

**VIRGIN ISLANDS FIRE AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES  
BUDGET TESTIMONY  
FISCAL YEAR 2024**



**COMMITTEE ON BUDGET, APPROPRIATIONS AND FINANCE  
35<sup>th</sup> LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS**

**August 7, 2023**

Presented By: Daryl A. George, Sr., Director

Good afternoon Honorable Senator Donna Frett-Gregory, Chairperson of the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance, other distinguished members of the 35<sup>th</sup> Legislature, and the viewing and listening audience.

I am Daryl A. George, Sr., Director of the Virgin Islands Fire and Emergency Medical Services (VIFEMS). Appearing with me today, in person and via Teams, are Assistant Director of EMS Lisle Evelyn, 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 Clarence Stephenson, St. Croix Fire Chief Klebert Titus, St. Thomas/St. John EMS Chief Victor Adams, St. Croix EMS Chief Robert Bryan, St. Croix Deputy Chief Paul Christian, and St. John Deputy Chief Magabe Calixte.

We appreciate the opportunity to present the proposed VIFEMS Budget for Fiscal Year 2024.

## Agency Overview

VIFEMS is an executive branch agency statutorily responsible for the delivery of fire and emergency medical services and other specialized emergency services such as search and rescue and hazardous materials responses. It is also tasked with conducting fire investigations, fire safety code inspections, and public education activities designed to prevent and reduce the risk of fire.

VIFEMS operates 10 strategically located fire stations and provides medical responses from an additional three EMS bases. *See Appendix A.*

The 319 personnel employed by the agency are organized into units and specialized divisions. *See Appendix B.*

The Suppression Unit is staffed by single and dual-role firefighters and provides responses to fires, medical emergencies, hazardous materials incidents, and technical rescue incidents.

The EMS Unit is comprised of single-role EMS providers that provide pre-hospital and non-emergency medical care consistent with their level of training and certification.

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.

The Administrative Unit provides support to the other three units by performing key administrative functions such as financial management, human resources, and procurement and consists of the Fiscal Team and the Human Resources Team.

The Maintenance Division maintains our fleet of vehicles and motorized equipment, and the Star of Life Crew is responsible for operating the ambulance boat that transports patients from St. John to St. Thomas.

## Budget Overview

The VIFEMS budget consists of a General Fund appropriation and non-appropriated funds, augmented by federal grant awards.

### General Fund Appropriation

To fund operations in Fiscal Year 2024, VIFEMS is requesting an appropriation of \$33,483,806.

Approximately 97% of the appropriated funds will be utilized for personnel costs, and the remainder of the appropriation will be used for utilities, supplies, and other services.

### Non-Appropriated Funds

The General Fund appropriation will be supplemented by non-appropriated funds, which are projected to total \$3,503,268 in Fiscal Year 2024.

Non-appropriated funds include the Fire and Emergency Medical Services Fund and the Emergency Services Fund.

The Fire and Emergency Medical Services Fund is a special fund consisting of fees collected for emergency medical services, fire safety inspections, permits, and other services as well as fines assessed for code violations. The Fiscal Year 2024 projection for the fund is \$2,837,690.

The Emergency Services Fund consists of emergency surcharges collected from users of mobile and landline phones and is shared by VIFEMS, the Department of Health, and the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA).

It is projected that \$665,578 of the fund will be available for VIFEMS's use in Fiscal Year 2024.

## Grants

In an effort to bridge the gap between operational needs and local funding, VIFEMS has actively pursued grants in recent years and has secured awards from the US Department of Agriculture's Forest Service, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Department of Interior (DOI), and VITEMA.

