

Dear Senators of the 36th Legislature and Mr. Dwane Callwood,

I am asking that this serve as my testimony and that you, Mr. Dwane Callwood, please make this part of the record for COW, (Committee of the Whole)

I have been a resident of Water Island for 11 years and love our way of life. I do not own, I rent, but my daughter and her family do own here and 2 of their 3 children were born right here on Water Island on their property with Miss Wendy attending their home water birth. Living on Water Island is not for the faint of heart. Every day errands are not as easy as we must commute to St. Thomas for many of our basic needs. Grocery shopping alone is quite the chore. And heavens forbid, we need a new refrigerator or any other appliance. But I will say that those of us who do live here, I do not believe, we would have it any other way.

I would like to take the time to personally thank all of the Senators and Representatives who have made a trip to Water Island, to take it in personally and invite any of those who have not to please come do so.

I am writing as a concerned Virgin Islander to urge you to vote NO on Bill #36-0340 when it comes before the Legislature on Tuesday, August 4. This bill would ratify the amended lease between the V.I. government and Water Island Development Company for the proposed resort, marina, and residential development on Water Island.

I have followed the hearings and reviewed both versions of the proposed lease, and I share the serious concerns raised by Water Island residents and the Water Island Civic Association:

- No real performance guarantee. The lease contains no enforceable mandate that the development actually be built, and no meaningful protection for the territory if the developer fails to perform. The \$3 million performance bond covers only permitting and design work on a \$300 million project — it does nothing to guarantee the resort itself is ever completed.
- No reversion clause. There is no provision requiring the land to revert to the USVI government if the development doesn't happen within a reasonable timeframe, leaving public land tied up indefinitely with no recourse.
- Protected land included. The lease includes land that is designated as non-development by deed, as well as historical and cultural sites that have no legitimate connection to a hotel or residential project.
- Public beach access at risk. The lease encompasses every sandy shoreline on Water Island currently open to the public. While Honeymoon Beach is technically excluded, the lease seeks control over it through a license arrangement — achieving the same result by another route.
- No oversight of private residential sales. The lease places no controls on who WIDC can sell its planned private residences to, or at what price. This strips away the Senate's traditional authority over the sale of public land, opening the door for insider deals at the public's expense.
- Federal authorization is missing. The federal deed restrictions protecting Water Island have not been released by the Department of the Interior, and DOI has confirmed only it can release them. The Legislature is being asked to approve a lease the federal government has not yet authorized.
- No competitive process. A public request for proposals was never issued for this deal, and the developer's financing remains unverified. The Legislature's own chief counsel has also flagged that the lease was reinstated after being terminated for nonperformance in 2025, with no evidence the breach was ever cured, and that the amendment could extend the agreement to roughly 113 years.

Given these gaps, I do not believe this lease is ready for a vote. I'm not opposed to responsible development on Water Island — but this deal, as written, protects the developer far more than it protects the Virgin Islands.

I respectfully ask that you vote NO on Bill #36-0340 on August 4, and insist on a lease that includes real performance requirements, reversion protections, protection of public beaches and cultural sites, and full DOI authorization before any vote is taken.

Thank you for representing the interests of Virgin Islanders on this issue.

Respectfully,

Debbie White
OSC.1 Altona & Welgunst Precinct
Lot 28 Remainder, Limestone Road,
(physical rental address for past 6 years of the 11 years of residence)
3 Water Island
St. Thomas, VI 00802

Debbie White, Secretary
Water Island Search & Rescue, Inc.
(207) 659-1264
farmchick1959@gmail.com