

BUREAU OF SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION & MAINTENANCE



Introduction

Good day, Honorable Senator Kurt A. Violet, Chairman of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development; Vice Chairman, Senator Avery L. Lewis; Committee Members—Senators Dwayne M. DeGraff, Kenneth L. Gittens, Marise C. James, Franklin D. Johnson, and Carla Joseph; non-committee members in attendance; and our listening and viewing audiences.

My name is Craig Benjamin, and I have the honor of serving as the Executive Director of the Bureau of School Construction and Maintenance (BSCM).

I am joined today by several key members of the BSCM team, including:

- Mr. Paul Harrigan – Assistant Director of School Maintenance
- Ms. Cynthia Allen – Assistant Director of School Construction
- Dr. Charmaine Mayers – Chief Financial Officer
- Mr. Alan Fleming – Chief Operations Officer
- Mr. Yauncey Milligan – School Facilities Maintenance Manager, St. Croix
- Mr. Gene Weekes – School Facilities Maintenance Manager, St. Thomas
- As well as other dedicated BSCM staff members present in the chambers today.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the Territory's 2025 Summer School Repair Schedule. My testimony provides a comprehensive update on facility temporary repairs across both the St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix districts, with particular emphasis on project scope, prioritization criteria, estimated costs, scheduling, inspection findings, contingency planning, and long-term maintenance objectives.

1. List of Schools, Contractors, and Scope of Work

St. Thomas/St. John District

A total of 51 projects are active or planned for this summer across schools in the St. Thomas/St. John district. These include:

- Temporary Roof Repairs (Joseph Sibilly, Edith Williams, Ivanna E. Kean)
- HVAC and A/C Replacements (Charlotte Amalie HS, Julius Sprauve, Joseph Gomez)
- Restroom Renovations & Plumbing (Ivanna E. Kean HS, Jane E. Tuitt, Bertha C. Boschulte, Lockhart, Julius Sprauve)
- Deck and Structural Repairs (Charlotte Amalie HS, Yvonne Milliner-Bowsky)
- Kitchen and Mechanical Upgrades (dishwasher outlets, water pumps, refrigeration systems)

Total estimated cost: \$5,465,679.44

St. Croix District

The St. Croix district has over 80 active projects, including:

- Temporary Roof and Structural Repairs (Pearl B. Larsen, Juanita Guardine, Alfredo Andrews, John H. Woodson)
- Restroom Renovations (across all educational levels)
- Mechanical Upgrades (cistern cleaning, water pump replacements, A/C installations, and wastewater systems)
- Campus Enhancements (gazebo construction, fence repairs, parking lot resurfacing, and JROTC tower construction)

Total estimated cost: \$7,871,533.46

Total Territory-wide estimated cost: \$13,337,212.90

A full list of project numbers, facility names, scopes, and funding allocations is included in **Appendix A**.

2. Criteria Used to Prioritize Projects

Project prioritization was guided by a combination of technical urgency, stakeholder input, and funding constraints. Key considerations included:

- **Health and Safety:** Immediate hazards such as water intrusion, failing HVAC systems, and fire/life safety risks.
- **Code Compliance:** Projects addressing ADA accessibility, electrical/fire code alignment, and environmental remediation requirements.
- **Operational Readiness:** Priority was given to facilities hosting summer school, special education programs, or designated shelters.

- **Infrastructure Age and Condition:** Schools with aging infrastructure and a high volume of deferred maintenance needs were ranked higher.
- **Equity Across Districts:** Repairs were distributed with a focus on ensuring balanced attention across campuses.

In addition, the following practical and strategic measures were taken:

- We selected “**low-hanging fruit**” projects—minor yet impactful tasks that could be completed quickly and cost-effectively, allowing for visible improvements in a short time frame.
- We **consulted with the Department of Education’s Liaison** to confirm the scope of work and ensure alignment with FEMA funding eligibility, particularly where disaster-related restrictions apply.
- **Principal requests were considered** and factored into project planning; however, due to tight budget constraints, not all requested items could be included.

To further illustrate our prioritization, the following categories summarize our focus:

1. **Temporary Roofing Repairs:** Leaking or damaged roofs were prioritized to prevent structural deterioration, mold growth, and indoor air quality concerns and inconvenience to students and staff.
2. **Electrical Upgrades:** Essential to enabling HVAC repairs and generator installations; critical for building-wide functionality and safety.
3. **Annual Deep Cleaning:** Comprehensive sanitation and maintenance to ensure safe, healthy learning environments prior to the new academic year.
4. **Low-Hanging Fruit:** Small-scale, high-impact tasks such as fixture replacements, basic carpentry, and minor plumbing that could be efficiently executed.

3. Budget Breakdown by Project and School

Act No. 8717, which established the Bureau of School Construction and Maintenance (BSCM), appropriated **\$5,000,000** to the Bureau and its Capital Fund. These funds were evenly distributed between the **St. Thomas/St. John** and **St. Croix** Districts, with each district receiving **\$2,500,000**.

