

1                   **35th LEGISLATURE OF THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS**  
2                   ***Committee on Homeland Security, Justice & Public Service***  
3                   **SENATOR Kenneth L. Gittens - CHAIR**

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5                   **VIRGIN ISLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT**  
6                   **Bills No. 35-0271 and BR23-0038**  
7                   **TESTIMONY**

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9                   **November 12, 2024**

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12                   Honorable Kenneth L. Gittens – Chairman of the Committee on the  
13                   Committee on Homeland Security, Justice & Public Service - Committee  
14                   Members, other members of the 35th Legislature, fellow testifiers and  
15                   colleagues, those in the listening and viewing audience... people of these  
16                   beautiful United States Virgin Islands, Good morning!

17                   I am Sidney Elskoe, Assistant Commissioner of the Virgin Islands  
18                   Police Department, and today I am pleased to represent the United States  
19                   Virgin Islands Police Department (VIPD) on behalf of Mario M. Brooks,  
20                   Acting Police Commissioner of the Virgin Islands Police Department.

21                   Today, we appear before you with the goal of giving testimony in  
22                   support of Bill 35-0271, an Act amending Title 20 of the Virgin Islands Code,  
23                   Chapter 43, Subchapter I, by adding Section 494b.

24                   Bill 35-0271 proposes amending title 20 of the Virgin Islands Code to  
25                   establish designated school speed zones, signage, and enforcement measures

26 near schools. This Act will play a fundamental role in safeguarding our  
27 students and pedestrians from the dangers posed by speeding vehicles in  
28 school zones.

29 Data from the 2024 report by the Virgin Islands Office of Highway  
30 Safety highlights a troubling trend in the frequency of speeding and traffic  
31 violations near school zones. According to this report, there has been a  
32 notable increase in speeding citations issued within proximity to school  
33 zones over the past year, with an alarming rate of more than 40% of all  
34 citations issued for speeds exceeding posted limits by 10 miles per hour or  
35 more. This statistic underlines the urgent need to implement designated  
36 school speed zones with enforceable speed restrictions to ensure the safety  
37 of students and school staff as they travel to and from campuses.

38 School zones are high-risk areas, and excessive speeding creates an  
39 imminent threat to young pedestrians, many of whom may not have the  
40 reflexes or awareness to respond to speeding vehicles. The Office of Highway  
41 Safety estimates that reducing speed limits to 14 miles per hour within  
42 designated school zones can reduce fatality risks for pedestrians in these  
43 zones by as much as 45%. This statistical projection serves as a powerful  
44 reminder of how enforceable school zone speed limits can contribute to  
45 preserving lives.

46           Furthermore, we recognize the manpower constraints currently facing  
47 the Virgin Islands Police Department (VIPD) and propose that all local law  
48 enforcement agencies be tasked with enforcing these reduced speed limits  
49 within school zones. The inclusion of multiple law enforcement entities in  
50 these efforts ensures that resources are used efficiently and enforcement is  
51 consistent across the Territory. Having all local law enforcement officers  
52 committed to monitoring these zones will allow us to increase compliance  
53 and deter unsafe driving behaviors without overburdening any single agency.  
54 Ensuring the provision of adequate personnel from all law enforcement  
55 agencies to manage school speed zones is essential for maximizing the  
56 effectiveness of these safety initiatives.

57           In conclusion, implementing Bill 35-0271 will serve as a proactive  
58 measure to prevent accidents and safeguard our children, educators, and  
59 community members near school campuses.

60           Turning to BR23-0038, this Act seeks to amend title 20 of the Virgin  
61 Islands Code to address the pressing issue of abandoned and derelict vehicles  
62 within the Territory. Abandoned vehicles are an unsightly and growing  
63 problem that detrimentally impacts both community aesthetics and public  
64 health. Abandoned vehicles are not only an eyesore, but they can also

65 obstruct roadways, create hazards for drivers, and contribute to  
66 environmental pollution.

67 According to recent data from the Virgin Islands Office of Highway  
68 Safety, there has been a 27% increase in the number of abandoned vehicles  
69 reported across the Territory since 2023. This surge has stretched local  
70 resources and exacerbated public health and safety concerns, including  
71 increased pest infestations and pollution from leaking fluids and other  
72 hazardous materials. Additionally, these abandoned vehicles often attract  
73 illegal dumping, further escalating cleanup efforts and expenses for the  
74 government.

75 BR23-0038, by updating and enhancing existing laws on abandoned  
76 vehicles, is a crucial step toward managing this problem. The proposed  
77 amendments provide clear guidelines for the removal, disposal, and  
78 enforcement measures for abandoned vehicles. With the involvement of the  
79 VIPD's Police Operations Division, this law will enable swift action to remove  
80 abandoned vehicles from our communities, thereby improving  
81 neighborhood safety and cleanliness. This legislation will also empower local  
82 agencies to effectively deter and address abandoned vehicle cases, enhancing  
83 the quality of life across our communities and reclaiming public spaces.

84 In addition to supporting these bills, we would like to emphasize the  
85 Virgin Islands Police Department's commitment to collaborative  
86 enforcement efforts with the Department of Planning and Natural Resources  
87 (DPNR) and other marine units within the Territory. While the DPNR serves  
88 as the lead agency in handling complaints related to illegal structures,  
89 activities on beachfront properties, and derelict boats in harbors, the VIPD  
90 remains committed to supporting these efforts. This collaboration includes  
91 ongoing joint operations between the VIPD and DPNR, with the shared goal  
92 of addressing issues that affect the Territory's beaches and waterfronts.

93 At Lindberg Bay, for instance, numerous complaints have been raised  
94 by community members regarding illegal activities. The VIPD continues to  
95 work closely with DPNR, the Virgin Islands Port Authority, and the  
96 Department of Sports, Parks, and Recreation (DSPR) to maintain safety and  
97 order at Lindberg Bay and other beaches across the Virgin Islands. These  
98 enforcement initiatives are not only aimed at upholding the law but also at  
99 preserving our beaches as safe and enjoyable spaces for all residents and  
100 visitors.

101 As we work with DPNR and other agencies to enforce regulations on  
102 land and in the water, our goal remains clear: to protect public spaces and  
103 maintain their safety and accessibility. The VIPD is proud to be a part of

104 these ongoing joint operations, which we view as essential to maintaining  
105 public order and responding to community concerns. Our combined efforts  
106 across multiple law enforcement units reinforce our shared commitment to  
107 ensuring that our islands' natural resources and community spaces are well-  
108 protected.

109 In conclusion, we urge the Committee to support Bill 35-0271 and  
110 BR23-0038. By establishing school speed zones, we can take a vital step  
111 toward reducing traffic-related risks for our students and school staff. By  
112 addressing the issue of abandoned and derelict vehicles, we can improve the  
113 safety, appearance, and environmental quality of our neighborhoods.  
114 Finally, with ongoing partnerships between VIPD, DPNR, the Port Authority,  
115 and other agencies, we are better equipped to safeguard our Territory's  
116 beaches and waterfronts for the enjoyment and safety of our communities.

117 Thank you for your consideration, and for your commitment to  
118 advancing public safety within the Virgin Islands. We are confident that  
119 these legislative measures will have a lasting positive impact on the wellbeing  
120 of our community, and I appreciate the opportunity to voice our support.