



U.S. Virgin Islands Division
of **Personnel**

Testimony | Bill No. 36-0354

Good morning, Honorable Lewis L. Lewis, Chairman of the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection; members of the Committee, non-committee members, and of the viewing and listening audience. I am Cindy L. Richardson, Director of the Division of Personnel. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Bill No. 36-0354. Here with me today is Assistant Director Florine Audain Hassell, Assistant Director, Valcina Quashie, Deputy Director, Aliya Felix-Blyden, Legal Counsel and the supporting members of the Division of Personnel present in the audience in both districts.

The Division of Personnel supports the purpose of this legislation and appreciates Senator Novelle Francis for recognizing the need to modernize the Government of the Virgin Islands' central personnel agency.

We support the proposed transition from “Personnel” to “Human Resources” because it reflects the evolution of the agency and the workforce we serve. However, given the significant expansion of our responsibilities, we believe this legislation presents an opportunity to accomplish more than a change in name.

Accordingly, we respectfully recommend amendments that would establish the Department of Human Resources as an executive department, headed by a Commissioner of Human Resources, and strengthen the agency's authority to promote compliance, accountability, and effective personnel administration throughout the Government.

The Evolution of the Division of Personnel

The Government's central personnel agency has evolved considerably over the years, both in its organizational placement and the scope of its responsibilities. The statutory foundation of the Government's personnel system dates back to at least 1946. In 1962, Act No. 819 transferred the existing Personnel Division and its personnel administration responsibilities from the Office of the Government Secretary to the Office of the Governor, where it remains today.

More than six decades later, the Division's responsibilities extend well beyond traditional personnel administration. While we continue to perform essential functions in recruitment, classification, compensation, personnel records management, and administration of the merit system, our work has expanded to encompass a much broader range of human resources services including employee benefits and wellness, workforce development, employee relations, performance management, workplace accountability, and personnel policy development.

We administer programs such as Donated Leave and the Career Incentive Program across all three branches of government, investigate equal employment opportunity and employee conduct matters, and provide guidance on the interpretation and application of personnel laws, rules, and policies.

Most recently, we launched GVI Learn, the Government's learning management system, expanding access to training and professional and personal development opportunities throughout the Government. We have also implemented a new performance management system to strengthen employee development, accountability, and organizational effectiveness. These efforts complement our ongoing work in employee wellness, ethics education, and the development of personnel policies and programs that respond to the evolving needs of the Government workforce.

These are just some examples of how our role has evolved beyond processing personnel transactions to support the entire employee lifecycle as employees navigate their public service careers. Importantly, many of these services extend across the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial Branches, demonstrating the Government-wide reach of our responsibilities.

Modernizing Government Human Resources

The term Personnel reflects a traditional model of workforce administration focused primarily on processing employment actions, maintaining records, and administering employment classifications. While these functions remain essential, today's workforce demands much more.

Modern human resources administration includes workforce planning, talent acquisition and retention, employee development, leadership training, succession planning, and organizational effectiveness. Across the country, jurisdictions including Tennessee, Vermont, and Virginia, have established departments designated as Human Resources or Human Resource Management reflecting the broader role of central workforce agencies.

The Government of the Virgin Islands should be no exception.

Our employees are the Government's greatest asset. The designation of Human Resources better reflects both the work we perform today and the work necessary to develop and sustain a capable, high-performing public workforce. For this reason, we recommend that Bill No. 36-0354 go beyond renaming the existing Division and establish a Department of Human Resources as an executive department.

Our proposed amendments would repeal 3 V.I.C. § 5, which reflects the Division's historical placement within the Office of the Governor, and establish the Department of Human Resources (DHR) under a new § 450 within Chapter 25 of Title 3. The Department would be headed by a Commissioner appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Legislature, with authority to organize its internal operations to effectively fulfill its responsibilities.

These changes would provide greater clarity regarding the agency's organizational status, leadership, and responsibilities while preserving the Government's existing personnel merit system.

Strengthening Accountability and Consistency

The proposed amendments also address the Department's ability to effectively carry out its responsibilities.

Although existing law authorizes the Division to establish rules and standards, we believe its authority to monitor and enforce compliance with those requirements should be more clearly defined.

Accordingly, we recommend amendments to 3 V.I.C. § 452 clarifying the Department's authority to conduct compliance reviews, audits, inquiries, and investigations; identify and document noncompliance; require appropriate corrective action; and monitor implementation.

We also recommend expressly authorizing the Department to establish training and competency requirements for Executive Branch employees responsible for administering personnel functions. This would promote consistency, reduce administrative errors, and strengthen accountability across departments and agencies.

Under the proposed amendments, DHR's compliance authority would focus on identifying violations of applicable personnel requirements, requiring corrective action, and monitoring compliance. Decisions concerning disciplinary action against individual employees would remain with the respective agency heads.

Together, these changes would strengthen the central human resource's function while preserving the respective responsibilities of individual departments and agencies.

Establishing a Foundation for Continued Modernization

These changes position the Department to provide broader support services across the Government of the Virgin Islands. As workforce challenges become increasingly complex and competition for talent continues to grow, agencies require expertise in recruitment, retention, workforce planning, professional development, employee engagement, compliance, leadership development, and succession planning.

Importantly, we recognize that establishing the Department of Human Resources would be the beginning of a broader modernization effort, not its completion. A change of this magnitude must be accompanied by a thoughtful plan to ensure that the Department has the structure, personnel, and resources necessary to fulfill its responsibilities.

This next phase would require collaboration with Government House, the Office of Management and Budget, the Department of Finance, the Legislature, and other relevant stakeholders to evaluate the Department's organizational structure, staffing, technology, funding requirements, and implementation priorities. It would also require an assessment of existing positions, classifications, and titles to determine what adjustments may be appropriate as the agency transitions from a Division to a Department.

We envision a phased, coordinated approach that establishes clear priorities, evaluates resource needs, and identifies opportunities to strengthen the delivery of human resources services throughout the Government.

Ultimately, this effort is not simply about expanding bureaucracy. It is about ensuring that the Government's central human resources agency has the structure and resources necessary to support its employees and strengthen public service delivery. Thus, the name change recognizes where we are today, while the proposed amendments establish the foundation for where we need to go tomorrow.

Conclusion

Bill No. 36-0354 presents an important opportunity to recognize the Division's evolution and establish a stronger foundation for the future of human resources administration in the Government of the Virgin Islands.

Accordingly, we respectfully recommend amendments that would:

- Establish the Department of Human Resources as an executive department headed by a Commissioner;
- Clarify the Department's compliance and corrective action authority;
- Expressly authorize training and competency requirements for Executive Branch employees responsible for administering personnel functions.

These changes, together with a coordinated implementation plan addressing staffing, funding, and organizational needs, would allow this legislation to accomplish much more than a change in title.

We appreciate Senator Francis and the members of this Committee for recognizing the importance of modernizing the Government's Human Resources function and for considering our proposed amendments.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My team and I are available to answer any questions the Committee may have.