

**VIRGIN ISLANDS FIRE AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES
BUDGET TESTIMONY
FISCAL YEAR 2026**



**COMMITTEE ON BUDGET, APPROPRIATIONS AND FINANCE
36th LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS**

June 24, 2025

Presented By: Antonio O. Stevens, Director

Good afternoon Honorable Senator Novelle Francis Jr., Chairperson of the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance, other distinguished members of the 36th Legislature, and the viewing and listening audience.

I am Antonio O. Stevens, Director of the Virgin Islands Fire and Emergency Medical Services (VIFEMS). Appearing with me are the members of the VIFEMS Executive Leadership Team, which include Assistant Director of EMS Lisle Evelyn, Assistant Director of Fire Clarence Stephenson, Chief Financial Officer Charmaine Akers-Hewlett, Director of HR and Payroll Barbara Williams-Brown, Medical Director Robin Ellett, Territorial Training Coordinator Michael Lewis, St. Thomas/St. John Fire Chief Eustace Grant Jr., St. Croix Fire Chief Klebert Titus, St. Thomas/St. John EMS Chief Victor Adams, St. Croix EMS Chief Robert Bryan, St. John Deputy Chief Magabe Calixte, St. Croix Deputy Chief Paul Christian, and St. Thomas Deputy Chief Craig Wade.

We are before you today to present the proposed VIFEMS budget for Fiscal Year 2026.

Agency Overview

The Virgin Islands Fire and Emergency Medical Services is an all-hazards, emergency response agency with the core mission of protecting life and property.

The agency employs 285 personnel, 252 of which are first responders trained in various disciplines. Employees are organized into four units: the Suppression Unit, the EMS Unit, the Arson Prevention and Investigation Unit, and the Administrative Unit.

Comprised of single and dual-role firefighters, the Suppression Unit responds to fires, medical emergencies, technical rescue incidents, and emergencies involving hazardous materials.

The Arson Investigation and Prevention Unit is responsible for conducting fire investigations, enforcing fire and life-safety codes, and educating the public on fire prevention. This unit is staffed by Inspectors and led by the Fire Marshal.

The EMS Unit provides pre-hospital emergency and non-emergent medical care, and its members are single-role, Nationally Registered EMS practitioners. The unit is also assisted by dual role EMRs, EMTs and Paramedics.

The Administrative Unit manages the agency's human resources functions and fiscal activities and is staffed by unsworn, administrative professionals.

VIFEMS operates 10 fire stations, 2 EMS bases, and 3 administrative offices. Each fire station and EMS base is strategically located to ensure emergency responses are timely and efficient. Emergency response vehicles and other assets are assigned to each station based on operational needs.

Budget Overview

Agency operations are funded by General Fund appropriations, non-appropriated funds, and federal grant awards.

General Fund Appropriation

The requested general fund appropriation for Fiscal Year 2026 is \$35,224,463, which is an increase from the Fiscal Year 2025 appropriation of \$31,058,050.

With wages and fringe benefits projected to total \$34,521,275, personnel costs will account for 98% of this appropriation.

Other Legislative Appropriation

To effectuate the transfer of fees billed and collected for ambulance services by the Department of Health on behalf of VIFEMS, an additional \$1.4 million will be appropriated to the agency with this body's approval.

Non-Appropriated Funds

The primary source of local, non-appropriated funds for VIFEMS is monies collected by the agency for inspections, permits and other services. These funds are deposited into the Fire Service Emergency Fund.

Grants

Grant awards will continue to play a critical role in filling funding gaps in Fiscal Year 2026, allowing the agency to fund training and purchase critical equipment and supplies.

Available federal awards total \$859,663.

Each award and their intended use are as follows:

1. Grant: Department of Interior Technical Assistance Program
Available Amount: \$441,043
Intended Use: Purchase of Two Rescue Vehicles
2. Grant: Department of Interior Maintenance Assistance Program award
Available Amount: \$185,891
Intended Use: Purchase of Brush Truck
3. Grant: FEMA Assistance to Firefighter Grant
Available Amount: \$21,942
Intended Use: Driver Training
4. Grant: United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service
Available Amount: \$100,000
Intended Use: Wildland Firefighting Supplies and Training
5. Grant: United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service
Available Amount: \$110,000
Intended Use: Wildland Firefighting Supplies

Disaster Recovery Grants

Federal grant funding will not only fund critical equipment and supply purchases but will also fund the replacement, repair and strengthening of VIFEMS facilities.

