

***Operations Update Testimony of Wynnne Testamark, Director
Virgin Islands Bureau of Corrections
Committee on Homeland Security, Justice, and Public Safety
December 4, 2025***

Good morning, Chairman Clifford A. Joseph, Sr., Vice-Chairman Ray Fonseca, esteemed Members of the Committee on Homeland Security, Justice, and Public Safety, Senator Gittens, Senator Lewis, Senator Bolques, Senator DeGraff, and Senator Johnson, distinguished Members of the 36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, legislative staff, and all those joining us in person and virtually via YouTube and Facebook.

My name is Wynnne Testamark, and I have the honor and privilege of serving as the Director of the Virgin Islands Bureau of Corrections. Today, I appear before you with deep respect and a renewed sense of purpose to present an operational update for the Bureau of Corrections.

Before we delve into the details of our testimony, allow me to introduce some of the committed leadership team that stands beside me, each a pillar in our daily operations and strategic vision:

- Peter Abrahams, Assistant Director of Support Services
- Dr. Linda Callwood, Medical Director
- Dr. Kyza A. Callwood, Chief Strategy Officer, and Acting Public Information Officer
- Mrs. Phyllis Hodge-Gumbs, Human Resources Manager
- Ms. Cathy Munro, Fiscal and Budget Manager

Several other key members of our management team are also present in the chambers, ready to provide insight and clarity where needed.

I. STATUS OF THE FEDERAL CONSENT DECREE

The Bureau continues to advance toward full compliance with the federal consent decree. In the St. Croix case, and during the Thursday, November 20, 2025, consent decree status hearing, Senior District Court Judge Wilma Lewis cited the Bureau's sustained and verifiable compliance with required medical and dental care standards, affirming that the long-standing deficiencies that once defined the facility's medical operations have been replaced with sound, modern, and constitutionally compliant practices after 39 years. The Court's determination follows encouraging updates from the panel of court-appointed monitors, who reported ongoing progress across several additional operational areas. ***The termination of medical and dental care provisions marks an historic benchmark and powerful testament to the Bureau's commitment to professional excellence, accountability, and the medical and dental treatment of individuals entrusted to its custody.*** It also signals the beginning of the final phase of compliance, as the Bureau continues its forward trajectory toward complete resolution of the Settlement Agreement after more than 39 years of federal supervision.

THEN

23rd Monitoring Report:

- Noncompliance (7)
- Partial Compliance (81)
- Substantial Compliance (18)
- Sustained Compliance (17)
- Downgraded (20)

NOW

31st Monitoring Report:

- Noncompliance (0)
- Partial Compliance (56)
- Substantial Compliance (38 / 39)
- Sustained Compliance (29 / 48)
- Downgraded (2)

In the St. Thomas case, the Bureau continues to ensure monthly status reports are submitted consistently to document progress and demonstrate commitment to compliance.

The FY 2026 Budget underscores the Territory's intent to exit these costly federal consent decrees. The Bureau's funding priorities demonstrate a strong and deliberate commitment to enhancing public safety and institutional effectiveness. Key areas of focus include:

- *Addressing correctional officer vacancies to ensure adequate staffing and improve facility security;*
- *Expanding and sustaining comprehensive medical and mental health services to meet the diverse needs of the inmate population; and*
- *Recruiting essential civilian personnel to support the Bureau's strategic initiatives and operational goals.*

All remaining components of the consent decree are tracked through written corrective action plans. Internal compliance teams monitor progress, and timelines remain in effect to ensure full adherence.

II. STATUS OF PAYMENTS TO ALL VENDORS, INCLUDING THE INDEPENDENT MONITORING TEAM

Vendor payment obligations have been reconciled and entered into the payment system. For FY 2025, eighty-five (85) outstanding vendor invoices totalling approximately \$2.8 million are in various stages of processing in coordination with the Department of Finance. Payments to the independent monitoring team are up to date and continue to follow the established schedule. The Bureau continues to utilize its payment-cycle controls to prevent backlogs and ensure continued vendor stability.

III. STAFFING, STAFF SAFETY, HEALTHCARE, SANITATION, AND FIRE SAFETY

The Bureau is authorized for two hundred twenty-one (221) positions and currently has one hundred fifty-eight (158) filled, leaving sixty-one (61) vacancies. Recruitment efforts remain active through targeted advertising, expanded training pipelines, and enhanced retention initiatives. However, with a \$1,258,003 reduction to our proposed FY26 budget of \$37,702,232 resulting in an approved total of \$36,417,229, we are being required to eliminate twenty-five (25) of the sixty-one (61) vacant positions.

