



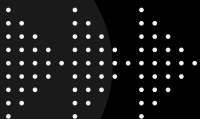
COMMITTEE ON

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS, VETERANS AFFAIRS, AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

NOVEMBER 14, 2025

Derek Gabriel

Commissioner
Department of Public Works



Good morning, Honorable Avery L. Lewis, Chairperson of the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection; Committee members; fellow Senators; and members of the viewing and listening audience. My name is Derek Gabriel, and I am the Commissioner of the Department of Public Works. Today, I appear before you, by invitation of the committee, to provide testimony on Bill No. 36-0052.

Title 29 of the Virgin Islands Code, Section 502, currently prohibits the erection or maintenance of any advertising device on publicly owned property, or within fifty feet of the center line of a public highway, without a written permit from the Commissioner of Public Works. This regulation applies equally to signs located on private property. The purpose of this law is to maintain public safety and consistent oversight over all advertising devices, including static signs and digital billboards, visible from public roadways.

The proposed amendment would remove private property from the permit requirement, thereby significantly undermining the goals of our advertising program. Permit fees collected through the program are a key source of revenue that helps the Department monitor, regulate, and maintain signage throughout the territory. Allowing private property owners to place signs without permits would make it extremely difficult to track locations, enforce compliance, and ensure that signs do not create hazards.

Unregulated signs can obstruct lines of sight, interfere with traffic flow, and distract drivers, all of which can increase the risk of accidents and compromise public safety.

The bill, as proposed, appears to favor a specific group of stakeholders, providing a limited benefit to a narrow set of property owners. In doing so, it could restrict legislative oversight and the Legislature's ability to establish consistent standards for public safety and signage across all property types. Maintaining consistent rules is essential not only for traffic safety but also for preserving the aesthetic and orderly appearance of our communities, which benefits all residents and visitors.

Even on private property, the Department requires written authorization from the property owner and compliance with all applicable standards under 29 V.I.C. §502. Applicants must agree to follow all safety and placement regulations outlined in the permit, which ensures that advertising devices are properly located and do not create hazards for motorists or pedestrians. Removing private property from the permit process would eliminate this crucial oversight and increase the Department's administrative burden, as staff would be required to monitor and address unpermitted signage that could pose safety risks.

With the rise of digital billboards and other modern advertising methods, the Department has adapted its program to allow personal and business advertising in a regulated manner. Oversight on private property is necessary to ensure that all signage, whether traditional or digital, meets safety standards, is properly maintained, and complies with the law.

Federal law, including the Highway Beautification Act, regulates outdoor advertising on both public and private property within approximately 660 feet of major highways if the sign is visible from the roadway. Only certain signs, such as those advertising on-site businesses or required by law, are permitted. Compliance with federal standards is critical, as failure to enforce these requirements can potentially place federal highway funding, both discretionary and formula-based funding, at risk.

Similarly, under Virgin Islands law, the Commissioner may exempt certain advertising devices that do not interfere with safety or violate other standards, but such exemptions are discretionary and must still comply with applicable guidelines. All other permits remain subject to review and fees, which allows the Department to maintain control over the number, placement, and safety of advertising devices throughout the territory.

In closing, while the Department supports safe and effective advertising, we do not support the intent of Bill No. 36-0052. Regulations should apply to private property just as they do to public property. Without proper oversight, the Department will incur additional time and expense removing non-compliant signs. Furthermore, the bill could limit legislative authority which may not serve the broader public interest. For these reasons, we recommend that Title 29 Virgin Islands Code, Section 502 remain unchanged.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I am prepared to answer any questions or address any concerns.