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Lieutenant Governor’s Office Faces 32 Vacancies as “Woefully Low” Salaries Persist; Former FirstBank Building Still Empty Two Years Later

Lawmakers pressed the Lieutenant Governor’s Office over 32 vacancies tied to low salaries, including appraiser and auditor posts, while asking why the former FirstBank property remains empty two years after purchase as the agency projects $126.6 million.

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Nelcia Charlemagne July 24, 2026

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Formerly a FirstBank property, the building on King Street in downtown Christiansted remains unoccupied more than two years after the OLG purchased it, as officials seek contractors for its renovation. **By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM.**

The Office of the Lieutenant Governor is struggling to fill 32 positions, including appraisers and franchise tax auditors, as lawmakers warn that low salaries are weakening the territory's second-largest revenue-generating agency. Senators also questioned why the former First Bank building remains unoccupied more than two years after its purchase.

Solicitations for the building's renovation were finally advertised on July 21, 2026, according to Acting Chief of Staff Nadia Harrigan. The property was purchased in February 2024, but OLG officials said substantial work is required before employees can relocate.

The two issues dominated the office's FY2027 budget hearing before the Senate Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance.

OLG is requesting $7,743,246 from the General Fund for FY2027, a 1.06 percent decrease from its FY2026 General Fund request. Its overall proposed budget totals $22,742,642.

The office anticipates collecting $122,774,230 in revenue, along with an additional $3,840,000 in money-transmission fees.

Low Salaries Complicate Recruitment

Lawmakers focused on the office's 32 vacancies, some of which were added during the current fiscal year while others have remained unfilled for longer periods.

The vacancies include critical appraiser positions within the Office of the Tax Assessor.

Claudette Farrington, director of OLG's Division of Business and Financial Management, told Senator Avery Lewis that "some of the positions are hard to fill."

Among them are two franchise tax auditor positions. Based on the responsibilities listed in the job description, qualified applicants "would expect to be more highly compensated," Ms. Farrington said.

The office has also struggled to recruit tellers. Ms. Farrington explained that the position requires a "certain number of credits in accounting."

The broader problem, she said, is the "entry level salary."

Committee Chairman Novelle Francis said the office must prioritize filling positions that directly support revenue collection, particularly appraisers.

"We have to take night and make day to prioritize these onboarding of these types of individuals because it really adds to our ability to be able to collect in a timely fashion and build the revenues that's required to provide services," Senator Novelle Francis, the committee's chair, said.

Mr. Francis and Senator Marvin Blyden encouraged OLG to develop relationships with the University of the Virgin Islands and the Skills Center to establish a pipeline of qualified workers.

Vialet Calls Salaries "Woefully Low"

Senator Kurt Vialet described the salaries as "woefully low." He said the Legislature would be willing to provide additional funding because the office is "revenue generating."

With sufficient personnel in place, Mr. Vialet argued, “it’s going to pay for itself.”

Ms. Farrington told lawmakers that several of the vacant positions are unionized and governed by a “master agreement.” She said the office would consider opening discussions with the Office of Collective Bargaining.

Senator Milton Potter agreed that OLG must engage with that office to address compensation. “Unions will not refuse increased salaries for their employees. They absolutely will not,” he said.

Without action, Mr. Potter warned, “we gonna find ourselves right back here a year later with the salary still the same, and the challenges with recruiting and retaining personnel.”

Senator Hubert Frederick similarly urged OLG leadership to “work through” the compensation restrictions “so people can feel like they’re valued as an employee.”

Building Renovation Solicitation Advertised Two Years After Purchase

Lawmakers remained frustrated that the former First Bank building has not been occupied since its acquisition.

Ms. Harrigan said solicitations for the building’s build-out were advertised on July 21. Although the process has been “challenging,” she said the office is moving toward renovating the property and relocating employees.

She told Mr. Lewis that the building had been “sitting for a while” before the government purchased it.

“There was a perception that the building is just ready to move into, and that’s not the case,” Ms. Harrigan stated.

Mr. Frederick questioned why the office waited so long to begin the necessary work. He suggested that if OLG was not prepared to occupy the property, it could have rented the space and allowed another entity to use it.

He criticized the government for purchasing a building while continuing to pay rent elsewhere. “Rent it out and start generating some revenue,” Senator Frederick said.

He argued that a private entity could have the building “turned around in two twos.”

The property was purchased in February 2024.

“We’re getting ready to hit 2027. You guys still aren’t gonna be in there,” he said.

Vialet Questions Four-Year Process

Mr. Vialet described the building as his “pet peeve” and noted that the Legislature appropriated the purchase funding in 2022.

“[Property and Procurement] took over two years to negotiate that deal for that building…Despite taking two years to negotiate, after we got it, it took the next two years to send us a solicitation,” Senator Vialet bemoaned.

He also questioned whether OLG has enough money to finish the renovation.

Ms. Farrington said the office is “assigning monies to address construction needs.”

One significant requirement is the installation of an elevator to bring the building into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Mr. Vialet suggested that the office should begin using the building before the elevator is installed. “Get the building open and then we do elevator. Don’ let the elevator be the reason why.”

He proposed establishing a service desk on the ground floor for people with certain disabilities until the Legislature can provide funding for major equipment such as an elevator.

Tax Collector Expected to Generate $58.9 Million

Of OLG’s projected revenue, $58.9 million is expected to be collected by the Office of the Tax Collector within the Division of Real Property Tax.

Ms. Harrigan asked lawmakers to consider increasing or eliminating the $500,000 annual cap on the Tax Assessor Revolving Fund to “assist the Division in generating more revenue for the territory and in carrying out all of its legislative mandates.”

Under current law, the fund receives 1 percent of real property taxes collected, up to a maximum of $500,000 each year.

Ms. Harrigan said the division would have received $560,062 instead of $500,000 if the statutory cap were not in place.