Staff safety protocols remain in full effect at all facilities, including off-island partner locations. The Bureau continues to meet required healthcare standards, reflected in the FY 2025 medical and mental-health expenditures of approximately \$4 million. Approximately 40% of the inmate population is receiving mental-health treatment.

Sanitation levels remain consistent with regulatory requirements through daily inspections and contracted services. Fire safety practices and procedures have been maintained and are undergoing further upgrades as part of the Bureau's capital improvement plan.

Inmates/Detainees

As of December 3, 2025, the Bureau of Corrections houses a total of 374 inmates. Of those, 220 are held locally—133 at the John A. Bell Adult Correctional Facility (76 detainees, 57 inmates) and 87 at the Alexander A. Farrelly Criminal Justice Complex (65 detainees, 22 inmates). The local population consists of 209 males and 11 females. An additional 154 inmates are housed in mainland facilities: 32 in Virginia, and 122 in Mississippi.

IV. STATUS OF CAPITAL AND CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

All capital and infrastructure projects remain active and are progressing. Major initiatives include:

- Installation of a 900 kW backup generator at John Bell and a 500 kW generator at the Farrelly Complex;
- Approximately 95% completion of perimeter lighting upgrades at John Bell;
- Initiating development of a new fire-alarm and suppression system for the John Bell Facility to enhance safety and ensure future compliance with modern standards;
- Completion of the architectural design for a new 207-bed facility at the Swan Annex site, with the Request for Proposals currently under development for a public-private partnership;
- Continued work associated with the Modular Detention Center and district-wide infrastructure enhancements.

These projects strengthen security, compliance, and operational continuity.

V. LONG-TERM PLANS FOR STAFFING, FACILITY IMPROVEMENT, REHABILITATION, AND RECIDIVISM REDUCTION

The Bureau's long-term strategic plan includes the following priorities:

A. Staffing Recruitment and Retention

- Expansion of recruitment pipelines and onboarding strategies;
- Enhancement of career development, training pathways, and retention incentives;
- Alignment of staffing patterns with facility needs and federal requirements.

B. Facility Modernization

- Modernization of security systems and physical infrastructure across both districts;
- Implementation of energy-efficient systems, emergency-backup solutions, and upgraded life-safety technologies;
- Continued planning and construction aligned with long-term facility demand.

C. Rehabilitation and Recidivism Reduction

- Expansion of educational and vocational programs, with seventy-two (72) inmates actively enrolled as of December 2025 at JABAC – 38 & CJC 34;

- Continuous engagement of inmate work programs, with (66) inmates actively engaged as of December 2025 at JABAC – 49 & CJC – 17;
- Strengthened re-entry programs and partnerships with community and behavioral-health organizations;
- Maintenance of a three-year recidivism rate of 11% (65 rearrested out of 575 released), significantly below the national average of 68%. This figure reflects a detailed analysis of the 2022 cohort tracked over a three-year period. Ongoing delivery of evidence-based programs aligned with the Bureau’s mission to prepare inmates for successful reintegration.

CONCLUSION

The Virgin Islands Bureau of Corrections remains committed to operational excellence, federal and territorial compliance, fiscal accountability, and the safety and rehabilitation of those entrusted to our care. We continue to modernize our systems, strengthen our workforce, improve our facilities, and advance initiatives that reduce recidivism and enhance public safety.

I extend a special thank you to Senate President Milton Potter, Senator Marvin Blyden, and Senator Angel L. Bolques, Jr. for their consistent support of our inmate programs and for their continued presence at our graduation ceremonies in the St. Thomas District. Your encouragement reinforces the transformational work taking place within our facilities. I also extend sincere appreciation to Senator Clifford Joseph for his recent visit to the John A. Bell Adult Correctional Facility and for conducting an in-person walkthrough to observe the great work at the Bureau and to gain a deeper understanding of our operational needs.

As we move forward, I respectfully urge the Legislature to continue supporting the Bureau with the additional funding necessary to properly care for the individuals entrusted into our care but especially those experiencing mental illness, to advance the construction of a new correctional facility, and to ensure critical upgrades to our aging infrastructure. These investments are essential to strengthening public safety and sustaining long-term compliance.

As we close the calendar year, I extend warm season’s greetings and a heartfelt Happy Holidays to the dedicated men and women of the Virgin Islands Bureau of Corrections for their continued service and professionalism. I also extend holiday blessings to the community we serve and protect. May this season bring peace, renewal, and continued strength as we move into the year ahead.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. I stand ready to answer any questions the Legislature may have.