In Fiscal Year 2024, the following grant awards, totaling \$715,423, will be available for the purchase of supplies and vehicles:

1. \$60,000 awarded by the USDA Forest Service through its Cooperative Forestry Assistance Program (Wildland Firefighting Supplies)
2. \$655,423 from the Department of Interior's Technical Assistance Program (TAP) Grant Program (Two Rescue Vehicles)

Additional grant funding may become available during the upcoming fiscal year as the following grant applications are pending:

1. A Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) application for the hire of 40 Fire/EMS personnel in the amount of \$8,966,000 (FEMA)
2. A Maintenance Assistance Program application for the purchase of a brush truck in the amount of \$185,891 (DOI)
3. A Virgin Islands Cooperative Fire Program application for the purchase of wildland firefighting supplies in the amount of \$100,000 (USDA Forest Service)
4. An Assistance to Firefighters Grant application for driver training, EMS equipment, and firefighting PPE in the amount of \$358,715 (FEMA)

## Disaster Recovery Grants

Since 2017, VIFEMS has been seeking to secure grant funding for the repair, replacement, or hardening of facilities damaged during Hurricanes Irma and Maria. With the assistance of disaster recovery partners Witt O'Brien's, the Office of Disaster Recovery, VITEMA, FEMA and the Department of Public Works, we have made significant progress in this endeavor.

Approximately \$47 million in funding has been obligated for projects for the following facilities:

1. Charles A. Seales Fire Station (Grove Place, St. Croix)
  - Scope: Reconstruction
2. Renceliar I. Gibbs Fire Station (Cotton Valley, St. Croix)
  - Scope: Reconstruction
3. Herbert L. Canegata Fire Station (Richmond, St. Croix)
  - Scope: Wind Retrofit Safe Room Construction and Generator Installation  
Repairs and Mitigation
4. Emile Henderson Sr. Fire Station (Frederiksted, St. Croix)
  - Scope: Wind Retrofit and Safe Room Construction and Generator  
Installation  
Repairs and Mitigation
5. Junior Firefighter Building (Est. Slob, St. Croix)
  - Scope: Repairs and Mitigation
6. Emile Berry Fire Station (Dorothea, St. Thomas)
  - Scope: Repairs and Mitigation
7. George P. Scott Maintenance Building (Anna's Retreat, St. Thomas)
  - Scope: Repairs
8. George P. Scott Fire Station (Anna's Retreat, St. Thomas)
  - Scope: Reconstruction
9. Omar Brown Sr. Fire Station (Est. Taarneberg, St. Thomas)
  - Scope: Repairs and Mitigation
10. Fortuna/Bordeaux Fire Station (Fortuna, St. Thomas)
  - Scope: Reconstruction
11. Coral Bay Fire Station (Coral Bay, St. John)
  - Scope: Repairs and Mitigation
12. Robert O'Connor Fire Station (Cruz Bay, St. John)
  - Scope: Reconstruction

Work on three projects commenced this fiscal year. The repair and hardening of the Emile Berry Fire Station on St. Thomas began in January and completion is anticipated in the fall. The repair of the George P. Scott Maintenance Building began in June, and completion is also expected in the fall. On St. Croix, the demolition of the Charles A. Seales Fire Station was substantially completed, and construction services are being solicited.

## Fiscal Year 2023 Accomplishments

In Fiscal Year 2023, VIFEMS has continued to employ strategic planning and effective resource utilization to meet objectives that improve operational efficiency and effectiveness. This fiscal year we have built capacity as an EMS organization, procured critical equipment, and improved community engagement.

### Built Capacity as an EMS Organization

To build capacity as an EMS organization, we increased the number of EMS bases and deployable resources, increased the number of EMS providers employed by the agency, and adopted policies and technology to streamline operational tasks.

#### *Increased the Number of EMS Bases and Deployable Resources*

In both districts, VIFEMS has increased the number of EMS bases and deployable resources, helping to reduce response times. In the St. Croix District, we established a third EMS base in a central location, which allows for a quicker response to calls in certain areas.

In the St. Thomas/St. John District, an ambulance has been stationed at the Coral Bay Fire Station allowing for medical transport, if necessary, in that coverage area. On St. Thomas, a third ambulance has been put into service and is deployed when there is a potential for a surge in EMS calls such as during major events or cruise ship visits.

#### *Increased Number of EMS Providers*

Through hiring and training, we increased the number of EMS providers in each district. Despite initial challenges with recruitment, we successfully hired four EMTs and one Paramedic in the STT/STJ District and three EMTs and one Paramedic in the St. Croix District.

