

# THE HONORABLE SENATOR AVERY L. LEWIS

Legislative Secretary

## 36<sup>TH</sup> LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS



**Chair:** Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, Consumer Protection

**Vice Chair:** Committee on Education and Workforce Development

**Member:** Committee on Rules and Judiciary

Committee on Culture, Youth, Aging, and Parks

Committee on Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety

Committee of the Whole

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**December 2, 2025**

Location: Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall, St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands

On December 2, 2025, the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection reconvened at the Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall on St. Thomas to receive testimony on Government Agency Operations; VITEMA and Veterans Affairs as well as two legislative measures: Bill No. 36-0208 and Bill No. 36-0190.

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### **In Block I:**

*Virgin Islands Office of Veterans Affairs – Agency Overview*

#### **Invited Testifier:**

- Mr. Patrick Farrell, Director, Virgin Islands Office of Veterans Affairs

#### **Highlights of Testimony:**

Director Patrick Farrell provided a comprehensive overview of ongoing initiatives, accomplishments, and long-term priorities within the Virgin Islands Office of Veterans Affairs (OVA). He emphasized the department's expanded communication outreach, including weekly radio programming, rapid updates during the federal shutdown, and increased digital engagement to ensure veterans across all islands receive timely and accurate information.

Mr. Farrell highlighted significant progress in veteran recognition and engagement, including new partnerships, territorial ceremonies, expansion of the Military Women's Memorial registrants, and successful appreciation events. He reported major advances in healthcare access, such as airfare support for non-service-connected medical travel through Fly the Whale and the successful implementation of Act No. 8991, allowing veterans to receive reimbursement for stateside medical travel.

Director Farrell discussed several infrastructure priorities, including development of the Clarence Beverhoudt Sr. Veterans Multi-Purpose Center, naming proposals for CBOCs in honor of fallen Virgin Islanders, and the forthcoming establishment of the first VA National

Cemetery in the Virgin Islands. He reaffirmed OVA's commitment to expanding services, improving veterans' quality of life, and ensuring continued advocacy at both local and federal levels.

## **In Block II**

### *Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority – Agency Operations Overview*

#### **Invited Testifier:**

- Mr. Hannibal "Mike" Ware, Executive Director, VI Waste Management Authority

#### **Highlights of Testimony:**

Executive Director Hannibal "Mike" Ware delivered a detailed and transparent overview of the escalating challenges facing the territory's solid waste and wastewater systems. He stressed that VIWMA's crisis stems from decades of underinvestment, aging infrastructure, lapses in compliance, and financial instability caused by delayed or insufficient appropriations.

Director Ware outlined critical conditions at the Bovoni landfill, both nearing capacity and subject to federal consent decrees. He discussed progress on closure and expansion efforts, funding through CDBG-DR and CDBG-MIT programs, and upcoming public engagement on siting a future landfill for St. Croix.

He also described significant wastewater infrastructure failures requiring urgent replacement, early action repairs across the territory, pump station upgrades, wastewater treatment facility improvements, and FEMA-supported long-term modernization. Ware emphasized the Authority's commitment to improving public trust through transparency, community engagement, and increased responsiveness, and requested legislative partnership to implement waste and tipping fee structures, combat illegal dumping, and support critical capital needs.

## **In Block III:**

### **Bill No. 36-0208**

*A Resolution recognizing United States Senator Mike Crapo for his instrumental role in securing the historic increase in the rum cover-over tax reimbursement for the Virgin Islands.*  
*Proposed by: Senator Avery L. Lewis*

#### **Invited Testifiers:**

- Mr. Kevin Callwood, President, Callwood & Associates
- Mr. Angel E. Dawson, Administrator/CEO, Government Employees' Retirement System (GERS)
- Ms. Teri Helenese, Director of State–Federal Relations and Washington Representative

#### **Highlights of Testimonies:**

Testimony for Bill No. 36-0208 was deeply reflective and overwhelmingly supportive, emphasizing Senator Mike Crapo's decades-long commitment to the economic stability and fiscal health of the Virgin Islands.

