



**36<sup>TH</sup> LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS  
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

The Honorable Senator Kurt A. Violet  
Chair of Committee

Testimony Presented By  
The Honorable Justa Encarnacion, RN, BSN, MBA/HCM  
Commissioner of Health

Bill No. 36-0207 An act amending title 3 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 25, subchapter VI, by adding section 590d and title 24 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 1, by adding section 24 requiring employers to grant parents or legal guardians of a child with a diagnosed disability, two hours per month of paid leave to attend the child's medical appointment.

1 Good day, Honorable Senator Kurt A. Violet, Chairperson of the Committee on Health,  
2 Hospitals and Human Services, Honorable Senator Avery L. Lewis, Vice Chair; Committee  
3 members, and all non-committee members, and of course the viewing and listening audience. I  
4 am Justa Encarnacion, Commissioner of Health for the Virgin Islands Department of Health.  
5 Joining me today are Dr. Nicole Craigwell-Syms, Assistant Commissioner; Reuben Molloy,  
6 Assistant Commissioner; Mackiesh Taylor-Jones, Chief Legal Counsel; Joan Jean-Baptiste,  
7 Deputy Commissioner and Dr. Gesil Ramos, Director of Behavioral Health.

8 I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to Governor Albert Bryan Jr. and Lieutenant  
9 Governor Tregenza A. Roach for their continued leadership and unwavering commitment to the  
10 well-being of the people of the Virgin Islands. We commend Senator Avery Lewis for proposing  
11 Bill No. 36-0207 An act amending title 3 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 25, subchapter VI, by  
12 adding section 590d and title 24 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 1, by adding section 24 requiring  
13 employers to grant parents or legal guardians of a child with a diagnosed disability, two hours  
14 per month of paid leave to attend the child's medical appointment.

15 From a public health perspective with a focus on behavioral health, this legislation represents a  
16 thoughtful investment in the well-being of children and families across the Virgin Islands.  
17 Children with diagnosed disabilities often require ongoing medical, developmental, and  
18 behavioral health services, yet many families face a difficult choice between maintaining  
19 employment and attending essential appointments. This bill directly addresses that barrier by  
20 supporting caregiver involvement in a child's care.

21 Allowing parents and legal guardians to attend appointments strengthens continuity of care,  
22 supports early intervention, and improves overall health outcomes. It also reduces the risk of  
23 more serious conditions and lessens reliance on emergency and long-term care systems.

24 Behavioral health benefits are significantly important. Consistent caregiver involvement  
25 improves engagement in therapy, strengthens family relationships, and reduces stress within the  
26 home. Children with conditions such as autism, ADHD, developmental delays, and other  
27 behavioral health needs often require frequent services, including therapy, counseling, and  
28 specialized care. Missed appointments can lead to regression, worsening symptoms, and  
29 challenges in school and social settings.

1 This legislation also recognizes that supporting families is a shared responsibility. By positioning  
2 employers as partners, it reflects a practical and compassionate approach to workforce policy.

3 The provision of two hours of paid leave per month is a strong and balanced component. It  
4 directly addresses one of the most common barriers to care—time—while remaining realistic and  
5 sustainable for employers. This type of policy demonstrates that meaningful impact can be  
6 achieved by removing everyday obstacles to care.

7 From a workforce perspective, this bill promotes employee retention, reduces unplanned  
8 absenteeism, and supports a more stable and productive workforce.

9 In closing, this legislation represents a smart, balanced investment in children, families, and the  
10 long-term health of our community. At its core, it advances one of the fundamental objectives of  
11 public health—ensuring early detection of changes in a child’s health and development and  
12 facilitating timely access to treatment and supportive services before conditions worsen. By  
13 removing barriers to care, we strengthen prevention, improve outcomes, and build a more  
14 responsive and resilient healthcare system.