

THIRTY-SIXTH LEGISLATURE OF THE U.S.
VIRGIN ISLANDS
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS,
VETERANS AFFAIRS, AND CONSUMER
PROTECTION

Chairman: The Honorable Senator Avery L. Lewis

Virgin Islands Police Department

St. Croix, USVI

October 19th, 2026

BILL NO. 36-0345 (Sponsored by: Senator Novelle E. Francis Jr.)

Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of the Senate, good morning.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Dwayne Richards, Director of Human Resources for the Virgin Islands Police Department, and I am here on behalf of Police Commissioner Mario M. Brooks.

Today, we submit this testimony in support of Bill No. 36-0345, which seeks to enact The Virgin Islands Heroes Act. This legislation represents an important commitment to the men and women who dedicate their lives to protecting our communities and to the families who bear the consequences when those public servants are killed or catastrophically injured in the line of duty.

As the Director of Human Resources, I recognize that law enforcement and public safety are professions that demand extraordinary courage, personal sacrifice, and an unwavering commitment to service. Every time an emergency response professional reports for duty, that individual accepts risks that most people will never experience. Behind every uniform is a family

that waits for its loved one to return home safely. When tragedy strikes, those families should not also have to face uncertainty about their financial security and future.

Bill No. 36-0345 acknowledges that the responsibility of caring for our public safety heroes does not end when they are no longer able to serve. By establishing benefits for the spouses and eligible children of officers who are killed or catastrophically injured in the line of duty, this measure offers a meaningful way to support the families whose sacrifices are often overlooked. It sends a clear message that the Virgin Islands Government recognizes the value of their loved ones' service and accepts responsibility to help protect the well-being of those left behind.

Our support for this legislation must also be grounded in our responsibility to remember the officers who have already made the ultimate sacrifice in service to our Territory. Their names represent more than a place in our history; they represent lives dedicated to duty, families forever changed, and a debt of gratitude that our community must never forget.

We remember our most recent losses, Colvin Georges, Delbert Phipps Jr., and Eustace Charles, whose names are part of the enduring legacy of sacrifice within our law enforcement community. Their service and the sacrifices associated with their names remind us that the dangers faced by our officers are real and that the consequences of those dangers extend far beyond the individual wearing the badge.

As we consider The Virgin Islands Heroes Act, we must recognize the families of these fallen officers and others who have suffered similar losses. Their loved ones served the people of the Virgin Islands, and their sacrifices deserve more than ceremonial recognition. They deserve a lasting commitment to honoring their service and supporting the families whose lives were permanently affected.

I respectfully encourage the Legislature to consider, to the extent permitted by law and the availability of reliable records, whether the Act should include an appropriate mechanism for recognizing families of officers who previously fell in the line of duty. Any retroactive application

or transitional benefit should be clearly defined, fiscally evaluated, and consistent with the Act's eligibility requirements. While we cannot undo the losses these families have endured, we can take meaningful steps to ensure their sacrifices remain part of our collective responsibility.

The enactment of The Virgin Islands Heroes Act would also reinforce the principles of recruitment, retention, morale, and public trust that are essential to an effective public safety workforce. Officers perform their duties knowing that they may be required to make split-second decisions under dangerous circumstances. The knowledge that their families will have access to defined benefits if the unthinkable occurs can provide a measure of reassurance to those who serve.

Equally important, this legislation recognizes that catastrophic injury may permanently change an officer's ability to work, provide for a family, or live independently. Support for eligible family members in these circumstances is not merely an expression of gratitude; it is a practical response to the lasting consequences of public service.

I encourage the Legislature to ensure that the Act establishes clear eligibility standards, an accessible application and claims process, reasonable timelines for determining benefits, and coordination with existing government, insurance, retirement, and workers' compensation programs. These safeguards will help ensure that benefits reach eligible families efficiently and equitably while promoting responsible fiscal administration.

Mr. Chairman and distinguished senators, the strength of our public safety institutions depends not only on the equipment we provide, the training we deliver, or the policies we enforce, but also on how we treat the people who answer the call to serve and the families who stand behind them.

The Virgin Islands Heroes Act is an opportunity to transform our appreciation for public safety officers into a tangible and enduring commitment. It recognizes that when an officer makes the ultimate sacrifice or suffers a catastrophic injury while protecting others, the impact is shared by an entire family. Those families should not have to navigate the aftermath of tragedy without a

meaningful system of support.

On behalf of the Virgin Islands Police Department, I commend Senator Milton E. Potter for proposing this legislation and respectfully urge the members of the 36th Legislature to support Bill No. 36-0345. Let us honor our fallen public safety heroes not only through remembrance, but through responsible actions that reflect the value we place on their service and the welfare of their families.

Our commitment to those who serve must extend beyond the badge, beyond the uniform, and beyond the end of a tour of duty. We must continue to ensure that those who protect our communities know that their sacrifices will not be forgotten and that their families will not be abandoned.

Thank you for your time, your consideration, and your continued commitment to the safety and well-being of the people of the United States Virgin Islands.

May God bless our public safety officers, their families, and the United States Virgin Islands. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, we remain available to answer any questions you may have.