

Lawmakers Approve \$1.7 Billion Budget Dependent on Revenue Collection and Federal Recovery Projects

The Legislature forwarded 31 budget bills to Governor Bryan, including a \$35,000 minimum wage for government employees, youth employment funding, and nonprofit support, while warning that late or weak tax collections could destabilize the plan.

Government / **Published On September 18, 2025 06:51 AM /**

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Revenue collection and the commencement of billions of dollars' worth of federally funded recovery projects will be the only way for the USVI's government to manage its \$1.7 billion budget. It includes general funds, non-lapsing funds, and federal funds for recovery projects.

On Wednesday, lawmakers took the final step of the Legislative process, forwarding 31 budget bills to Governor Albert Bryan Jr's desk, exactly two weeks before the new fiscal year begins.

Among those bills are provisions to [raise the minimum wage for government employees](#) to \$35,000 annually.

Senator Novelle Francis, chair of the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance, announced that there are 846 funded vacancies within the Government of the Virgin Islands, backed by close to \$119 million. He explained that money set aside to fill these positions is part of what allowed lawmakers to secure the \$35,000 wage increase. At the same time, he stressed the importance of actually hiring new employees, noting that bringing more workers into government service will ultimately help stabilize the Government Employees' Retirement System.

According to Senator Carla Joseph, the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance has done a "yeoman's job of scrubbing the numbers, sitting down late evenings, having real discussions to balance this budget – and it is balanced." The Legislature, she said, has also implemented "mechanisms" to allow tax collections to flow freely into the government.

However, as Senator Francis warned, "all of this is projections...all of this is for nought if we're not able to collect our revenues. It's simple math. Revenues versus expenditure is our 2026 budget."

"We're getting ready to pass a budget that we hope is balanced, and it's only going to be balanced if we're able to collect those taxes that are owed to this Government of the Virgin Islands, and if we get these bundles moving," agreed Senator Kurt Vialet.

Nonetheless, Vialet was pleased with some of the budget's inclusions, including funding for interscholastic sports and STEM education. In collaboration with the commissioner of Labor, the Legislature was able to "significantly increase the amount of monies available for summer youth employment: from \$800,000 to some \$1.2 million." It will allow for as many as 1,200 students to be employed. This year, approximately 300 students were not able to be accommodated in the program due to insufficient funding.

Some 60 nonprofit organizations will also benefit from the FY2026 budget. "All of them play a critical role and fill the gap for many areas in government that we fall short," remarked Senator Marvin Blyden.

Outside of the budget bills, lawmakers also exercised their power to override Governor Albery Bryan's veto of two bills. The first was Bill 36-0027, [Jah'niqua's Law](#). Sponsored by Senator Kenneth Gittens, the bill requires someone convicted of negligent vehicular homicide or driving under the influence to pay restitution to minor children of their victims, if the victims die or are permanently disabled as a result. Governor Bryan [rejected the bill](#) for its limited scope, pointing out that it failed to include more serious crimes such as intentional homicide.

Senator Alma Francis Heyliger also rallied her colleagues to [override the veto](#) of [Bill 36-0057](#), which proposed the automatic expungement of arrest records following an acquittal. Governor Bryan worried that limiting judicial discretion could hinder law enforcement's ability to recognize patterns in recurring cases, potentially compromising public safety.

Lawmakers also supported the following bills and nominations during Wednesday's marathon session:

- Bill No. 36-0101 An Act to provide for continuity of operations in the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands in the event of prolonged judicial vacancies.
- Bill No. 36-0112 An Act amending title 4 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 31, section 516 increasing the filing fee for general civil complaints in the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands and title 5 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 41, section 426 allowing for the collection of nine percent interest when an offer of judgement is filed with the court.
- Mr. Roy Moorehead for the Board of Parole.
- Mr. Damian M. Cartwright for the Virgin Islands Board of Land Use Appeals.
- Mr. Xavier A. Acevedo for the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority Governing Board.
- Ms. Safiya George, PhD, for the Virgin Islands Government Hospitals and Health Facilities Corporation Board of Directors.