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No Funding Secured for Minimum Wage Increase, But Violet Says "Where There's a Will, There's a Way"

Lawmakers approved the \$35K minimum wage hike without confirmed funding; Violet defended the move, citing under \$10M in cost and pointing to excessive VIPD overtime, vacant positions, and unspent funds as areas where the money could be found.

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Despite not having a confirmed source of funding, lawmakers on Friday unanimously [overrode](#) Governor Albert Bryan Jr.'s veto of Bill No. 36-0053, which raises the minimum salary for government employees from \$27,000 to \$35,000. The increase is scheduled to take effect in October 2025, yet the Legislature had not secured a fiscal analysis at the time of the vote.

Shortly after the override, Governor Bryan issued a scathing statement accusing the Legislature of putting political optics ahead of sound fiscal policy. He said the measure was passed “without analysis, without stakeholder consultation, and with no regard for the long-term financial consequences they impose on our government and the people of the Virgin Islands.” He further criticized senators, declaring, “It is official—the inmates are running the asylum,” and warned that “what sweeten’ goat mouth will sour they bam bam.”

Senate President Milton Potter wrote to Personnel Director Cindy Richardson on Monday—three weeks after voting to increase the minimum wage and four days ahead of the override vote—requesting an analysis on the cost and impact of the minimum salary increase. He asked for data including the number of full-time employees earning below \$35,000, a departmental breakdown, and a projection of total costs.

Still, senators moved forward without this data in hand. In an interview with the Consortium, bill sponsor Senator Kurt Vialet defended the decision, explaining that the Legislature’s Post Audit Division had already conducted its own review. According to Vialet, fewer than 1,000 central government employees, including the semi-autonomous arms, qualify for the raise, and the cost to implement—including fringe benefits—would be under \$10 million.

Vialet laid out the math: assuming 1,000 employees receive the full \$8,000 raise, that totals \$8 million. Fringe costs would push the figure slightly above \$10 million, though Vialet noted that not all employees would receive the maximum increase. “You need to bring the numbers. You need to show it. If you’re saying that it’s such an impact, why are you not having your financial team release that analysis?” he asked.

The Senate's report stands in stark contrast to [an analysis Bryan issued on June 17](#), which projected an annual increase of \$40 million in payroll and fringe benefit costs.

Mr. Vialet pointed to bloated overtime expenditures within the Virgin Islands Police Department—estimated at over \$20 million annually—as a potential area for cuts. He claimed that a significant portion of VIPD’s overtime hours are not genuine, stating that some officers clock in and leave for other jobs or personal errands. “There’s massive fraud,” he said. “Just put GPS in... overtime will decrease automatically.” Vialet said he has been urging the commissioner to install GPS systems in all VIPD vehicles, a practice already common on the mainland.

When asked whether such reductions in overtime spending were realistic, Vialet insisted they were achievable with proper accountability. He added that other budgetary savings could come from departments with unspent personnel funds and by trimming vacant, unfilled positions. He noted that while the government hired 125 new employees in the current fiscal year, over 200 left due to resignations or retirements.

“We're going to find it,” he said. “The budget is never a static number.” Vialet argued that projected economic activity—including large federal projects like school and hospital construction—would generate tax revenue to support the salary increase. “These employees... they’re paying income tax. They have more disposable income. They’re going to pay property tax that they couldn’t before. So it’s a ripple effect,” he said.

He also advocated for greater enforcement by the Bureau of Internal Revenue, suggesting that even small actions like sending interns out to verify gross receipts compliance could generate significant revenue. “If we are broke, why are government cars being driven 24/7, on weekends and holidays?” he asked.

Violet pushed back on the idea that funding the raises would be impossible, especially when juxtaposed with the \$51,000 salary increase approved for the governor—an increase that would bring his annual pay to \$201,000. He criticized what he saw as inconsistent reasoning: “Why are you making such a justification as to why you can’t pay them [low-wage workers], and the next time you’re making a justification as to why you are going to put in a \$51,000 raise?”

Senator Violet added that while commissioners received raises of \$15,000 to \$20,000 without economic analysis during a prior budget crisis, this minimum wage increase—affecting employees who haven’t seen a raise since 2015—was being subjected to far more scrutiny.

He pointed to ongoing waste across government, such as long-vacant buildings that still cost the government over \$100,000 in rent, and legal contracts with questionable return on investment, such as a proposed \$1.1 million contract with a law firm for the Bureau of Corrections. “You have no assurance that \$1.1 [million] got everything,” he said, noting that the consent decree the contract aims to address may not even be lifted.

In his view, the government has consistently failed to direct resources toward those who need it most. “You know who goes to work every day? The food service workers and the custodians,” he said. “Continue for them to have two jobs and they still can’t take care of their families.”

Despite ongoing questions about funding sources, Violet expressed confidence that the funds could be found. “If there is a will, there is a way,” he said. “We will work with [the administration] to find it.”