

Attorney Vacancies Slow OCB Cases as Office Carries 473-Case Load and Seeks \$1.57 Million

OCB Chief Negotiator Joss Springette said two vacant attorney posts have slowed legal work while the office manages 473 cases, including 390 rights arbitration matters, as lawmakers weigh shifting one DOJ-funded post into OCB's budget for direct hiring.

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Two vacant attorney positions at the Office of Collective Bargaining have slowed the office's legal work while it manages 473 pending cases, Chief Negotiator Joss Springette told lawmakers Wednesday during the agency's fiscal year 2027 budget hearing.

Ms. Springette appeared before the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance to present OCB's funding request, which totals \$1,574,728 for FY2027. During the hearing, lawmakers

learned that as of May 31, 2026, the office's caseload stood at 473.

That includes 390 rights arbitration cases, 46 unfair labor practice charges, 26 civil cases, 8 unit clarification cases, 1 Equal Employment Opportunity case, 1 Government Service Appeal case and 1 recertification.

Between October 1, 2025 and May 31, 2026, OCB received 98 cases and "were successful in disposing of five." Both attorney positions were vacant during that period, Ms. Springette said.

Explaining the hiring difficulty to Senator Novelle Francis, chair of the committee, Ms. Springette said interviews have been conducted for attorneys, but some candidates "accepted and then withdrew their acceptance of the offers."

For some candidates who interviewed from the mainland, "relocation may be an issue, or, of course, bar admission." Others received more attractive offers, she said.

"It has definitely slowed down the legal work that we do in terms of arbitrating or disposing cases, but it hasn't stopped," Ms. Springette told lawmakers.

She said the vacancies have required most of OCB's six employees to "take on some extra responsibilities when it comes to the legal work."

The Department of Justice was previously responsible for hiring attorneys to work on behalf of OCB. Discussing the vacancies with Senator Dwayne DeGraff, Ms. Springette said she requested that "both positions be placed under OCB's budget, so that we can directly recruit and hire."

Only one position was transferred to OCB's budget. The other remains under the Department of Justice.

"We expect the DOJ position to be filled this summer, crossing our fingers that the individual meets our bar requirements and is able to onboard this summer," Ms. Springette told Senator DeGraff.

Despite the vacancies and the nearly 500-case workload, Ms. Springette disagreed with Senator DeGraff's suggestion that the situation would be "a wash."

"I wouldn't say it's a wash if we're expecting to fill both positions," she said.

OCB hopes to fill one attorney position by the end of the fiscal year and have two attorneys on staff by the end of the calendar year.

Lawmakers appeared open to helping move the remaining attorney position into OCB's budget. Senator Kurt Vialet suggested that the Legislature could make the adjustment directly.

"I just waltz over to the chair and say, let's decrease [the Department of] Justice budget and increase OCB. We don't have to ask for permission. We could do that," Mr. Vialet stated.

With one attorney position included in OCB's budget, the agency's FY2027 request stands at \$1,574,728. The request includes \$867,215 for personnel costs and \$371,168 for fringe benefits. Equipment and supplies are budgeted at \$40,000.

Utility costs for OCB's St. Croix office are \$13,000, while no utilities are paid for the St. Thomas office. Other services, including rent, service agreements, IT and communication, are estimated at

\$163,345.

Ms. Springette also testified that copiers in both offices need to be replaced. In addition, the vehicle in St. Thomas has been “turned over to the Department of Property and Procurement for disposal.”

OCB is requesting \$120,000 in capital outlay to purchase new copiers and a vehicle.

Beyond the two attorney positions, OCB also needs a financial management officer. Ms. Springette said the office hopes to fill all vacant roles as soon as possible.

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