

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

On **January 23, 2026**, the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection convened at the Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall on St. Thomas to receive testimony on matters of significant importance to the democratic process, election administration, and the recognition of exemplary public service in the Virgin Islands.

During this meeting, the Committee heard extensive testimony concerning proposed legislative changes **Bill No. 36-0187** requiring the Board of Elections to count by hand votes deposited in a ballot box, to election procedures, the operational status and statutory authority of election bodies, and the readiness of the Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands to administer its 2026 Democratic Primary Election. These discussions addressed issues of voter confidence, transparency, constitutional authority, administrative clarity, and coordination among election stakeholders, reflecting the Committee's ongoing responsibility to ensure good governance and public trust.

Additionally, the Committee considered **Bill No. 36-0220** honoring the life and legacy of former Senator Lorraine L. Berry, whose decades of service left a lasting imprint on the Territory. Testimony presented throughout the meeting was thorough, substantive, and reflective of the diverse perspectives held by election officials, party leadership, community advocates, and former public servants.

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### **In Block I:**

The Committee will receive testimony on the operations of the Elections System of the Virgin Islands including but not limited to enabling laws, current department challenges, a plan of action to resolve challenges and the following:

- All matters related to the discussion on the status, functions, and operations of the agency.

### **Invited Testifiers were as follows:**

- Ms. Carol M. Burke, Chairwoman, Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands
- Ms. Carol Burke, Chairwoman of Democratic Party
- Mr. Raymond J. Williams, Chairman, Board of Elections
- Mr. John Yob, Chairman of Republican Party

## Highlights of Testimonies

Senator Joseph made a motion for the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection to subpoena Mr. John Yob, Chairman of the Republican Party, to appear to its next committee meeting to discuss all matters that have to do with the election of their delegates, governors, and senators. The motion was seconded by Senator Ray Fonseca. Legal counsel was called to the floor to discuss matter. Senator Joseph's motion failed: 3 yeas, 3 nays, 1 absent.

Subsequently, Ms. Burke presented testimony outlining the Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands' readiness for the August 1, 2026, Democratic Primary Election, citing the adoption of the 2026 Primary Election and Certification Plan, formally approved by the DPVI Territorial Committee. She emphasized that the Plan was developed in direct response to recent federal court rulings affirming political parties' constitutional authority to administer and certify their own candidates. The testimony detailed the Plan's provisions governing eligibility standards, certification procedures, transparency requirements, dispute resolution processes, and coordination with election administrators, while affirming DPVI's commitment to accountability, neutrality, and compliance with territorial and federal law.

Mr. Williams provided an operational update on the Virgin Islands Board of Elections, outlining internal challenges, statutory ambiguities, and recent Board actions related to Act No. 8690. He highlighted concerns regarding overlapping duties between the Board of Elections and the Supervisor of Elections and reiterated the Board's longstanding request for legislative clarification of Title 18 to ensure clear authority, quorum requirements, and effective election administration.

Committee members engaged in discussion regarding coordination between political parties and election authorities, statutory clarity, and the importance of maintaining public confidence in the electoral process.

### **In Block II:**

**Bill No. 36-0187** *An Act amending Title 18, Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 23, Section 622, requiring the Board of Elections to count by hand votes deposited in a ballot box. Proposed by Senator Franklin D. Johnson.*

### **Invited Testifiers were as follows:**

- Mr. Raymond J. Williams, Chairman, Virgin Islands Board of Elections
- Ms. Caroline F. Fawkes, Supervisor of Elections
- Ms. Mary L. Moorhead, Community Activist

## Highlights of Testimonies:

Testimony on Bill No. 36-0187 presented sharply contrasting views regarding election transparency and administrative feasibility. Supporters of the measure, which included Ms. Lorelie Monsanto and Dr. Cleopatra Peter (testimonies were read into the record by the clerk), emphasized voter confidence, auditability, and the perceived benefits of manual vote counting as a safeguard against irregularities. Several testifiers cited personal experiences, historical practices, and constitutional concerns to support the proposal.

Opposing testimony focused on the operational, legal, and fiscal implications of mandating hand-counted ballots. Election officials raised concerns regarding increased risks of human error, delays in election results, staffing challenges, higher costs, and conflicts with existing statutory frameworks and judicial precedent. Following extensive deliberation, the Committee voted to hold Bill No. 36-0187 in Committee.

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### **In Block III:**

**Bill No. 36-0220** *An Act honoring and commending former Senator Lorraine L. Berry posthumously for her decades of outstanding public service by renaming Hull Bay Road, located in North Side, St. Thomas, the “Lorraine L. Berry Drive. “Proposed by Senator Avery L. Lewis*

### **Invited Testifiers were as follows:**

- Mr. Roosevelt St. C. David, Former Senator
- Ms. Crystal L. Bryan, Niece of the late Senator Lorraine L. Berry
- Mr. Winston Ledee, Brother
- Ms. Celeste Brin, Sister
- Mr. Clement “Caine” Magrass, Former Senator

### **Highlights of Testimonies:**

Testimony in support of Bill No. 36-0220 was deeply reflective and overwhelmingly favorable. Testifiers highlighted Senator Berry’s historic 24-year legislative career, her principled leadership, fiscal discipline, and tireless advocacy for accountability and good governance. Family members and former colleagues described the renaming of Hull Bay Road as a fitting tribute to Senator Berry’s enduring legacy and her lasting impact on the Virgin Islands.

### **COMMITTEE ACTION: THE VOTE**

- Bill No. 36-0187: Held in Committee
- Bill No. 36-0220: Passed in Committee and forwarded to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary

### **ATTENDANCE:**

#### **Committee Members:**

Senator Ray Fonseca, Senator Alma Francis Heyliger, Senator Novelle E. Francis, Jr., 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, Jr., Senator Clifford Joseph, Senator Marise C. James

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