

# Bill No. 36-0026

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An Act amending title 23 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 10, by adding a subchapter VI to establish the “Virgin Islands Meteorological Office” within the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency



**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**

**May 20, 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.

6 I am Ovid J. Williams, Assistant Director of the Virgin Islands Territorial  
7 Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA). I am providing testimony today to  
8 Bill No. 36-0026, an act amending title 23 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 10, by  
9 adding a subchapter VI to establish the “Virgin Islands Meteorological Office”  
10 within the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency dated  
11 February 27, 2025, sponsored by Senator Ray Fonseca.

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13 VITEMA already maintains a strong relationship with the National Weather  
14 Service in San Juan, Puerto and a Virgin Islands Meteorological Office at  
15 VITEMA with appropriate technical staff would serve to enhance that relationship,  
16 based on recent discussion with the leadership of the National Weather Service in  
17 San Juan. Not only does the National Weather Service provide VITEMA 24-hour  
18 telephone support and Emergency Alert Service messages to smartphones  
19 throughout the US Virgin Islands, but it also provides as needed, virtual meeting  
20 capability with Government Agency Officials, and provides its written products on  
21 social media and hosts on-line meetings in English and Spanish.

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23 One of the greatest benefits of adding meteorologists to the VITEMA team is to  
24 provide much needed technical input to San Juan National Weather Service for  
25 timely notification of weather conditions to St Croix, St Thomas, St John and  
26 Water Island based on the input from local observations in the Territory. With  
27 input on existing treat conditions from a VITEMA meteorologist, severe weather

warnings could go out earlier from the National Weather Service on VITEMA's Alert VI mass message notification system, NWS wireless Emergency Alert System, and the NOAA 24-hour weather radio broadcasting from the one (1) tower located on the east end of St. Thomas at frequency 162.475 Mhz.

As to the inclusion of a doppler radar located on St. Croix, unfortunately the construction of the new VITEMA Emergency Operations Center at Hermon Hill on St. Croix, using FEMA Hazard Mitigation Funds, is several years behind schedule, and is currently only at 30% design. VITEMA cannot provide an anticipated date of availability and recommends partnership with NWS for identification of alternate locations on St. Thomas or St Croix.

Besides an improved Territorial weather forecast linked to the National Weather Service, these positions in the VITEMA Meteorological Office would also be responsible for coordinating with multiple Federal and Caribbean agencies on the maintenance of critical weather-related instruments located here in the Territory. These instruments monitor atmospheric weather conditions, marine conditions, changes in sea levels indicating potential tsunami, and seismic sensors detecting earthquakes. With proper training and coordination with the National Weather Service, VITEMA meteorological staff could release daily weather balloons, which provide real time information to San Juan for more accurate weather forecast to our islands. The VITEMA meteorologist can also conduct education outreach to schools to further provide awareness on the science behind our unique weather conditions such as Saharan dust, hurricanes, droughts, floods, volcanic ash, sargassum, and earthquakes, just to name a few. These positions could also provide

education on the role of the hurricane hunter aircraft, which fly out of St. Croix during tropical storms and hurricanes.

As to funding any meteorologist positions, a competitive salary is required to draw and retain qualified individuals, recurring visits for training and coordination to the National Weather Service, educational outreach material, travel between islands to support weather instrument maintenance and outreach, and equipment for daily weather balloon release and reporting of data. Due to the duties of the meteorological office staff, vehicles would be required for both St Croix and St Thomas. As VITEMA currently does not possess funding for the portions of Atmospheric Scientist, Meteorologist, or Meteorological Assistant, other funding sources would need to be identified to maintain a Meteorological Office for the territory.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on Bill No. 36-0026. In summary, VITEMA recommends the inclusion of a Meteorological Office, with recommended staffed positions, but does not support the doppler radar as there is no current location available for deployment or available funding. I would request that the Bill Sponsor, Senator Ray Fonseca, consider amending Bill No. 36-0026 as such. I am prepared to answer any questions any members of this committee may have at this time.