

Legislature of the Virgin Islands



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The Honorable

Angel Bolques, Jr.

Senator-At-Large

36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands

CHAIRMAN

Committee on Culture, Youth, Aging, and Parks

VICE-CHAIRMAN

Committee on Economic Development & Agriculture

MEMBER

Committee of the Whole

Committee on Rules & Judiciary

Committee on Homeland Security, Justice & Public Safety

Committee on Disaster Recovery, Infrastructure and Planning

Sub-Committee on Energy & Infrastructure Development

MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Members of the Committee on Culture, Youth, Aging, Sports, and Parks

The Honorable Carla Joseph, Vice Chair

The Honorable Marvin A. Blyden

The Honorable Alma Francis Heyliger

The Honorable Novelle E. Francis, Jr.

The Honorable Franklin D. Johnson

The Honorable Avery L. Lewis

FROM: Senator At Large Angel L. Bolques, Jr.

Chairman, Committee on Culture, Youth, Aging, Sports, and Parks

DATE: September 29, 2025

RE: AGENDA | Committee on Culture, Youth, Aging, Sports and Parks

HEARING: Friday, October 31, 2025, at 10:00 AM, Fritz E. Lawaetz Legislative Chamber, St. Croix, USVI
"Healing and Empowering Our Youth: Confronting Violence, Mental Health, and Opportunity Gaps in the Virgin Islands"

The Committee on Culture, Youth, Aging, Sports, and Parks will convene a legislative hearing to examine the pressing and multifaceted challenges affecting the youth of the Virgin Islands. This hearing will explore the intersections of public health, education, economic opportunity, and community support as they relate to youth development, safety, and success—particularly in the face of rising violence, trauma, and systemic inequity. Through testimony from government agencies, nonprofit leaders, educators, and young people themselves, the Committee seeks to identify legislative and policy solutions that address root causes, close opportunity gaps, and foster a stronger, more equitable future for the territory's next generation.

BLOCK I: 10:00 AM - 12:30 PM
Healing Our Youth: Mental Health, Intervention, Government & Community Services & Support

During this Block, the Committee will receive testimony and examine the rise of youth violence in the Virgin Islands as a public health emergency that demands a comprehensive, trauma-informed response. This segment seeks to uncover the root causes of trauma and aggression among young people, while evaluating the availability, accessibility, and cultural relevance of behavioral health services across the territory. The Committee will explore how schools, law enforcement, and grassroots organizations are working—both independently and collaboratively—to interrupt cycles of harm and deliver mental health support, crisis intervention, and violence prevention services. Special attention will be given to prevention models, early intervention strategies, and community-based programs that provide safe spaces, foster emotional resilience, and build trust between youth and institutions. The overarching goal is to assess the territory's current response capacity and identify actionable, sustainable strategies to promote healing, safety, and long-term well-being for all young people.

Invited Testifiers:

- Honorable Justa Encarnacion, Commissioner, Virgin Islands Department of Health
- Mr. Antonio Emanuel, Director, Office of Gun Violence Prevention
- Honorable Dionne Wells-Hedrington, Commissioner, Virgin Islands Department of Education
- Honorable Mario Brooks, Commissioner, Virgin Islands Police Department
- Honorable Averil George, Commissioner, Department of Human Services
- Honorable Gordon Rhea, Esq., Attorney General Virgin Islands Department of Justice – Juvenile Division
- Mr. Moleto A. Smith Jr., Director, Law Enforcement Planning Commission (LEPC)
- Youth-Focused Nonprofit Organizations: My Brother's Workshop, Youth Against Gun Violence, St. Croix Foundation, The Village Partners in Recovery
- Public Witness Panel: Testimony from individuals with lived experience

LUNCH

12:30 PM - 1:00 PM

BLOCK II:

1:00 PM - 4:00 PM

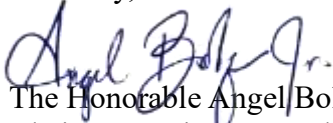
Expanding Youth Opportunities: Community Access, Workforce Development, Education & Equity

This Block will continue the Committee's in-depth review and shift the focus to the long-term structural conditions shaping youth success in the Virgin Islands. This segment will assess educational access, vocational training, and workforce readiness disparities. The Committee will examine data on school dropout rates, employment trends, and the underutilization of existing youth development programs. Invited agencies and stakeholders will offer insights into challenges and gaps within afterschool services, technical career education, and youth employment pathways. Testifiers will be asked to recommend legislative and policy solutions to strengthen school-to-career pipelines, improve equity in public programs, and expand youth opportunity through culturally rooted, community-based initiatives such as recreation, sports, and the arts as essential tools for youth empowerment and engagement, along with recommendations for the support of programs and services concerning the youth of the Virgin Islands.

Invited Testifiers:

- Dr. Haldane Davies, Director, Virgin Islands Bureau of Economic Research
- Honorable Dionne Wells-Hedrington, Commissioner, Virgin Islands Department of Education
- Ms. Genevieve Whitaker, Executive Director, Career & Technical Education Board
- Honorable Gary Molloy, Commissioner, Department of Labor
- Honorable Averil George, Commissioner, Department of Human Services
- Mr. Vincent Roberts, Commissioner Designee, VI Department of Sports, Parks & Recreation
- Mr. Julio Rhymer, Director, Office of Management & Budget
- Community Stakeholders Panel: Youth Organization Leaders, Youth Empowerment and Recreation Program Providers

Sincerely,



The Honorable Angel Bolques, Jr.
Chair, Committee on Culture, Youth, Aging, and Parks
Senator At Large, 36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands

Courtesy Copy:

Cc: All Senators, All Chiefs of Staff, All Divisions of the Legislature of the Virgin Islands, All Members of the Virgin Islands Media
