



GOVERNMENT OF
THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS
OFFICE OF VETERANS AFFAIRS



Virgin Islands Office of Veterans Affairs Testimony – Agency Overview

December 2, 2025

Pleasant good morning Mr. Chairman, Honorable Senator Avery L. Lewis, other members of the committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection, and all other distinguished Senators of the 36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands of the United States. Additional greetings to all physically present, those viewing via Legislature's LEGIT TV, and those who may have chosen to use another source of media. Special greetings, thoughts, and prayers go out to our servicemen and women who are currently serving in our hometown Virgin Islands Army and Air National Guard, and to those Virgin Islanders on active duty across the globe. Today, you are serving during a very unpredictable time in our history. Rest assured, you are in our hearts every single step of the way. "Watch Your Six".

To those who have already borne the battle, Thank You for your service to our country and our beloved territory. To the staff of the Virgin Islands Office of Veterans Affairs whom I refer to as the "Pillars of the Office of Veterans Affairs", Mrs. Frederick, Ms. Daniel, and Mrs. Gordon, Thank you for your daily commitment to our Veterans. Your willingness to enhance their quality of life represents your dedication to the overall mission of the Office of Veterans Affairs and it will never go unrecognized.



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For the record, my name is Patrick D. Farrell, and I have the honor of serving as the Director of the Virgin Islands Office of Veterans Affairs. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to share an overview of our work, our accomplishments, and the priorities we continue to advance on behalf of the Veterans of the Virgin Islands of these here United States.

Over the past year, one of our major focuses has been strengthening the way we communicate with our Veterans and with the broader community. We know that information is a lifeline. To that end, I have continued to engage through community media, including my appearance on WTJX's "Analyze This" with Neville James, where I spoke directly about benefits, healthcare access, and ongoing initiatives. In addition, I host a weekly radio program, "The Veterans Voice," on FM 107.9 DaVybe every Tuesday evening from 7 to 8 p.m. This show has become one of our strongest communication tools, allowing us to speak directly to Veterans, answer questions in real time, and share important updates. The show is supported by an active social media page and a website that keeps Veterans informed across all three islands and wherever else they may be listening from. These platforms proved especially valuable during the recent federal shutdown, when we were able to quickly reassure our Veterans that the VA Caribbean Healthcare System, via the Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) on St Thomas and St Croix, remained fully operational. That level of communication prevented confusion, missed appointments, and unnecessary anxiety within our Veteran community.

Alongside communication, we have worked hard to strengthen community partnerships and recognition of service. This past year we collaborated with



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Southland Gaming Virgin Islands to honor Veterans at the "Salute to Service" races. We also coordinated a meaningful Purple Heart Veteran Recognition and Proclamation Signing Ceremony hosted by Governor Albert Bryan Jr. and Lieutenant Governor Tregenza A. Roach Esquire, which was the first of its kind held in the territory. Territory-wide Veterans Day ceremonies and parades were executed successfully, with Mr. Wilfred Tuitt being honored on the island of St. Croix, and Mr. Henry Powell being honored in the St. Thomas / St. John district. Throughout the year, we continue to honor Veterans at multiple points, not only in the month of November surrounding Veterans Day.

We also focused on highlighting the contributions of Women Veterans. After issuing a call encouraging Virgin Islands women who served to register with the Military Women's Memorial in Washington, D.C., our territory's numbers rose from just four to more than fifty. That growth reflects a major step toward ensuring that the service and sacrifices of Virgin Islands women are preserved in the national archives. We will renew this call to action frequently until we have captured a more significant number of women Veterans that we know have served. For those women Veterans listening or watching, we ask that you visit www.womensmemorial.org and register. Be documented and recognized nationally amongst women that you yourself have served with.

In addition to recognition, we have placed strong emphasis on Veteran engagement and well-being. Our appreciation events in the St. Croix and St. Thomas/St. John district were well attended and well received. This year, we expanded our activities to include a Territorial Domino Tournament, which we have now established as an



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annual tradition. The champions for the St. Croix district were Mr. and Mrs. Beresford Edwards; the champions for the St. Thomas/St. John district were Mr. Nigel Richardson and his partner Bernadette; and after a spirited competition, Mr. and Mrs. Edwards were crowned the territorial champions. The Veterans Appreciation Day, which has been in existence for the past 6 or 7 years has now become one of the most anticipated Veteran events of the year, bringing camaraderie, connection, and morale across districts. We also launched a Disabled Veterans Parking Initiative. Although community participation was limited in the first phase, we plan to revive and strengthen this initiative in the near future.

When it comes to healthcare access, we made some of the most significant strides in years. Through our partnership with Fly The Whale Airlines, Veterans on St. Croix no longer pay out-of-pocket airfare to travel to Puerto Rico for non-service connected VA medical appointments. This includes coverage for a medically necessary companion. In addition, with the passage of Act # 8991, eligible Veterans are now able to receive full airfare reimbursement for travel to and from VA medical facilities on the United States mainland, up to two times per year, with coverage for a caregiver or companion when medically required. This is one of the most substantial enhancements to Veteran healthcare access that the Virgin Islands has seen in recent years, and it is already making a meaningful difference. The persistence of one of our very own Virgin Island Veterans advocating for this measure brought it to fruition.

On the national front, I continue to serve on the VA Advisory Committee for the U.S. Outlying Areas and Freely Associated States, representing the Virgin Islands at the



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federal level. Understanding the importance of expanding our voice in those national conversations, I advocated for an additional Virgin Islander to be permitted to submit for committee membership, and that request was approved. Several individuals have already submitted their interest. Although committee activities to include the selection of the additional person were paused due to the federal shutdown, we expect operations to resume shortly.

We are also advancing several long-term infrastructure initiatives. One of our major goals is the development of the Clarence Beverhoudt Sr. Veterans Multi-Purpose Center on St. Thomas. This facility is envisioned to house the St. Thomas Office of Veterans Affairs on one level and provide a hall where the American Legion Post 90 and the Office of Veterans Affairs can conduct outreach and community events on a second level. Importantly, the building will also serve as an emergency shelter for Veterans in the event of a disaster. This center will become a dedicated, secure, and dignified space for Veterans and Veteran organizations.

We have also begun the process in advocating to officially name our VA clinics in honor of two fallen Virgin Islanders: the St. Croix CBOC in honor of LTC David C. Canegata III, and the St. Thomas CBOC in honor of SFC Floyd E. Lake. Naming these facilities after servicemembers who made the ultimate sacrifice will create permanent legacies that reflect honor, respect, and gratitude.

One of the most significant developments we are pursuing is the establishment of the first VA National Cemetery in the Virgin Islands. We have been in close communication with the National Cemetery Administration, and based on those communications, it appears very likely that our number will be called upon soon.



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We have completed all required paperwork, met every federal requirement, and enacted territorial legislation setting aside the required \$350,000 match via Act # 8365 during the 33rd Legislature. The planned location is on St. Croix, immediately west of the existing Veterans section in the Kingshill Cemetery. This project will allow Virgin Islands Veterans to be laid to rest on their home soil, with dignity, honor, and permanence. It represents another historic advancement in Veteran services for our territory.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection, the Virgin Islands Office of Veterans Affairs remains fully committed to serving, supporting, and advocating for the men and women who have worn the uniform of the United States of America and its territories. We will continue pushing forward initiatives that expand access, improve quality of life, and ensure that every Veteran, whether on St. John, St. Thomas, or St. Croix, receives the respect and support they deserve.

Thank you for your continued partnership and oversight. I am prepared to answer any questions the Committee may have.