

THE HONORABLE SENATOR AVERY L. LEWIS

Legislative Secretary

36TH 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

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

On Thursday, May 7, 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 and deliberate on legislation honoring distinguished Virgin Islanders for their service and contributions to the Territory, proposed amendments to election procedures, and matters relating to election administration and public safety.

During the meeting, the Committee heard testimony from former public officials, law enforcement personnel, election officials, government representatives, family members, community advocates, and members of the public regarding legislation intended to recognize extraordinary service to the Virgin Islands community and proposed amendments concerning election administration and ballot tabulation procedures. The Committee was also scheduled to receive testimony from the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission regarding administrative operations and matters related to the Office of the Virgin Islands Inspector General's audit; however, the invited testifier was not in attendance.

Committee members engaged in substantive discussion regarding public safety, election integrity, transparency, accountability, and the importance of recognizing individuals whose dedication and sacrifice positively impacted the people of the Virgin Islands.

In Block I

Bill No. 36-0114: An Act honoring and commending Dilsa Capdeville for her many contributions to the Virgin Islands community through her roles in various areas of social services and advocacy for abused women and children and to rename the Bolongo Bay Head Start Facility the "Dilsa Capdeville Head Start Facility" in her honor.
Proposed by Senator Carla J. Joseph

Invited Testifiers:

- Former Senator Myron D. Jackson
- Ms. Yvette M. Finch
- Dr. Angelina Prince

- Ms. Anya Stuart
 - Ms. Tonia Garnette
-

Highlights of Testimonies

Testimony presented before the Committee was overwhelmingly favorable and deeply reflective of Ms. Dilsa Capdeville’s decades-long commitment to serving the people of the Virgin Islands through social services, child advocacy, domestic violence prevention, and trauma counselling.

Testifiers highlighted Ms. Capdeville’s work through organizations such as Kidscope, the Family Resource Center, and Nana Baby Home, emphasizing her role in transforming the Territory’s response to child abuse, domestic violence, and family trauma. Speakers reflected on her unwavering dedication to protecting vulnerable children and families, mentoring generations of advocates, and strengthening support systems throughout the Virgin Islands.

Several testifiers also spoke to Ms. Capdeville’s personal compassion, sacrifice, and commitment to public service, noting the profound impact she has had on countless individuals and families across the Territory. The testimony reflected broad support for renaming the Bolongo Bay Head Start Facility in her honor as a lasting tribute to her contributions and legacy within the Virgin Islands community.

Committee members acknowledged Ms. Capdeville’s extraordinary legacy of advocacy, leadership, and service.

Bill No. 36-0191: An Act honoring and commending Detective Delberth Phipps, Jr., for his service with the Virgin Islands Police Department and to the Virgin Islands community, by renaming the portion of Hospital Gade where it intersects with Veterans Drive, at the Alexander Farrelly Criminal Justice Complex, to the beginning of the Maude Proudfoot Drive, the “Delberth Phipps, Jr., Street.” *Proposed by Senator Angel L. Bolques, Jr.*

Invited Testifiers

- Mr. H. “Jerry” Inniss, Virgin Islands Department of Justice
 - Mr. Vernon Carr, Virgin Islands Police Department
 - Ms. Vivianne Newton, Virgin Islands Police Department
 - Captain Maria Colon, Virgin Islands Police Department
 - Mrs. Denise Phipps
 - Retired Officer Delberth Phipps, Sr.
 - Mr. Demel A.V. Phipps
 - Ms. Melodi Davis
-

Highlights of Testimonies

Testimony presented in support of Bill No. 36-0191 was deeply emotional and overwhelmingly favorable, reflecting on Detective Delberth Phipps, Jr.’s dedication to law enforcement, mentorship, community service, and ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty.

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Testifiers described Detective Phipps as a respected officer, mentor, friend, father, and family man whose professionalism, compassion, and commitment to service positively impacted countless individuals throughout the Territory. Members of the Virgin Islands Police Department highlighted his work as a certified instructor and mentor to younger officers, while family members and lifelong friends reflected on his humility, integrity, and unwavering willingness to help others.

Several testifiers recounted Detective Phipps' heroic actions on July 4, 2023, when he responded to assist fellow officers and ultimately sacrificed his life in service to the community. Testimony emphasized that renaming a portion of Hospital Gade in his honor would serve as a permanent reminder of his courage, dedication, and enduring legacy within the Virgin Islands community and law enforcement profession.

Committee members acknowledged Detective Phipps' extraordinary service and sacrifice and expressed appreciation to his family for sharing his legacy with the people of the Virgin Islands.

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

Amendment No. 36-662

The Committee also considered **Amendment No. 36-662**, offered in the nature of a substitute, establishing procedures for voter-requested hand-marked paper ballots, ballot reconciliation requirements, chain-of-custody procedures, public observation standards, post-election audits, and election official training requirements.

Invited Testifiers

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

Discussion on Bill No. 36-0187 focused extensively on election integrity, voter confidence, ballot security, transparency, and operational feasibility.

Ms. Caroline F. Fawkes, Supervisor of Elections, testified in opposition to the bill and expressed concerns regarding the elimination of electronic tabulation procedures currently utilized within the Virgin Islands Elections System. Her testimony outlined concerns related to increased risks of human error, implementation challenges, staffing burdens, chain-of-custody issues, delays in election results, and the absence of uniform standards for determining voter intent during manual tabulation procedures. Ms. Fawkes noted that, despite the provision of Amendment No. 36-662, her opposition to Bill No. 36-0187 remains the same.

Ms. Fawkes also provided detailed explanations regarding the functionality of the Territory's DS200 tabulation equipment and ExpressVote systems, emphasizing the accessibility features available to voters with disabilities, current reconciliation practices, post-election audits, and transparency measures already utilized within the Elections System. Additionally, she stressed the complexity of ballot tabulation within the Virgin Islands due to multiple contests and referendum items appearing on individual ballots.

Mr. Raymond J. Williams, Chairman of the Virgin Islands Board of Elections, testified that the Board of Elections met to deliberate on the proposed legislation and voted not to support the measure. Mr. Williams stated that, due to the short notice of Amendment No. 36-662, he was unable to discuss it with the Board. As such, he was reluctant to place his position on the Amendment on the record.

Committee members engaged in extensive discussion regarding election administration, public trust, implementation logistics, accessibility protections, and the balance between transparency and operational practicality within the electoral process.

In Block III

Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission Operational Update

The Committee was scheduled to receive testimony from the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission regarding an update and overview of the Office of the Virgin Islands Inspector General's audit of the administrative functions of the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission.

However, the invited testifier, Ms. Melissa Smith, Executive Director of the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission, was not in attendance, and therefore no testimony was presented before the Committee on this matter.

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COMMITTEE ACTION: THE VOTE

- **Bill No. 36-0114:** Voted upon favorably and forwarded to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary
- **Bill No. 36-0191:** Voted upon favorably and forwarded to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary
- **Bill No. 36-0187:** Voted to be Held in Committee until the call of the Chair

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 Angel L. Bolques, Jr., Senator Clifford Joseph

Through the Chair:

Supervisor of Elections: What is the percentage of people voting through paper ballots? –
Alma Francis Heyliger