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## Funding Failures Leave National Guard Without Water, Unpaid for Festival Duty, and Behind on Veteran Pensions

**With over 40% of its FY2025 budget still unreleased by the local government, the V.I. National Guard faces water shortages, unpaid pensions, and delayed TAD wages—issues that led troops to skip St. Thomas Carnival duty after not being paid.**

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**V.I. National Guard training event. By. VING.**

Despite there being only one more quarter in the FY2025 fiscal year, the Office of the Adjutant General says over 40% of its budget appropriation “has not been released,” placing the Office’s operations in a precarious position. Insufficient funding, lawmakers learned, is affecting the

Office's ability to purchase drinking water for members of the Virgin Islands National Guard.

This was only one of several worry-inducing revelations shared by Adjutant General Kodjo Knox-Limbacker and his team when they presented their FY2026 budget request to the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance on Monday. This time, the Office is requesting \$3,243,939 from the general fund, including \$396,000 as a cost-share amount for its federal master cooperative agreement. This, as the Office expects to receive \$46,956,770 in federal funding, "16 times" more than the amount being requested from the general fund.

Nikita Ward, the Office's executive director, provided a breakdown on the general fund budget request, which includes a "miscellaneous budget appropriation of \$150,000 for the Virgin Islands National Guard pension fund and \$982,242 for the Youth About Face and Ford March program. The appropriation covers \$1,343,855 in personnel costs and \$630,406 in fringe benefits. Other services are budgeted at \$508,338 while utilities are expected to cost \$410,000. Capital projects are expected to cost an additional \$220,180.

The Office's approved budget, however, "continues to be inaccessible to fully execute those requirements for water," Knox-Limbacker told committee chair Senator Novelle Francis, who had introduced the topic. The federal government is unable to foot such a bill as "those basic facilities are requirements of the GVI."



*Adjutant General Kodjo Knox-Limbacker, center, testifies during Monday's Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance hearing. (Credit: V.I. Legislature)*

“That's unacceptable,” Francis stated. “I don't know of any excuse that could be made in respect to that and not prioritizing this particular issue.” Senator Kenneth Gittens agreed. “This is truly bothering me. I don't want to beat a dead horse, but you know water is life's greatest necessity.”

Delayed allotments aren't affecting just the ability to purchase drinking water. Pension payments owed to veterans are also significantly impacted, Ms. Ward shared. \$150,000 is set aside in the Office's miscellaneous budget for that purpose. However, the Office has only received funding to pay out pensions for the first and second quarters. “We're still awaiting third quarter, with the intention to submit fourth quarter as it begins tomorrow,” noted Ms. Ward.

Senators were perturbed. “We can't minimize the need to ensure that our retirees are compensated,” Francis stated. “In this community, we know of people dying waiting for yearly

pensions,” lamented Senator Marise James, who urged for a speedy resolution.

Senator Dwayne DeGraff, for his part, promised to introduce legislation that could potentially create an imprest fund for the Office of the Adjutant General. “They would have access to that money rather than waiting for the quarters to be put in so these people could get paid.”

It was the second time during Monday’s hearing that Senator DeGraff offered a solution to the Office’s varied challenges. He had also brainstormed ways to troubleshoot a recurring issue where National Guard soldiers and airmen often wait for extended periods to receive payment for Territorial Active Duty (TAD).

“If we cannot pay TAD on time, we should not call them to duty,” read Knox-Limbacker’s testimony. “I recommend future legislation and allocation of funding for restricted internal service fund to finance TAD pay for VING service members,” he suggested. With officers unpaid after the St. Croix Christmas Festival, they failed to show up to support security efforts during St. Thomas Carnival.

“After reading this last night, we went ahead and put in a bill draft to hopefully address this,” Senator Francis shared. Senator DeGraff, however, felt it wise to simply “put a line item into the budget strictly for TAD.” He initially floated the idea of \$500,000. But when Senator Kurt Vialet learned that activating 20 soldiers would only cost approximately \$30,000 per festival, he suggested starting off with “\$120,000 and then if there's a need, you can always replenish as necessary.”

In past years, the Office of the Adjutant General has lost federal funding opportunities as the territory was unable to dole out the necessary matching funds promptly. “Every year since I've been here, we were unable to execute the money that we actually were allocated and approved to have because the funds are not available on time,” Knox-Limbacker lamented. “Our balanced budget is not available due to unforecasted overtime by other agencies spending that money from the general fund.”