To increase the number of dual-role firefighters, we provided ongoing training opportunities for current single-role fire personnel. In the St. Croix District, four firefighters completed EMT training and have earned National Registry certification. In the St. Thomas/St. John District, five firefighters completed EMT training. Of these five, two are scheduled to take the National Registry certification exam this month. The other three must complete clinical rotations on the ambulance before they are eligible to take the certification exam.

### *Adopted Policies and Technology to Streamline Operational Tasks*

In an effort to streamline the scheduling process for EMS providers, the EMS Unit procured and implemented an electronic scheduling system in November 2022 at an initial annual cost of \$5,400. The system has proven to be effective and has made the scheduling process for EMS personnel more efficient.

After updating the relevant policies to establish an appropriate supply chain, the EMS Management team has also begun the process of procuring an electronic inventory management system to efficiently track EMS medications and supplies. Implementation is expected this month.

### Procured Critical Equipment

Utilizing funding appropriated by this body, VIFEMS has continued updating its fleet of response vehicles. This fiscal year we received and placed into service five fire apparatus purchased with appropriated funding.

Two of these apparatus were specially designed for St. John's terrain and have been assigned to that island.

In addition to response vehicles, we also received cascade systems for the islands of St. Croix and St. John. These essential pieces of equipment are used to refill the self-contained breathing apparatus firefighters use during firefighting operations. Both systems were purchased with a DOI-TAP grant award totaling \$122,000.

### Improved Community Engagement

With the creation of the Public Information Office in August 2022, VIFEMS significantly improved its engagement with the community. We now have an expanded presence on the web and increased social media engagement. In September 2022, accounts were created on Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter. The Facebook account was also rebranded to reflect our new agency name. All platforms have been used to share informative updates, safety tips, and engaging content. They have also been used to share recruitment postings, which were also posted on Zip Recruiter, Glass Door, LinkedIn, Indeed and the Division of Personnel's website.

Since its inception, the Public Information Office has ensured information about major incidents is disseminated in a timely manner and that the public is aware of significant agency activities through traditional media as well as social media.

## Goals for Fiscal Year 2024

In Fiscal Year 2024, VIFEMS will continue working to improve operations and the quality of service provided to the community. To accomplish this, we intend to increase staffing, expand the fleet, establish a marine unit, offer an online payment portal, acquire a facility to house the St. Croix Prevention and Administrative offices, and acquire property to develop a training center.

### Increase Staffing

To ensure adequate staffing in both the Suppression and EMS Units, VIFEMS will hire additional Firefighter/EMTs and single-role EMS providers in Fiscal Year 2024.

### Expand Fleet

In the upcoming fiscal year, we will also continue efforts to expand the fleet. Seven new ambulances will be purchased for the territory with \$1.8 million appropriated in the 2023 Consolidated Appropriations Act.

In addition, two rescue vehicles will be procured utilizing a DOI TAP grant award. If DOI also approves a pending grant application submitted to its Maintenance Assistance Program for \$185,891, a brush truck will also be purchased for the St. Croix District.

### Establish the Marine Unit

In Fiscal Year 2024, we also anticipate the expansion of our fleet of watercraft. The firefighting vessel procured with \$1,000,000 of local appropriated funds is currently in production, and it is expected to be completed by the summer of 2024. In anticipation of this, VIFEMS will continue to take the necessary steps to establish a marine response unit including recruiting qualified personnel.

### Offer an Online Payment Portal

Aiming to provide customers with more convenient and efficient service, we have been working on implementing an online payment portal. The Public Information Office has been collaborating with the Bureau of Information Technology, and we are hopeful that implementation will be completed in Fiscal Year 2024.



### Acquire a Home for the St. Croix Administrative and Prevention Offices

To accommodate our current and future growth, we have been working to secure a larger space for our administrative and Prevention offices on St. Croix. Presently, we are exploring the purchase of the facility we currently lease as a long-term solution. In the interim, we are working to amend our lease to include additional space in our current building that will soon become available. Once the lease is finalized and funding is secured, we intend to build out new office spaces.

