



Legislature of the Virgin Islands

# PRESS RELEASE

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July 19, 2016

## **FY 2017 BUDGET: CRUCIAN CHRISTMAS CARNIVAL, ST. JOHN FESTIVAL, V.I. CARNIVAL COMMITTEE, DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM**

ST.THOMAS—The Committee on Finance, chaired by Sen. Clifford F. Graham, continued the budget hearing process Tuesday, with representatives from the Crucian Christmas Carnival, St. John Festival and Cultural Organization and the Virgin Islands Carnival Committee, at the Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall.

For FY 2017, Davidson Charlemagne, Chair of the Crucian Christmas Festival proposed a budget of \$520,000; Leona Smith, Chair of the St. John Festival and Organization proposed a budget request of \$320,000; and Halvor E. Hart III, Executive Director for the Virgin Islands Carnival Committee on St. Thomas, proposed budget of \$1,150,000.

Senators spoke of ways to increase participation and attendance, optimize budgets, cut costs and improve the overall experience for revelers.

“You’re all providing similar service to each of your respective islands,” he said. As a result, it’s best that “we have the combined discussion on how we can move forward and have a better carnival/festival with the limited resources we have. Because all we’re doing is duplicating services and it’s costing the government money.”

Sen. Kurt A. Violet, the Committee Vice Chair, spoke to the reduction in the quality of some of the carnival offerings that once attracted large mature crowds and explored the possible reasons for why the drastic changes have occurred.

“The Queen Shows to a certain degree, have become more high school shows, than the maturity level, the sophistication, that was there before. And on St. Croix we have been lucky that we have had a number of college girls that are running on a regular basis, but the format of the show, the entertainment,” he said. The mature crowds, “want to come to a nice show where you have individuals that are going to reflect a more mature show,” he added. This demographic too, is more inclined to spend, he said.

The Committee Vice Chair also spoke to the need for more inter-island participation for each island’s festivities and referenced the St. John Festival and Cultural Organization who pay for parade-related costs such as bands and barge transportation for participating troupes.

“We have to somehow offer some type of incentive that is going to have troops back and forth,” he said.

Sen. Graham shared a similar sentiment.

“What I’d like to see is a greater collaboration between the three,” he said. “Especially in some of the resources that you can share. I know in your testimony St. Thomas, you talked about buying the stage. But your stage is only going to be used for a small portion out of the entire year. So maybe what the government can do is provide the seed money to acquire a stage.” Then it can then be moved from island to island when needed, he said.

Sen. Janette Millin Young “Culture sells and people all over love our culture,” she said. Sen. Millin Young also spoke to the decrease in participation and encouraged all three entities to focus on better marketing.

“Beyond marketing, since you start planning for the next carnival, festival, celebration right away, people should know, revelers should know, what the schedule is.”

Such improvements would better allow visitors to plan ahead and participate, she said.

“The festival arts are very important and I commend all of you for the work that you do on behalf of the people of the Virgin Islands, but we have some ways to go in the way of our festival arts,” said Sen. Jackson.

Later, the Committee heard testimony from the Department of Tourism.

“The total budget request of the Department of Tourism is \$28,284,605. Of that amount, \$25,385,000 or 90% will be allocated from the Tourism Advertising Revolving Fund (TARF) to cover our marketing and promotional expenses, which are projected to be \$24,000,000 in FY 2017, and to support Carnival initiatives at a cost of \$1,385,000. Two million six hundred nine thousand six hundred and five dollars (\$2,609,605) or 9% has been designated for the Department’s operational expenses and the remaining two hundred ninety thousand dollars (\$290,000) is covered under the miscellaneous portion of the General Fund as grants,” said Doty.

At press time, the discussion continued.

All committee members, including Senators Marvin A. Blyden, Clifford F. Graham, Myron D. Jackson, Positive T.A. Nelson, Tregenza A. Roach, Sammuell L. Sanes, and Kurt A. Vialet, were present. Non-committee member, Sen. Janette Millin Young, was also present.



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