

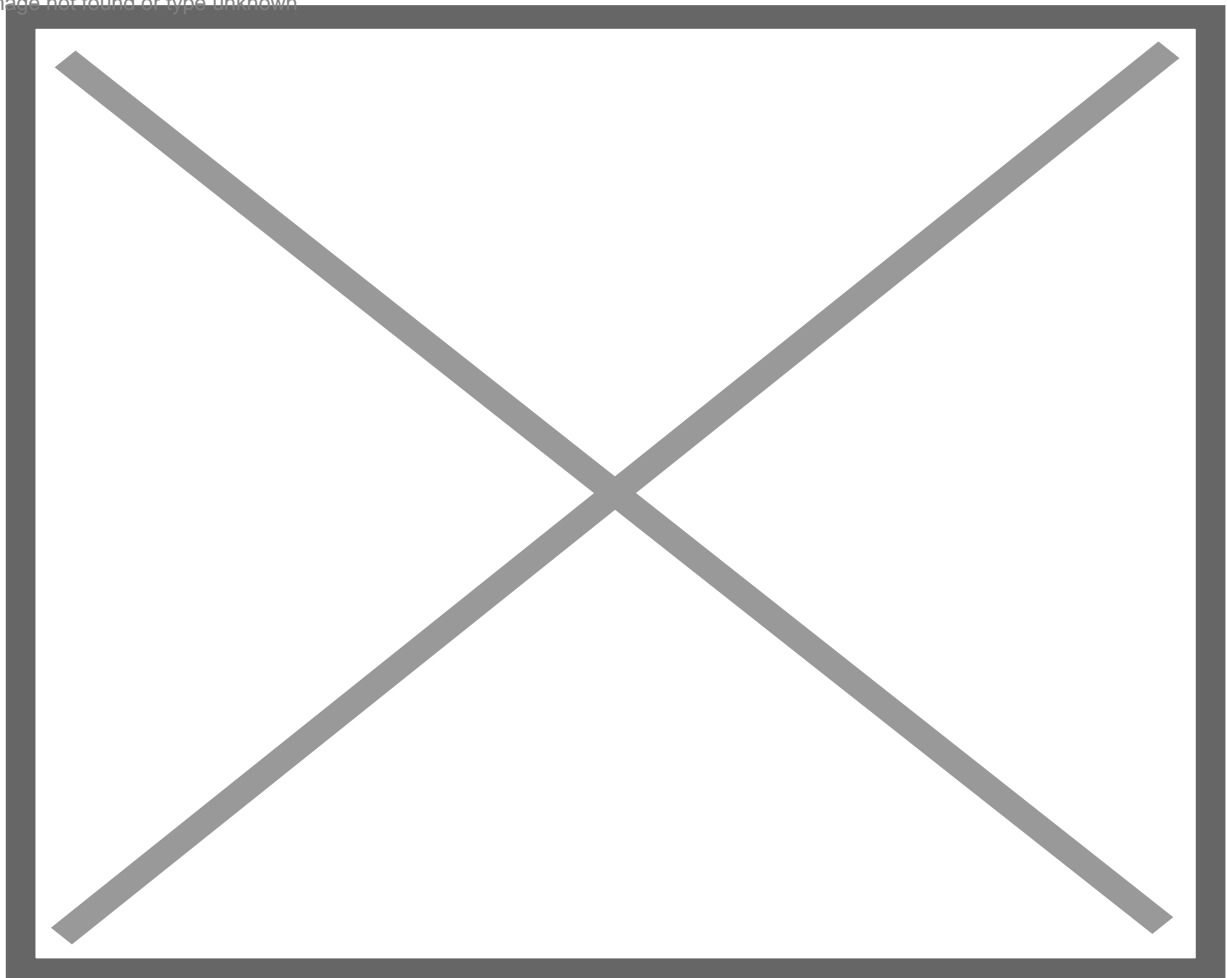
Nursing Board Faces Budget Strain Amid Costly Rentals, Building Access Dispute, and Push for Training Expansion

With St. Thomas rent nearing \$90K and no access to its FEMA-funded, storm-damaged building, the Nursing Board faces mounting pressure from lawmakers while seeking funds for HVAC upgrades, membership dues, and expansion of training programs to St. Croix.

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Nelcia Charlemagne **July 25, 2025**

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When the Board of Nursing Licensure appeared before the Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance on Thursday, lawmakers raised concerns about the wide disparity in office rental costs. They were particularly alarmed to learn that the board had apparently lost access to a property damaged during the 2017 hurricanes.

On St. Thomas, the Board's monthly rent in the Time Center Building is approximately \$7,337 for a monthly total of \$88,528.50. On St. Croix, however, VIBNL pays a monthly rent of \$1,648 for a space in the Golden Orange Center. A stunned Senator Marvin Blyden described it as a "big, big difference." He questioned whether the Board was "looking for another place." The Nurse Licensure Board has occupied the space since January 2024. Before that, the Board shelled out \$5,000 in monthly rent for a different location. "We have always paid kind of high... We went from a rent-free board to a board that is paying like near \$100,000," noted Carmen Vanterpool-Romney, the Board's executive director.

Her remark speaks to a peculiar situation. Prior to the 2017 hurricanes, the VIBNL occupied a building on Kongens Gade in St. Thomas. Damaged by the storms, the Board received funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to rehabilitate the building. However, Ms. Vanterpool-Romney informed lawmakers that she is "not in the loop with anything."

In fact, the executive director explained to Senator Ray Fonseca that "we received a letter from the Commissioner of Health stating that we no longer own rights to the building." Per Ms. Vanterpool-Romney, the Board has since contacted the Department of Property and Procurement, as they are in receipt of "correspondence from Property and Procurement stating that the board is responsible for anything that is to be done with that building."

"We went to try to get our files. We could not enter the building," she told the committee. The VIBNL has again written to Property and Procurement explaining that the files are "personal and confidential." In the interim, the Board continues to foot hefty rental costs in St. Thomas. After hearing the alarming update, Sen. Fonseca promised to "get to the bottom of it" immediately.

Meanwhile, Sen. Blyden has encouraged Ms. Vanterpool-Romney to investigate whether the Board can "share" space with another agency until repairs to the Kongens Gade building are complete.

The rental costs account for a relatively significant portion of the Board's \$846,078 approved budget. For Ms. Vanterpool-Romney, the amount is insufficient for "all our initiatives and our goals." The Board's budget was decreased in FY2025, and the executive director says the Board was "unable to defend" it. Now, the Board is attempting to "work with our budget that was less than what we expected."

Planned initiatives include a training center which will "help us get more nursing assistants out in the community." The limited budget funding has prompted the Board of Nurse Licensure to submit a supplemental budget valued at \$42,295. The funding is necessary for an HVAC supply contractor in both districts. According to the Board's operations director, Joycelyn McFarlane, similar contracts are being funded through the VIBNL's revolving fund, but "it would be beneficial if we could get those funds on professional contracts on the general fund." The revolving fund is intended for programmatic use.

The Board also requires \$6,000, not included in its FY2026 budget for annual membership dues, as it considers joining the [Nurse Licensure Compact](#). "Everyone is asking for the compact, but the compact has its pros and cons with the finances to the Board," said Ms. Vanterpool-Romney.

With limited funds available, the Board must carefully navigate its planned initiatives prudently. For instance, the Board is only operating a training center on St. Thomas, with insufficient funds to expand to St. Croix. Still, Ms. Vanterpool-Romney assured Senator Marise James that, "I think it's fair that we serve each district the same way. That's the way it should be."

