The Honorable Senator Avery L. Lewis
LEGISLATIVE SECRETARY
36TH LEGISLATURE

CHAIR Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, Consumer Protection
VICE CHAIR Education and Workforce Development
MEMBER Rules and Judiciary | Culture, Youth, Aging, And Parks | Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety | Committee of the Whole

Location: Frits E. Lawaetz Legislative Conference Room on St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands

On Monday, September 28, 2026, the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection was scheduled to convene at the Frits E. Lawaetz Legislative Conference Room on St. Croix to receive testimony on an operational update from the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission and to consider legislation honoring Virgin Islanders for their contributions to public service, sports, journalism, music, culture, and community life.

The agenda included measures honoring Adelbert M. "Bert" Bryan, Jerome Austin Browne, Hans Lawaetz, Rena Brodhurst, Kevré Hendricks, Maude "Maudie" Dowdy Roberts, and the Queens of the Fireburn of 1878. Written testimony located for this report reflected contributions to law enforcement, youth mentorship, baseball, agriculture, swimming, journalism, music education, military service, and the preservation of Virgin Islands history and culture.

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

In Block I

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 Commission's administrative functions.

Invited Testifiers:

- Ms. Melissa Smith, Executive Director, Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission
- Mrs. Elizabeth Hansen-Watley, Board Chair, Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission

Highlights of Testimonies

Ms. Melissa Smith, Executive Director of the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission, addressed the findings of the Office of the Inspector General's audit covering Fiscal Years 2018–2022. She acknowledged the identified deficiencies and highlighted ongoing efforts to strengthen internal controls, improve recordkeeping, address staffing shortages, and enhance accountability.

Smith reported improvements in medallion registry verification, auction tracking, taxi licensing procedures, inspections, enforcement, and revenue collection. She also confirmed that the audit found expenditures reviewed during the period complied with Virgin Islands law and were used for authorized purposes.

She emphasized that continued progress will require additional funding for technology modernization, records digitization, staffing, and enforcement.

In Block II

Bill No. 36-0229: An act honoring and commending Adelbert M. "Bert" Bryan for his outstanding contributions and dedicated service to the Virgin Islands community, particularly on St. Croix, and to ceremoniously name Queen Street in Frederiksted in his honor as "Adelbert M. 'Bert' Bryan Drive."

Proposed by Senator Kenneth L. Gittens. Sponsor: Senator Angel L. Bolques, Jr.

Invited Testifiers:

- Ms. Nikki Thomas, Daughter
- Mr. Devin Carrington, Longtime Friend
- Mr. Renholdt Jackson, Longtime Friend

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Highlights of Testimonies

Testimony described Mr. Bryan as a respected law-enforcement leader, community advocate, and mentor whose life and work were closely connected to Frederiksted. His daughter, Nikki Thomas, reflected on his upbringing on Queen Street, emphasizing the discipline, resilience, self-reliance, and sense of community responsibility that shaped him. She also noted his accomplishments in law enforcement and karate and explained why the street that helped shape his life was a fitting place to honor his legacy.

Longtime friend Devin Carrington described Mr. Bryan as a courageous and forward-thinking advocate who challenged systems and spoke about educational deficiencies, conditions at St. Croix Central High School, and the importance of teaching Virgin Islands and Caribbean history. His testimony emphasized Mr. Bryan's efforts to empower ordinary Virgin Islanders and encourage greater attention to their political, educational, and economic interests.

Longtime friend Renholdt "Rookie" Jackson spoke of Mr. Bryan's service as a police officer and captain and his commitment to mentoring young people. He recalled Mr. Bryan's role in keeping the Police Athletic League operating when its future was threatened, including relocating its activities into the police station after the program lost its building. The testimony portrayed Mr. Bryan as a dedicated public servant and champion for youth.

Bill No. 36-0218: An act honoring and commending Jerome Austin Browne for his outstanding achievements and contributions to baseball and the youth of St. Croix by renaming Prince Street in Christiansted "Jerry Browne Street."

Proposed by Senator Angel L. Bolques, Jr.

