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Bryan Slams \$35K Government Minimum Salary Bill as Unfunded and Financially Dangerous

Governor Bryan warned that implementing the \$35,000 minimum salary for all government employees without a clear funding plan would force cuts to critical services, stall infrastructure projects, and jeopardize years of fiscal progress.

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Governor Albert Bryan Jr. By. GOV'T HOUSE.

Governor Albert Bryan Jr. on Thursday said he is strongly urging caution following the Legislature's passage of Bill No. 36-0053, calling the mandated increase to a 35,000 dollar minimum salary for all government employees irresponsible, unfunded and catastrophic to the Government of the Virgin Islands budget.

According to the release, while reaffirming his full support for increasing wages for public workers, Mr. Bryan said the measure — which the governor contends was enacted without a clear and immediate plan for how to pay for it — threatens to undo years of hard-earned fiscal progress.

“This bill, while sounding good in principle and aiming to help people with the rising cost of living, is nothing more than a feel-good measure that gives struggling Virgin Islanders a false sense of hope,” Governor Bryan said. “The truth is that it is an empty promise. If enacted into law, it will lead to cost cutting measures that will directly impact the very employees it claims to support and will set us back financially as a government and a people.”

The governor took aim at the Legislature’s suggestion that the government “has months” to find the money before the October 1, 2025 effective date, calling the claim disingenuous and misleading.

“Hope is not a plan,” Mr. Bryan said. “Kicking the can down the road does not make this mandate any more affordable. Passing a bill of this magnitude without even a hearing or testimony, or identifying the revenues to fund it is reckless and puts the entire government, and by extension the people of the Virgin Islands, back in the same saddle we sat in for decades. That is how we accumulated 225 million dollars in unpaid retroactive wage obligations that my administration is now working feverishly to resolve.”

Government House pointed to statistics from the Office of Management and Budget, which reveals the cost of implementing Bill No. 36-0053 in its first year to be over \$37.9 million. Roughly 1,300 employees would receive an average raise of \$4,000, totaling \$5.2 million dollars, according to OMB. Salary adjustments for 3,000 additional employees would increase costs to \$12 million, and fringe benefits at 46 percent would add another \$7.9 million dollars. A 3 percent increase in employer contributions to the Government Employees Retirement System would add \$13 million.

Furthermore, this increase would further place our struggling hospitals, Water and Power Authority, and Waste Management Authority in a more precarious financial position jeopardizing our basic needs for healthcare, electricity, and sanitary living conditions, the administration contends.

Governor Bryan warned that absorbing these costs without corresponding revenue would force deep cuts to critical government services, halt ongoing infrastructure investments and reverse the administration’s work to restore financial solvency.

“We have fought hard to stabilize our finances, repay workers and invest in infrastructure and essential services. This bill threatens all of that,” Bryan said. “It does not build on our progress. It threatens to dismantle it.”

The governor also criticized the Legislature for bypassing the collective bargaining process and introducing a sweeping wage mandate during active negotiations with major government unions.

“This bill interferes with union bargaining and undermines the structure we have in place to negotiate wages fairly and sustainably,” Mr. Bryan said. “It sends the wrong message and sets a dangerous precedent.”

The governor noted that his administration has already taken action to improve compensation, including repaying 8 percent salary cuts from 2011, distributing more than \$60 million in retroactive wages and securing raises for teachers, police officers, firefighters, corrections officers

and other frontline personnel.

The governor noted his commitment to better wages but made clear that any such increases must be implemented responsibly and with a fully developed funding plan. He stressed that enacting this measure without the means to properly fund it puts the Government of the Virgin Islands right back in the same position that led to the \$225 million debt in retroactive wage payments his administration is currently working to address.

“This bill is not a solution. It is a shortcut that leads us back to a place of financial instability,” Bryan said. “We cannot afford to make promises we cannot keep. Our people deserve better than symbolic gestures that cannot be sustained. They deserve real, responsible progress.”

He called on the Legislature to return to the table, work in partnership with the executive branch and develop a phased and financially sound approach to wage reform.

“We must lift our employees up, not set them up for disappointment,” Mr. Bryan said. “If we are truly serious about helping working families and building a stronger government, then we must be just as serious about how we pay for it.”

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