



GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

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DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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Wednesday, April 15, 2015

TESTIMONY

**THE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT SERVICES, CONSUMER AND
VETERAN AFFAIRS ON BILL NO. 31-0036;**

Good day Senator Justin Harrigan Sr. Chairman of the Committee on Government Services, Consumer and Veterans Affairs and other sitting members of the Committee, also the listening and viewing audience.

My name is Howard Forbes Sr. and I am the Acting Director of the Department of Planning and Natural Resources' Division of Environmental Enforcement.

I am here before you today seeking your approval to amend Section 1. Title 25 Virgin Islands Code Chapter 16, Section 403 subsections (a) (1) which reads:

" The Commissioner is authorized and directed to conduct public hearings and, in accordance with Title 3, Section 913, Virgin Islands Code, promulgate rules and regulation or amend same relative to:

(a) Reasonable fee schedules for various administrative services, subject to the approval of the Legislature.

The DPNR's Division of Environmental Enforcement is requesting an amendment of the rules and regulation by striking the phrase:

"subject to the approval of the Legislature"

This will give the Department's Commissioner the ability to make changes to the fee structure without legislature approval. This will also give the Department the ability to increase mooring fees which have not been increased for over two decades.

The projected increase in revenue will allow the department to hire additional officers, and better maintain its fleet of vessels, thereby providing a much needed marine presence throughout the territory.

The Division of Environmental Enforcement presently has 10 (ten) officers in the territory, 5 in each district. Subsequently, the Division is understaffed for enforcing the rules and regulations of the nine divisions within DPNR and assisting other law enforcement agencies when needed. The division also has no dedicated marine unit.

Officer's responsibilities include:

- recreational boating safety enforcement and inspection
- fisheries enforcement and inspection
- serve notices of violation for other Divisions within the Department
- Marine search and rescue

The Division of Environmental Enforcement is tasked with many responsibilities with limited resources and is required to fulfill many tasks and obligations in addition to augmenting other local and federal law enforcement agencies.

Our primary function is to enforce all environmental rules and regulations, boating safety, permitting laws of the United States Virgin Islands, and to protect, conserve and preserve the natural resources of the Territory.

This concludes my prepared testimony and at this time I am available to answer any questions you may have.