Disaster recovery grant awards are available for the following projects:

1. Construction of the Charles A. Seales Fire Station in Grove Place (St. Croix)
2. Demolition and construction of the Renceliar I. Gibbs Fire Station in Cotton Valley (St. Croix)
3. Repair and hardening of the Herbert L. Canegata Fire Station in Richmond and construction of a safe room (St. Croix)
4. Repair and hardening of the Emile Henderson Sr. Fire Station in Frederiksted and construction of a safe room (St. Croix)

5. Demolition and construction of the George P. Scott Fire Station in Anna's Retreat (St. Thomas)
6. Demolition and construction of the Fortuna Fire Station in Fortuna (St. Thomas)
7. Demolition and construction of the Robert O'Connor Fire Station in Cruz Bay (St. John)

Fiscal Year 2025 Accomplishments

In Fiscal Year 2025, as in FY24, VIFEMS worked to build its capacity as an EMS organization.

Since October 2024, VIFEMS has increased the number of Nationally Registered Emergency Medical Technicians employed by the agency by 27, bringing the total number of VIFEMS EMTs to 65. Twelve of the newest EMS providers are Probationary Firefighter/EMTs, who recently completed training. Their graduation marked the completion of the agency's first successful joint fire and EMS training academies.

While contractors conducted previous EMT courses, VIFEMS recently received state certification to operate an Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Education Training Center. This marks a historic milestone, as it is the first time in the territory's history that the agency will have its very own EMS training program.

This accomplishment is more than just a symbolic achievement—it delivers tangible benefits to the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands. Establishing its own training center allows VIFEMS to produce highly qualified instructors from within its ranks, eliminating the need to rely on external institutions and saving significant costs previously spent on outsourcing EMS education and certification.

Additionally, this initiative lays the foundation for a sustainable instructor lineage that will strengthen the department for years to come. By cultivating homegrown educators, VIFEMS ensures continuity, deepens institutional knowledge, and raises the overall level of professionalism and capability within its EMS services. It also creates new pathways for upward mobility and leadership development within the agency's training cadre—an investment in both its people and its future.

Seeking to build capacity in other operational areas, VIFEMS also expanded its marine

assets in this fiscal year, proudly placing the Antonio “Tony” Hendricks fire boat in service in April. This is an accomplishment that the agency shares with this body as the 34th Legislature appropriated funding for the vessel.

Goals for Fiscal Year 2026

For Fiscal Year 2026, VIFEMS’s strategic priorities include increasing staffing, implementing a medical billing system, and expanding the ambulance fleet.

Increasing Staffing

Efforts to increase staffing for the Suppression and EMS units will continue in the upcoming fiscal year. Thirteen (13) candidates have been selected for the recruit training academy in the St. Thomas/St. John District, and the academy is scheduled to begin on June 30.

Implementing a Medical Billing System

Having entered into a contract for medical billing services in FY25, VIFEMS will continue to work on implementing and maintaining a medical billing system in Fiscal Year 2026.

Expanding the Ambulance Fleet

Utilizing funds obtained through Congressional Community Project Funding, VIFEMS has procured seven (7) new ambulances. They are scheduled to ship to the territory in October 2025, and the agency will work on outfitting them with radios and placing them in service in the upcoming fiscal year.

Conclusion

Before concluding, I would like to extend my gratitude to the men and women of the Virgin Islands Fire and Emergency Medical Services for their dedicated service and commitment to protecting life and property in the territory. A special thank you to our Employees of the Year, Ms. Shermaine Lawrence and Ms. Kayla Ventura, for their hard work and contributions to the agency over the last year.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on the proposed VIFEMS budget for Fiscal Year 2026. We await your questions.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A - VIFEMS COLLECTIONS