### Develop a Training Facility

In Fiscal Year 2024, we also hope to begin the development of a training facility. Training is crucial to effective operations, and presently we do not have a dedicated facility that can meet all our training needs. In the St. Thomas/St. John District, we identified a suitable site adjacent to the Omar Brown Sr. Fire Station.

In recent communication, the Public Finance Authority has advised that the property will be purchased for the benefit of the Government of the Virgin Islands. Once the sale is finalized, we are hopeful that it will be assigned to VIFEMS, and we can move forward with plans to construct a training facility.

### Conclusion

This concludes my testimony today. I would like to close by thanking the dedicated men and women of the Virgin Islands Fire and Emergency Medical Services. We are beyond grateful for their service and sacrifice.

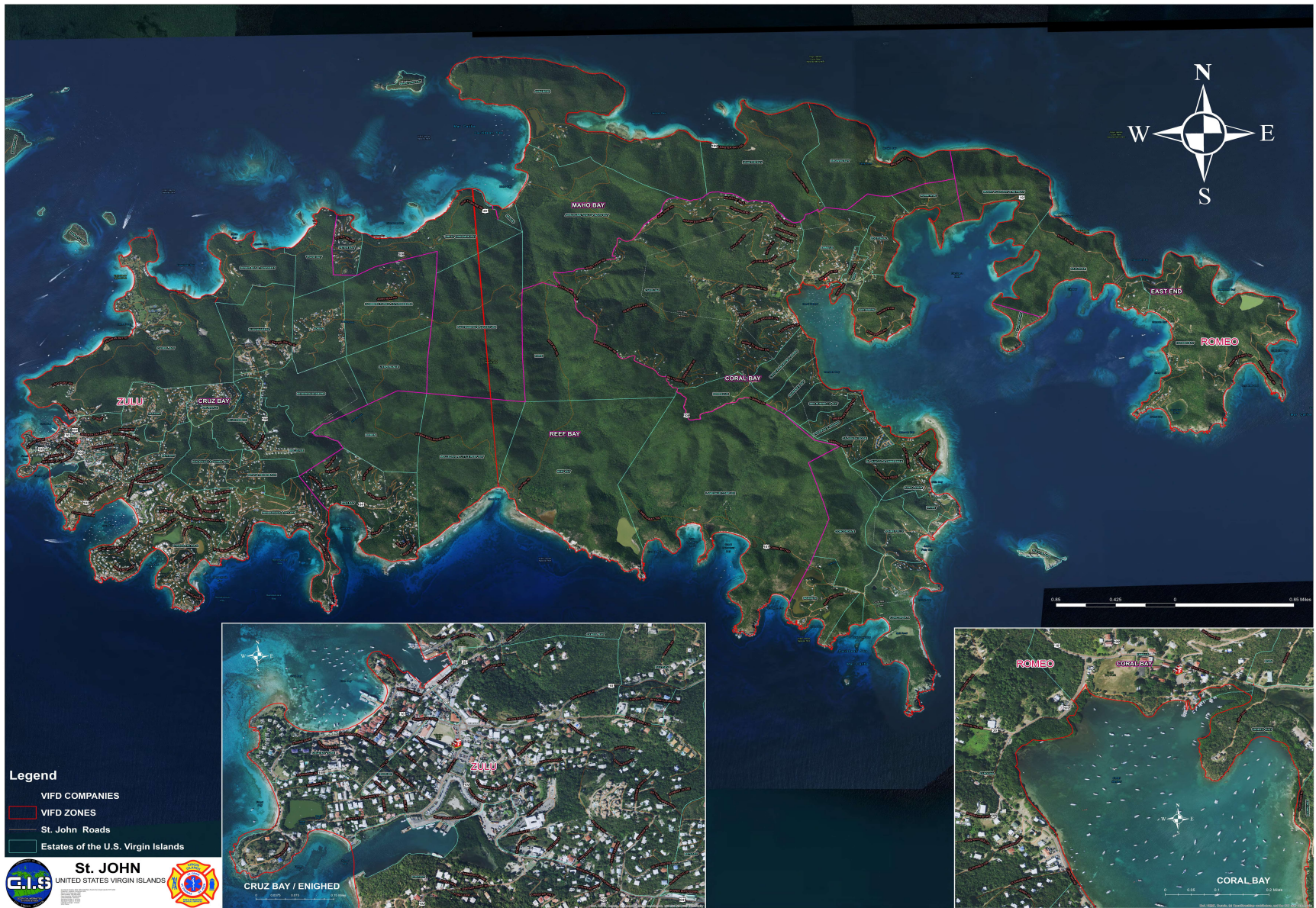
Thank you again to this body for the opportunity to provide testimony and for your continued support. We await your questions.

