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WTJX to Host First Ever Radio Pledge Drive to Offset 10 Percent Budget Cut

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WTJX CEO Tanya Singh

ST. THOMAS – Tanya-Marie Singh, CEO of the Virgin Islands Public Television Station, WTJX, testified Tuesday during a budget hearing in the Committee on Finance, revealing that WTJX would host its first ever 12-hour radio pledge drive on December 1-2 to support radio programming following a budget cut of 10 percent.

The fiscal year 2021 budget of \$3,627,111.00, submitted by Governor Albert Bryan, shows a ten percent decrease in the station's budget from fiscal year 2020 resulting in a \$400,000.00 shortfall.

WTJX has been operational for 48 years. The communications network is the sole Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) member in the territory, and the only National Public Radio (NPR)

member station serving the USVI. The network reduced its manpower by a total of six employees in order to accommodate the budget cut and has been in telework mode since March 17, 2020, according to Ms. Singh.

Ms. Singh said PBS provides its member stations with programming that covers a myriad of subjects to include education, politics, mental health, children's fare, and news and public affairs. It supports the educational development of individuals beginning at the preschool level to adults over 50, with their AARP programming. The station is part of two national brands that are trusted sources of education and inspiration and is made available to the community and nearly every household at no cost. Its organic reach extends beyond the USVI to the British and Spanish Virgin Islands, as well as the easternmost parts of Puerto Rico, said the CEO.

WTJX planned and executed the eTeacher Network, which features 18 hours of content each week, Monday through Thursday, on behalf of the VI Department of Education. The program runs for a period of eight weeks and the target audience is students from K through 12. The eTeacher network provides students with a carefully curated compilation of programming from WTJX, PBS, and other PBS stations (WHRO and East Tennessee PBS) with lessons on science, math, English Language Arts, V.I. History and more. Local teachers are featured providing instruction through pre-recorded video links.

Yet even with all its important programming to the community, Ms. Singh said the station is still in a fragile state of disrepair after Hurricanes Irma and Maria damaged its facilities, with 19 project worksheets in the FEMA grants management system, 14 of which have been obligated. Even so, Ms. Singh said the slow pace in receiving recovery dollars has not deterred her team. Senator Donna Frett-Gregory said she would look into why funding was taking so long.

"The continual delays with FEMA have been the resounding discussion for the majority of departments that come before the legislative body and you have been challenged since the 2017 storms. I am going to have to look into that," she said.

Ms. Frett-Gregory posed the question of fundraising as a means to offset the budget shortfall. Ms. Singh pointed out that while WTJX employees have gone without raises for a couple of years because of lack of funding, they have adjusted. The CEO also confirmed that she received a raise of \$42,000 in the fiscal year 2021 budget, moving from a salary of \$98,000 to \$140,000.

WTJX has a director of development and fundraising who focuses on generating income ideas and is actively working with the board to facilitate it, the CEO said.

Senator Allison DeGazon inquired if WTJX had access to a grants manager who is specifically committed to sourcing funding and is skilled at generating streams of income to provide for programming. Ms. Singh committed to securing a grants manager and Ms. Degazon encouraged her to consider adding the request to the budget. The senator emphasized that additional funding could provide for programs which focus on teaching the territory's youth about personal finances and V.I. history, and she voiced her willingness to help the station work to that end. Senator Janelle Sarauw asserted that Math would be a great addition to the program line up as well.

Despite the personnel shortages and decrease in funding WTJX has experienced, all of the station's vendors are paid on time and there were no findings in the station's annual financial audit. Senator Novelle Francis applauded what he said was WTJX's accomplishments and excellent work ethic.

