



THE GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

BUREAU OF CORRECTIONS

"Security, Custody, Control"

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Bureau of Corrections Response to the AVIS Newspaper Weekend Issue

ST. THOMAS, USVI – The Virgin Islands Bureau of Corrections (BOC) continues to progress, despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which have affected employee morale, wellness, and work-life balance at correctional agencies nationwide. Director Wynnie Testamark continues to focus on supporting BOC staff by offering increased training, wellness, and virtual resiliency seminars, EPA sessions through CIGNA, and by emphasizing an open-door policy.

In the last month alone, correctional officers have received use of force, report writing, and firearms training. During that same time, correctional supervisors and civilian managers received leadership training at a week-long conference on St. Thomas. To address staffing shortages, which leads to long hours and low morale, BOC has stepped up its recruitment and retention efforts as part of its recently completed 5-year strategic plan. Those efforts have led to a record number of correctional recruits.

"BOC is not in the business of losing its sworn or civilian staff, and we are working proactively behind the scenes to transform our entire operation three or more strategies at a time," Testamark said. "Rest assured that our employees, inmates, and facilities remain our number one priority, and great things are to come."

In response to the AVIS weekend issue, Sunday-Monday, March 14-15, 2021, these are the facts regarding the LESU salary changes:

- As of March 10, 2021, all of the LESU 10/01/2019 salary change NOPAs have been released to partner agencies for their final approval.
- Once approved by these partner agencies, the 2019 LESU salary change NOPAs will be processed for payment.
- The 2020 LESU salary change NOPAs will be processed in the same manner once the 2019 NOPAs have been finalized.
- In addition to the wage increases, LESU members will receive retroactive pay from 10/1/2019.

- The exact same process applies for the 2019 and 2020 general scale wage increases for BOC civilian staff.
- All BOC staff who separated from BOC but are entitled to salary changes will receive manual ePAAD NOPAs.
- BOC has already begun processing ePAAD NOPAs for separated employees. These NOPAs will be processed manually.
- Note that outstanding retroactive payments will be generated upon complete execution of the NOPAs by partner agencies.
- BOC anticipates that all salary adjustments will be finalized by May 2021.
- Any BOC sworn or civilian staff owed a wage increase or retroactive pay will be paid.

Despite the pandemic's disproportionate impact on prisons and jails, BOC has continued to record concrete accomplishments that not only improve the agency's outlook but make it better able to achieve its core mission objectives. These accomplishments include:

- Hiring vital security personnel, including a new Warden and Assistant Warden for the Alexander A. Farrelly Criminal Justice Complex on St. Thomas.
- Making meaningful headway in resolving the overtime/payroll issues that led to an 8-year-old grievance by correctional officers. In November, BOC changed its payroll system to make sure that correctional officer overtime is correctly recorded. BOC continues to work with the Department of Finance to address any glitches in the payroll system that may affect correctional officer overtime pay or accrual of sick and annual leave.
- Redoubling its recruitment efforts, which has led to a record number of new correctional recruits on both islands. The Bureau will continue to work closely with the Division of Personnel to streamline the onboarding process, offer study guides, post a continuous employment posting, and provide entrance examination waivers for those individuals with degrees and military backgrounds with an honorable discharge for correctional recruits.
- Renegotiating the correctional officers' collective bargaining agreement, which expired in 2014.

"The Virgin Islands Bureau of Corrections continues to employ Correctional Best Practices and Techniques to foster a positive, innovative, and creative work environment that generates results so that everyone performs better," Testamark said. "We invite solutions-based suggestions and support from the community as we rise towards a sustainable future as an efficient and effective correctional agency."

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