Invited Testifiers:

- Mr. John Clenance, Family Friend
- Mr. Norman Williams Jr., Family Friend
- Mr. Dexter Skeppel, Pastor and Family Friend

Highlights of Testimonies

Written testimony from family friend John Clenance supported renaming Prince Street "Jerry Browne Street." Mr. Clenance reflected on Mr. Browne's baseball journey, including his early development playing baseball in a family yard, participation in Little League, and the encouragement he received from family members and coaches. He noted Mr. Browne's achievement of spending ten consecutive years in Major League Baseball and described the determination required to overcome difficult conditions and racial discrimination.

The testimony emphasized Mr. Browne's significance as a role model for young people in St. Croix and as an example of what persistence, talent, and support can make possible. No additional written submissions from the other invited testifiers were identified among the materials available for this report.

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Bill No. 36-0281: An act honoring and commending Hans Lawaetz for his lifetime of exemplary service to the Virgin Islands and awarding him the Virgin Islands Medal of Honor.
Proposed by Senator Novelle E. Francis, Jr. Sponsor: Senator Angel L. Bolques, Jr.

Invited Testifiers:

- Mr. Dennis Brow, Longtime Friend
- Mr. Jose Bermudez, Family Friend
- Ms. Curleen Rogers, Former Business Associate
- Mr. John Harper

Highlights of Testimonies

Dennis Brow, President of the Virgin Islands Baseball Federation, described Mr. Lawaetz as a longtime friend, mentor, and community leader who supported sports and youth development. His testimony highlighted Mr. Lawaetz's leadership and involvement with the Virgin Islands Olympic Committee, baseball, and sports administrators, as well as his generosity and willingness to sponsor and create opportunities for others.

Curleen Rogers, Director of the St. Croix Abattoir within the Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture, discussed the role of Annaly Farms in marketing local livestock and supporting local farmers and local meat production. She also described Mr. Lawaetz's assistance in helping the Department procure replacement parts for abattoir machinery, reducing equipment downtime. Her testimony underscored the value of public-private partnerships in supporting local agriculture.

John W. Harper described Mr. Lawaetz's contribution to swimming and youth athletics, including support for the St. Croix Dolphins and the establishment of a 50-meter pool at St. Croix Country Day School, now Good Hope Country Day School. He also discussed Mr. Lawaetz's work with the Virgin Islands Olympic Committee and athletes, as well as his efforts in breeding and promoting Senepol cattle internationally.

Collectively, the written testimony reflected a broad legacy spanning athletics, agriculture, conservation, business, mentorship, and community service. The available written submissions did not include testimony from every person listed on the agenda.

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Bill No. 36-0319: 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: Senator Angel L. Bolques, Jr.

Invited Testifiers:

- Ms. Eunice Bedminster, Former Employee
- Ms. Lee Rohn, Esq., Friend and Attorney
- Ms. Sonia Boyce, Friend
- Mr. Joel Holt, Esq., Friend and Attorney

Highlights of Testimonies

Eunice Bedminster, former managing editor of the St. Croix Avis, emphasized Ms. Brodhurst's role in journalism, public accountability, literacy, and mentorship. Her testimony described Ms. Brodhurst as a fearless editor who encouraged others and demonstrated generosity and a lasting commitment to the community.

Attorney Lee Rohn discussed Ms. Brodhurst's expansion and improvement of the Avis and the newspaper's coverage of government, public safety, courts, and community events. Her testimony also emphasized the paper's role in documenting Virgin Islands cultural history and supporting freedom of speech.

Sonia L. Boyce described the St. Croix Avis as a vital link among community members and a source of information about government, elections, public concerns, cultural events, and local history. She emphasized the newspaper's role in accountability and cultural preservation and reflected on the community impact of its closure in January 2024.

The testimony presented Ms. Brodhurst's legacy as one of independent journalism, public accountability, mentorship, and the preservation of the Virgin Islands' historical and cultural record. Written testimony from all invited testifiers was not available in the materials reviewed.

In Block III

Bill No. 36-0320: A resolution honoring and commending Kevré Hendricks for his outstanding contributions to music, education, military service, and cultural preservation in the Virgin Islands.

Proposed by Senator Kurt A. Vialet. Sponsor: Senator Angel L. Bolques, Jr.

