

Good Afternoon Senator Carla Joseph, Chairperson of the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs and Consumer Protection, Senator Dwayne DeGraff and other Senators Present.

I am Hillis Benjamin, Commander of American Legion Patrick U. George Post 90, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, here to provide my input of 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 Counsel 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.

Let me state for the record, a Veterans Council has been initiated by the Director of Veterans Affairs. At its second meeting, the members present elected the positions of Chairman, Vice Chairman and Secretary and has develop the By-laws that would govern the operation of the council.

The formation of a council provides the Director of Veteran Affairs a single entity that will help plan, coordinate and execute activities affecting veterans. Any veteran in the Virgin Islands and Virgin Islands Veterans residing on the mainland are eligible for membership.

My concerns regarding this bill are:

1. Who will determine the make-up of the council?

2. Will this bill put any additional burden on the government?

3. Is legislation required at all regarding the formation of a council?

I recommend that the council already formed by the Director of Veterans Affairs is allowed to function without the implementation of this legislation. The council along with the Director should provide this committee with updates on its activities and programs and then if legislation is needed to enforce and ensure the council operates as intended then maybe legislation submitted when all else fails.

I thank you for allowing me to testify on behalf of the members of Post 90 and I stand ready to answer any questions you may have.