



35th Legislature Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance

May 9, 2023, OTAG MG Kodjo Knox-Limbacker Testimony

1 Good day, Chairperson of the 35th Legislature's Committee on Budget,
2 Appropriations, and Finance Honorable Donna A. Frett-Gregory, Vice Chairman
3 Honorable Novelle E. Francis Jr., Committee Members Honorable Marvin A.
4 Blyden, Honorable Samuel Carrion, Honorable Dwayne M. DeGraff, Honorable
5 Ray Fonseca, Honorable Javan E. James Sr; all non-committee members present in
6 the Senate chambers; and the general public viewing and listening locally as well as
7 abroad. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony for Bill No. 35-
8 0012 to increase the National Guard Retirement Pension.

9
10 I am Major General Kodjo S. Knox-Limbacker, The Adjutant General, and the
11 Commander of the Virgin Islands National Guard. It is an honor and privilege to
12 provide written testimony in support of the Bill No. 35-0012 Act amending Title 23
13 Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 19, Subchapter III, section 1556 relating to the
14 retirement from the National Guard to increase the retirement pension.

15
16 **Bottom-Line Up Front:** I commend the Government of the Virgin Islands for the
17 monthly \$100.00 payments paid to our National Guard Grey Area Retirees from age
18 55 to 60. I fully support increasing it to \$200.00 and recommend it be increased to
19 \$300.00 to meet the original intent of this bill.

20
21 **Context:** \$100.00 dollars in 1982 when this bill was originally passed is equal to
22 \$320.87 in 2023 per the (Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis Inflation Calculator)
23 <https://www.minneapolisfed.org/about-us/monetary-policy/inflation-calculator>.
24 The Virgin Islands Army and Air National Guard Soldiers and Airmen primary job
25 is to fight and win our nation's wars, while defending the Homeland and our way of
26 life. As our servicemembers are called to serve routinely in the territory over the
27 span of their 20 years plus careers to reach retirement eligibility. The geographic
28 location of the four noncontiguous islands making up the Virgin Islands creates
29 unique challenges all hazards and workforce challenges. Our territory's
30 undermanned medical support personnel; public works personnel; and Fire and
31 Emergency Service; and local and federal law enforcement agency leads to
32 routinely request support from the Virgin Islands National Guard in the territory.
33 In 1973 the draft for military service ceased after the Vietnam War, this began era
34 of our all-volunteer military serving today. Our local Army and Air National Guard
35 men and women who make up the all-volunteer total force continue to deploy in
36 support of the Combatant Commander's requirements around the globe. Our



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37 Servicemembers have and will deploy to the Middle East, Africa, South America in
38 support of national interest, as well as to the United States southern border in
39 supporting Homeland Security missions. I am pleased to see the Virgin Islands have
40 gone above and beyond to recognize and support our veterans in the past. This
41 measure to increase the payment from \$100 to \$200 is not only honorable but
42 needed for these for some of our veterans. Currently, the Office of the Adjutant
43 General has 50 personnel receiving payments and can cover the increased cost from
44 May to September 2023 without additional funding. For Fiscal Year 2024, \$40,000
45 additional funds will be needed to add to the \$80,000 currently budgeted to provide
46 \$200.00 to identified 50 Grey Area Retiree. We can undoubtedly say that the
47 freedoms and defense support to civil agencies we enjoy every day in the Virgin
48 Islands and the nation come at a cost. At times, the cost of life, limb, or debilitating
49 injuries suffered by the men and women affects them emotionally and financially,
50 anything we can do to help our veterans is much appreciated.

51
52 **Closing:** In closing, I would like to thank this legislative body for the continued
53 support it provides to our Servicemembers, Veterans, and their Families. The Office
54 of Veterans Affairs estimates they are 8,000 veterans in the territory, but only 3,000
55 are registered with their office. We have approximately 8,000 Veterans in the
56 territory which is 0.091 percent of our 87,146 population (per 2020 Census). It
57 seems fiscally manageable to provide a total of \$120,000 annually for our 50 Grey
58 Area Retirees who selflessly and honorably served the people of the U.S. Virgin
59 Islands in our times of need. There should be no hesitation to vote favorably for this
60 legislative change. The Government of the Virgin Islands have and will continue to
61 call on our Army and Air National Guard for all hazards events supporting all 15
62 Emergency Support Functions to aid our governmental agencies. VINGs
63 capabilities significantly increases our government's ability to respond to
64 hurricanes, pandemics, public safety, environmental air and water monitoring,
65 weapons of mass destruction, counter drug, and support to homeland security
66 requirements to prevent/defense against terrorist activities in our territory. Our
67 Servicemembers, Veterans, and their Families thank you for your continued to
68 support.

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70 Thank you for allowing my testimony to be read Madam Chair,
71 Sincerely Major General Kodjo S. Knox-Limbacker.