# APPENDICES

# APPENDIX A- COVERAGE MAPS







## APPENDIX B- VIFEMS STAFFING

VIFEMS EMPLOYEES				
TOTAL NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 319				
	STX	STT-STJ	Total Number of Employees	Percentage of VIFEMS Workforce
<b>Suppression Unit</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>76%</b>
<b>Arson Investigation and Prevention Unit</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>Administrative Unit</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>10%</b>
<i>Support Staff</i>	5	6	11	
<i>Maint Division</i>	3	3	6	
<i>Executive Team</i>	6	10	16	
<b>EMS Unit</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>10%</b>
<i>Providers/ Supervisors</i>	10	18	28	
<i>Boat Crew</i>	0	3	3	

### APPENDIX C- VIFEMS EMS PROVIDERS

	<b>STX</b>	<b>STT-STJ</b>	<b>Territory</b>
<b>Total No. of Providers</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>81</b>
<i>Emergency Medical Technician</i>	5	8	<b>13</b>
<i>Emergency Medical Technician-Advanced</i>	2	4	<b>6</b>
<i>Paramedic</i>	2	4	<b>6</b>
<i>Firefighter/Emergency Medical Responder</i>	16	17	<b>33</b>
<i>Firefighter/Emergency Medical Technician</i>	11	12	<b>23</b>

## APPENDIX D- VIFS FY23 COLLECTIONS

Territory-FY 2023										
Dates	New Businesses-Terr	Amount Collected	Existing Businesses	Amount Collected	Reinspections	Fines	Late Fees	Misc.	TOTAL INSPECTIONS	TOTAL
Oct-22	100	\$ 14,850.00	139	\$ 22,550.00	5	\$ -	\$ 8,110.00	\$ 5,571.00	244	\$ 51,081.00
Nov-22	96	\$ 14,400.00	150	\$ 24,450.00	1	\$ -	\$ 6,035.00	\$ 5,930.00	247	\$ 50,815.00
Dec-22	92	\$ 13,450.00	253	\$ 35,685.00	6	\$ -	\$ 6,235.00	\$12,709.00	351	\$ 68,079.00
Jan-23	108	\$ 16,200.00	279	\$ 36,950.00	1	\$ -	\$ 5,320.00	\$ 6,751.00	388	\$ 65,221.00
Feb-23	119	\$ 17,700.00	300	\$ 42,100.00	0	\$ -	\$ 10,885.00	\$ 5,106.00	419	\$ 75,791.00
Mar-23	128	\$ 20,350.00	310	\$ 49,105.00	1	\$ -	\$ 10,350.00	\$ 5,765.00	439	\$ 85,570.00
Apr-23	78	\$ 11,575.00	193	\$ 28,900.00	6	\$ -	\$ 6,087.00	\$10,121.00	277	\$ 56,683.00
May-23	90	\$ 14,350.00	264	\$ 39,450.00	3	\$ -	\$ 8,795.00	\$ 4,903.00	357	\$ 67,498.00
Jun-23	75	\$ 11,325.00	398	\$ 51,780.00	7	\$ -	\$ 9,060.00	\$ 8,821.00	480	\$ 80,986.00
Jul-23	0	\$ -	0	\$ -	0	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	0	\$ -
Aug-23	0	\$ -	0	\$ -	0	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	0	\$ -
Sep-23	0	\$ -	0	\$ -	0	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	0	\$ -
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>886</b>	<b>\$134,200.00</b>	<b>2286</b>	<b>\$330,970.00</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ 70,877.00</b>	<b>\$65,677.00</b>	<b>3,202</b>	<b>\$601,724.00</b>
Misc.: Plan reviews, sales of badges, pins, hats, certificate retype, fire reports, t-shirts										



