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Address in Support of Bill No. 36-0190

Presented to the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs and Consumer Protection

Honorable Members of the Thirty-Sixth Legislature,

I rise today in strong support of **Bill No. 36-0190**, a vital piece of legislation that seeks to amend Title 1, Chapter 15, Section 254 of the Virgin Islands Code to require the presence of **American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters** at all visually broadcasted meetings and official functions of the Government of the Virgin Islands.

This bill, proposed by Senator Angel L. Bolques, Jr., is not merely a legislative amendment—it is a declaration of our commitment to **equity, inclusion, and accessibility** for all Virgin Islanders, especially those in our Deaf and hard-of-hearing communities. By ensuring that government communications are accessible through live ASL interpretation, we affirm that **transparency and civic engagement are rights, not privileges**.

The bill thoughtfully outlines the logistical and financial framework necessary for implementation. It mandates the hiring of at least one qualified ASL interpreter in each island district and provides for remote interpretation when in-person services are unavailable. This flexibility ensures that no broadcasted government function will exclude members of our community due to lack of access.

Moreover, the requirement for funding to be included in the **Fiscal Year 2027 Executive Budget** demonstrates foresight and responsibility. It gives agencies time to prepare, recruit, and integrate these services into their operations, while holding everybody accountable to a clear deadline—**September 30, 2027**.

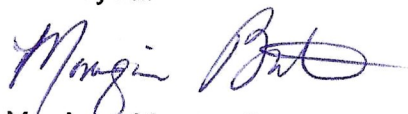
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This deadline is still two years out; I would have liked to see it happen in the next year due to the disadvantage it causes our citizens. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) went into law on July 26, 1990. Here we are in 2025 still playing catch up and finally addressing accessibility issues within the law. We need to be more proactive and less reactive to situations within our community.

In a territory as diverse and vibrant as ours, accessibility must be a cornerstone of governance. This bill is a step toward a more inclusive Virgin Islands, where every citizen—regardless of ability—can participate fully in the democratic process.

I urge my fellow legislators to support this bill wholeheartedly. Let us pass it not only as a legal mandate but as a moral imperative.

Thank you.



Monique Magras-Bute

Virgin Islands Association for Independent Living Inc.
Executive Director