

## School Maintenance Bureau Says It Is “Operating on Fumes” After Receiving \$3M Despite \$5M Legal Minimum

Craig Benjamin says BSCM received \$3 million in FY2026 despite a \$5 million legal minimum for school maintenance, while CFO Charmaine Mayers said annual needs are about \$9.7 million, vendors are owed \$910,879, and repairs remain delayed at schools now.

Government / **Published On July 08, 2026 06:54 AM /**

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Craig Benjamin says BSCM’s \$3 million FY2026 maintenance allocation fell below the \$5 million legal minimum, delaying school repairs and increasing the risk of costlier infrastructure failures. **By. V.I. LEGISLATURE.**

The Bureau of School Construction and Maintenance is requesting \$10,986,415 for Fiscal Year 2027 after receiving only \$3 million in FY2026 for school maintenance, despite what officials said is a legal requirement for at least \$5 million annually.

At Tuesday's budget hearing before the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance, BSCM Executive Director Craig Benjamin said the FY2026 funding shortfall "significantly limited the Bureau's ability to address preventative and routine maintenance needs..." As a result, planned maintenance was deferred, "increasing the likelihood of costly repairs and infrastructure failures in the future."

The Bureau is asking that the \$5 million allocation from the Bureau of School Construction Capital Fund be included in its FY2027 budget. That is in addition to a general fund request of \$5,986,415, which Mr. Benjamin said only covers personnel and fringe benefits. It does not include maintenance operations, supplies, equipment, contractual services or other operational expenses.

Senator Dwayne DeGraff asked about the cost of other typical budget categories, including supplies and other services, but Mr. Benjamin said he did not have a response "at this current time."

Mr. Benjamin said the total request would allow the Bureau to "continue maintaining school facilities, expanding preventative maintenance efforts, strengthening its workforce, and protecting the government's investment in public educational infrastructure."

Without sufficient funding, Mr. Benjamin warned that maintenance challenges will worsen. He said the Bureau is already dealing with limited staffing, which has resulted in "greater reliance on external contractors for work that could otherwise be completed by Bureau personnel."

In the current fiscal year, funding challenges delayed summer maintenance programs. Mr. Benjamin testified that "previously available funding sources had been fully utilized and access to the remaining settlement funds was not authorized until enactment of Act 9100 on June 9, 2026."

With funding now available, the Bureau is prepared to undertake \$2.1 million in maintenance projects across both districts. Mr. Benjamin said BSCM is "committed to ensuring every school is safe, functional, and prepared to support student learning on the first day of school."

The Bureau has asked contractors to "put in extra time" to get projects completed before the August 10 reopening of school.

Still, officials said inadequate funding means some repairs will not be completed during the summer break. "We cannot accomplish replacing air conditions and fixing the major stuff without money," said Antoine Magras, who is responsible for maintenance projects in the St. Thomas-St. John District.

For now, Mr. Magras said the Bureau is painting, power washing and beautifying schools. He reiterated that there are not enough funds to repair air conditioners and "get some of those classrooms mold remediated.."

Responding to questions from Senator Novelle Francis Jr. on how the Bureau has obtained funding for necessary repairs, Mr. Magras said, "sometimes, I fix it out of my own pocket because I'm here for the children. I'm giving back now...I was retired."

Senator Francis did not treat the account as a positive one, noting that Mr. Magras should not have to use his personal funds for school maintenance needs.

“Right now we are operating on fumes,” said Charmaine Mayers, BSCM’s chief financial officer.

Ms. Mayers said the \$2.1 million in settlement funds only covers summer maintenance, leaving the Bureau without “any additional funding to do anything.” She reminded lawmakers that BSCM has already exceeded the \$3 million appropriated this year.

“Based on our assessments, we would need about \$9.7 million,” Ms. Mayers said.

While the Bureau deals with immediate funding constraints, its team has developed a 20-year facilities maintenance plan whose success depends on “the availability of a sustainable funding source.” Calculations completed in preparation for the plan place annual maintenance costs at \$9,740,173.20.

Managing financial resources for maintenance and related services will become increasingly important as schools across the territory are rebuilt. Although BSCM is a relatively new agency, it is currently carrying \$910,879 in outstanding vendor payments. A breakdown of the age of those debts was not provided during Tuesday’s hearing.