

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bureau Of Corrections Aims To Raise Base Pay Of Employees To \$30K

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ST. THOMAS -- Bureau of Corrections Acting Director Rick Mullgrav, along with other members of his team, gave testimony at the Earl B. Ottley Legislative Hall on Wednesday during the Bureau's FY2016 budget hearing, seeking \$30.5 million, most of which will be appropriated from the general fund.

One of the main issues that took hold at yesterday's hearing was the need to increase the agency's base salary.

The Bureau's starting pay is currently at \$24,500 during the probation period, which lasts for one year, and moves up to \$27,000 annually thereafter. Mullgrav said BOC is looking

to increase the base salary to \$30,000 to not only boost morale of employees who haven't seen wage increases in years, but also be able to attract new talent from outside the territory. He said the Bureau is currently working with the Division of Personnel on a marketing campaign.

"What I'm looking at is something at least equivalent to the other law enforcement agencies, mainly the police department. If we had something equivalent to what they make, we would tend not to lose people to these other agencies as well," Mullgrav said.

Aside from salary, Mullgrav said a lot of work needed to be done at BOC in multiple areas. He mentioned the morale of employees, security, practices and procedures, and structure.

"We've lost things through the translation over the years," Mullgrav remarked, adding that BOC's infrastructure "is really in poor shape, and it's hard to keep people in those kind of conditions."

There are about 300 prisoners on St. Croix and just over 200 here. Mullgrav said new facilities would be the best course of action for the Bureau, one with updated technology to meet 21st Century needs in relation to security and other indelible aspects of running a successful corrections agency.

The acting director estimated that new facilities on both islands would cost roughly \$150 million in total, and agreed with Senator Myran Jackson that they could be erected in phases.

"Phase one would be to build at least two mental health units that can take in and control a small population," Mullgrav said. He added that the facility here could possibly be built on property owned by BOC at its current location.

And in regards to staffing, because of the adverse working conditions at the facilities, Mullgrav confirmed that BOC has been losing employees to retirement, resignations and termination. "The absence of these employees drastically challenge our daily operations," he said. "The loss of one officer, for one day, has a significant impact on our ability to function, more so than most agencies."

Feature Image: Golden Grove Correctional Facility.