reduced significantly in the executive budget.”?

Some examples include the About Face program, managed by the Virgin Islands National Guard, and left unfunded in the executive budget. Lawmakers, however, programmed in an appropriation to ensure that the program can remain active for another year. Meals on Wheels is another — the Legislature [intervened](#) after learning of the financial challenges embattling the program. Frett-Gregory explained that a line item was added to the Department of Human Services' budget to allow for the purchase of two new vehicles, and the hiring of two new staff members. These additional resources are expected to keep the program afloat and ensure continued access to federal funds.?

Cognizant that DHS is “responsible for the most vulnerable amongst us,” the Legislature has restored its budget “to the extent possible to ensure that we are able to provide social services in our community,” she said.

Of particular note is new legislation to establish a special revolving fund worth \$250,000 to reimburse veterans who must [travel to the mainland](#) for medical care not available within the Caribbean region. “Stateside travel at least twice a year will now be included for our veterans,” Ms. Frett-Gregory beamed. The money will also support burial costs for deceased veterans.

“We ensured that we were able to keep as many positions in the FY2025 budget as possible,” said Frett-Gregory. To do so, special line items for vacancies and associated fringe benefits were included so “agencies can prioritize their hiring needs.”

The \$75 million settlement from the [JP Morgan case](#) funds several critical non-profit organizations, while the Department of Education will receive a \$3.5 million increase in its utility budget for a total of \$8.5 million - “their real cost of electricity in 2024.”

The approval of budget bills and their ascension to the Committee on Rules on Judiciary began on Wednesday and will continue on Thursday.

?The following are some of the bills voted upon favorably by members of the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance on Wednesday:?

- Bill 35-0341: an Act providing an appropriation for the operating expenses of the Virgin Islands Board of Education from the General Fund of the treasury of the Government of the Virgin Islands during fiscal year October 1 2024 through September 30 2025.?
- Bill 35-0342: an Act providing an appropriation for the operating expenses of the Virgin Islands Office of Inspector General from the General Fund of the treasury of the government of the Virgin Islands for fiscal year October 1, 2024, through September 30, 2025.
- Bill 35-0343: an Act providing an appropriation from the operating expenses of the Virgin Islands Career and Technical Education board, from the General Fund of the treasury of the

Government of the Virgin Islands during fiscal year October 1, 2024 through September 30, 2025.

- Bill 35-0344: an Act providing an appropriation for the operating expenses of the Virgin Islands Hospital and Health Facilities Corporation from the General Fund of the treasury of the Government of the Virgin Islands for fiscal year October 1, 2024, through September 30, 2025.?
- Bill 35-0345: an Act providing an appropriation for salaries and expenses of the Virgin Islands Board of Elections and the Office of the Supervisor of Elections for fiscal year October 1, 2024, through September 30, 2025.
- Bill 35-0346: an Act providing an appropriation for the operation of the Judicial Branch of the Government of the Virgin Islands, the Judicial Council and the Office of the Territorial Public Defender during fiscal year October 1, 2024 through September 30, 2025.?
- Bill 35-0351: an Act providing an appropriation for the operating expenses of the Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority from the General Fund of the treasury of the Government of the Virgin Islands during the fiscal year October 1 2024 through September 30, 2025.
- Bill 35-0352: an Act appropriating \$2,079,296 from the General Fund of the treasury of the Government of the Virgin Islands for the operating expenses of the Public Services Commission for fiscal year October 1, 2024, to September 30, 2025.
- Bill 35-0354: an Act providing an appropriation from the Anti-Litter and Beautification Fund to the Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority and the Virgin Islands Department of Public Works for operating expenses during the fiscal year October 1, 2024 through September 30, 2025.
- Bill 35-0355: an Act providing an appropriation from the Caribbean Basin Initiative Fund as a contribution to the General Fund of the treasury of the Virgin Islands for the fiscal year October 1, 2024, through September 30, 2025.?
- Bill 35-0356: an Act providing an appropriation from the Business and Commercial Properties Revolving Fund to the Virgin Islands Department of Property and Procurement for the operating expenses for the fiscal year October 1, 2024, through September 30, 2025.
- Bill 35-0357: an Act providing an appropriation from the Virgin Islands Lottery as a contribution to the General Fund of the treasury of the Government of Virgin Islands for fiscal year October 1, 2024, through September 30, 2025.
- Bill 35-0358: an Act providing for a lump sum appropriation from the Health Revolving Fund to the Virgin Islands Department of Health and a contribution to the General Fund of the treasury of the Government of the Virgin Islands for FY for fiscal year October 1, 2024, through September 30, 2025.
- Bill 35-0360: an Act providing an appropriation to the Virgin Islands Taxi Cab Commission for the fiscal year October 1, 2024, through September 30, 2025.
- Bill 35-0361: an Act providing an appropriation from the Transportation trust fund as a contribution to the General Fund of the treasury of the Virgin Islands and to provide operating expenses for the V.I Bureau of Motor Vehicles and the Department of Public Works for the fiscal year October 1, 2024, through September 30, 2025.
- Bill 35-0362: an Act providing an appropriation from the Virgin Islands Insurance Guarantee Fund as a contribution to the General Fund of the treasury of the Government of the Virgin Islands for fiscal year October 1 2024 through September 30, 2025.?

- Bill 35 -034, an Act providing an appropriation from the Tourism Advertising Revolving Fund to the Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority, Office of the Governor, the Virgin Islands Department of Education, the Virgin Islands Police Department, the Virgin Islands Department of Public Works, the Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture, the Virgin Islands Department of Sports, Parks and Recreation, and the Virgin Islands Department of Tourism during the fiscal year October 1 2024 through September 30, 2025.
- Bill 35-0365: an Act providing an appropriation for the operating expenses of the Waste Management Authority from the Sewer Waste Water Fund of the Government of the Virgin Islands for the fiscal year October 1 2024 through September 30, 2025.
- Bill 35- 0366: an Act providing an appropriation from the General Fund of the treasury of the Virgin Islands to the District Public Road Fund for fiscal year October 1 2024 through September 30, 2025.
- Bill 35-0347: an Act providing an appropriation for the operating expenses of the Public Employees Relations Board for the fiscal year October 1, 2024, through September 30, 2025.