

Bill No. 36-0190

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An act amending title 1 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 15 section 254 providing for sign language interpreters at all Government of the Virgin Islands broadcasts and official functions



PRESENTED BY

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Submitted to

SENATOR AVERY L. LEWIS, CHAIRMAN

Senate Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, Consumer Protection

Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands

December 2, 2025

3 Good morning, Senator Avery L Lewis, Chairman, Committee on Government
4 Operations, Veterans Affairs, Consumer Protection, other committee members, 36th
5 Legislature Staff, and those in the viewing and listening audience.

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7 I am Daryl D. Jaschen, Director of the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency
8 Management Agency (VITEMA). I am here today to provide testimony to Bill No.
9 36-0190, an act amending title 1 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 15 section 254
10 providing for sign language interpreters at all Government of the Virgin Islands
11 broadcasts and official functions, dated October 27, 2025, sponsored by Senator
12 Ray Fonseca.

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14 VITEMA supports Bill No. 36-0190 to fund the hiring of two (2) qualified
15 American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters, one for each island district. However,
16 as part of the bill discussion, we must first define and agree on the level of
17 individual qualification. My recommendation for qualification and to be placed in
18 the position description, is defined in the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf
19 (RID), Inc. (<https://rid.org>) as that of an individual who holds a current National
20 Interpreter Certification (NIC). RID currently lists over 10,000 NIC certified
21 individuals in the USA. Certification is achieved after passing both a knowledge
22 examination of 150 multiple-choice questions on ethics, linguistics, and
23 interpreting protocols and a performance exam. The performance exam is a video-
24 based exam that assesses interpreting in various real-world scenarios such as
25 healthcare consultations, education lectures, or courtroom settings. Once
26 certification is achieved, holders must renew their certification every four years,
27 which includes earning Continuing Education Units (CEUs) and upholding the

RID Code of Professional Conduct. There would be no “years of experience” which permit an individual to bypass the NIC requirement.

While there are additional National Interpreter Certification Industry Groups focused on Clinical Interpreter, Healthcare Interpreter, Legal Interpreter, and others, an additional industry specific certification is not required for the positions we are discussing.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of interpreters and translators, show, as of May 2023, an annual mean wage of \$63,490 for the State and Local government industry segment, excluding schools and hospitals.

For approved federal emergency declarations where Government of the Virgin Islands provides American Sign Language services are utilizing with these two (2) positions, and as with all other professionals such as police, fire, and emergency medical services, only their overtime would be eligible for reimbursement at the appropriate cost share, which is usually 75% federal and 25% territorial. I recommend that these two positions be located with the external communications group at the office of the Governor. Additional ASL individuals may be requested to support surge operations following a disaster either through FEMA or through a State-to-State EMAC request. A Territory State of Emergency, declared by the Governor, authorizes an EMAC request but would be 100% cost to the Territory, unless a federal disaster declaration is approved by the President of the United States.

53 When the ASL interpreters are not available, VITEMA supports a remote or
54 Virtual Sign Language Interpreter at all televised and broadcasted meetings of the
55 Government of the Virgin Islands, its departments, and instrumentalities, where
56 visual transmission is disseminated to the public.

57 For another option and with today's technology, an audience can be provided with
58 Communications Access Real Time Translation, or CART. CART refers to the
59 real-time conversion of spoken words into text or captions. The generated text is
60 displayed on a large screen visible to everyone, on a laptop, or on a mobile device.
61 Remote CART services allow captions to be streamed to an internet browser or
62 integrated into third party platforms such as Zoom or WebEx. CART is carried out
63 by a human captioner, also known as a stenographer. CART services utilize a
64 stenograph machine, computer, and highly specialized software to provide
65 instantaneous speech-to-text translation.

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67 Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on Bill No. 36-0190, and again,
68 VITEMA supports this Bill. I am prepared to answer any questions any members
69 of this committee may have at this time.