

The Virgin Islands Consortium

V.I.P.D. Overtime Costs Topped \$30 Million In 2018. Bryan Administration Wants To Stop The Excessive Spending.

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Ernice Gilbert **April 25, 2019**



The Bryan administration is looking into ways of curbing excessive overtime spending by government departments and agencies, chief among them the Virgin Islands Police Department.

That's according to Office of Management and Budget Director Nominee Jenifer C. O'Neal, speaking to senators during a Rules and Judiciary Committee hearing on Wednesday, where her nomination was forwarded favorably to the full Senate.

The government's recently launched transparency website revealed that many police officers, because of overtime, made on average between \$150,000 to \$250,000 -- a gargantuan increase over their base salaries -- in 2018. Police officer salaries start at roughly \$44,000, with others earning \$65,000 and most not more than \$100,000. See the 2018 salaries [here](#).

"I will say senator, the overtime as we know it is a major, major problem. The biggest culprit as we all know is V.I.P.D. I have no qualms in saying that the biggest culprit is V.I.P.D.," Ms. O'Neal told lawmakers.

She said O.M.B. has had conversations with Acting V.I.P.D. Commissioner Jason Marsh about the problem. Ms. O'Neal also said an effort is afoot to lower shift work from 12 to 10 hours, along with getting an additional 50 officers in the police force.

Senator Donna Frett-Gregory, along with the other senators at Wednesday's hearing, expressed concern with the excessive V.I.P.D. overtime. "This is a serious matter. We know about our economic situation here in the territory," Mrs. Frett-Gregory said.

To solve the problem, Ms. O'Neal made known that the administration is looking into putting in place mechanisms that would trigger the government's ERP system, which, among other functions, manages payroll. The trigger, she explained, would essentially stop payment when red flags are detected.

"Currently the process is payroll is processed regardless. However, that is being changed. We're working with the ERP to put the same trigger that is there for all the other categories, to put that on personnel," Ms. O'Neal explained.

She acknowledged that such a move would be controversial, but nonetheless necessary: "Now, we will have people who will say we didn't get paid. But it will stop them the first time it happens [and] they will know you can't continue. So that's how we're going to start the process of controlling it."

Mrs. Frett-Gregory, recognizing the potential dangers of such an approach, discouraged it. "You see what that can create, right? I don't think that's the right approach," she said. "I'm on the other side of the table and my concern here is you cannot ask officers, employees to work overtime because the government needs them, and then we don't pay them. And in the case of the Virgin Islands Police Department, I am certain that [overtime] is caused for several reasons, but I'm also aware that we are very short staffed. So please be mindful of that, because we don't need any unnecessary riots here in the Virgin Islands, or union issues because of those types of decisions."

Ms. O'Neal said officers would get their overtime pay with the new setup, but the process would become more thorough.

"Putting that trigger on is the first step. We will have those conversations with those departments that are traditionally overspending on overtime, but we're not saying that the employees will not get paid; they will get paid, it just won't be as easy for them to get paid as it is now," she said.

Senator Kenneth Gittens did not mince words on what he described as brazen abuse. "Fifty additional officers would not stop the waste, fraud and abuse that I'm seeing. It's a

matter of management. I have repeatedly stated I do not see a money problem in the Virgin Islands, our major problem is the management of these funds," the lawmaker said. "And until we get people to start doing what they're supposed to do, we're going to have a problem." Ms. O'Neal agreed with the senator.

And Mr. Gittens, a former law enforcement officer himself, said that even with the more than \$30 million in overtime the V.I.P.D. expended last year, he had not seen positive results of such spending: "What irate me a bit more is I don't see the productivity of it all. If somebody wants to sit in this community and play dumb, death and blind, that's on them, but I don't see the productivity."