

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

Good morning Honorable Senators,

My name is Dennis Howell, Chairman of the Parole Board of the Virgin Islands. The other active members are Pastor Chelsey Roebuck and Pastor Doctor Bentley Thomas, whom both could not be here today because of prior commitments.

The Board of Parole thanks you for the opportunity to provide further testimony and/or comment on the proposed changes amending Title 5 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 407, Bill NO. 35-0045. In the board's first appearance to this committee, I provided pertinent information to assist the Parole Board in making objective decisions. I will try not to regurgitate what I previously presented at the session. However, I remain available to discuss any additional questions arising from that meeting.

It is clearly time to seriously consider this bill before you. Considering the benefits that can be derived by both the government and those incarcerated. We have recently witnessed some rehabilitation efforts that promote second chances, such as the education and training programs in progress. The equine (horse program) and post-secondary education programs are netting successful results.

The 21st Century and technological advances have been game changers. The sophisticated systems make getting away with a crime almost impossible. Parameters set can

be easily implemented and monitored. There is good in everyone regardless of the crime committed. After lengthy sentences or many years of incarceration, prisoners get to a point of diminishing returns. Meaning they no longer want to, have the drive, or physically cannot harm anyone. Sometimes their psyche, because they are human they become despondent and there is nothing they are willing or care to do in the rehabilitative process – becoming hopeless. It can get to a point where there is no benefit of keeping them incarcerated.

While the Board is obligated to follow the law, my previous testimony asked the body to consider the current challenge of overcrowding at the facilities. Prison beds should be reserved for the highest risk offenders. Please note: Risk categories change as time in incarceration lengthens, hence a Comprehensive Risk Assessment administered by a Clinical Forensic Psychologist should be done to determine the current risk level.

Additionally, the provisions we discussed relative to establishing parameters have been incorporated in the amendment and we believe it strengthens the proposed law. This legislation will create hope and provide incentives to promote rehabilitative efforts.

“Create hope/Incentives” = “Good Behavior/Rehabilitative efforts”. These two provisions will create hope that will incentivize rehabilitation.

As we have seen in our community, we urge this body to consider mental health concerns that affect the prison population. This law should not risk or jeopardize the safety of officers, staff or prison population. In fact, I believe it will enhance mental health for all concerns.

We remain available to answer any questions.

Thank you