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# '\$1 Million Ain't Enough' to Execute Successful 175th Emancipation Commemoration, Committee Tells Senators

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**Carol M. Burke, the chairwoman of the ECC. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE**

The Emancipation Commemoration Committee (ECC) has said that it does not have enough money to fund the operation of the 175th celebration of Emancipation, despite a commitment from Governor Albert Bryan Jr. in July 2022, to budget \$1 million toward the activities.

According to Carol M. Burke, the chairwoman of the ECC, only \$250,000 became available to them in January of 2023 and already a third of that sum has been spent to survey capital projects such as the transformation of Frederiksted roadway to Emancipation Drive.

“I think we need \$150,000 to support our operations....We don't have that now because that money is not in the budget. So, without that it's difficult," she said, noting that the money appropriated is “just about depleted.”

She told legislators on the Committee on Culture, Youth, Aging, Sports and Parks that they have been unable to use the funds that are available for activities such as renting office space or for travel to meetings and appearances.

"We have had to depend and rely on the Chief of Staff, Carl Knight at Government House because originally there were funds to be available for those specific purposes," she said.

According to Ms. Burke, the committee had resorted to meeting virtually in order to execute the work. And although the governor anticipated robust youth involvement in the milestone Emancipation celebrations, without the additional funds, she said the committee has not been able to engage schools.

“We need to go into the schools on island. We need to do these things and we can’t do them because of the cost of travel and we just can’t even afford nor are we even allowed to access the other funds that are dedicated for other things that are not operational,” she explained.

Meanwhile, despite comments from some in the community suggesting that the \$1 million allocated is excessive, Ms. Burke said "a million dollars ain't enough.... We'll never have 175 years to celebrate ever again. This is a moment in time for all of us to give the best of us," she stated.

Efforts to raise funds are also underway.

"We have engaged the Seven Flags to contribute generously to the 175th emancipation commemoration events," ECC secretary, Teri Helenese added. She said they have until March 31st to respond to the committee's request and to let the ECC know how much they will be contributing.

Senator Novelle Francis told the chairman that it was her responsibility to demand the extra funds. “This is too important of an issue for us to be having discussion about an office space,” he remarked after starting his contribution by outlining the need to add Virgin Islands history into the school curriculum.

“This is too important of an issue to be talking about limited resources. We should not be shortchanging ourselves during this 175th commemoration. Otherwise, we’re cheating ourselves, we’re being counter-productive and we’re continuing the slave mentality if we’re not able to make an impact and step out,” he insisted.

The milestone anniversary will posthumously honor 175 people called Keepers of the Flame, in keeping with the 175th anniversary celebration.