



GOVERNMENT OF  
THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS  
OFFICE OF VETERANS AFFAIRS



St. Croix:  
Tel: (340) 773-VETS (8387)  
Fax: (340) 692-9563

St. Thomas:  
Tel: (340) 774-VETS (8387)  
Fax: (340) 714-0589

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

August 23, 2016

A most pleasant good day to you the Honorable Senator Justin Harrigan Sr., Chairman of the Committee on Government Services, Consumer and Veterans Affairs, Committee members, and other distinguished Senators of the 31<sup>st</sup> Legislature. Additional greetings to all that are physically present, listening via radio, or viewing via the Legislature's LEGIT TV. Last but certainly not least, to my comrades in and out of uniform known to you as the Veterans of this beloved territory, good afternoon.

Mr. Chairman, I humbly ask for your excusal from this very important hearing. I am not able to be personally in chambers due to a previously scheduled engagement which includes the Virgin Islands being selected as the 2017 host of the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs Annual Conference. For this I apologize; however I will like to place my position on the record as it pertains to Bill # 31-0173, an act amending Title 3 Virgin Islands Code chapter 1, section 8b to extend burial death benefits to veterans who were domiciled outside of the Virgin Islands at their time of death.

Mr. Chairman, in the Virgin Islands we are sometimes faced with medical situations that force us to travel outside of the territory to obtain certain types and levels of care. In some extreme cases it may cause actual relocation in order to receive the healthcare needed. Currently, non-service connected Veterans are reimbursed for travel outside of the territory once it is a scheduled appointment at a U.S. Veterans Affairs medical facility. If that Veteran passes away while at the VA Medical facility there is very minimal, if any, assistance rendered by the U.S. Veterans Affairs to return the remains of that Veteran being that he/she is non-service connected. I wholeheartedly support authorizing the VI Office of Veterans Affairs, based on the availability of funds, to reimburse a minimum of 50% to the person paying for the transportation of a Veterans' remains back to the Virgin Islands for final interment. Whether the Veteran was out of the territory because of an actual appointment or if they were forced to moved because of a medical condition within a certain time period I would deem them eligible for such a benefit. My recommendation on the time limit would be up to two (2) years before the passing of the Veteran.

Based on our financial allotments for the past couple of years and this current fiscal year, we are in the position to financially support these efforts at a minimum of a 50% reimbursement rate if the rate of death remains the same or slightly higher. **This measure will allow us to further live up to our mission statement by continuing to** honor the commitment of Virgin Islands Veterans. We are committed to doing just that.

Mr. Chairman, before closing, I will like to say "Thank You" to Senator Samuel Sanes for this proposal, not because he is a Veteran of the United

States Navy but because it's the right thing to do by those who have sacrificed so much to allow us the freedom we have today and for the future.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to address you and the Committee on Government Services, Consumer and Veterans Affairs as it pertains to Bill # 31-0173, an act amending Title 3 Virgin Islands Code chapter 1, section 8b to extend burial death benefits to veterans who were domiciled outside of the Virgin Islands at their time of death.