

BILL NO. 36-0319

Thirty-Sixth Legislature of the Virgin Islands

July 21, 2026

An act honoring and commending Rena Brodhurst for her extraordinary contributions to journalism and the preservation of the Virgin Islands' historical and cultural narrative and awarding her the Virgin Islands Medal of Honor

PROPOSED BY: Senator Novelle E. Francis, Jr.
Sponsor: Angel L. Bolques, Jr.

WHEREAS, Rena Brodhurst was born on August 26, 1960;

WHEREAS, Rena Brodhurst graduated from Fairleigh Dickerson University in 1986 with a bachelor's degree in business management;

WHEREAS, the St. Croix Avis was founded in 1844 and is chronicled to have reported on the historic events of July 3, 1848, the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation and the 1878 Fire burn insurrection;

WHEREAS, the St. Croix Avis is the longest-running newspaper in Virgin Islands history;

WHEREAS, Canute A. Brodhurst Sr., along with Montclair Creque and Ariel Melchoir purchased the St. Croix Avis from Gustave Johansen in 1940;

WHEREAS, her father, Canute A. Brodhurst, Sr. served as the publisher, editor, and owner of the St. Croix Avis for 40 years until his death in 1980;

1 **WHEREAS**, Canute A. Brodhurst, Sr. placed his own freedom on the line in 1944 when
2 he was sentenced to 10 days in jail after a judge objected to an article appearing in the St. Croix
3 Avis;

4 **WHEREAS**, her father was vindicated in 1945 for defending and championing the
5 freedom of the press when he won his appeal from the Third Circuit Court in the famous case
6 of People of the Virgin Islands vs. Brodhurst, 148 F.2d 636 (3d Cir. 1945);

7 **WHEREAS**, Brodhurst's victory in this case cemented the family's commitment to
8 advancing transparency, accountability, and the principles of a free press;

9 **WHEREAS**, Rena Brodhurst assumed leadership of the St. Croix Avis operations at the
10 age of 25 with no formal training in running a daily newspaper;

11 **WHEREAS**, Rena Brodhurst and her father served as publishers/editors/owners of the
12 St. Croix Avis, upholding the principles of free speech and freedom of the press included in
13 the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution;

14 **WHEREAS**, her two children, Britney and Lasiba Knight, followed in her footsteps,
15 working for the St. Croix Avis as editor and reporter, respectively, until its closing;

16 **WHEREAS**, under her management, the St. Croix Avis continued to report local,
17 Caribbean and national news and chronicled the social and political evolution of the Virgin
18 Islands;

19 **WHEREAS**, her no-holds barred editorials were a must read, showing courage in
20 keeping politicians' feet to the proverbial fire, speaking fearlessly on topics the community
21 cared about and inspiring countless individuals and young journalists;

22 **WHEREAS**, her hiring of Eunice Bedminster as managing editor prepared Bedminster
23 to make history as the first Caribbean woman and only the third female executive editor in the
24 95-year history of the St. Croix Avis;

1 **WHEREAS**, an astute businesswoman, in the late 1990s, Rena expanded her family-
2 owned business to publish the Virgin Islands Independent, a daily newspaper on St. Thomas-
3 St. John;

4 **WHEREAS**, while the Virgin Islands Independent ceased publication in the 2000s, the
5 St. Croix Avis began to be widely distributed on St. Thomas and St. John;

6 **WHEREAS**, in 2014, under Rena Brodhurst's stewardship, the St. Croix Avis staff won
7 a second-place Sunshine Award in the Breaking News Category for Small Papers from the
8 Society of Professional Journalists Florida Association for a series titled “St. Croix Hospital in
9 Crisis,” which highlighted gross neglect and mismanagement at the Gov. Juan F. Luis Hospital
10 and Medical Center. The highlighted mismanagement led to the loss of certification from the
11 U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid, eventually causing the resignation of top hospital
12 officials and prompting the Virgin Islands government to provide funding to improve
13 conditions so the hospital could regain certification;

14 **WHEREAS**, Ms. Brodhurst guided the newspaper through the administrations of eight
15 governors, economic booms and busts, and events including the historic election of the first
16 black president, Barack Obama;

17 **WHEREAS**, outside of newspaper publishing, Rena quietly dedicated her time and
18 resources to community initiatives that promoted literacy;

19 **WHEREAS**, she established the University of the Virgin Islands' Caribbean Writer's
20 Canute A. Brodhurst Prize for short fiction, making the prize available to authors who carry on
21 the fine tradition of excellence in writing;

22 **WHEREAS**, she donated weekly copies of the St. Croix Avis to the Golden Grove prison
23 for literacy projects among prisoners, many of whom wrote poems and letters that were
24 published on the op-ed pages;

1 **WHEREAS**, Rena has made a lasting impact on the community through her civic and
2 philanthropic work;

