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Veterans Affairs Says Taxicab Commission Still Owes \$61,639 From Medallion Auctions

Director Patrick Farrell said payments from 2021 to 2025 remain outstanding, while OVA seeks \$1.2 million from the General Fund, continues work on the Clarence Beverhoudt Sr. Veterans Complex and asks for St. Thomas crypt funding.

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Director Patrick Farrell told lawmakers the Taxicab Commission still owes \$61,639.92 from Veterans Taxi Medallion Auctions while outlining FY2027 funding needs for travel, burial benefits and veterans infrastructure. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE.

The Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission has again failed to provide legally mandated payments from the Veterans Taxi Medallion Auction to the Office of Veterans Affairs, bringing the total

outstanding amount to \$61,639.92 from auctions conducted between 2021 and 2025.

Patrick Farrell, director of the Office of Veterans Affairs, raised the issue Wednesday during the agency's budget hearing before the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance. His testimony closely mirrored concerns he brought to lawmakers a year ago, when he said the office had not received required funds from the Taxicab Commission and was also awaiting \$100,000 in non-appropriated funding from the V.I. Lottery for operational expenses.

Mr. Farrell said the situation with the V.I. Lottery has improved. The Lottery has provided the first two allotments for the current fiscal year, and he expects the remaining contributions to arrive "on schedule."

The issue with the Taxicab Commission remains unresolved. Mr. Farrell said he has spoken with Commission Director Melissa Smith, who told him that "at least a couple years of the payment that they owe... it's now in process, so she's just waiting for it to be dispersed from the [Department of] Finance."

Lawmakers again expressed frustration with the Commission's failure to transmit the funds.

Senator Kurt Vialet said he was frustrated that the Commission could not complete a "simple procedure as to turn over money." He cited that failure while arguing against funding the Commission's digitization efforts.

"I really believe that as a body we need to mandate that the Taxi Commission got to step up their game, and do a better job before we begin to pour any money into their coffers," he declared.

Despite the outstanding payments, the Office of Veterans Affairs is again expecting \$111,600 in non-appropriated funds from the Taxicab Commission and V.I. Lottery to support FY2027 expenses.

The office is also requesting \$1,219,369 from the General Fund. Mr. Farrell said \$525,814 would be used for personnel salaries and fringe benefits, \$243,552 for operating expenses, and \$450,000 for "non-service-connected VA medical travel both within and outside of our region, as well as burial benefits."

The Office of Veterans Affairs is also continuing work on the Clarence Beverhoudt Sr. Veterans Complex, for which \$1.5 million was previously appropriated. According to Mr. Farrell, the design phase is 50% complete.

He warned, however, that "there will come a time in the near future when additional funding will be required to complete the project."

Mr. Farrell also raised concerns about burial infrastructure for veterans, telling lawmakers that "we have now reached the point where an additional multi-vault crypt is immediately needed on St. Thomas." He asked the Legislature to "consider providing supplemental funding that would allow the Office of Veterans Affairs to move forward with construction of an additional crypt."

The last crypt cost approximately \$417,000 to construct, Mr. Farrell told Senator Hubert Frederick. "I can imagine, between then and now, that the construction cost has elevated," he said.

OVA is also expected to enter a cost-sharing agreement with the Department of Public Works to purchase a forklift to assist with interring remains above a certain height within the crypt.

Looking ahead to FY2027, the Office of Veterans Affairs has outlined several priorities it intends to pursue with its limited budget. Those plans include increased attention to women veterans and the creation of a woman-veteran coordinator position. Senator Marise James is preparing legislation related to that effort.

OVA is also advocating for the naming of both VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinics in honor of two Virgin Islanders who “made the ultimate sacrifice” during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

If approved, the St. Croix clinic would be named in honor of Lieutenant Colonel David C. Canegeta III, while the St. Thomas clinic would be named in honor of Sergeant First Class Floyd E. Lake. The process requires Congressional approval, and OVA is continuing to work with the Delegate to Congress to advance the initiative.

Mr. Farrell said he was pleased to learn that Senator Novelle Francis has drafted a resolution related to renaming the St. Croix clinic. Legislation to consider renaming the St. Thomas clinic is also pending.

The director also announced that the Virgin Islands has been selected, “by an overwhelming margin,” to host the 2027 National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs Fall Conference. It will be Mr. Farrell’s second time hosting the event.

He said the conference will “generate economic activity through hotel occupancy, transportation services, restaurants...and other tourism-related spending.”

Mr. Farrell asked lawmakers to “consider supporting this effort through an appropriation similar to what was provided for our previous conference.”

Moving forward, Mr. Farrell said the Office’s focus will remain on “increasing veteran participation in available programs and services,” strengthening partnerships, expanding healthcare access and improving infrastructure.

The office is also working to create a new position to oversee public information, media relations, digital media, community outreach and veteran engagement initiatives.