

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Government Owes One Communications Over \$7 Million, Most of It Past Due

One Communications told lawmakers that more than \$7 million owed by local and federal agencies remains largely unpaid, with 89 percent past due, creating cash flow strain as the company continues providing service to government entities.

Business / **Published On April 09, 2026 05:13 AM /**

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One Communications Chief Executive Officer Siobhan James-Alexander. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE.

A telecommunications provider told lawmakers this week that more than \$7 million owed by local and federal government entities remains outstanding, with the vast majority of

that debt already past due, raising fresh concerns about the territory's long-running problem of delayed vendor payments and the strain those arrears place on companies continuing to provide essential services.

The issue surfaced Wednesday before the Committee on Housing, Transportation, and Telecommunications, where One Communications Chief Executive Officer Siobhan James-Alexander outlined the scale of the government's unpaid obligations to the company. According to Ms. James-Alexander, One Communications is owed more than \$7 million by a mix of local and federal government entities, and "89% of that is past due."

Asked by Senator Marvin Blyden which agencies were among those carrying overdue balances, Ms. James-Alexander identified "The hospitals, for instance, Department of Education, Department of Health," and said the company remains in discussions with those agencies as well as the commissioner of finance. Even so, she said the unpaid balances remain "significantly outstanding and significantly past due."

Senator Blyden asked whether the debt owed to One Communications is affecting projects that would benefit the territory. Ms. James-Alexander said the situation creates a "significant cash flow issue," particularly because the company continues providing service to agencies that have not paid. "We represent and understand our actual role, and therefore we have not disconnected any agencies, but we continue to work with them," she said.

She added that receiving the money already owed would allow the company to "be able to be invested in other areas."

Breaking down the total, Ms. James-Alexander told Senator Kurt Violet that "about \$4 million of that is local, [and] about \$3.5 of that is federal." She said local government debt is 92 percent past due, while federal debt is 86 percent past due.

The situation described by One Communications is not new. Government agencies in the Virgin Islands have long faced criticism for overdue vendor payments, even as efforts continue to reduce outstanding balances. At the same time, new obligations continue to accumulate, adding to the chronic problem of past-due invoices owed by central government and affiliated agencies.

With budget season approaching, the issue is expected to remain in focus, as lawmakers again confront the effect that delayed government payments are having on vendors, cash flow, and the delivery of services across the territory.