

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Fiscal Year 2017 Budget Bill Of \$720 Million Heads To Governor; Includes Several Amendments

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ST. THOMAS -- Governor Kenneth Mapp is expected to sign into law Bill No. 31-0403, the government's fiscal year 2017 budget bill totaling \$720 million (actual amount is \$719.84), which covers operating costs for a myriad of agencies, semiautonomous entities and departments.

As has always been the case with such measures, 31st Legislature senators tacked on a surfeit of amendments to the main bill. Below are some of the bigger additions:

- Making available extra funding for the Herbert Grigg Home for the Aged for additional staff

- Some \$20,000 in funds set aside through the Department of Sports, Parks and Recreation for the expansion of the St. Croix Central High School library, to be redistributed for a construction of a skateboard park in St. Croix
- \$500,000 from the Virgin Islands Education Initiative Fund for the implementation of what has been dubbed "structured civics classes" in the territory's schools.
- \$1 million for the training and hiring of school monitors in both districts. The original amendment only included St. Thomas, but the amendment was amended by Senator Kurt Vialet to include St. Croix
- \$4 million from the St. Croix Capital Improvement Fund in the 2017 budget to the Department of Public Works for the repairing of roads.
- \$1.5 million from the St. Croix Capital Improvement Fund in the 2017 budget to the Virgin Islands Public Broadcasting System for the purchase of needed equipment
- \$2.4 million in both the 2017 and 2018 budgets from the St. Croix Capital Improvement Fund to the Virgin Islands Port Authority to be used as matching funds for federal grants under the [Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery](#) (TIGER) grant, for the [St. Croix Molasses](#) Pier Enhancement project.
- \$100,000 reallocation from the Virgin Islands Cultural Institute to the University of the Virgin Islands Caribbean Cultural Center
- \$650,000 from the Crime Prevention and Prosecution Fund to the local Department of Justice for the funding of a forensic lab.

Senators also approved the following bills:

- Bill No.31-0469, relating to the licensure of physicians and expanding the conditions under which the Virgin Islands Board of Medical Examiners may issue temporary and special licenses to practice medicine in the Virgin Islands. A similar measure [was vetoed](#) by Governor Kenneth Mapp in August.
- A Novelle Francis-sponsored measure which [attempts to delay tipping fees](#).
- Bill No. 31-0439, which appropriates operating expenses funds to the judicial branch of government, as well as the Office of the Territorial Public Defender.
- Bill No. 31-0417, which appropriates \$95.9 million from the Internal Revenue Matching Fund to the Department of Human Services and the Department of Finance.

Notably, senators overrode [Mr. Mapp's veto](#) of Senator Janette Millin Young's bill calling for a comprehensive study of violence and public health in the territory.

Also on Thursday, [senators passed a \\$247 million borrowing measure](#), of which \$100 million will go towards G.E.R.S.'s unfunded liability.

Feature Image: Earl B. Ottley Legislative Building, St. Thomas. (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, VIC)