

V.I. Olympic Committee Pleads for \$500K Budget After 10 Months Without Funding, Citing Strain on Athlete Support and Operations

The V.I. Olympic Committee has received none of its \$450,000 approved FY26 allocation, forcing the organization to rely on reserve funds to support elite athletes and secure travel for regional games while requesting an increase to \$500,000.

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Adriel Sanes and Natalia Kuipers carry the V.I. flag as Team Virgin Islands' flag bearers at the XIX Pan American Games opening in Santiago, Chile, October 2023. By. V.I. OLYMPIC COMMITTEE.

The Virgin Islands Olympic Committee is requesting an additional \$200,000 over its recommended budget of \$300,000 for FY2026, with VIOC president John Abramson Jr., defending the request before the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance on Wednesday.

“The government fundings are critical for the VIOC to continue to provide support to our 24 member federations as well as our elite athletes,” Mr. Abramson said. Federation budgets, he explained, total “over \$2 million.” VIOC’s operating budget averages over \$1 million annually. “We must selectively approve funding requests for our members because we have limited money,” Mr. Abramson said. VIOC also plans to hire additional administrative staff, which would necessitate additional funding.

The Committee also directly supports the territory’s athletes across numerous sporting disciplines as they prepare for various tournaments. Elite athletes receive “training grants as they pursue their training to participate in qualifiers and ultimately in major games,” Mr. Abramson testified. Currently, 12 athletes receive \$3,000 monthly from the VIOC.

Year to date, VIOC has provided \$175,637 in athlete preparation, and “requests are still pending for senior and junior athletes ahead of the CAC Games, the Junior Pan Am Games and the regional championships.” In the previous fiscal year, VIOC provided \$340,950 to federations.

Outside of the general fund request, the VIOC receives \$40,000 from Pan Am Sports and \$800,000 from the International Olympic Committee. The IOC amount can fluctuate, and in past years, has been less. Approximately half of the aforementioned \$800,000 is redirected to local federations, per Mr. Abramson.

Lawmakers, however, were stunned to learn that the VIOC was another agency or entity which [has not received approved allocations from central government](#). For the Olympic Committee, it is its entire general fund allocation of \$450,000, nearly 10 months into the fiscal year. The VIOC has requested the release of the funds, is reportedly in good standing, and has written to the Office of Management and Budget. But according to Mr. Abramson, “to date, not a penny” has been received.

“We have our reserve account, and we’ve been using that as a holdover until we get the money,” he told a concerned Senator Novelle Francis, the committee’s chair. Operations are understandably impacted. VIOC is currently booking flights for the Junior Pan Am Games and have “been trying to reroute as well as book flights that can fall within our current budget.”

“We have to decide how much we gain from investment in sports all around,” noted Senator Marise James.

“Please do not give us \$300,000,” Mr. Abramson pleaded. The executive branch, he said, has an “old mindset” hence the reduction in the VIOC’s recommended budget.

“I agree. I don’t think \$300,000 is definitely the number,” said Senator Dwayne DeGraff, but he requested formal financial statements to allow the Legislature to make an appropriate decision.

“I don’t understand why you would be going down to \$300,000 and not going up to maybe \$600,000,” added Senator Clifford Joseph, who referenced inflation and the impact on daily life. He wondered how the government could continue to provide sufficient support to athletes. “The first thing is to give us a good appropriation. That way, we could keep our restricted funds to gifted athletes,” replied Mr. Abramson. “If you all could give us a million, we’ll take it.”

“We're forcing the Olympic Committee to utilize funds to be able to maintain the operation that could be used for training and to be able to send our athletes abroad,” Senator Kurt Violet lamented. “What you put in is what you going to get out. I looked at this year's budget, and you're seeing \$150,000 cut to the Olympic Committee.” He reminded his colleagues that interscholastic sports and other sporting programs have had their funding zeroed out in the budget.

“You could see as clear as day as to what the intent is when it comes to sports in the Virgin Islands,” he continued. He encouraged his colleagues to appropriately fund the VIOC with the addendum that “now we have to advocate for the funds to be released.”

“Michelle Smith is returning home. Everybody up in arms and saying, “no congratulations,” but the central government that's supposed to fund the Olympic Committee isn't funding the Olympic Committee,” noted Mr. Violet. “You can't just decide to fund what you want to fund and fund them when you want to fund them.”

It seems that the VIOC's request may be granted. “Several of us senators have already begun conversation on the budget markup [and] how important the Olympic Committee is. There's some other agencies coming here, and \$500,000 is not even a drop in their bucket,” said Senator Ray Fonseca at the meeting's close.