

## VI Board of Parole Testimony – Bill 35-0045

Good morning Honorable Senators,

My name is Dennis Howell, a member of the Parole Board. The other active members are Pastor Chelsey Roebuck and Pastor Doctor Bentley Thomas.

The Board of Parole thanks you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed changes amending Title 5 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 407, Bill NO. 35-0045

The Board is obligated to follow the published laws. For purposes of the testimony, we remain neutral as to how the legislation should be acted upon. Our aim is to provide information that will make the decision beneficial to the Government of the Virgin Islands, the victims/family members, those incarcerated and their families.

The proposed bill as written can serve a dual purpose. First it would be a significant cost reduction to the Government of the VI by reducing cost for medical and/or specialized care and prescription medicine. Due to the Bureau of Corrections limited facility and service capacity, the bill may reduce the cost of housing prisoners and possibly increase service capacity as the number of prisoners decreases. While this cannot be the only reason, it is a much needed relief.

In reference to the new proposed sections 4601a and 4601b, consideration should include but not limited to:

- (1) It is crucial that parameters are in place to monitor the activities of the Parolees. With technological advancements and increased use of social media, a stipulation should be added to not engage in illegal activities via these mediums.
- (2) Wherever the time limit mentioned in the proposed bill reference 60 days, it should read 60 to 90 days. This adjustment accounts for requests coming before the board within 30 days of the statutory meeting in subsection 4602. (First week in June and December to conduct the regular parole board hearings)

While we understand compassion for the terminally ill, we cannot abdicate our other statutory duties to facilitate the request(s).

- (3) In reference to 4601b, the board is concerned that the verbiage in 4601b(f)(1)

“the sentence imposed on prisoner and percentage of time served”

is not clear as to the intent of the law. It should reflect the percentage of time to be served in fraction. i.e.,  $\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $\frac{1}{3}$ ,  $\frac{1}{2}$  etc. Additionally, language should be added as to address when a person commits a crime at the age close to 65 or after 65 and the

prisoner suddenly becomes incapacitated and falls into the provision of the 4601a and b.

We ask this body to consider the following when acting on this bill:

There is overcrowding at the facilities and prison beds should be reserved for the highest risk offenders. Please note: Risk categories change as time in incarceration lengthen, hence a Comprehensive Risk Assessment administered by a Clinical Forensic Psychologist should be done to determine the current risk level.

The board believes that provision should be made to “Create hope/Incentives” = “Good Behavior/Rehabilitative efforts”

These two provisions will create hope that will incentivize rehabilitation.

We urge the body to consider Mental Health concerns that affect prison population as well as the safety of officers and staff.

We ask the body to consider expanding “Good Time Credit“ for all inmates. This may prove beneficial to the system. Again, adding more days of good time credit on a monthly basis will incentivize inmates to do better and hopefully reduce infractions.

We hope that our input will help in your quest to get this legislation thoroughly vetted.

We remain available to answer any question(s) you may have for us.

Thank you.