Act No. 8918 subsequently appropriated an additional **\$7,000,000** to the BSCM. These funds were also evenly divided, with **\$3,500,000** allocated to each district. Allocations were prioritized based on the specific maintenance needs of schools within each district.

Under **Act No. 8920**, an additional **\$20,000,000** was appropriated to the BSCM. However, this amount was later reduced to **\$10,000,000** through **Act No. 8985** (Bill No. 36-0047). These funds are designated to support **critical infrastructure upgrades**, including **electrical system improvements** and **generator installations** at selected schools across the Territory—projects that were previously supported by **ARPA funding**, which totaled **\$9,286,120.44**.

For the **2025 summer projects**, the Bureau has encumbrances totaling **\$6,588,134.03** territory-wide. Of this amount, **\$3,182,797.11** has been encumbered for the **St. Croix District**, and **\$3,405,336.92** for the **St. Thomas/St. John District**.

The allocations are detailed in Appendix A.

4. Project Timelines

- **Start Dates:** Ranged from May through June 2025
- **Target Completion:** July 31, 2025, ahead of staff reentry and school reopening
- **Summer Program Coordination:** Projects scheduled around active academic and enrichment programs

5. Inspection Reports & Corrective Actions (2024–2025 School Year)

All school facilities underwent walkthrough inspections during Summer 2024. Key findings included:

- Faulty plumbing systems
- Electrical safety issues
- Inoperable HVAC units
- Roof damage and water intrusion

Unlike in previous years, no formal report was issued by the Virgin Islands Department of Education and the Board of Education. In response, the Bureau of School Construction and Maintenance (BSCM) prepared its own inspection report. Additionally, BSCM responded to specific requests from Senator Avery Lewis regarding his walkthrough of schools on St. Thomas, as well as concerns raised by Chairman Kurt Vialet. Corrective actions based on these findings are currently underway. Some issues have already been addressed, while others remain in progress. Supporting reports and documentation are provided in **Appendix C**.

Appendix C offers a comprehensive status update on facility conditions across the St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix District schools, following the July 2024 walkthrough. It outlines progress on completed and ongoing maintenance, active capital projects, and plans for Summer 2025. Key areas of focus include roofing repairs, HVAC system upgrades, plumbing and electrical improvements, modular classroom assessments, and perimeter security enhancements.

The appendix also details responses to site-specific concerns raised by Senator Avery Lewis during school visits in February 2025. These concerns—ranging from kitchen equipment and restroom functionality to mold remediation and student safety infrastructure—have been addressed with clear status updates and designated responsible agencies, including BSCM, the School Food Authority, and the Office of Disaster Recovery. Many items have already been resolved or are included in the Summer 2025 Maintenance Plan, while others are being addressed through disaster recovery modernization projects or are currently in procurement.

6. Inspection Schedule for 2025–2026

The inspection schedule for the 2025–2026 school year began April 2025, to allow for early detection of facility issues, and to support timely budgeting for necessary repairs ahead of the summer. The 2025 walkthrough inspections are scheduled for **August 1, 2025**, in the St. Thomas/St. John District, and **August 4–5, 2025**, in the St. Croix District.

Correspondence has been sent to the **Department of Health, Fire and EMS, Department of Planning and Natural Resources**, and the **Department of Public Works** to confirm their availability for participation.

7. Contingency Planning

To mitigate project delays, we have implemented:

- Weekend, evening, and holiday work schedules
- Early procurement of critical materials
- Engagement of multiple contractors and in-house crews for redundancy

8. Long-Term Maintenance Planning

The Bureau has initiated the implementation of a preventative and routine maintenance program, which includes the following components:

- **Scheduled quarterly inspections** of major systems (HVAC – service contract currently in progress), roofing, and plumbing
- **Facility Condition Index (FCI) tracking** for each campus
- **In-house maintenance task forces** for timely response to minor repairs
- **Funding alignment** through a multi-year facilities improvement plan

A draft of the new 20-year maintenance plan has been developed. While the Master School Construction and Capital Plan Review Panel convened twice, its first official meeting was held on March 11, 2025. However, we have not yet been able to present and discuss the draft plan with the Committee due to meeting cancellations caused by Senate hearings and other critical obligations. We are currently working to reschedule and anticipate a meeting in mid-July.

9. Funding Challenges Impacting Key Projects

Several A/C repairs are contingent on the successful completion of electrical system upgrades. As such, electrical upgrades were prioritized as foundational work for broader mechanical improvements. However, delays in the availability and accessibility of ARPA funds have jeopardized both the electrical upgrade and generator installation projects. Without timely identification of alternative funding sources, there is a risk that contracted vendors will not be paid, which may result in project delays or suspension of work.

Conclusion

The Territory's summer repair schedule represents a vital investment in student and staff safety, operational readiness, and long-term educational excellence. With over \$13.3 million in improvements underway, our coordinated approach across agencies and contractors is designed to ensure we are prepared for the new school year.

Thank you for your support. My team and I are available to address any questions and can provide additional documentation as needed.