

The Virgin Islands Consortium

New B.O.C. Director Wants 800-Room Prison On St. Croix; Violet Pushes Back: We Need Fluff For Education, Not Penal Facilities

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Ernice Gilbert **July 24, 2019**



Bureau of Corrections Director Wynn Timerman said at B.O.C.'s budget hearing on Tuesday that an 800-room prison is needed on St. Croix to replace the current one in Golden Grove, which Ms. Timerman has said is old and outdated. On St. Thomas, she said a 300-room prison would be sufficient, bringing the total number of rooms for penal institutions in the territory to 1,100, if the new director's vision were to hold. She said in light of the territory's difficult financial position, the new facilities would be built through public-private partnerships.

"One consideration, now being explored, is to have a private company build the facility we need, then sell it back to us under a long-term funding agreement," said Ms. Testamark.

She said the rooms would accommodate mental patients, temporary federal prisoners and local inmates. "To encompass all the different classifications of inmates the Virgin Islands has, we need to build for the future and not necessarily what we have currently," Ms. Testamark said.

But her plan came under immediate fire, specifically from Senator Kurt Vialet, who said the director's idea amounted to an insult to the territory.

"We're not talking about schools, we're not talking about economic development, we're talking about penal institutions. So I am very offended when this number has increased by some 800 projected beds that is embedded in your testimony," Mr. Vialet said. "These are the numbers that you have, so those numbers just got to be fluff. An 800-bed facility is embedded here. How? The Virgin Islands never in its history has had so many prisoners. Even if we project a hundred more we're not going to reach those numbers.

"And we want preventative programs; we want to reduce the prison population," Mr. Vialet went on, adding that with the [recent passage of the medicinal marijuana law](#), some inmates will need to be released because of decriminalized offenses.

Ms. Testamark responded by stating that the number of beds also include consideration in case of storms or emergency, where prisoners would need to be moved from one facility to the next. Her response, however, did not quell the veteran senator's angst.

"You think the Government of the Virgin Islands has that kind of fluff? We want a shelter for the people of the Virgin Islands, not building fluff. So that whole number needs to be revisited. That whole paragraph is totally, dead wrong. Totally, totally off. And I don't know if this was through your consulting part or this is from your analysis, but when you come before the Legislature, present information based on the facts in front of you and what is taking place at those facilities now. Have those numbers; you're hired now," chided Mr. Vialet.

He then mentioned the director's salary, increased under the Bryan administration by \$15,000 to \$115,000 annually.

"You're the director. A hundred and fifteen thousand dollars to put this together, so I don't want to see fluff and this is fluff. I would love to see fluff in the Department of Education with facilities for our children, etc., but not penal."

Following the castigating, Ms. Testamark said a 500-room prison on St. Croix would work.

B.O.C. is seeking \$34.3 million for its fiscal year 2020 budget.