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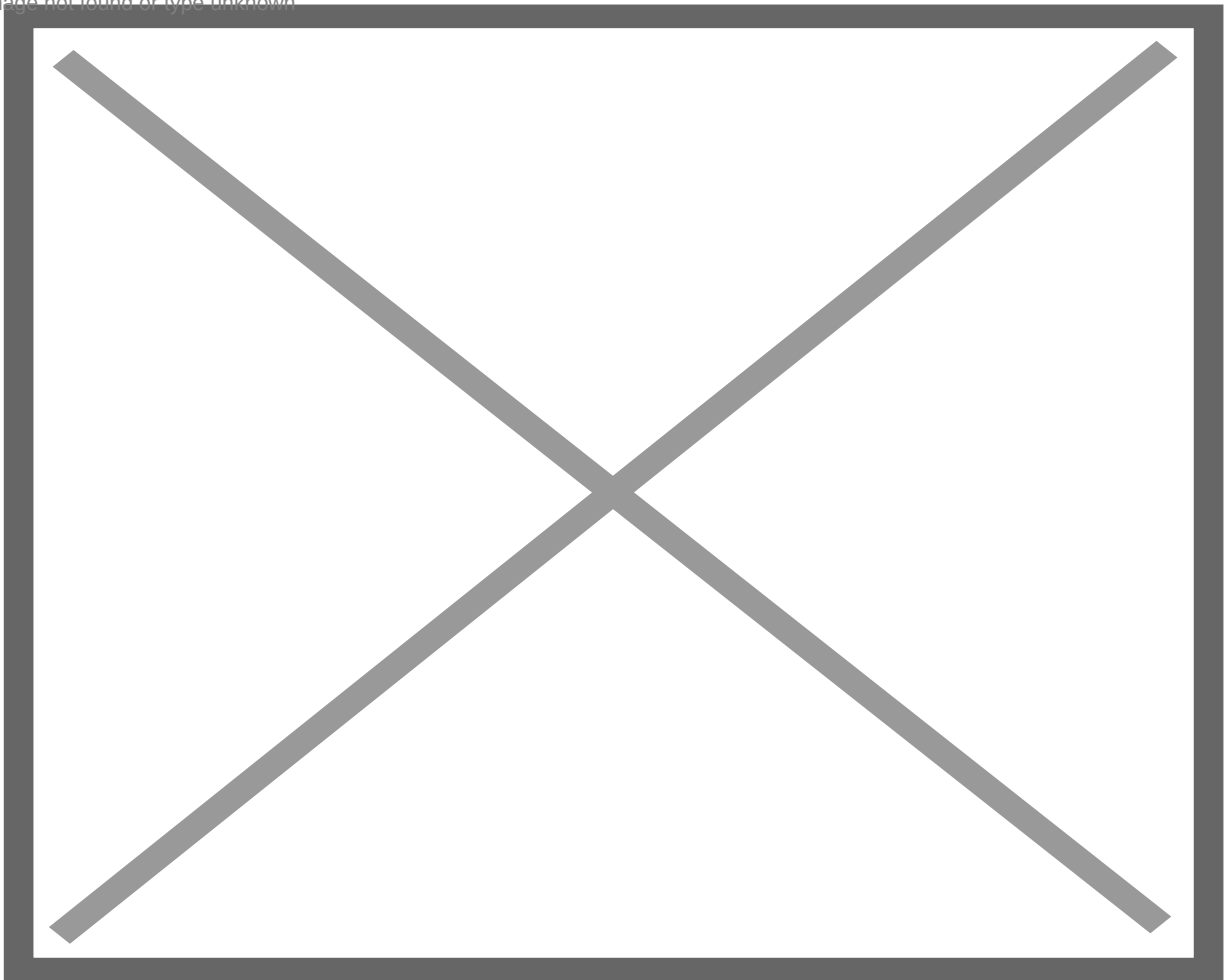
Budget Committee Advances \$150K VIDE Asset Inventory Bill; Contract Cost Put at About \$90K

Bill 36-0308 would fund a territory-wide inventory of roughly 486 federally funded VIDE assets valued at \$5,000 or more. Though the measure appropriates \$150,000, officials said the contractor's actual price is about \$90,000 and the bill will be revised.

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Nelcia Charlemagne **August 21, 2026**

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The Senate Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance has approved funding for the V.I. Department of Education to conduct a biennial inventory of approximately 486 federally funded assets across 65 sites, an exercise officials say is necessary for federal compliance and must be completed and validated by September 30.

Bill 36-0308, sponsored by Senator Kurt Violet, appropriates \$150,000 from the Virgin Islands Education Initiative Fund for the assessment. However, VIDE Assistant Commissioner Victor Somme III later told lawmakers that the actual contract associated with the inventory is approximately \$90,000, and Sen. Violet is expected to revise the measure to reflect that amount.

The assessment is necessary for VIDE's compliance with U.S. Department of Education administrative requirements and is not the first such inventory undertaken by the department. Sen. Violet said the process allows VIDE to "fully account for the assets and provides a level of transparency."

The inventory will cover federally funded assets valued at \$5,000 or more. Mr. Somme said conducting the assessment "will strengthen the Department's ability to accurately identify, document, safeguard, and account for these resources."

Among the property to be inventoried are vehicles, commercial stoves and ovens, interactive boards, playground equipment, certain musical instruments including concert tubas, and multifunction printers and copiers. The total number of assets requiring review is "approximately 486," Mr. Somme said.

VIDE plans to conduct the St. Croix portion of the physical count from August 31 through September 9. Inventory work in the St. Thomas-St. John District is scheduled from September 11 through September 22, leaving the department to complete and validate the territory-wide count by September 30.

The assessment will not be performed by VIDE employees. Mr. Somme described the use of an outside entity as a "special condition" imposed by the U.S. Department of Education.

VIDE has consequently contracted Bondurant Enterprises, Inc., d/b/a Pro-Bar to conduct the work. Mr. Somme said using the contractor is also necessary because of the "scope of the work and the limited workforce in the Department's Division of Fixed Asset Management."

Explaining the original \$150,000 appropriation, Mr. Somme said the "appropriated amount of \$150,000 accounts for the projected logistical costs of mobilizing teams across all three islands to the sixty-five distinct sites within a condensed timeframe..." The funding would also cover the "specialized, technical expertise required for fixed asset reconciliation and the subsequent integration in the Department's system of record."

Mr. Somme subsequently confirmed that the contract itself is valued at approximately \$90,000, prompting the expected revision to the amount contained in Bill 36-0308.

Beyond maintaining federal compliance, VIDE expects the inventory to "provide greater transparency and accountability in the management of taxpayer-funded property" and "assist in identifying lost, damaged, obsolete, or unaccounted-for assets."