

The Virgin Islands Consortium

De Jongh Blocked Inspector General From Traveling To Receive Training For Almost 8 Years

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ST. THOMAS -- The John P. de Jongh administration barred the Inspector General's Office from traveling off island to receive important training for over 7 years, hamstringing the office's efforts to learn best practices in its challenge of keeping honest various government departments and agencies.

That's what the territory's Inspector General, Steven van Beverhoudt, told members of the Senate Committee on Finance at the Earl B. Ottley Legislative Hall on Wednesday, while presenting his fiscal year 2016 budget of approximately \$2 million.

"This past June, for the first time in almost eight years, we were able to meet our continued professional education or CPE requirements by attending the 26th Annual Association of Certified Fraud Examiners Global Fraud Conference in Baltimore," van Beverhoudt said. The inspector general also thanked Governor Kenneth Mapp for allowing his team to take the trip.

Aside from the indelible training, the conference, van Beverdoudt noted, allowed his office to network with other investigators from around the country and the world.

Van Beverhoudt revealed that even if his office has funds available for travel, or to hire and perform other such important tasks, "I have to get the governor's blessing to hire the [Attorney General and Budget's] approval that the funds are there and everything is in order," he revealed.



Virgin Islands Inspector General Steven van Beverhoudt.

Senators, recognizing the need for transparency in government, promised to take action on a measure that would truly give complete independence to the IG's Office.

"Colleagues, we will always have a problem if, like Mr. van Beverhoudt said, he's been denied to go to necessary training," Sen. Terrence "Positive" Nelson, said. "We are hearing here, at the discretion of a chief executive, the operations of this office can be stymied.

"Well, if I'm a chief executive not operating on the up-and-up, I can get the heat off my back by just shortcutting your office, one way or the other, denying you certain training or denying certain access to funds," Nelson added.

The senator stressed the importance of untying the IG's Office from the governor, because "what takes away from all our efforts is the long term embedded corruption in this government," contended Nelson.

Nelson said everyone's talking about corruption within the government but no one has been able to track it.

"I can put my finger on some of it," Nelson went on, "but we need to be able to have something done about it because that's my problem: watching it, identifying it, is one thing, but when nothing is done about it, it's not very interesting after that."

Committee Chairman Sen. Graham said there's a bill currently in circulation "that truly will give the Inspector General's Office independency; because as long as you're under the control of the executive branch, they can limit what you can do and who you audit," Graham said.

Graham added that while it is commendable that van Beverhoudt has a good working relationship with the current administration, "truth be told, you'll probably have a good working relationship with any administration coming in until you do the first audit of that administration, and then we wonder where the relationship will go after that."

Of the \$2 million budget, van Beverhoudt said \$1,619,628 is for personnel and fringe benefits.

"As previously stated, currently there are four vacant positions within the VI Inspector General's Office, two in the St. Croix District and two in the St. Thomas/St. John District. Having recently received approval to fill the positions, we hope to be fully staffed to our approved level of 18 employees by the beginning of the 2016 Fiscal Year. Also, as previously stated, the proposed funding level for Fiscal Year 2016 includes funds for salary adjustments for the staff of the agency," van Beverhoudt said.

The IG also requested \$100,000 for capital outlays in order to update his office's computer systems territory-wide.

"The last update of our computers was in Fiscal Year 2002. With the rapid enhancements in technology, our computers are outdated and very slow, often times resulting in very frustrating delays in accessing and opening files," van Beverdoudt made known.

To close, the inspector general said his office "continues to do the best we can with the resources provided. We have an excellent and professional group of employees who are committed to do all that is possible to help the Government to be effective and efficient in carrying out its responsibilities for the people of the Virgin Islands.

"Can we use more funds, hire more auditors and investigators? Sure we can; however, in view of the state of the economy and the Government, we are not requesting additional funding at this time. Our only request is that the level of funding be maintained and allotted at the Fiscal Year 2015 level of \$2,000,000."

The IG's Office budget breakdown and testimony can be read [here](#).