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Senator Carrion Refutes Animal Welfare Center's Funding Claims, Confirms \$225K Restored in FY25 Budget

The center's claims stem from relying on OMB's proposed cuts, says Senator Carrion, who successfully fought to restore \$225,000 in the FY25 budget. He criticized the center for not addressing concerns during discussions with him and other stakeholders

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Ernice Gilbert **October 05, 2024**

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Senator Samuel Carrion has expressed disbelief at [recent claims](#) made by the St. Croix Animal Welfare Center (SCAWC), which stated that the organization would no longer be able to accept unwanted animals or continue its spay/neuter program due to a lack of government funding. The SCAWC's statement, which indicated that \$225,000 in total government funding had not been renewed, has prompted confusion and concern, as Carrion asserts that the funding in question has

indeed been restored in the Fiscal Year 2025 budget.

In an interview with the Consortium on Friday night, Senator Carrion said the statement from the animal welfare organization was inaccurate, explaining that while the V.I. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) had initially proposed a decrease in the center's funding, he had successfully advocated for the full amount of \$225,000 — \$175,000 for the shelter's operations and \$50,000 for its spay/neuter program — to be reinstated.

"The government, through the Office of Management and Budget, had proposed a decrease in funding, but I advocated long and hard during the markup of the Committee on Appropriations, Budget, and Finance. We found funding to restore the amount to what they received in FY24," Carrion stated. "So for FY25, they have \$175,000 plus \$50,000 for their spay/neuter program."

Carrion, who has been leading efforts to establish an animal control unit within the Department of Agriculture, emphasized that this funding had been approved in the FY25 budget passed by the 35th Legislature last Friday. He clarified that while the recommendation from the OMB called for reduced funding, the Legislature did not pass this version. "It appears that the center relied on the recommendation given by the Office of Management and Budget and ran with that, thinking that was what we budgeted in the bill, but no, that's not what we passed," he explained. "That's where communication was broken."

The senator noted that although the budget was passed, the process of disbursing funds can take time. "The governor has 10 days to sign all the bills, and because of the government process, they likely won't see the first-quarter payment until January," he said. "There's no one else to do the job they are doing, and the government cannot afford not to fund this, at least until the Department of Agriculture establishes its own animal control unit, which will take about a year once my bill is passed," he said.

The animal control unit with the Dept. of Agriculture would have an enforcement division with peace officer status to address animal abuse and neglect and would also amend existing animal cruelty laws. The senator is optimistic that this unit will help address the territory's animal welfare needs in the long term.

Carrion also highlighted ongoing efforts with various animal organizations across the territory. "We have a task force with all animal organizations in the territory and have been working collectively toward this common goal, revising and amending current laws together," he said. The senator expressed surprise that the SCAWC had not raised concerns about its funding directly with him, noting that discussions with stakeholders from St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix had been productive.

According to Carrion, while the SCAWC has expressed a need for additional funding to meet growing demand and rising costs, he remains committed to identifying revenue sources to help sustain the shelter and support the new animal control unit. "We've been working closely with all stakeholders towards this goal," he said.