



Legislature Of The Virgin Islands

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THE HONORABLE
Carla J. Joseph
LEGISLATIVE SECRETARY
35TH LEGISLATURE OF
THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

CHAIR

Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs,
and Consumer Protection

*Liaison to the United States Department of Interior and
Office of Insular Affairs*

MEMBER

Committee of the Whole

Committee on Rules and Judiciary


Committee on Education and Workforce Development

Committee on Disaster Recovery, Infrastructure, and Planning

Committee on Housing, Transportation, and Telecommunications

Memorandum: 23-009

TO: Mrs. Kurell A. Sheridan, JD
Executive Director
35th Legislature of the V.I.

FROM: Carla Joseph 
Chair
Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs,
and Consumer Protection

DATE: March 21, 2023

SUBJECT: Committee Report for Monday, March 20, 2023 Meeting

Please find attached the report for the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection (GOVACP) meeting held on Monday, March 20, 2023, in the Frits E. Lawaetz Legislative Conference Room, St. Croix.

Cc: All Senators
Chief Legal Counsel
Archive Division
Journal Division

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS, VETERANS AFFAIRS, AND CONSUMER PROTECTION MARCH 20, 2023 COMMITTEE MEETING REPORT

The Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection held its meeting on Monday, March 20, 2023, at the Frits E. Lawaetz Conference Room on St. Croix. The Committee received testimony and considered the following bill:

- Bill No. 35-0010 – An Act honoring and commending Mr. Aloy “Wenty” Nielsen for his years of service to the Virgin Islands community and naming the Christiansted Bypass in his honor; making a \$10,000 appropriation from the General Fund for signage at Aloy Nielsen Bypass and for other related purposes. This bill is sponsored by Senators Novelle E. Francis, Jr., Kenneth L. Gittens, and Angel L. Bolques, Jr.

Then, the Committee received testimony on the operations of the Virgin Islands Veteran Affairs, the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs, and the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission.

The meeting was called to order by the Committee Chair, Sen. Carla J. Joseph at 9:34 a.m.

Committee Members Present

Sen. Carla J. Joseph, Chair
 Sen. Javan E. James, Sr., Vice-Chair
 Sen. Samuel Carrion
 Sen. Ray Fonseca
 Sen. Alma Francis Heyliger
 Sen. Kenneth L. Gittens
 Sen. Milton E. Potter

Sergeant-At-Arms

Ms. Khalisha Clarke
 Mr. David Johnson

Public Affairs/Media

Mr. Kashief Hamilton
 Mr. Omari Hicks
 Ms. Diana Cruz
 Ms. Chaunte Herbert
 Ms. Africah Harrigan
 Mr. Alvin Burke, Jr.
 Mr. Alwyn Baptiste, Jr.
 Mr. Eustace Browne
 Ms. Melissa Gustave
 Mr. Bernard Matthew, Sr.

Non-Committee Members Present

Sen. Pres., Novelle E. Francis, Jr.
 Sen. Diane T. Capehart
 Sen. Marise C. James

Protocol Officer

Ms. Myrna De-Altier-Pickard

Legislative Reporters

Ms. Vashti Berry
 Mrs. Natanya Melchior-Munoz
 Ms. Nadine Coley-Williams

Clerk/ Timekeeper

Ms. Delekah Callwood

Supporting Staff

Kadeem Harry

Legal Counsel

Attorney Holly Fulkerson

In block one, Bill No. 35-0010 was introduced by Senators Novelle E. Francis, Jr and Kenneth L. Gittens. Mr. Robert Moorehead, Ms. Chainie Lang, and Mr. Darryl A. Smalls, Former Commissioner of the Department of Public Works testified in support of the bill. Also, John Paul David, Wystan Benjamin, and Ricky Nielsen written testimony in support of the measure were read into the record. Senators proceeded with one (1) round of four (4) minutes each of questioning. Senator Gittens made a motion for Bill No 35-0010 to be approved and forwarded to the Rules and Judiciary Committee for further consideration. The motion was seconded by Senators Carrion, James, and Heyliger Francis. The motion was carried.

In block two of the meeting, Director Patrick Farrell of the Office on Veterans Affairs appeared before the Committee and presented testimony on the Office of Veterans Affairs operations including but not limited to enabling law and jurisdiction, current agency challenges, and plan of action to resolve challenges. Additionally, Mr. Joel Giffit a Vietnam Veteran of the United States Army testified that the Veteran's Medical travel to the mainland is only being reimbursed in the amount of \$250.00. However, the cost of travel to the U.S. mainland is expensive and the \$250.00 reimbursement is insufficient. Mr. Giffit advocated for the reinstatement of full medical travel cost reimbursement. Senators proceeded with one (1) round of five (5) minutes. Director Farrell stated that the Veterans Affairs are fully staffed as of today. He also mentioned that there are approximately 8, 000 veterans in the Virgin Islands. Joel Giffit expressed his concerns on the allowance for medical travel reimbursement for veterans in dire need of healthcare and medical attention.

In block three of the meeting, Commissioner Richard T. Evangelista, Esq. of the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs testified on the operations to include but not limited to enabling law and jurisdiction, current agency challenges, and plan of action to resolve challenges. Senators were allotted one (1) round of seven (7) minutes. Commissioner Evangelista stated that there are 54 positions with 7 vacancies and that one of their major challenges is the lack of staff. He also stated that a total of \$3,215,423.24 was awarded to DLCA in grants from the American Rescue Plan Act. Commissioner Evangelista represented that the ARPA funds were used to purchase kiosks at the Vendors' Plaza, and they will officially be open on Monday, April 17, 2023.

In the final block of the meeting, the committee was slated to receive testimony from representatives of the V.I. Taxicab Commission. A letter from Vernice Gumbs, Executive Director of the V.I. Taxicab Commission, was read into the record asking to be excused from this meeting due to being under continued medical care from her physician. Senator Joseph excused the Executive Director and extended her prayers to Director Gumbs for healing as well as a speedy recovery.

During the meeting, a request for additional information was made through the chair. The information is as follows:

- Senator Samuel Carrion asked Veterans Affairs for the number of veterans burials in FY 2022;
- Senator Samuel Carrion requested from Veteran Affairs a copy of the travel policy for veterans traveling for medical reasons; and
- Senator Carla J. Joseph asked Veterans Affairs for the name of the contractor being used to gather the name of all veterans the contracted amount and the performance period of the contract.

The Chair, Sen. Carla J. Joseph, adjourned the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection meeting at 4:55 p.m.