

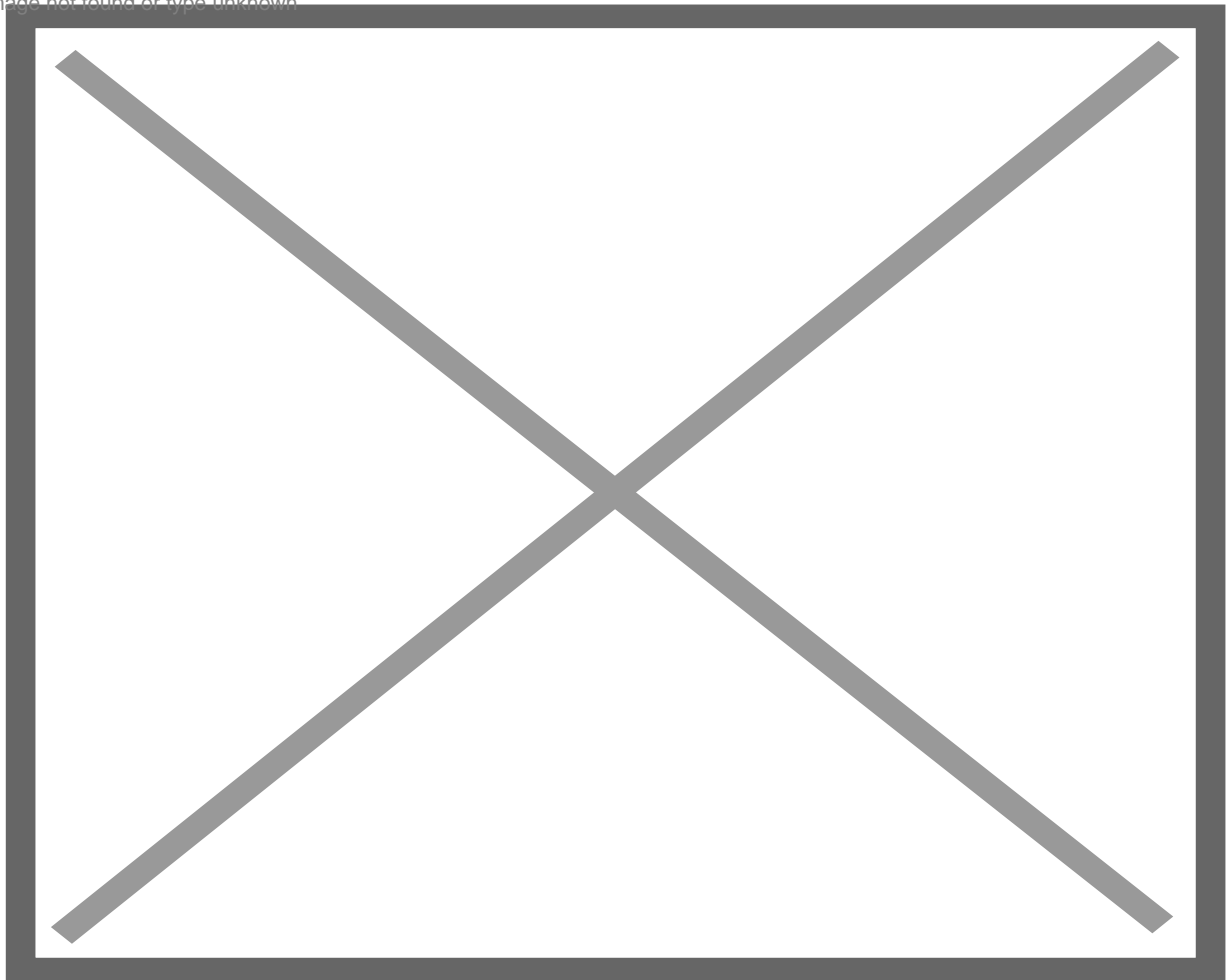
## Violet Lone in Opposition as Senate Committee Advances \$5 Million for St. Croix Racetrack

**Senator Kurt Violet stood alone in voting against the \$5 million reappropriation for St. Croix’s Randall “Doc” James Racetrack, saying he supports horse racing but criticized the process and lack of coordination between Government House and DSPR.**

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**Senator Kurt Violet. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM.**

Senator Kurt Violet was the only member of the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance to vote against Bill 36-0119, legislation that reappropriates \$5 million to the Department of Sports, Parks, and Recreation to fund the completion of the Randall “Doc” James Racetrack.