Invited Testifiers:

- Mr. Angel Ventura, III, Friend/Colleague
- Mr. Daniel J. Nibbs, SFC, Subordinate
- Mr. Erick Willie, PhD, Student
- Mrs. Essi Gaston-Edwards, Friend

Highlights of Testimonies

Angel Ventura III described Mr. Hendricks as a multi-instrumentalist, bandleader, songwriter, producer, and collaborator whose influence spans performance and music education. His testimony highlighted more than two decades as a public-

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school music educator, his leadership with Fusion Band and Black Empire, multiple Road March titles, and the "VI to the Bone" Nzuri Riddim. He also emphasized Mr. Hendricks's mentorship of emerging musicians.

SFC Daniel J. Nibbs reflected on more than twenty years working under Mr. Hendricks in the Virgin Islands Army National Guard Band. He described Mr. Hendricks as an influential leader who inspired students to pursue music and military service, noting that former band members went on to become music instructors in schools.

Essi Gaston-Edwards described Mr. Hendricks as humble and generous, with a strong commitment to students, soldiers, family, and the wider community. Her testimony emphasized his loyalty, compassion, mentorship, and willingness to create opportunities for others.

The testimony portrayed Mr. Hendricks's contributions as extending beyond music into education, military leadership, mentorship, and the preservation of Virgin Islands culture. The available written submissions did not include testimony from every invited testifier.

Bill No. 36-0323: An act honoring and commending Maude "Maudie" Dowdy Roberts posthumously and concurrently designating Prince Street in Frederiksted the "Maude 'Maudie' Dowdy Roberts Drive."
Proposed by Senator Kenneth L. Gittens.

Invited Testifiers:

- Mrs. Janice Hansen-Murray, Granddaughter
- Mr. Alvin Milligan, Community Member

Highlights of Testimonies

Janice Hansen-Murray, granddaughter of Ms. Roberts, described her as a lifelong Frederiksted resident who cared for children and helped preserve local history through baseball, softball, music, and community gatherings. Ms. Roberts was remembered as the "Woman of Prince Street" and the "Queen of the Band." Her granddaughter noted that Ms. Roberts celebrated her 100th birthday on September 3, 2022, the same day she passed away.

Community member Alvin Milligan described Ms. Roberts as a fearless and memorable Crucian whose nurturing presence, knowledge of local history, and participation in sporting and cultural gatherings made her an integral part of Prince Street's identity. His testimony supported the street designation as a lasting way to preserve her memory and her contribution to Frederiksted.

The testimony highlighted Ms. Roberts as a caregiver, cultural figure, and keeper of community history whose influence was deeply woven into the life of Frederiksted.

Bill No. 36-0333: An act renaming Queen Street in the town of Christiansted, Queen Street in the town of Frederiksted, and Custom House Street in Frederiksted in honor of the Queens of the Fireburn of 1878.

Proposed by Senator Clifford A. Joseph, Sr. Sponsor: Senator Angel L. Bolques, Jr.

Invited Testifiers:

- Mr. Frandelle Gerard, Executive Director
- Ms. Claire Roker, Culture Bearer

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Highlights of Testimonies

Claire L. Brown Roker submitted written testimony in strong support of Bill No. 36-0333. She supported renaming Queen Street in Frederiksted for Mathilda McBean, Custom House Street in Frederiksted for Susanna Abramsen, and Queen Street in Christiansted for Axeline "Agnes" Elizabeth Salomon. Her testimony described the Fireburn of 1878 as a pivotal labor uprising led largely by women resisting low wages, harsh conditions, and restrictions on freedom. She emphasized that street signs and biographical plaques would preserve the Queens' legacy in the communities where the uprising unfolded and make Virgin Islands history more visible to residents, students, and visitors. She urged the Committee to vote favorably on the measure. The agenda also listed Mr. Frandelle Gerard as an invited testifier; separate written testimony from him was not included in the materials reviewed.

COMMITTEE ACTION: THE VOTE

The Committee voted favorably on all measures considered at the September 28, 2026, meeting. All bills and resolutions passed and are being forwarded to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary for further consideration.

ATTENDANCE

Committee Members: Senator Ray Fonseca, Senator Alma Francis Heyliger, Senator Novelle E. Francis, Jr., Senator Kenneth L. Gittens, Senator Franklin D. Johnson, and Senator Carla J. Joseph.

Non-Committee Members: Senator Angel Bolques Jr., Senator Hubert L. Frederick, Senator Dwayne DeGraff, Senator Kurt Vialet

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