



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: 23-022

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: June 1, 2023

SUBJECT: Committee Report for Wednesday, May 31, 2023 Meeting

Please find attached the report for the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection (GOVACP) meeting held on Wednesday, May 31, 2023, in the Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall, St. Thomas.

Cc: All Senators
Chief Legal Counsel
Archive Division
Journal Division

**GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS, VETERANS AFFAIRS, AND CONSUMER PROTECTION
MAY 31, 2023 COMMITTEE MEETING REPORT**

The Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection held its meeting on Wednesday, May 31, 2023, at the Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall on St. Thomas. The Committee received testimony on the operations of the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission and also received testimony and considered the following bills:

- Bill No. 35-0036 – An Act amending title 3 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 16, section 274, subsection (f), paragraph (11) to clarify the duties and responsibilities of the Executive Director of the Taxicab Commission. This bill is sponsored by Senators Angel L. Bolques, Jr., and Kenneth L. Gittens,
- Bill No. 35-0008- An Act amending title 3 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 1, section 8a relating to the Office of Veterans Affairs to establish the Veterans Council under the Office of Veterans Affairs to serve as advisor to the Office of Veterans Affairs and as a liaison between the Office of Veterans Affairs and all private entities serving veterans in the Territory. This bill is sponsored by Senator Dwayne M. DeGraff,
- Bill No. 35-0033- An Act honoring and commending Mr. Benburin “Benny” Stephens posthumously for his heroism in saving the lives of a mother and her children and to rename the Bovoni Road (Route No. 30), specifically from the entrance of the Abattoir to the entrance of the Bertha C. Boschulte Middle School, “The Benburin “Benny” Stephens Drive”. This bill is sponsored by Senators Ray Fonseca and Marvin A. Blyden, and
- Bill No. 35-0075- An Act to designate the third Monday in February as Virgin Islands Governors Day. This bill is sponsored by Senators Angel L. Bolques, Jr., and Marvin A. Blyden.

The meeting was called to order by the Committee Chair, Sen. Carla J. Joseph at 9:33 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. Milton E. Potter
Sen. Kenneth L. Gittens

Sergeant-At-Arms

Mr. Delvin Fleming
Mr. Devaughn Dowe

Public Affairs/Media

Ms. Diana Cruz
Ms. Chaunte Herbert
Mr. Jamal Potter
Mr. Barry Leerdam
Mr. Omari Hicks
Ms. Africah Harrigan
Mr. Kashief Hamilton
Ms. Melissa Gustave
Mr. Alwyn Baptiste, Jr.
Mr. Alvin Burke, Jr.

Non-Committee Members Present

Sen. Angel L. Bolques, Jr.
Sen. Dwayne M. DeGraff
Sen. Diane T. Capehart
Sen. Marvin A. Blyden
Sen. Marise C. James

Legislative Reporters

Ms. Tricia Sealey
Mrs. Natanya Melchoir-Munoz
Ms. Joanne Samuel
Ms. Vashti Berry

Clerk/Timekeeper

Ms. Delelah Callwood

Supporting Staff

Ms. Knysa Berkeley
Ms. Cheryl Thompson

Legal Counsel

Attorney Nandi Sekou

In block one of the meeting, Ms. Vernice Gumbs, Executive Director of the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission and Chairwoman of the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission Board, Ms. Loretta Lloyd 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 five (5) minutes. Executive Director, Gumbs stated in her testimony that the lack of automated services and data has left the commission at a disadvantage with manual operations. Chairwoman Lloyd represented that the Taxicab Commission office has been closed from March 21, 2023, due to mold remediation and plans to reopen on Monday, June 5, 2023.

In block two of the meeting, Bill No. 35-0036 was introduced by Sen. Angel L. Bolques, Jr. Ms. Vernice Gumbs, Executive Director of the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission, Honorable Richard T. Evangelista, Esq., Commissioner of the Department of Licensing and Consumer, and The Honorable Janelle K. Sarauw, Former Senator testified in support of the bill. Senators proceeded with one (1) round of three (3) minutes each of questioning. Senator Gittens made a motion for Bill No. 35-0036 to be approved and forwarded to the Rules and Judiciary Committee for further consideration. The motion was seconded by Senators Potter and James. Voting in favor were Senators Fonseca, Francis Heyliger, Gittens, James, Joseph, and Potter. The motion was carried.

In block three of the meeting, Bill No. 35-0008 was introduced by Sen. Dwayne M. DeGraff. Mr. Patrick Farrell, Director of the Office of Veterans Affairs, Major General Kodjo S. Knox-Limbacker, Adjutant General of the V.I. National Guard, Ms. Hillis Benjamin, Commander of the American Legion Post 90, and Mr. Jean Forde, Assistant Commissioner of the Department of Labor testified in opposition of the bill. Senators proceeded with one (1) round of three (3) minutes each of questioning. Senator Francis Heyliger made a motion for Bill No. 35-0008 to be approved and forwarded to the Rules and Judiciary Committee for further consideration. The motion was seconded by Senator Carrion. The motion failed and the bill remains in Committee.

In block four of the meeting, Bill No. 35-0033 was introduced by Sen. Ray Fonseca. Ms. Beverly Stephens-Samuel, Mr. Ariel Brathwaite, Ms. Monife Stout, and Dr. Robert C. Chalwell, Jr. testified in support of the bill. Senators proceeded with one (1) round of three (3) minutes each of questioning. Senator Fonseca made a motion for Bill No. 35-0033 to be approved and forwarded to the Rules and Judiciary Committee for further consideration. The motion was seconded by Senators Francis Heyliger and Potter. Voting in favor were Senators Fonseca, Francis Heyliger, Gittens, James, Joseph, and Potter. The motion was carried.

In the final block of the meeting, Bill No. 35-0075 was introduced by Sen Angel L. Bolques, Jr. The Honorable Myron Jackson, Former Senator, testified in person in support of the bill. The Honorable Shawn Michael Malone, Former Senator, The Honorable Vargrave Richards, Former Lt. Governor, and The Honorable Stedmann Hodge, Jr. testimonies in support of the bill were read into the record. Former Senator Malone appeared virtually to answer questions on the measure. Senators proceeded with one (1) round of three (3) minutes each of questioning. Senator Carrion made a motion to move Amendment No. 35-297 to Bill No. 35-0075. The motion failed due to a lack of a second. Senator Potter made a motion for Bill No 35-0075 to be approved and forwarded to the Rules and Judiciary Committee for further consideration. The motion was seconded by Senator Carrion. Voting in favor were Senators Carrion, Joseph, and Potter. Senator Francis-Heyliger voted against the measure. The motion was carried.

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

- Senator Ray Fonseca asked the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission to submit what is needed for them to have automated services.
- Senator Samuel Carrion asked the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission to submit the number of citations that have been filed.
- Senator Samuel Carrion asked the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission to submit the deadline to have the medallion registry completed.

- Senator Samuel Carrion asked the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission to submit the number of complaints received and the status of those complaints.
- Senator Samuel Carrion asked the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission to submit a copy of the monthly financial report for the last year.
- Senator Samuel Carrion asked the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission to submit a copy of the by-laws as well as policy and procedures.
- Senator Dwayne M. DeGraff asked the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission to submit a copy of the amount of money generated prior to the closure.

The Chair, Sen. Carla J. Joseph, adjourned the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection meeting at 6:23 p.m.