Sponsored by Senators Avery Lewis and Angel Bolques Jr., the bill would grant DSPR the [funding to continue and complete St. Croix's racetrack](#) after VIGL failed to meet its contractual obligations to do so. St. Croix, which Senator Vialet considers the "horse racing capital" of the territory, has been without its track for approximately a decade. Still, he chose not to vote in favor of the measure.

"I want horse racing on St. Croix, but I have issues with the way that the process is taking place. Clearly, by the testimony, you could see that there hasn't been a bunch of conversation between Government House [and] Sports, Parks and Recreation," he stated. "We're acting like, oh, we give this \$5 million and it's going to materialize, and in a month, in two months, in four months, in a year; that we going to have races."

He complained that other projects like the Vincent Mason Pool only opened after a protracted period. "So don't let us sit here and act like this is the miracle. Oh, give the \$5 million and the track is going to open."

Indeed, the DSPR's commissioner Vincent Roberts informed lawmakers that while the \$5 million grant is a "critical step forward," it "will not complete the Randall "Doc" James Racetrack." The total cost of completing the entire facility, including the running surface, track, grand stand and other infrastructure is between \$12 million and \$14 million, said Mr. Roberts.

Nonetheless, DSPR intends to use the money to jump start the stalled construction at the site, a move [endorsed by Government House](#). According to Mr. Roberts, the department's top priority is completing the race track while ensuring "safety, functionality and compliance with the horse racing standards." That could cost as much as \$1.5 million, with important sand and specialty equipment needed.

DSPR intends to engage "construction management services" and "complete a comprehensive running surface assessment." Several testifiers told the Committee that the material previously used for an almost half-mile section of the racetrack's subbase is inappropriate and that major remedial work will be necessary. The pending assessment will reveal the full extent of the work needed.

DSPR also wants to stretch the \$5 million to "install perimeter fencing to secure the facility and manage public access." The department also wants to clear the vegetation that has overtaken the site during "years of inactivity." Finally, they'll begin "critical stable and paddock area renovations to ensure proper conditions for horses, trainers and jockeys." These costs could total as much as \$2 million.

The planned projects are a big ask for the \$5 million at stake. "These things I'm seeing here is going to cost way more than \$5 million," Senator Marvin Blyden said.

With the knowledge that the \$5 million allocation is insufficient, Senator Marise James wanted to know whether DSPR intends to return to the Legislature with an additional request for funding.

The reappropriation is the first step to get the project underway once more. "After that, we will see whether we have any takers or any interested investors," Mr. Roberts replied. "If not, we most likely will probably end up back in the Legislature."

DSPR has not yet issued a request for proposals for a promoter for the Randall "Doc" James Racetrack. Mr. Roberts said the failure to do so could have been an "oversight" as the department has been focused on "just getting money to get the racetrack completed."

Lawmakers, including Senators James and Franklin Johnson, have encouraged cross-agency collaboration to reduce equipment and manpower costs.

Senator Novelle Francis, the Committee's chair, further urged DSPR to try to work on projects concurrently to expedite completion. There is no clear timeline for the commencement of work, nor how long each component could take, a reality worsened by a lack of funding.

Jay Watson, a horse racing enthusiast, felt that the proposed legislation should also include considerations to engage a "viable and legitimate promoter." "Horse Racing needs to be looked at from a revenue-generating perspective and not as a cost to the government," he suggested. Senator Dwayne DeGraff agreed. "The government shouldn't be the entity with their hands on this at all," he stated.

However, Hugo Hodge, a member of the Horse Racing Commission, argued that the \$5 million injection of funds is not enough of an incentive to attract a promoter. "The enticement would be that a certain portion of the project has been completed prior to them having to expend the funds," he said. He reminded committee members that investors are interested in a return on their investment. "The \$5 million is not going to be part of that equation."

Despite the myriad of unanswered questions and perceived hurdles relating to the completion of the racetrack, there was overall support for Bill 36-0119.

Elroy Bates of the Flamboyant Park Horsemen Association was among those who supported the bill. "It is not merely a matter of convenience, but a necessity," he testified. "We have been waiting as racing enthusiasts for the construction to begin so that we can not only begin to enjoy the excitement of the sport of kings, but also for the overall development of this majestic sport," declared Dodson James, chairman of the St. Croix Racing Commission.

Apart from Senator Vialet's opposition, other members of the Budget, Finance and Appropriations Committee who were present for the vote approved of the measure. The bill will now move to the next stage of the legislative process.