



GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS OF THE UNITED STATES

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DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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**Office of the Commissioner**

July 2, 2025

The Honorable Ray Fonseca  
Chair  
Committee on Health, Hospitals & Human Services  
36<sup>th</sup> Legislature of the Virgin Islands

via email: [senatorrayfonseca@legvi.org](mailto:senatorrayfonseca@legvi.org)

Dear Senator Fonseca,

I am in receipt of your invitation dated May 28, 2025, to testify before the Committee on Health, Hospitals & Human Services July 7, 2025, on issues related to the potential environmental and public health impacts of sewage discharges into our local beaches and waterways. Unfortunately, I will be unable to attend the hearing but do offer the comments below for your discussion.

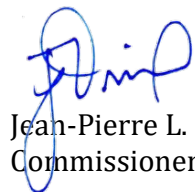
In your invitation, you request a comprehensive overview on the potential impacts of sewage discharge into our waterways. This would best be covered by the Department of Health, particularly the Division of Environmental Health, which has also been invited to testify for your hearing; however, in a nutshell, sewage has bacteria in it, which in high concentrations, is not good for human health. From a marine species perspective, sewage also has a high level of nutrients, which then leads to the formation of algal blooms, which then settle on substrate that outcompetes coral recruitment for settlement.

In your invitation you state, "We are particularly concerned about the long-term consequences of these discharges on marine ecosystems, public recreation, and local tourism..." I must caution that your concern, while hypothetically correct, is unsubstantiated. DPNR's Division of Environmental Protection samples 33 of the most used beaches in the Territory every Monday and releases the results of the sampling every Friday. Over the last year, there have only been two instances where we reported elevated readings for bacteria, and those instances were days after heavy rainfall events during the previous weekend. Moreover, the VI Waste Management Authority must immediately report all upsets that result in discharges into the waters of the Virgin Islands; while there have been several occurrences within the last six to eight months, none of these upsets resulted in the discharge near our most used swimming areas. Thus, the concern you mention is unfounded.

Your invitation also requests updates on any planned collaborative efforts to improve sewage infrastructure. As you know, sewage infrastructure is managed and operated by the VI Waste Management Authority (VIWMA), thus it would be more appropriate for them to speak of their plans on the improvement efforts, both short-term and long-term. Due to the importance of having improvements made to the sewage system, DPNR stands at the ready to assist the VIWMA in every way we can to complete all our processes.

Apologies once again for being unable to participate in the discussion.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "JP Oriol", with a large loop at the end.

Jean-Pierre L. Oriol  
Commissioner