

DSPR Says 31 Nonprofits Have Not Applied for \$1.3 Million in Available Grant Funding

DSPR says 31 of 38 nonprofits have not applied for funding allocated through the department, leaving \$1.3 million unused, while lawmakers questioned communication gaps, delayed allotments, racetrack utilities and enforcement at Thursday's budget hearing.

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DSPR Commissioner Vincent L. Roberts said 31 of 38 nonprofits have not applied for funding allocated through the department, leaving \$1.3 million unused as lawmakers reviewed DSPR's FY2027 budget. **By. V.I. LEGISLATURE.**

The Department of Sports, Parks and Recreation says 31 of 38 nonprofit organizations allocated funding through the department have not yet submitted requests, leaving \$1,308,500 unused as

lawmakers review DSPR's fiscal year 2027 budget.

The issue emerged Thursday during DSPR's budget hearing before the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance. Commissioner Vincent Roberts told lawmakers that only one nonprofit allotment, totaling \$100,000, has been released to date. Another six applications, totaling \$350,000, are currently being processed at the Office of Management and Budget or the Department of Finance.

Committee Chair Senator Novelle Francis expressed concern that the funds could "fall on the wayside."

"We have to continue to exhaust our authority to make sure that they follow through on it," he told Commissioner Roberts.

Mr. Roberts said communication with the nonprofits is ongoing. "Majority, if not all, already know that the funding is available," he said.

Senator Marvin Blyden said he was concerned that there is a "disconnect somewhere," with nonprofits saying they have not received funding while DSPR says applications have not been submitted.

"I find that hard to believe, because most of these non-for-profit that we put here are active...I think we have to have a circle back with that and see what's going on in our space and see how we can improve the communication," he stated.

Despite the underutilization of the funds, DSPR will manage \$1,408,500 in miscellaneous grant funds for nonprofits in the FY2027 budget. That is separate from the department's \$10,029,992 General Fund request for operations.

The General Fund request includes \$5,381,514 for personnel services, \$3,292,379 for fringe benefits and \$159,053 for supplies. Other services and charges are estimated at \$392,046, while utilities are budgeted at \$805,000.

Senator Angel Bolques Jr. raised a separate concern about the pace of allotment releases. He noted that DSPR is nine months into the fiscal year but has received only 50% of its allotment.

"I have an issue with that," Senator Bolques stated, noting that DSPR is "engaged with recreational activities" that keep young people occupied.

Commissioner Roberts confirmed that delayed allotments affect DSPR's ability to procure supplies and pay utility bills. Senator Bolques urged OMB to "please support and provide the funding that's necessary for all of these youth programs."

Lawmakers also discussed utilities at the Clinton E. Phipps Racetrack, which exceed \$100,000 but are not budgeted. Senator Carla Joseph questioned why DSPR could not use the Horse Racing Improvement Fund for that purpose.

Mr. Roberts said he believed the fund could only be used for "maintenance" of the facility, prompting Senator Joseph to request a legal opinion.

Based on the interpretation from the Legislature's legal counsel, "utilities would be part of maintenance." When Mr. Roberts still appeared uncertain, Senator Francis suggested that DSPR

also seek an opinion from the Attorney General.

The hearing also touched on DSPR's work with the Department of Property and Procurement and the Department of Public Works to file a claim against the performance bond of McCourt Construction Inc.

In 2021, the contractor received separate contracts to resurface basketball and tennis courts across the territory. Mr. Roberts said work was completed in the St. Thomas-St. John district, but "performance in the St. Croix district did not meet contractual expectations and resulted in significant project delays."

DSPR is also pursuing the creation of a dedicated enforcement division. According to the department, it "faces increasing challenges related to unauthorized vending, loitering, vandalism, theft, and the management of large public gatherings."

Senator Alma Francis Heyliger is preparing to introduce legislation to establish the enforcement division.

The department also plans to launch a new, "user-friendly" website on July 1, 2026. The website will allow DSPR to accept online payments, among other services.

Commissioner Roberts said DSPR is "actively pursuing a variety of initiatives" to diversify revenue generation, ensure "long-term stability," and reduce dependence on the General Fund.

As part of those efforts, DSPR is conducting a "comprehensive market-rate analysis of facility rental fees, lease agreements, and user chargers" to ensure they "accurately reflect current market conditions while remaining fair and competitive."

The department is also "exploring the reinstatement of paid parking at Emile Griffith Park," Commissioner Roberts said.