## APPENDIX E – GRANTS

GRANTS AWARDED										
Grant Title	Funding Agency	Project No.	CFDA	Grant Period	Amount Received	Amount Expended	Amount Remaining	Local Grant Manager	Federal Project Officer	Use
VIRGIN ISLANDS COOPERATIVE FIRE PROGRAM	USDA Forest Service	F2415	10.698	6/14/2021-9/30/2023	\$ 60,000.00	\$ 60,000.00	\$ -	Charmaine Akers-Hewlett	Magaly Figueroa	To purchase wildland fire fighting supplies
EMERGENCY MED RESPONSE TRAINING & DECONTAMINATION EQUIPMENT	VITEMA	F2328	97.067	9/1/2020-8/31/2023	\$ 115,390.00	\$ 95,797.57	\$ 19,592.43	Florecita Brunn	Florecita Brunn	To fund EMR Training and purchase 2 Decon tents
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-		15.875	5/1/2023-9/30/2027	\$ 655,423.00	\$ -	\$ 655,423.00	Lola Pierre	Jennifer Feng	To purchase two rescue vehicles
USDA Forest Service	USDA Forest Service	F5417	10.698	7/18/2022-8/30/2024	\$ 60,000.00	\$ -	\$ 60,000.00	Lola Pierre	Magaly Figueroa	To purchase wildland fire fighting supplies
<b>TOTALS</b>					<b>\$ 1,122,813.00</b>	<b>\$ 387,010.57</b>	<b>\$ 735,802.43</b>			

GRANTS PENDING AWARD DOCUMENTS										
Grant Title	Funding Agency	Project No.	CFDA	Grant Period	Amount Received	Amount Expended	Amount Remaining	Local Grant Manager	Federal Project Officer	Use
HRSA COMMUNITY PROJECT FUNDING	U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES-OFFICE OF FEDERAL ASSISTANCE MANAGEMENT HEALTH RESOURCES AND SERVICES ADMINISTRATION				\$ 1,897,000.00	\$ -	\$ 1,897,000.00	Charmaine Akers-Hewlett		To purchase 7 ambulances
<b>TOTALS</b>					<b>\$ 1,897,000.00</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ 1,897,000.00</b>			

GRANTS APPLIED FOR										
Grant Title	Funding Agency	Project No.	CFDA	Grant Period	Amount Received	Amount Expended	Amount Remaining	Local Grant Manager	Federal Project Officer	Use
STAFFING FOR ADEQUATE FIRE AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE (SAFER)	FEMA				\$ 8,966,000.00	\$ -	\$ 8,966,000.00			To hire 40 Fire/EMS personnel
DOI-MAP 2023	DOI-MAP				\$ 185,891.00		\$ 185,891.00			To purchase a brush truck
VI COOPERATIVE FIRE GRANT	USDA Forest Service				\$ 100,000.00		\$ 100,000.00			To purchase firefighting supplies
ASSISTANCE TO FIREFIGHTERS GRANT*	FEMA				\$ 358,715.00	\$ -	\$ 358,715.00			To fund driver training and purchase a monitor defibrillator, automatic chest compressor, and SCBAs
<b>TOTALS</b>					<b>\$ 9,610,606.00</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ 9,610,606.00</b>			

\* Note: Total project cost \$358,715 with 10% match of \$32,610.45. We requested the waiver of \$32,610.45 (Current Federal share \$326,104.55)

APPENDIX F- VEHICLES

# FIRE APPARATUS RECEIVED IN FY23

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