



1 Good day, Chairperson of the 35th Legislature's Committee on Government
2 Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection, Honorable Carla J. Joseph,
3 Vice Chairman Honorable Javan E. James Sr., Committee Members Honorable
4 Kenneth L. Gittens, Honorable Samuel Carrión, Honorable Alma Francis Heyliger,
5 Honorable Ray Fonseca, Honorable Milton E. Potter; all non-committee members
6 present in the Senate chambers; and the general public viewing and listening. Thank
7 you for the opportunity to provide written testimony for the Act to add a new
8 section 8(d) of Bill No. 35-0008.

9
10 I am Major General Kodjo S. Knox-Limbacker, The Adjutant General, and the
11 Commander of the Virgin Islands National Guard. I am here at your request to
12 provide testimony on Bill No. 35-0008 – An Act amending Title 3 Virgin Islands
13 Code, Chapter 1, to add section 8(d) to a Veterans Advisory Council.

14
15 **Bottom-Line Up Front:** I need more clarity on how these initiatives benefit
16 Veterans beyond what is available today. The proposed council may be duplicative
17 in nature or create additive layers that delay the delivery of services to our Veterans
18 in the territory. The Virgin Islands Office of Veterans Affairs is our conduit to the
19 Department of Veterans Affairs. There were 26 Veterans Affairs Advisory
20 Committees already established at the federal level, where policy authority is
21 associated, and federal funding allocation resides.

22
23 **Context:**

24 Unlike large states or territories with numerous mayors and municipalities which
25 creates difficulty to address veterans' concerns. These states and large territories
26 have limited access to varied lawmakers, Senators, Congresspersons, or their
27 Veteran Affairs personnel, I would say the Virgin Islands is different. The Veterans
28 in our community have access to the Director of the Office of Veterans Affairs as
29 well all 15 Senators of the 35th Legislature, our Congresswoman, Lieutenant
30 Governor, and Governor to address our Veterans concerns. Through leveraging
31 available townhalls, Senate Committee hearings like this one and the federal
32 Department of Veterans Affairs outreach, I am not sure what is the impetus for this
33 initiative. I seek further information before I can concur with this initiative.
34 Additionally, I am concerned about misinformation and increased workload for the



35 Office of Veterans Affairs. I do think this Legislative Committee can receive
36 concerns from Veterans groups and convening similar hearings like this one to
37 prevent missteps based on ideas and opinion versus federal policy and law with
38 strict guidelines. Many of our Veteran's group can write, call, and lobby for
39 additional benefits beyond what is provided or that may present unique needs for
40 the Virgin Islands. If you are a registered Veteran, like me, you can receive updates
41 on retirement, medical, and other benefits online, by phone, or by mail
42 correspondence.

43
44 According to <https://www.va.gov/advisory/> The federal level Department already
45 has an Advisory Committee Management Office to address the concerns laid out in
46 this Bill. *"The Advisory Committee Management Office's (ACMO) mission is to
47 provide guidance and support to the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Federal
48 advisory committees. Federal advisory committees are a key component of VA's
49 overall strategy to achieve stakeholder and public engagement in its efforts and
50 commitment to serve Veterans, their families, and Survivors. The Federal Advisory
51 Committee Act (P. L. 92-463) provides a mechanism for an advisory committees to
52 operate as another component of the "people's voice" in our democratic form of
53 government.*

54
55 *Some of VA's advisory committees have been mandated by Congress to ensure
56 that federal laws, as carried out by the executive branch, are meeting their intended
57 goals. Other VA committees have been created by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs
58 to assess specific VA policies or programs. Advisory committee members are
59 generally acknowledged by VA's leadership and members of the Veterans Affairs
60 Committees in Congress as "consumer representatives" of those millions of
61 beneficiaries whose lives are affected each year by VA programs.*

62
63 *ACMO is committed to supporting VA's mission by managing and promoting the
64 highest quality administration of the laws, regulations, and policies governing
65 Federal advisory committees. At this website, you can access information about
66 each of VA's Federal advisory committees, its membership, laws, regulations, and
67 other applicable guidance relating to the establishment and management of*



68 *advisory committees. You may also access information concerning ethics and*
69 *financial disclosure.” <https://www.va.gov/advisory/>*

70
71 The following list of 26 Veterans Affairs Advisory Committees includes 17 that
72 have been established by statute (with an asterisk *) and 9 nonstatutory committees
73 designed to provide advice on selected VA programs and policies at the federal
74 level. A key insight is these have associated federal authorities for policy and
75 funding to support their initiatives.

- 76
- 77 1. VA National Academic Affiliations Council
- 78 2. Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials *
- 79 3. Cooperative Studies Scientific Evaluation Committee
- 80 4. Advisory Committee on Disability Compensation *
- 81 5. Veterans' Advisory Committee on Education *
- 82 6. Veterans' Advisory Committee on Environmental Hazards * Administratively
83 Inactive
- 84 7. Advisory Committee on Former Prisoners of War *
- 85 8. ~~Genomic Medicine Program Advisory Committee~~– terminated as of 6/9/2022
- 86 9. Geriatrics and Gerontology Advisory Committee *
- 87 10. Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses *
- 88 11. Health Services Research and Development Service Merit Review Board
- 89 12. Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans
- 90 13. Joint Biomedical Laboratory Research and Development and Clinical Science
91 Research and Development Services Scientific Merit Review Board
- 92 14. Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans *
- 93 15. National Research Advisory Council
- 94 16. Advisory Committee on Prosthetics and Special Disabilities Programs *
- 95 17. Advisory Committee on the Readjustment of Veterans *
- 96 18. Veterans' Advisory Committee on Rehabilitation *
- 97 19. Rehabilitation Research and Development Service Scientific Merit Review
98 Board
- 99 20. Veterans' Rural Health Advisory Committee
- 100 21. Special Medical Advisory Group *



101 22. Advisory Committee on Structural Safety of Department of Veterans Affairs
102 Facilities *

103 23. Department of Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service National Advisory
104 Committee

105 24. Advisory Committee on Women Veterans *

106 25. Veterans' Family, Caregiver, and Survivor Advisory Committee

107 26. Veterans and Community Oversight and Engagement Board *

108
109 The geographic location of the four noncontiguous islands making up the Virgin
110 Islands creates unique challenges for veterans living and working in the territory.
111 We can undoubtedly say freedoms we enjoy in the nation and the Virgin Islands
112 come at a cost of dedicated selfless service and unfortunately debilitating acute and
113 chronic illness and often death for many who serve in our nation's military. The
114 cost of life, limb, or debilitating injuries suffered by the men and women affects
115 them emotionally and financially, and I applaud your efforts to seek solution to
116 deliver more efficiently deliver support and services to our veterans.

117
118 **Closing:** In closing, I would like to thank this legislative body for the continued
119 support it provides to our Servicemembers, Veterans, and their Families. The Office
120 of Veterans Affairs estimates they are 8,000 veterans in the territory, but only 3,000
121 are registered with their office. We have approximately 8,000 Veterans in the
122 territory which is 0.091 percent of our 87,146 population (per 2020 Census). Our
123 Servicemembers, Veterans, and their Families thank you for your continued support
124 and initiatives.

125
126 Thank you for the opportunity to provide my testimony Madam Chair,
127 Sincerely Major General Kodjo S. Knox-Limbacker.