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BOC Budget Hearing Exposes \$21.1 Million Local Inmate Cost, Off-Island Care Concerns and 69 Vacancies

BOC said local inmate care costs \$320 per day compared with \$85 to \$109.58 at mainland facilities, prompting questions over whether off-island housing saves money while preserving dignity, family notification, staffing and federal consent obligations.

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The John A. Bell Adult Correctional Facility on St. Croix. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM.

Differences in the cost of housing inmates locally and in mainland facilities dominated the Bureau of Corrections' budget hearing Thursday, where lawmakers also pressed officials on the treatment

of off-island inmates, family notifications, overtime savings, staffing levels, consent decree costs and outstanding medical bills.

BOC is requesting \$36,476,665 for fiscal year 2027, an increase of \$461,171 over FY2026. Vendor payments account for \$14.5 million of the total request and include payments to house and feed inmates placed off-island. According to BOC Director Wynnie Testamark, the Bureau budgeted \$7.9 million for those costs in FY2025.

The cost of housing inmates locally is significantly higher. According to Director Testamark, “maintaining an inmate in the territory amounts to \$320 per day.” With 181 inmates housed by the Bureau as of June 2026, that amounts to an annual cost of \$21,140,800.

By comparison, BOC funds the care of 170 inmates overseas: 33 inmates at a Virginia facility at \$109.58 per day, and 137 inmates in Mississippi at \$85 per day. The combined total for those placements is \$5,570,316.10.

There are only 11 more inmates housed locally than in mainland facilities, but the local cost is more than four times greater. Those figures drew concern from members of the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance.

Senator Carla Joseph suggested that housing more inmates off-island could be more fiscally responsible.

“If we were putting some of these human beings off island, we would be saving a significant amount of money for the government,” she stated. “We could get money freed up to, guess what, pave the roads...The hospital needs the money. We have urgent care for people who are law-abiding here in the Virgin Islands...We could have gotten a sizable amount of savings here.”

The level of care and communication provided to families of inmates housed off-island also became a major point of discussion. Senator Franklin Johnson asked what “tracking system” the Bureau uses to notify families when inmates die while overseas. He alleged that BOC failed to properly notify at least two families.

“The last inmate that was stabbed, if the family mother didn't call you, no one would have found out, because you have not updated their file,” he told Director Testamark. Senator Johnson also recalled the cremation of another inmate who died of natural causes, saying “no one contact his family members.”

Director Testamark attempted to assure him that inmates are “treated with dignity and respect,” but Senator Johnson was unconvinced.

He insisted that “we're sending our inmates away and we're not being responsible.”

Regarding the cremation, BOC Medical Director Dr. Linda Callwood explained that the inmate’s “immediate family did not want to have anything to do with him.” She said the next of kin listed was not a family member.

“It's only this week one of his sisters on his father's side contacted the Bureau of Correction...and I told her we're going to respect his wishes to notify the next of kin that was listed,” Dr. Callwood stated.

She later told the committee that although all listed next-of-kin numbers were called, they were “incorrect.”

Despite those explanations, Senator Johnson said the government should conduct a “deep dive.”

“It's a travesty as to what's happening,” he said.

Senator Johnson also questioned BOC's overtime savings. In previous years, overtime costs increased because of insufficient manpower. According to Ms. Testamark's testimony, overtime expenditures as of June 8, 2026, stood at \$2,671,802.62.

“Expenditures thus far have decreased by \$2,202,073.30 from the FY2025 actual expenditure of \$4,873,875.92,” she said.

Overtime spending is expected to rise before the fiscal year ends on September 30. However, Ms. Testamark told lawmakers that “year-to-date spending levels reflect a significant reduction when compared to the same period in prior years.”

Senator Johnson questioned whether BOC had “compromised on the shift while saving this overtime.” Wardens at both correctional facilities denied that assertion, but Mr. Johnson said he has “got a lot of complaints about that.”

BOC currently has 69 vacancies, including correctional officer positions. In her testimony, Director Testamark described correctional officers and supervisors as the “backbone” of the Bureau.

“Despite persistent staffing challenges, they have continued to carry out our mission...” she said.

According to the director, “most” of the existing vacancies are for correctional officers.

Senator Hubert Frederick said he was “excited” about the overtime savings. Director Testamark attributed the reduction in part to the inmate population being “much lower.” She also told Senator Frederick that BOC has completed a staffing analysis to identify where positions can be consolidated “safely.”

Additional cameras have also helped, she said. “It doesn't take the place of a human being, but it assists the individual doing that job.”

Despite savings in overtime, BOC continues to budget \$1.2 million for court-appointed monitors and experts. Ms. Testamark described that expense as a “required and legal obligation under two active federal consent decrees.”

Although those costs remain “mandatory,” the U.S. District Court recently “recognized the Bureau's sustained and verifiable compliance with constitutional medical and dental care standards” on St. Croix.

According to Ms. Testamark, “long-standing deficiencies have been replaced with stable, modern, and compliant systems.”

The termination of the medical and dental provisions “signals entry into the final phase of compliance,” she said. However, BOC still needs to make progress under the St. Thomas Settlement Agreement. Ms. Testamark told Senator Milton Potter that the Bureau is “working tirelessly to meet the mandates.”

The Bureau's FY2027 request includes several categories of spending. Personnel and fringe benefits account for \$21.91 million, while supplies are budgeted at \$1,935,592. BOC expects to spend \$50,000 on capital projects and \$12,579,522 on other services.

BOC is also managing millions in vendor payments, including \$1,247,339.24 in local medical costs. The Bureau is reviewing bills from both hospitals to ensure accuracy.

While the Juan F. Luis Hospital has invoiced BOC for more than \$4 million, Ms. Testamark said the Bureau's records show that it "only owe a balance of \$900,000."