

The Virgin Islands Consortium

30th Legislature 2015 Budget Increased By \$3 Million

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The 30th Legislature of the United States Virgin Islands passed its own budget of \$21 million for fiscal year 2015 on Tuesday, up from \$19 million the year prior-- representing an increase of \$3 million.

The increase is significant because various branches of government, over the months, have argued for budget increases with little to no success. In fact, most government agencies have had to sustain budget cuts as the ongoing recession, mostly caused by the shuttering of HOVENSA in 2012, has been used by officials as cause for the cuts.

The Juan F. Luis Hospital and Medical Center (JFL) is the only hospital on St. Croix, and over the years, its budget has seen significant cuts from \$33 million in 2008 to about \$17

million in 2014. The budget cuts have forced JFL to cut back in key departments, producing a chain reaction leading to the lack of staff to perform critical tasks, nursing deficiencies and other problems.

The hospital [recently](#) lost its accreditation.

In August, Department of Agriculture Commissioner Louis Petersen, Jr. said [there could be a halt in meat sales](#) in the territory if the Department failed to comply with federal standards by September. Petersen cited budget constraints as the main reason for the ills at his department, highlighting concerns at the abattoir division in relation to safety, physical infrastructure and, most importantly, staffing.

DOA had overtime lost critical staff positions and has not been able to fill them. Petersen also revealed that many of his already overworked staff had to perform triple duties to keep the department running, including his supervisors and directors.

"In general, staff morale and productivity have been negatively impacted as a result of low, stagnant wages and overworked conditions due to staff shortages," Petersen said, adding that staff members were left with no other choice but to seek second jobs.