

**Testimony on Legislature Bill No. 36-0026**

“... to establish the Virgin Islands Meteorological Office to monitor weather conditions, provide accurate forecasts, establish a Doppler Weather Radar Station in St. Croix, and enhance preparedness and response to weather-related hazards in the Territory.”

May 20, 2025

To: The Honorable Avery L. Lewis and the Members the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs and Consumer Protection, 36<sup>th</sup> Legislature of the Virgin Islands of the United States

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Subject: This testimony is offered to support certain aspects of Bill 36-0026, while suggesting hesitation on others, and offering cautionary observations with respect to funding.

My name is Roy A. Watlington, and I am a retired professor, principal investigator and administrator at the University of the Virgin Islands, a founding board member of the Caribbean Coastal Ocean Observing System and the USVI Science Representative to the National Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Program. My academic preparation includes two degrees in physics, one in science education and five years residence in training in the Department of Meteorology and Physical Oceanography at the University of Miami. I have played major roles in recruiting funding and deploying weather stations at Sandy Point, St. Croix; Buck & Capella Islands, St. Thomas; and at three other sites. Additionally, I have been involved in establishing and maintaining the long-serving data buoy stationed south of St. John and the current-measuring high-frequency radar station at Flamingo Point, Water Island. While at UVI, I taught a freshman course on natural hazards, published papers on related topics, and have been a frequent presenter on hurricane and tsunami awareness in FEMA-sponsored courses and at disaster-management workshops, sponsored by the private sector.

I strongly support the intent of Bill 36-0029 in that it could bring meteorological skills and capabilities to the US Virgin Islands through the establishment of a Meteorological Office within the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency. Such capabilities have long been lacking. The hiring of one or more meteorology professionals into a Meteorological Office within VITEMA could enhance collaboration and communication with the National Weather Service in San Juan and accelerate decision-making when hazards threaten. It could also provide more expert voices in informing Virgin Islanders about meteorological matters, such as drought and

flooding in addition to tropical storms and provide VITEMA with the scientific and technical expertise necessary to make decisions about acquiring technology, such as a Doppler radar.

Fortunately, some of the proposed intended services are already available – albeit with improvements always needed - some by VITEMA and some provided with federal funding by the Territory’s stakeholder privileges extended from National Weather Service in San Juan, or through *pro bono* contributors such as the non-profit organizations with which I work.

I support the bill’s call for, “... a comprehensive needs assessment to evaluate the necessity and feasibility of establishing a Doppler radar weather station on the east end of St. Croix”. Attempting to install the technology associated with a Doppler radar station before feasibility is established and costs and funding assessed, is not advisable. While its data output could be useful in “filling gaps” when incorporated into the data products already available through the National Weather Service, the data from a stand-alone Doppler radar station requires much processing and preparation to be useful and made available to the public. Further, the equipment and physical facility is likely to be very expensive to install and maintain, at a time when both territorial and federal funding are likely to be very difficult to secure.

Bill 36-0026 is welcome because it brings attention to unfulfilled technical needs of the USVI. and to the assets and services already being provided through threatened federal programs that may soon need to be funded by the Government of the Virgin Islands. Additionally, the bill provides an opportunity to realistically assess the Territory’s prospects for assembling funds for such important endeavors at this critical time.

Thank you for receiving this testimony.