

Committee on Homeland Security Justice and Public Safety
35th Legislature of The Virgin Islands
Bureau of Motor Vehicles Presentation
Bill 35-0409
December 11, 2024

Senator Kenneth L. Gittens Chair of the Committee on Homeland Security Justice and Public Safety, Members of the Committee, other Senators present, the listing and view audience, good morning.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today regarding **Bill 35-0409** An Act to amend title 20 Virgin Islands Code, part II, chapter 32, subchapter I to amend the definition of “salvage vehicle purchaser” or “junk vehicle purchaser” to include businesses that includes junk and salvage vehicle businesses and to require salvage vehicle purchasers to file a report with the Bureau of Motor Vehicles that documents the salvage vehicles obtained and sold during a given time period, and to require a penalty for failure to file the report.

The US Virgin Islands Bureau of Motor Vehicles does not share vehicle Certificate of Title information with other states and territories, neither can we readily retrieve any information on titles from other jurisdictions. We have seen a significant increase in the number of “washed” titles coming into the territory, and I am sure there several of VI titles that are being manipulated when vehicles leave the territory. We also do not have the ability to report back to the states, as is required by the Federal Anti-Theft Act, vehicles that arrive in the territory and the integrity or “brand” of the titles. Branding is the term that is used to define the status or quality of the title be it Good, Salvage, Rebuilt, Junk, etc.

Why is reporting important? Reporting is important to protect consumers from fraud and unsafe vehicles and to keep stolen vehicles from being resold. Reporting is also important to law enforcement to track vehicles with an altered VIN or Brand that may have been involved in criminal activities. We enlisted the assistance of the National Motor Vehicle Information Titling System (NMVTIS), which is a Department of Justice System that captures specific pieces of vehicle information from state motor vehicle titling agencies, automobile recyclers, junk and salvage yards, into one system. NMVTIS was established by the Anti-Car Theft Improvement Act of 1996, and is a tool that assists local, state, and federal law

enforcement in investigating, deterring, and preventing vehicle-related crimes. NMVTIS requires a mandatory reporting requirement especially for junk and salvage vehicle businesses and penalties for failure to report.

Currently Title 20 section 203 defines a Salvage vehicle purchaser or junk vehicle purchaser to mean any person other than an insurer who purchases or otherwise obtains possession of a salvage vehicle or a junk vehicle. Section 222 of title 20 under the “Duties of a salvage purchaser” simply says that “The salvage vehicle purchaser shall display the salvage certificate upon the request of any appropriate public official”. In addition, there are no penalties for failure to report, as we know if there are no penalties then the assumption is its not that important or enforcement is impossible.

Amending the VI Code as requested will allow the US Virgin Islands to capture the vehicle information of the salvage or junk vehicle purchaser so that we can include that information when we upload vehicle titles as well as access vehicle title information via NMVTIS; this will ensure the integrity of the vehicles that we are titling here in the VI.

Thanks for listening while we share with you the importance of this critical amendment. I am prepared to engage in meaningful dialogue with you on this matter.