Territory-FY 2025										
Dates	New Businesses-Terr	Amount Collected	Existing Businesses	Amount Collected	Reinspections	Fines	Late Fees	Misc.	TOTAL INSPECTIONS	TOTAL
Oct-24	114	\$ 17,250.00	257	\$ 37,200.00	3	\$ -	\$ 9,640.00	\$ 7,248.00	374	\$ 71,338.00
Nov-24	79	\$ 11,700.00	228	\$ 33,750.00	8	\$ -	\$ 3,740.00	\$ 7,983.00	315	\$ 57,173.00
Dec-24	74	\$ 10,900.00	297	\$ 38,025.00	8	\$ -	\$ 7,205.00	\$ 6,736.00	379	\$ 62,866.00
Jan-25	72	\$ 10,700.00	319	\$ 43,075.00	5	\$ -	\$ 5,645.00	\$ 5,421.00	396	\$ 64,841.00
Feb-25	75	\$ 11,050.00	358	\$ 52,375.00	3	\$ -	\$ 6,880.00	\$ 6,143.00	436	\$ 76,448.00
Mar-25	84	\$ 13,245.00	284	\$ 42,725.00	4	\$ -	\$ 7,245.00	\$ 7,632.00	372	\$ 70,847.00
Apr-25	93	\$ 14,650.00	298	\$ 44,830.00	3	\$ -	\$ 6,300.00	\$ 8,478.00	394	\$ 74,258.00
May-25	73	\$ 11,850.00	294	\$ 44,850.00	6	\$ -	\$ 8,355.00	\$ 5,391.00	373	\$ 70,446.00
Jun-25	0	\$ -	0	\$ -	0	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	0	\$ -
Jul-25	0	\$ -	0	\$ -	0	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	0	\$ -
Aug-25	0	\$ -	0	\$ -	0	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	0	\$ -
Sep-25	0	\$ -	0	\$ -	0	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	0	\$ -
TOTAL	664	\$101,345.00	2335	\$336,830.00	40	\$ -	\$ 55,010.00	\$55,032.00	3,039	\$548,217.00

Misc.: Plan reviews, sales of badges, pins, hats, certificate retype, fire reports, t-shirts

APPENDIX B- BUSINESSES INSPECTED

Businesses Inspected							
St. Croix FY 2025			St. John FY 2025			St. Thomas FY 2025	
DATES	TOTAL		DATES	TOTAL		DATES	TOTAL
Oct-24	136		Oct-24	38		Oct-24	200
Nov-24	90		Nov-24	29		Nov-24	196
Dec-24	166		Dec-24	22		Dec-24	191
Jan-25	150		Jan-25	39		Jan-25	207
Feb-25	146		Feb-25	44		Feb-25	246
Mar-25	122		Mar-25	40		Mar-25	210
Apr-25	140		Apr-25	39		Apr-25	215
May-25	156		May-25	24		May-25	193
Jun-25			Jun-25			Jun-25	
Jul-25			Jul-25			Jul-25	
Aug-25			Aug-25			Aug-25	
Sep-25			Sep-25			Sep-25	
TOTAL	1106		TOTAL	275		TOTAL	1658
			TOTAL	3039			

APPENDIX C- GRANTS

GRANTS												
<u>Grant Title</u>	<u>Funding Agency</u>	<u>Project No.</u>	<u>CFDA</u>	<u>Grant Period</u>	<u>Amount Received</u>	<u>Amount Expended</u>	<u>ERP/Pending</u>	<u>Amount Remaining</u>	<u>Local Grant Manager</u>	<u>Federal Project Officer</u>		
DOI-CIP Grant	DOI-CIP	F2414	15.875	10/01/2020-09/30/2025	\$ 232,000.00	\$231,213.00	\$ -	\$ 787.00	Lola Pierre	Aimee Munzi	To purchase four quick attack vehicles	
DOI-TAP	DOI-TAP	F2418	15.875	5/1/2023-9/30/2027	\$ 655,423.00	\$214,380.00	\$ -	\$ 441,043.00	Lola Pierre	Jennifer Feng	To purchase two rescue vehicles and 4 Quick response vehicles	
DOI-Map 2023	DOI-MAP	F2419	15.875	07/17/2023-0930/2027	\$ 185,891.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 185,891.00	Lola Pierre	Jennifer Feng	Brush truck	
Assistance to Firefighter Grant (AFG)	FEMA-AFG	F2421	97.044	8/14/2023-8/13/2025	\$ 269,250.00	\$227,408.00	\$ 19,900.00	\$ 21,942.00	Charmaine Akers-Hewlett	Alvin Matthew	25 SCBAs and Driver training	
VIRGIN ISLANDS COOPERATIVE FIRE PROGRAM	USDA Forest Service	F2422	10.698	6/18/2023-9/30/2025	\$ 100,000.00	\$ -		\$ 100,000.00	Charmaine Akers-Hewlett	Magaly Figueroa	Wildland fire fighting supplies	
VIRGIN ISLANDS COOPERATIVE FIRE PROGRAM	USDA Forest Service		10.698	8/6/2024-9/30/2026	\$ 110,000.00	\$ -		\$ 110,000.00	Charmaine Akers-Hewlett	Magaly Figueroa	Wildland fire fighting supplies	
Office of Federal Assistance Management Health Resources and Services A	U.S. Department of	F2423	93.493	9/30/2023-9/29/2026	\$ 1,897,000.00	\$ -		\$ -	Charmaine Akers-Hewlett		& ambulances	
TOTALS					\$ 3,449,564.00	\$673,001.00	\$ 19,900.00	\$ 859,663.00				