

Committee on Homeland Security Justice and Public Safety

35th Legislature of The Virgin Islands

Bureau of Motor Vehicles Testimony on Bill 21-0554

Wednesday, March 15, 2023

Senator Kenneth L. Gittens, Chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security Justice and Public Safety, other Senators present, testifiers, the listening and viewing audience. My name is Barbara Jackson-McIntosh, the Director of the Bureau of Motor Vehicles. I apologize that I am unable to appear before the committee, because of previously planned personal commitments.

I was given the chance to review the bill during the development phase and the final product before you today. I also reviewed the legislations of five (5) out of the nineteen (19) states that offer driver's licenses to immigrants regardless of their legal status in the United States; namely New York, Rhode Island, Delaware, Hawaii, and Oregon. The essence of those legislation is no different from that proposed in the amendment to Title 20 Virgin Islands Code, part II, relating to the issuance of operators': licenses to applicants unable to prove legal residence in the United States and to applicants without social security numbers.

The approval of this amendment will affect all residents regardless of their resident status. This will allow anyone applying for a non-REAL ID to produce other documents that the BMV (Bureau of Motor Vehicles) currently cannot accept as qualifying documents. Specifically, the provisions of this amendment will allow undocumented residents the opportunity to obtain a driver's license so that they can drive legally, work to feed their families, present as identification to cash a check, be seen by a physician, take their children to school, obtain vehicle insurance that protects the motoring public, obtain a bank account, go to the grocery store or even leisure activities. This amendment will also protect children of mixed-status families who are dependent on undocumented parents.

The BMV can implement the provisions of this legislation and, in anticipation of its passage, has begun a dialog with the appropriate stakeholders to ensure that the process is effortless.

Please feel free to contact me if necessary. I urge you to approve this bill as I will request Governor Bryan to approve as well. I trust that you will have a productive session.