

Daniel Flippo, Director United Steelworkers District 9

Statement to the 36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands

Good morning, Mr. President, members of the 36th Legislature of the United States Virgin Islands, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for allowing me to speak with you virtually today regarding an important issue that we believe is crucial to your constituents, the Government of the Virgin Islands, and its future progress.

I am honored to serve as the District Director of District 9 and a member of the International Executive Board of the United Steel, Paper and Forestry, Rubber, Manufacturing, Energy, Allied Industrial, and Service Workers International Union, known worldwide as the USW. I want to provide a brief overview of our Organization, which represents some 850,000 workers across the United States and Canada in twelve (12) separate Districts. Our members work in every facet of our lives, including Steel, Rubber, Paper, aluminum, packaging, communication, healthcare, and Public Works, just to name a few.

In District 9 specifically, we represent workers in the U.S. Virgin Islands, including Saint Croix, Saint Thomas, and Saint John, as well as Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, Tennessee, North Carolina, and South Carolina. We represent approximately 50,000 workers in District 9 who work in various industries and the Public Service.

In the U.S. Virgin Islands, we are proud to represent Government Workers who support the public infrastructure of the Islands, communications, heavy materials, and the hospitality industry. We are incredibly proud of our members and their work. We honor their daily dedication and contributions, which they provide to make the lives of U.S. Virgin Islands citizens better every day through their work. Our members have a long history of joining together in a Labor Union to gain the security, respect, and dignity that a Collective Bargaining Agreement provides.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today in full support of Bill 36-0053, which is an Act amending title 3, Virgin Islands Code, chapter 25, subchapter 55b, which would increase the minimum salary for full-time employees of the Government of the Virgin Islands, its semi-autonomous and agencies and independent instrumentalities from the current rate of \$27,040 to a new rate of \$32,000.

We support the passage of this bill for several specific reasons. First, the U.S. Virgin Islands is blessed with three (3) beautiful Islands that have not only beautiful landscapes, magnificent views, and resilient people full of pride and history but also a Public workforce that cares and wants to have the Government of the U.S. Virgin Islands protect its heritage and the beauty of the Islands for generations to come. The daily work of the Government and its workers in the U.S. Virgin Islands is essential to providing the services that the Government requires, protecting the Island's infrastructure, and ensuring that citizens receive services provided both courteously and efficiently. The dedication to this mission deserves a minimum salary that attracts the best employees possible for the essential roles that they provide for the Government and the citizens of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Secondly, the passage of Bill 36-0053 will help retain the next generation of Government Workers to provide the essential services the citizens of the Virgin Islands deserve. Our world is constantly evolving through innovative technology. Not so long ago, I would not have been able to video conference into a meeting as we are today.

The changes that technology has brought to our lives require a salary that not only retains the current workers of the Government of the U.S. Virgin Islands but also requires that the next generation of workers remain on the Islands to contribute and help the Islands grow and prosper. Increasing the minimum salary of these workers, as Bill 36-0053 provides, is a positive step in ensuring that the retention of the current workers is enhanced and the prospect of attracting the next generation of workers is on a path to success.

I would also recommend keeping in mind that, in the current economic climate, it is essential to provide workers with a salary that can provide a living wage. No one needs to be reminded that the cost of all facets of life, including housing, electricity, water, food, and the bare essentials of life, has increased over the last several years. We believe that all workers deserve and want to earn a fair, livable, and sustainable wage to support their families' needs. This increase in the minimum salary will assist in this regard.

Finally, the increase proposed and offered in Bill 36-0053 is simply the right thing to do. The passage and enactment of this amendment will facilitate the retention of current employees, enhance the ability to attract the next generation of public servants and provide the necessary support in addressing the growing cost of living.

We thank and commend Senators Vialet and Federick for sponsoring this important piece of legislation. On behalf of our International Union, its Executive Board, and its members, we fully support Bill 36-0053 and respectfully request that the whole of the 36th Legislature of the United States Virgin Islands pass it for the well-being of the dedicated workers of the incredible and beautiful U.S. Virgin Islands.

Respectfully Submitted:

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