Mr. Kevin Callwood recounted the historical evolution of federal advocacy efforts and Senator Crapo's pivotal involvement in protecting the Virgin Islands' economic interests. He

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detailed key milestones including the defeat of the CFO bill, major congressional interventions affecting federal funding, and Senator Crapo's crucial role in making the rum cover-over permanently part of U.S. law.

Mr. Angel Dawson submitted testimony underscoring the measure's impact on GERS, noting that the permanent rum cover-over rate supports long-term pension stabilization and alleviates financial pressures on retirees and active members. He highlighted the broader significance of predictable revenue as a tool for systemic financial recovery.

Ms. Teri Helenese offered testimony tracing decades of rum cover-over advocacy and underscored Senator Crapo's steadfast bipartisan leadership. She discussed his personal engagement with the Territory, the profound fiscal impact of permanency, and the collaborative work of local, regional, and federal partners. Her remarks celebrated the resolution as a meaningful expression of gratitude from the Virgin Islands.

## BLOCK IV

### **Bill No. 36-0190**

*An Act amending Title 1, Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 15, Section 254, to provide for sign language interpreters at all Government of the Virgin Islands broadcasts and official functions. Proposed by: Senator Angel L. Bolques, Jr.*

### **Invited Testifiers:**

- Mr. Angus Drigo, Executive Director, Disability Rights Center of the Virgin Islands (DRCVI)
- Ms. Monique Bute, Executive Director, Virgin Islands Association for Independent Living (VIAIL)
- Ms. Shamika Thomas, Executive Director, VIUCEDD
- Mr. Julio Rhymer Sr., Director Office of Management & Budget (OMB)
- Mr. Daryl D. Jaschen, Director, VITEMA
- Mr. Julian Henley, ADA Coordinator, Office of the Governor – ADA Office

### **Highlights of Testimonies:**

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Testifiers expressed strong, unified support for Bill No. 36-0190, emphasizing that access to qualified ASL interpretation is a civil right and a necessity for effective communication within the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing community.

Mr. Angus Drigo in his absence, submitted a testimony highlighting ASL's cultural significance, its recognition under the ADA, and the critical need for local interpreters who understand Virgin Islands dialects and context.

Ms. Monique Bute underscored the bill's alignment with principles of equity and inclusion and praised its structural and financial planning provisions, including the mandate to hire qualified interpreters and the flexibility for remote services.

Ms. Shamika Thomas provided data on hearing disability in the Virgin Islands and stressed that ASL not captioning is the primary and most effective communication mode for many Deaf residents. She applauded the bill's clarity, enforcement structure, and alignment with UVI's mission, offering support to expand interpreter training capacity.

Director Daryl Jaschen affirmed VITEMA's support and recommended the use of nationally certified interpreters (NIC) for consistency and professionalism. He also discussed remote interpreting options, CART services, and FEMA-related reimbursement scenarios, underscoring the importance of reliable communication during emergencies.

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## **COMMITTEE ACTIONS**

**Bill No. 36-0208: Passed by a vote of 5 yeas, 1 absent, and 1 not voting.**

**Bill No. 36-0190: Was held in the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans, and Consumer Protection until the call of the Chair. Moved by Senator Kenneth L. Gittens. Seconded by Senators Carla J. Joseph and Alma Francis Heyliger.**

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## **ATTENDANCE**

### **Committee Members:**

Senator Ray Fonseca, Senator Alma Francis Heyliger, Senator Kenneth L. Gittens, Senator Franklin D. Johnson, Senator Carla J. Joseph

### **Non-Committee Members:**

Senator Milton E. Potter, Senator Marvin A. Blyden, Senator Angel L. Bolques

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### **Through The Chair:**

1. Senator Carla J. Joseph (Veterans Affairs) – What is the budget or how much money do you have to provide the services such as free flights and medical appointments for veterans?
2. Senator Angel L. Boloques (VITEMA) – Provide data or metric tonnage accumulated every fiscal year?
3. Carla J. Joseph (VITEMA) – Send the amount received from OMB for this current fiscal year.