

There are several areas of the Bill that I would like to highlight because it would make the experience for child victim/witnesses less traumatizing.

1. Allowing the child victim's testimony to be taken in a room other than the court room and to be televised by two-way closed-circuit television. This allows a reduction in trauma exposure. Child victims must cope with not only the emotional consequences of criminal acts but also with the potentially traumatizing effects of the legal system.
2. Closing the court room: This allows the judge to close the court room to the public as this would be in the best interest of the child victim if they must testify in open court. Currently, the court is open to the public. Testifying in open court can cause substantial psychological harm to the child victim. Some child victims are already suffering from (PTSD) Post-traumatic stress disorder. According to National Center on PTSD, ninety percent of all children who are sexually assaulted will develop PTSD and this can prevent the child from testifying. Some signs of PTDS are unexpected anger, volatile outburst, inability to focus or function at home and school as well as sleep disorders.
3. Use of Multidisciplinary Child Abuse teams (MDT):
We already have a St. Croix MDT in place, this bill would allow another team to be established on St. Thomas/St. John as well. The team is made up of professionals from the public and private sector who work together in the best interest of the child victims. These types of teams are established all over the country to help the child victims and their families through the legal system with the least amount of harm and a great deal of support.

This Bill was created by Senator Angel Bolques, Jr. and his Staff and we all will be eternally grateful for what he is trying to do to save our children and hold the penetrators accountable for the criminal acts committed against our children.

We who work with child victims and their families will have more to work with having these safeguards to protect them in this Bill.



Good morning:

Honorable Senator Kenneth L Gittens, Chairperson of Committee on
Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety

Vice Chair, Honorable Ray Fonseca

Other Committee members, Honorable Angel L Bolques, Jr.

Honorable Dwayne DeGraff

Honorable Alma Francis Heyliger

Honorable Javan E. James

Honorable Franklin D. Johnson and all other senators present: as well as
testifiers and listening and visual audience.

My name is Dr. Clema S. Lewis, DHL. I am the Executive Director of the
Women's Coalition of St. Croix.

I am here to testify on Bill 35-0031 an Act amending Title 5, V.I. C., Subtitle 3
Part 1, by adding a new chapter 301A, creating the Child Victims' and Child
Witness Rights Act and repealing Chapter 301 subchapter IV, Section 3510
sponsored by Senator Angel L Bolques, Jr.

The Women's Coalition of St. Croix Child Abuse Task Force, and the St. Croix
Child Abuse Multi-disciplinary Team are all in support of Bill No. 35-0031, an
Act amending Title 5, Virgin Islands Code, Subtitle 3 Part 1, by adding a new
chapter 301A, creating the Child Victim's and Child Witness Rights Act, and
repealing Chapter 301, subchapter IV, Section 3510 proposed by Senator
Angel Bolques, Jr.

We consider this proposed legislation to be amazing because it considers the
child victims and child witnesses need in the criminal justice system.

We say children are our future and our most precious resources, let us show them by supporting this Bill, that we really care about their well-being and safety.

It is well known in my work as a victim advocate of over 40 years a successful prosecution with the victims kept safe during the process, helps in their healing and moving forward in life.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dr. Clema S. Lewis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Clema S. Lewis. DHL.

Executive Director of

Women's Coalition of St. Croix