3 **WHEREAS**, she employed the St. Croix Avis as a tool to mobilize community resources
4 to support vulnerable populations, including children in need, after the devastation of Hurricane
5 Hugo in 1989;

6 **WHEREAS**, her sponsorships included the Virgin Islands Department of Energy's
7 KidWind Challenge, and Little League Baseball when funding became a challenge;

8 **WHEREAS**, she helped revive the Foreday Morning Serenade with Stanley and the Ten
9 Sleepless Knights, which is now on a 20-year rebirth thanks in part to stories documented by
10 the St. Croix Avis, and she established the tramp portion for the Crucian Rican Ole Time
11 Breakfast and Tramp held annually during Three Kings Day;

12 **WHEREAS**, Rena contributions to journalism and the Virgin Islands community have
13 not gone unnoticed;

14 **WHEREAS**, in 2016, Chief District Court Judge Wilma Lewis invited Rena Brodhurst
15 to speak to a new group of U.S. citizens about First Amendment rights and her family's history
16 in paving the way for freedoms in the Virgin Islands that at one time were enjoyed only on the
17 U.S. mainland; and

18 **WHEREAS**, in 2016, the Rotary Club of St. Croix honored her as its first "Woman of
19 Distinction" during a brunch in recognition of International Women's Month where chapter
20 president Sonia Boyce praised her as someone who "kept people connected" and was there for
21 the community in good and bad times;

22 **WHEREAS**, in August 2019, she was awarded the first D. Hamilton Jackson Lifetime
23 Achievement Award by V.I. Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett, recognizing nearly two
24 centuries of barrier-breaking journalism by The St. Croix Avis's staff;

1 **WHEREAS**, Delegate Plaskett also read the newspaper's century-long achievements
2 into the Congressional Record to further honor its legacy and impact in the Virgin Islands;

3 **WHEREAS**, in January 2024, the St. Croix Avis printed its "Final Edition" on its front
4 page, marking the last issue of a 180-year era as the territory's oldest publication and the
5 longest-running newspaper in the Virgin Islands;

6 **WHEREAS**, in an open letter to readers announcing the shuttering of the publication,
7 she cited that the Avis could no longer compete in today's environment of free social media, as
8 well as challenges from tech giants Meta and Google, taxes, and the Virgin Islands Water and
9 Power Authority;

10 **WHEREAS**, in that same letter, she thanked the Moravian Church for insisting that the
11 enslaved learned to read and write during the time Denmark owned the territory; and

12 **WHEREAS**, on the first day of Black History Month in 2025, V.I. Delegate to Congress
13 Stacey Plaskett stood on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives to honor the legacy and
14 long-standing impact of the St. Croix Avis;

15 **WHEREAS**, the University of the Virgin Islands conferred an honorary degree of Doctor
16 of Humane Letters (L.H.D.) upon Rena Brodhurst during its 2026 commencement ceremony
17 on St. Croix, in recognition of her extraordinary contributions to journalism and the
18 preservation of the Virgin Islands' historical and cultural narrative; and

19 **WHEREAS**, Ms. Brodhurst's career-long dedication to documenting Virgin Islands
20 history has provided an invaluable service to the territory and inspired future generations of
21 journalists; Now, Therefore,

22 ***Be it enacted by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands:***

23 **SECTION 1.** The Legislature of the Virgin Islands, on behalf of the people of the Virgin
24 Islands, honors and commends Rena Brodhurst for her 39 years of exemplary leadership and
25 dedication as the publisher, editor, and owner of the St. Croix Avis and her steadfast

1 commitment to the First Amendment, upholding the principles of free speech and freedom of
2 the press throughout her tenure. The Legislature expresses its profound gratitude for her
3 profound sense of community partnership, her quiet but impactful advocacy for literacy, and
4 her support of local cultural and educational events. The Legislature also commends Ms.
5 Brodhurst for sustaining the 180-year legacy of the territory's oldest publication and the
6 longest-running newspaper in the Virgin Islands, ensuring the people of the Virgin Islands had
7 a fearless voice and a daily chronicle of their history.

8 **SECTION 2.** In recognition and appreciation of the profound impact of Rena Brodhurst
9 in the field of journalism, the Legislature of the Virgin Islands, under 1 V.I.C § 103(b), awards
10 the Virgin Islands Medal of Honor to Rena Brodhurst. The President of the Legislature, or the
11 President's designee, shall present Rena Brodhurst with the Virgin Islands Medal of Honor,
12 cast in gold, and shall present a perma plaque copy of this act to Rena Brodhurst at an
13 appropriate ceremony.

14 **BILL SUMMARY**

15 This resolution honors and commends the life and legacy of Rena Brodhurst and her
16 accomplishments through journalism and the St. Croix Avis to the Virgin Islands community.
17 This bill also awards Rena Brodhurst the Virgin Islands Medal of Honor.

18 **BR25-0927/June 22, 2026/PFA/Revised July 9, 2026/PFA**