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Entire PERB Board Serving on Expired Terms as Two Vacancies Threaten Case Progress

Every member of the Public Employees Relations Board is serving on an expired term, while two seats have remained vacant for years—a governance gap officials say could slow cases and deepen backlogs as the board seeks more staff and meetings in FY2027.

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Every member of the Public Employees Relations Board is serving on an expired term, while two seats have remained vacant for several years, creating a governance problem that officials say could slow the resolution of cases and contribute to a backlog.

PERB Executive Director Jessica Philgence told the Senate Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance on Friday that a complete board is necessary for the agency to continue moving labor disputes through its process.

“a full board allows the PERB to continuously move forward with cases and avoid a backlog.”

In addition to the expired terms of the sitting members, two board positions remain vacant. Ms. Philgence said the vacancies have existed for “several years.”

“The chairman has reached out to the Governor. We’re still waiting,” she told Senator Marvin Blyden.

“There is nothing the PERB can do at this point,” she stated.

The board appeared before the committee alongside the Labor Management Committee, with each entity presenting a separate FY2027 budget request.

PERB is requesting $1,686,910 for FY2027, matching the amount recommended by the governor.

Board Chairman Pierna Jacobs-Feldman acknowledged the territory’s financial limitations while expressing appreciation for the recommended allocation.

The board “acknowledges the government’s fiscal constraints, and we are grateful for the governor’s recommended budget…”

The request includes $814,500 for personnel and $375,243 for fringe benefits.

PERB is also seeking $46,100 for supplies, $388,200 for other services and charges, $16,000 for utilities and $46,867 for capital outlays.

Ms. Philgence said PERB’s FY2027 objectives “will be achieved within the recommended budget proposed for FY2027.”

Those goals include reducing the agency’s caseload, recruiting and retaining employees, increasing the number of board meetings, training board members and staff, hiring security services, and replacing furniture and equipment in the training room.

PERB also intends to increase the salaries of some employees.

The planned raises were disclosed during questioning by Senator Dwayne DeGraff before the affected staff members had been formally notified.

Senator Kurt Vialet noted that the salary adjustments and accompanying increases in fringe-benefit costs would affect the board’s overall spending plan.

No individual salary figures or total cost for the raises were provided during the discussion.

The Labor Management Committee is requesting $285,000 for FY2027, an increase of $85,000 over its previous appropriation.

Executive Director Yirah Tutein said part of the additional funding would be used for employee salary increases.

The executive assistant’s salary would rise from $45,000 to $46,000, while the executive director’s salary would increase from $70,000 to $85,000.

The custodian is also expected to receive a raise, although the proposed amount was not disclosed.

Committee Chairman Novelle Francis questioned the difference between the $15,000 increase proposed for the executive director and the $1,000 adjustment for the executive assistant.

Ms. Tutein said the executive director had not received a raise since 2018. The administrative assistant, by comparison, “had a raise two years ago.”

Of the LMC’s proposed budget, $147,000 would be used for personnel and $11,000 for fringe benefits.

The spending plan also includes $5,000 for capital outlays, $10,000 for office supplies and $112,000 for other services and charges.

The additional $85,000 requested for FY2027 would also help cover inter-island travel and professional services.

With slightly more than two months remaining in the current fiscal year, the Labor Management Committee is also asking lawmakers to consider providing additional FY2026 funding.

LMC Co-Chair Joseph Gumbs said the money would be used to revise the Virgin Islands Labor Management Committee information brochure.

The update would “provide additional information on frequently asked questions, training programs, and other pertinent information.”

No specific dollar amount was attached to the request.