

TESTIMONY OF ATTORNEY GENERAL
GORDON C. RHEA, ESQ.
THIRTY-SIXTH LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY, JUSTICE, AND PUBLIC
SAFETY
IN RE: BILL NO. 36-0139
FEBRUARY 13, 2026

Good day, Chairman Clifford Joseph, Committee on Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety members, other Senators, Legislative staff, and the listening and viewing audiences. I am Attorney General Gordon Rhea. It is an honor and a privilege to appear before you today.

The Department of Justice appreciates the opportunity to review and provide comments on Bill No. 36-0139. Although the stated purpose of Bill No. 36-0139 is to amend title 31 of the Virgin Islands Code, chapters 20 and 21, to assess civil liability for destruction or damage to government property through willful or negligent acts, the Department of Justice believes this measure is duplicative and, therefore, unnecessary. Here, the Department of Justice agrees with the Department of Property and Procurement. There are currently remedies available, including enforcing internal departmental policies and procedures and, if needed, filing civil actions, as permitted by the Code.

For example, the penalties and financial responsibility for misconduct and physical damage to any of the Government's motor vehicles are currently codified in Title 31 of the Virgin Islands Code, Section 167. Additionally, civil actions are another available remedy to recover damages for destruction or damage to government property. Finally, Departments and Agencies within the Government of the Virgin Islands should have formal policies regarding the use and misuse of government property, including vehicles. By giving individual Departments and Agencies the autonomy to resolve these matters in-house, claims can be resolved more quickly and efficiently, reducing costs. Matters that cannot be resolved internally should be escalated through the remaining available avenues.

Duplicative laws should be avoided, as they are an inefficient use of resources and can lead to significant problems, including confusion and inconsistency in the law and arbitrary enforcement.

I thank the Committee for allowing the Department of Justice to testify on Bill No. 36-0139. This concludes my formal remarks. I welcome any questions you may have.