

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Enforcement Backlog Spurs Casino Commission to Seek Budget Increase and Revenue Fund Reallocation

Facing a 400-case investigation backlog and limited staffing, the Casino Control Commission appealed for a \$300,000 budget increase and reshuffling of the Casino Revenue Fund, urging lawmakers to reallocate 10% to enforcement via small agency cuts.

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Casino Control Commission office in Orange Grove, St. Croix. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM.

The Casino Control Commission has preempted its FY2026 budget hearing, making an appeal before the Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture on Monday for an increase in its operating budget and a reshuffling of the Casino Revenue Fund.

The Commission's leadership appeared before the Committee to share updates on operations, enforcement, and responsible gaming, among other agenda items. While the Commission's chairman, Marvin Pickering did address the expected topics, he ended his testimony with a call for more funding. In years past, the Commission was granted \$1,423,800 from the general fund for staff and fringe benefits. "The commission has requested, and the Governor has recommended, a budget of \$1,723,800," he informed the Committee. Staffing is apparently a pressing need.

The announcement followed his request that the Legislature amend the law governing the Casino Revenue Fund. First, he argued for the reinstatement of funding for the V.I. Department of Labor's JAG Program, which was defunded when the 34th Legislature reapportioned the Fund's finances [in Act 8577](#), passed in 2022. Secondly, the Commission wants lawmakers to "provide an allocation to the [Division of Gaming Enforcement] (DGE) for additional staffing to address the tremendous backlog of investigations that is hampering the Commission's operations," Mr. Pickering said, noting that this request is included in their proposed budget.

To do so, the Commission is seeking to trim some current allocations by 1-2% until 10% is available for the Division of Gaming Enforcement. As it stands, three-quarters of the money in the Casino Revenue Fund is allocated to various government agencies; 20% to the Department of Education, 10% to the Department of Agriculture, 15% to the Department of Sports, Parks and Recreation, and 1% to the V.I. Alliance for Responsible Gaming, among other agencies and entities.

"While 1% or 2% deduction from a division or department or agency of the government might not be a tremendous burden to that entity, the aggregate amount that will go to the DGE will inherit to the benefit of the division by assisting in the hiring of additional staff," R. Oliver David, who oversees the DGE, stated in his testimony.

He explained to lawmakers that due to "limited staff," the DGE cannot conduct its work in a timely fashion. There are approximately 400 investigations and renewals for license requests in the DGE's backlog. "I have consistently made my case for three additional staff for the Division: an administrative assistant, and two investigators," said Mr. David, justifying the need for the reallocation of funding. A 2024 letter addressed to then-Budget Committee chair Donna Frett-Gregory outlined that request.

Senator Novelle Francis, chair of the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance, shared with his colleagues that based on the Commission and DGE's previous requests, his office has already taken some action. "An amendment that was sent in on January 14, 2025, to amend the distribution of the Casino Revenue Fund to be able to support and assist the Casino Commission," is currently in progress, he noted. The request included in both testimonies was, therefore, not necessary.

"We have the responsibility of looking at the wide picture, whether or not we're going to decide to fund the hospital and the emergency room or fund the Casino Commission," Sen. Francis argued.

"There's no way that we can be strong armed in being able to make this happen. And it will not happen overnight. There is a process, and I think that the process is being run," he advised Mr. Pickering and Mr. David. "I'm just in a quagmire in terms of what we're

trying to achieve at this time, rather than working collectively as a body to make sure that we're supporting all of the necessary entities," he continued.

Sen. Francis would later state that, "I was hoping that we could just move the amendment; however, my colleagues would prefer for this to go through the committee process."

Nonetheless, lawmakers were generally supportive of the request, albeit without a bill before them. "I do agree with you that there needs to be a reallocation," remarked Senator Marise James. "We do need to consider how to make you more effective," she said, but warned the two men that "for me right now, the hospitals are number one."

"I'm hoping that we could really fulfill that [and] give you the additional personnel and then hold you accountable to make sure that we're addressing the backlog," Sen. Francis chimed in again, this time addressing Mr. David specifically.

It is anticipated that staffing will be discussed during the Commission's budget hearing next week, but there was no indication of the date on which the proposed amendment would begin making its way through the legislative process.