



**THE
VIRGIN
ISLANDS
DEPARTMENT
OF HUMAN
SERVICES**

**KIMBERLEY CAUSEY-GOMEZ, MSW
COMMISSIONER**

**COMMITTEE ON
BUDGET,
APPROPRIATIONS,
AND FINANCE**

Tuesday, 04 April 2023

**SENATOR DONNA FRETT-GREGORY
CHAIRWOMAN**

1 Good day Honorable Donna Frett-Gregory, Chairwoman of the Committee on Budget,
2 Appropriations and Finance, Committee members and other Senators present, colleagues, and
3 the listening and viewing audience. Thank you for allowing the Virgin Islands Department of
4 Human Services (DHS) this opportunity to testify on Bill NO. 35-0054, An Act amending title 1
5 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 7, section 103b, relating to the Centennial Treasures Award, to
6 provide for a single, lumpsum award payment.

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8 This testimony is being read into the record on behalf of Kimberley Causey Gomez, Commissioner
9 of the Virgin Islands Department of Human Services (DHS). I am currently out of the territory
10 presenting with other Virgin Islanders at the 2023 National Hurricane Conference, a national forum
11 for federal, state, and local officials to exchange ideas and recommend new policies to improve
12 Emergency Management. As the agency lead for Emergency Support Function Six (ESF-6), this
13 provides the VI additional opportunities to enhance hurricane preparedness, response, recovery,
14 and mitigation in order to save lives and property.

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16 **Centennial Living Treasures Award**

17 The Virgin Islands Centennial Living Treasures Awards Program was created by the 31st Legislature
18 and enacted on December 20th, 2016, by way of override veto, thus establishing ACT No. 7956.
19 The statute was created to recognize and honor senior citizens who reside in the Virgin Islands
20 upon attaining their 100th birthday and to provide a monetary award to those centenarians. ACT
21 No. 7596 also established the Centennial Living Treasures Award Program Fund within the
22 Treasury of the Virgin Islands as a separate and distinct fund administered by the Commissioner
23 of Finance. The Fund consists of an annual appropriation to DHS, when available by the
24 Legislature.

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26 The Program itself is very clear with its mandate, when a Virgin Islands Resident reaches his/her
27 100th birthday, the Department of Human Services awards the centenarian a grant of \$4,000, and
28 upon the recipient's untimely passing, DHS awards \$1,000 towards the recipient's burial expenses.
29 The statutory requirements of the living trust award maintains that the individual must have

30 resided in the Virgin Islands for not less than 30 years and must be residing in the VI when they
31 attain the age of 100 years. These Senior Citizens are not just our family members but also are
32 part of a generation that helped define our community, provide foundational values and are living
33 links to the rich and varied history of this territory. They have stories to tell and are important
34 contributors to what the U. S. Virgin Islands is today, and recognizing their milestone birthday is
35 an honor.

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37 In the past three years, DHS has had the privilege of providing thirty-two (32) residents with the
38 Centennial Living Treasures award. Recipients and their families always express their pride and
39 gratitude for the recognition and the award. The award often provides a needed financial resource
40 that improves the centenarians' quality of life. This award has afforded our Centenarians family
41 vacations, purchase of needed household items, improvements to their homes, and/or medical
42 supplies. The awards were delivered to the special Centenarian by a team of DHS staff and the
43 Office of the Governor and Lt. Governor, and usually surrounded by loved ones. The most
44 wonderful part is when asked, "how does one live to be 100 years old, what is your secret?"
45 Although the responses varied, there was a common theme of faith in a Higher Power, love one
46 another as your own, forgive easily, eat healthy and get lots of exercise. The FY23 appropriation
47 to DHS was \$40,000 and to date, we have granted \$28,000 to seven (7) Centenarians.

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49 **Bill No. 35-0054**

50 The Virgin Islands Department of Human Services is in support of Bill No. 35-0054 which amends
51 the Centennial Treasures Award statute to provide for a single \$5,000 award payment. We
52 acknowledge that there have been times where it has proved difficult to provide the additional
53 \$1,000.00 to recipients due to prohibitive factors. In certain instances, it is a matter of timing.
54 There have been times when DHS does not get notified in a timely manner to the passing of a
55 recipient and is unable to present the additional \$1,000.00 or the recipient passed while off-island.

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57 The Department supports the legislation's aim of awarding the single grant payment of \$5,000.00
58 to the Centenarian. This provides the awardee and their family to spend the money as they find

59 appropriate, whether that be planning and prepaying funeral expenses or using it for the
60 Centenarians' care, comfort, and enjoyment during their life. Moreover, it relieves the family of
61 the burden of having to alert DHS of the passing to coordinate payment during, what may be a
62 very trying time in their lives.

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64 I applaud the sponsor of the bill, Senator Dwayne M. DeGraff and the support of the 35th
65 Legislature for always placing our beloved Seniors at a high level of thoughtfulness. Thank you
66 again, Chairwoman Frett-Gregory for allowing the Department of Human Services this opportunity
67 to provide comments and support to Bill NO. 35-0054.