



***GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES' RETIREMENT SYSTEM OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS***

**PRESENTATION  
TO  
THE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY, JUSTICE, AND PUBLIC  
SAFETY  
THE THIRTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE  
OF  
THE VIRGIN ISLANDS OF THE UNITED STATES**

**BILL NO. 35-0238**

**The Frits E. Lawaetz Legislative Conference Room  
St. Croix, Virgin Islands  
Tuesday, May 14, 2024  
10:00 AM**

Good morning, Senate Majority Leader, Senator Kenneth L. Gittens, Chairperson of the Committee on Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety, esteemed committee members, other legislators present, and members of the viewing and listening audience. I am Roy Moorehead, Acting Property Manager and Chief Security Officer of the Government Employees Retirement System at Havensight Mall.

We respectfully request your support for this legislative amendment, Bill No. 35-0238, which aims to confer peace officer status on qualified enforcement officers employed by the Government Employees Retirement System of the Virgin Islands. For those who may not be aware, the Government Employees Retirement System owns and operates the Havensight Mall. This proposed legislation, sponsored by Senators Milton E. Potter and Angel L. Bolques, Jr., is not merely a request for enhanced authority; it is a strategic initiative to enhance the safety and security framework of Havensight Mall, a bustling hub and significant cruise port in the US Virgin Islands. Your support for this amendment is pivotal to realizing GERS's shared vision of a safe and flourishing community.

Havensight Mall's diverse commercial ecosystem includes a wide variety of venues, ranging from popular restaurants such as Agave, Tap & Still, Smoking Rooster, and Virgin's Haven, which draw significant local nighttime activity, to many retail stores, including jewelry, souvenir, and clothing stores. This vibrant mix attracts a significant daily influx of locals and tourists, notably cruise ship passengers, who account for a substantial amount of our foot traffic. The variety of offerings, from dining to shopping, ensures that Havensight Mall remains a key destination for visitors and residents alike, contributing to the vibrant atmosphere and economic vitality of the area.

Therefore, it is imperative that our security apparatus be robust, responsive, and equipped with the necessary authority to ensure the well-being of all who visit. Granting peace officer status to our security officers will elevate our capability to address potential threats and emergencies with the greatest success.

---

We view this proposed legislation as being rooted in a collaborative security model. It respects the primary role of the Virgin Islands Police Department (VIPD) during emergencies, suggesting that in such times, peace officers, including GERS Enforcement Officers, would be temporarily assigned to the VIPD to leverage our law enforcement resources effectively. This approach enhances the operational response to emergencies and solidifies an ongoing partnership with the VIPD.

Furthermore, the proposed legislation empowers our officers to assist the Virgin Islands Police Department (VIPD) in enforcing a broader spectrum of laws and ordinances, thereby comprehensively enhancing public safety. This includes aiding in traffic control activities, enforcing other laws, and responding to assist the VIPD when needed. By working collaboratively with the VIPD, our officers will play a vital role in upholding the law, deterring potential infractions, and contributing to a safer environment for residents and visitors.

A noteworthy aspect of this initiative is its impact on the visitor experience. The presence of peace officers at Havensight Mall is crucial, especially during critical times such as the disembarkation of cruise ships, some of which can carry up to 6,000 passengers each. On days when as many as three ships are docked at the WICO Cruise Ship Dock, the total number of passengers can be as high as 14,000 passengers and up to 4,000 crew members. In 2023, Havensight Mall welcomed approximately 800,000 cruise ship passengers, excluding local residents shopping, overnight hotel guests, and participants in nighttime events or local entertainment.

For 2024, we anticipate the number of cruise ship passengers to range from 800,000 to 1,000,000, not accounting for these additional groups. This forecast, coupled with the popularity of nighttime activities and events that attract further crowds, underscores the critical need for maintaining a secure and welcoming environment at the mall. The presence of peace officers provides a profound feeling of safety and assurance to visitors and tourists during such peak periods. This reassurance is vital for sustaining and enhancing the Virgin Islands' reputation as a safe and welcoming destination.

---

It also aligns with our economic objectives by encouraging tourism and spending, which are essential to our local economy's vitality.

In essence, the proposed amendment is a comprehensive strategy to reinforce public safety, foster a secure environment for economic activity, and enhance the overall experience of visitors and locals alike. It underscores our commitment to proactive security measures and collaborative law enforcement practices that benefit our community.

The GERS wholeheartedly supports this legislation and deeply appreciates your consideration of this amendment. Your support in enacting this legislation will mark a significant step forward in our ongoing efforts to ensure Havensight Mall remains a safe, attractive, and prosperous center for commerce and tourism in the US Virgin Islands.

We look forward to working together to make this important change a reality and are available for any additional information or questions you may have.

#

---