

Testimony for The Committee

on

Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection

Bovoni, Bolongo, Nadir Community Action Group

36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands

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Good morning, Senator Avery L. Lewis, Chairman of the Committee on Government Operation, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection, committee members, other senators of the 36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, and the community in the viewing and listening audience.

I am Felecia L. Blyden, member of the Bovoni, Bolongo, Nadir (BBN) Community Action Group. The BBN Community Action Group represents residents who are actively identifying and addressing concerns of the residents within the Bovoni community and the surrounding areas, with the explicit goal of improving the quality of life.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Bill 36-0232. The goal of this testimony is to share the concerns of the community residents about the impact of this bill and to offer solutions in addressing the management of the green waste and disposal of it. A recent community assessment of our residents ranked “dissatisfaction with the landfill” and “environmental factors” as the top concerns. In preparation for this testimony, we listened to the concerns of the residents, reviewed available information on the technology, and engaged with the VI Waste Management Authority (VIWMA)

and individuals familiar with this technology, including environmentalists. Our position is one of balance: any proposed solution must consider the human impact in addressing vegetative waste management. This begins with community awareness and education on the proposed solutions.

First, I will share a brief history of the Estate Bovoni Homes. The Estate Bovoni Homes, Frenchman's Bay Quarters Nos (1 and 2), Southeast Estates came into being in June of 1963, in the most lush and pristine setting, in a valley surrounded by rolling hills. It was nature at its best, visited by deer, parakeets and other domestic animals. Many families moved into the community from 1963 to 1970. Many of those families still reside in their original homes today. The residents once used the original site where the current Landfill exists for recreation: softball, bicycling, cookouts and picnics, and the Mangrove Lagoon (Cass Cay) for boating, fishing and camping. In 1971, the Bovoni Public Housing community came into existence, followed by Thomasville homes in 1975. The landfill and the car track came that same year and have forever changed the beauty and tranquility of Estate Bovoni. Since that time, Jenny's Hope community has been added along with many private homes and a proliferation

of businesses. The Bovoni area is densely populated with demographic and economic diversity.

The Bovoni, Bolongo, Nadir Community Action Group (BBN) reorganized in 2025. BBN was predated by the Bovoni Homeowners Association which operated for over 40 years. The former home association advocated for a better quality of life in the community thereby engaging with VI Waste Management, Public Works and other associated entities. The landfill has been at the center of most of the former association's efforts. BBN continues to work on previously established goals and new initiatives.

It important to note that the while the discussion may be centered on residents of Bovoni and surrounding communities, there are also persons included that work 8-12 hours a day at businesses in the area, children who attend the Bertha C. Boshculte Middle school and soon the Department of Human Services Head Start Program will offer services in Bolongo. The Bovoni Landfill issues will continue to affect the entire District; however, the residents, especially the children and seniors, and individuals with compromised

immune systems, of Bovoni, Bolongo, and Nadir remain the most vulnerable and will be impacted disproportionately.

Bill 36-0232 proposes to amend Act 8018 to allow the Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority (VIWMA) and landfill operators to dispose of vegetative debris using controlled incineration technologies, including air-curtain incinerators (ACI or Incinerator). The bill also states that other methods such as composting, mulching, and shredding remain permissible options.

The bill as written is vague, it speaks primarily of methods to address the elimination of green waste; but it is void of any protective language as it relates to assurances of air quality controls for the potentially impacted area nor does it address the maintenance and management of the equipment.

While there is language in the bill that speaks to mulching, composting and shredding there appears to be no commitment to utilizing these technologies to address the green waste issue.

There are many questions that require answers as it relates to the management and maintenance of the ACI.

- Will additional staff be required?
- What is the incinerator's operating frequency?
- What time of day will the ACI be operated?
- Where is the proposed site, on the Landfill for the incinerator?
- Is certified staff required to operate the equipment?
- How will maintenance be provided; will staff be trained or will maintenance services be contracted?

The major concern for residents who traverse the area for various reasons is air quality control. The Bovoni Landfill is less than 2 miles from the nearest home; industrial scale burning poses a direct health threat to the residents. Consequently, health impacts include asthma, respiratory irritation, eye irritation, chronic respiratory disease, cardiovascular disease and overall increased mortality risk. Of note is the fact that there is a lack of data on the prevalence and rate of asthma in the Virgin Islands. Limited data exists from surveys conducted on select populations for asthma and respiratory illnesses.

However, anecdotal data and real-life experiences of residents on the impact of dust and smoke from the landfill is significant. If this technology is implemented, it is imperative that morbidity and mortality data is gathered consistently about health impact. Of equal importance, is the implementation of the appropriate air quality permits and guidelines for consistent monitoring of emissions.

While we are not experts in this field, we are aware that there is a body of credible data which gives pause in matters of personal health as it relates to the ACI. Greg Guannel of Caribbean Green Technology (at the University of the Virgin Islands) provided testimony to this body on the proposed use of controlled incineration technologies for the disposal of vegetative debris and provided alternative green waste management programs which can be considered.

In testimony presented to this body on March 10, 2026, by the VIWMA, Daryl Griffith noted the “data confirms that the USVI has meaningful opportunities to divert vegetative waste from disposal practices that overburden the landfills”.

In the same testimony, VIWMA referenced a long-term strategy which places significant emphasis on waste diversion, especially organic and compostable materials. We are interested in learning more about this strategic plan for waste diversion and their timeline for implementation.

When working on meaningful solutions we must begin with the end goal in mind. The end goal as understood is sustainable green waste disposal. BBN recommends that this bill focus on composting, mulching, and shredding, as specified in Bill No. 36-0232 and Act No. 8018. These by far would be sustainable activities with the least impacts on human health and the environment. To alleviate the accumulation of green waste at the landfill, it is also suggested that the composting, mulching and shredding occur at other established sites. These off-site green waste disposal centers could be opportunities for non-traditional partnerships thus ensuring that no green waste ends up at the landfill. If we aspire to live in a cleaner and healthier environment, then we **MUST** keep it clean.

Let us keep in mind that Bovoni in a densely populated business and residential area: private homes, public housing, schools, churches,

businesses and hotels. Therefore, the issues of vegetative debris not only impact immediate residents but individuals who work and traverse through this area.

In addressing the green waste crisis, we ask that you reflect on what your advocacy efforts would be if the air curtain incinerator was targeted for your community. Additionally, it is important to consider how frequently issues are presented as critical to the community due to a lack of follow-through or enforcement of existing rules and legislation.

We thank the bill sponsors, committee chair and other members of the 36th Legislature for the opportunity to present testimony on behalf of the Bovoni, Bolongo, Nadir Community Action Group. It is our hope that this is the beginning of our re-engagement with the parties here today on matters relating to a healthier and cleaner community.

As adopted, “Anything that is for us or about us should not happen without us.”