

Legal Services Says It Is “Running on Fumes” as Nearly \$1 Million in Government Allotments Remains Unreleased

Legal Services says \$1 million in appropriated allotments remains unreleased, while OMB recommends only \$1 million of its \$2.01 million request and expiring grants, attorney vacancies and lost senior funding threaten critical services territory-wide.

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Legal Services of the Virgin Islands says it is “running on fumes” as it waits for approximately \$1 million in government allotments, relies on grant funding to cover operating gaps and faces an FY2027 recommendation from the Office of Management and Budget that is less than half of what the organization requested.

Executive Director Shelby King Gaddy told the Senate Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance on Friday that LSVI received no territorial allotments for more than a year despite the Legislature having appropriated the money.

Between March 2025 and June 2026, LSVI “did not get any allotments from the VI Government even though these funds had previously been appropriated,” she testified.

A lump-sum payment received in June did not bring the organization current. Ms. King Gaddy said it represented only the “past due quarterly allotment of funds...through the first quarter of FY2026.”

LSVI is asking lawmakers to approve its full \$2,007,700 request for FY2027 and ensure that its outstanding FY2026 allotments are released.

Grant Funding Used to Cover Government Shortfall

To continue providing legal services throughout the territory, LSVI has had to “move money around” and use available grant funding to cover expenses ordinarily supported by local appropriations.

Some of those grants will expire September 30, 2026, while others have already ended.

Senator Kurt Violet described the delayed allotments as “an issue.”

Ms. King Gaddy agreed, calling the situation a “major concern and problem for us.”

The organization has continued providing services despite the funding delays, but its ability to keep shifting restricted grant money to cover other needs is narrowing as awards expire.

Senior Legal Services Funding Has not Arrived in Years

Questions from Senator Ray Fonseca revealed that LSVI has also gone several years without receiving grant funding normally provided through the Department of Human Services for legal services to residents age 60 and older.

Ms. King Gaddy said LSVI typically received money from Human Services to support that work, but “we have not received that in quite some number of years.”

The amount was previously “\$60,000, maybe \$75,000 one year,” she said.

Senator Marvin Blyden asked what steps had been taken to resolve the matter.

“We’ve made contact. It just had not happened yet,” Ms. King Gaddy responded.

She emphasized that LSVI has continued serving senior residents despite not receiving the expected funding.

LSVI requested \$2,007,700 for FY2027, but OMB recommended only \$1 million.

Ms. King Gaddy told Mr. Violet that the organization had only recently learned of the recommended amount and had not discussed with OMB why the request was reduced by more than half.

She said the full request would “allow us to maintain the status quo at our present level of service delivery, while properly staffing to reduce potential burnout and loss of attorney staff.”

The organization is already operating with several attorney vacancies and has struggled for years to rebuild its legal workforce.

Five Attorneys Lost in Two Years

Since 2018, LSVI has been in a “continuous building posture to replace experienced attorney resources...” Ms. King Gaddy said.

The organization has lost five attorneys during the past two years, “primarily due to attorneys seeking higher salaries in government attorney positions.”

Although LSVI has recently filled some vacancies, it still needs a managing attorney and a staff attorney on St. Thomas, along with a staff attorney on St. Croix.

To continue meeting demand with limited personnel, the organization has had to “reimagine, restructure, and realign job functions,” Ms. King Gaddy stated.

A reduction in government funding would further complicate LSVI’s efforts to recruit and retain attorneys.

Ms. King Gaddy said LSVI intends to create a resource-development plan that includes establishing a “pipeline for new hires from law schools by offering internships and fellowships.”

Training will also be an important part of that plan, but the loss or expiration of grant funding is expected to reduce the money available for professional development.

Grants provided through programs including the Violence Against Women Act previously allowed LSVI to train attorneys and “anyone who had constant contact with victims of domestic violence.”

The organization has since relied on “other funds from our other budget sources in order to make sure that our people are still trained and that they’re still sensitized,” Ms. King Gaddy explained.

LSVI’s central budget requests are approval of the full \$2,007,700 sought for FY2027 and the release of the remaining FY2026 allotments already appropriated by the Legislature.

Committee Chairman Novelle Francis Jr. told Ms. King Gaddy that the request is “reasonable and it will be considered during our budget mark up period.”