

Virgin Islands Fire and Emergency Medical Services

**Testimony on Bill No. 35-0173,
an Act amending Title 5 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 201, by
adding a subchapter enacting the Safe Haven Newborn
Protection Act**



**COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, HOSPITALS, AND HUMAN SERVICES
35th LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS**

DECEMBER 6, 2023

Presented By: Antonio Stevens, Acting Director of Fire

Good morning, Honorable Senator Ray Fonseca, Chairman of the Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services, other distinguished Committee members, and the listening and viewing audience.

I am Antonio Stevens, Acting Director of the Virgin Islands Fire and Emergency Medical Services (VIFEMS). I am before you today to provide testimony on Bill 35-0173, the Safe Haven Newborn Protection Act.

VIFEMS fully endorses the proposed legislation and welcomes the opportunity to serve and protect the most vulnerable members of our community.

With the passage of Bill 35-0173, the Virgin Islands will join other states and territories in offering parents a means of safely relinquishing their newborns.

Like many other safe haven legislations, this bill tasks first responders and medical providers with critical roles. VIFEMS is in full support of the role assigned to our employees as it aligns with the current duties and responsibilities of our EMS providers. Moreover, our personnel receive HIPAA training and are otherwise mandated to maintain confidentiality, which will help to ensure the details of any relinquishing, including the identity of the parents will not be disclosed.

The designation of fire stations as safe havens ensures that all parents regardless of where they reside are afforded an opportunity to take advantage of the law if they so choose. We currently operate 11 stations, strategically located throughout the territory.

While we are in support of the bill for the foregoing reasons, we do have the following recommendations:

1. The signs on the buildings of every Safe Haven Provider and any materials educating the public on the law should state that a newborn can only be lawfully relinquished to an employee of the Safe Haven Provider. It should be made clear that a parent cannot leave their baby at a facility if there are no personnel present.
2. The Department of Human Services in conjunction with the Safe Haven Providers should develop a standard operating procedure for the

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employees of the providers. This will ensure that there is uniformity in safe haven operations where practical.

3. Any SOP created should outline the roles and responsibilities of Safe Haven Provider personnel, list the information that must be provided to a relinquishing parent, and provide helpful tips. For instance, the SOP may include guidance on how to ascertain a baby's age so personnel can determine if relinquishing is permissible. It may also be beneficial to include questions that an employee should consider asking a parent. While questions regarding the identity of the parent would be impermissible, inquiring about the parent's medical history and pregnancy and delivery may be helpful in determining the appropriate treatment, care, and placement of a baby.

The Safe Haven Newborn Protection Act ensures the most innocent among us are protected and cared for, and I urge this body to take favorable action on Bill 35-0173.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I am available to answer any questions you may have.