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The Honorable Members of the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs and Consumer Protection

36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands

RE: Urgent Plea from a viNGN Employee – Oppose or Amend Bill No. 36-0066 (Mandatory GERS Enrollment)

Dear Honorable Senators,

I am writing with urgency and personal concern regarding **Bill No. 36-0066**, which your committee recently voted to advance. This bill proposes requiring all employees of viNGN to enroll in the Government Employees Retirement System (GERS), including a mandatory 18% paycheck deduction.

I respectfully ask you to reconsider this decision — not only because of the financial burden it will place on viNGN, but because of what it will do to employees like me.

I have proudly served viNGN for over **13 years**. I was part of the team before we even had an office — working late nights past midnight during the **grant phase**, assisting with **grant reporting and network mapping**, and supporting the agency before, during, and after the **construction of the territory's broadband network**. I now serve as **IT Manager**, and I remain just as committed to our mission today as I was when we started.

I am also a **single mother of three**. I carry the full weight of providing for my household, and like many Virgin Islanders, I've watched the cost of living continue to rise — from grocery prices to fuel to utilities. Over the years, I've had to adjust to **reduced healthcare coverage**, and I now pay more for a plan that offers far less. I've also had to find **additional sources of income** just to stay afloat.

An **18% deduction** from my salary would be devastating. It's not just a pay cut — it's a crisis. If this bill becomes law, I will be forced to consider leaving viNGN — not because I want to, but because I simply will not be able to survive.

Beyond my personal situation, I urge you to consider the **operational impact**. viNGN already operates with a **lean, essential staff**. We cannot afford to lose anyone. If even one or two team members are forced to leave due to this financial burden, it could seriously disrupt critical services that the territory relies on.

This is all happening at a time when viNGN is already facing financial pressure. As reported by multiple news outlets, the agency's **\$2.1 million federally awarded Digital Equity Capacity Grant was terminated** without warning. In testimony to the Legislature, our President, Stephan Adams, stated that we are now actively trying to identify **alternative funding sources** just to continue our work. This is not the moment to add new financial mandates.

Most importantly: **viNGN already has a functioning, federally compliant retirement plan** — the **Fidelity SIMPLE IRA**, which includes a 3% employer match. This plan was established because viNGN is a **semi-autonomous agency**, not a government department. We do not receive General Fund support, government-sponsored health benefits, or merit system protections. Yet, this bill treats us as if we do — while giving us none of the same support.

I understand the Legislature's desire to protect and strengthen GERS. But forcing viNGN employees into a system we were never part of, and cannot afford, is not the solution.

I respectfully urge you to **oppose Bill No. 36-0066**, or at the very least, **amend it to exempt viNGN and similarly situated semi-autonomous agencies**. I've worked too hard, for too long, and given too much to see it all threatened by a law that simply doesn't fit our structure or reality.

Thank you for your time, your service, and your willingness to hear directly from the people this bill will impact the most.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Latesha', followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Latesha Florent Isaac

IT Manager

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This letter reflects my personal views as an employee directly impacted by the proposed legislation. It does not represent the official position of viNGN.