



April 2, 2025

Good morning:

Honorable Clifford A. Joseph, Sr., Chairman, Committee of Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety

Honorable Ray Fonseca, Vice Chair and other honorable senators of this committee: Avery Lewis, Angel L Bolques, Jr., Dwayne DeGraff and Franklin D. Johnson.

Other Committee members, all other senators present, as well as testifiers and listening and visual audience.

My name is Dr. Clema S. Lewis, DHL. I am the Executive Director of the Women's Coalition of St. Croix (WCSC).

I am here to testify in support of Bill No. 36-005 an Act amending Title 16 V.I. C., chapter 2, section 99 establishing a mandatory minimum bail amount in domestic violence cases.

I would also like take this opportunity to thank Honorable Senator Angel L Bolques, Jr., for realizing the importance of domestic violence in our community and keeping families safe.

I have been working in field of domestic violence for over 40 years on the island of St. Croix. Actually, it was the WCSC that spearheaded the Domestic Violence Council on St. Croix. It was this group that was instrumental in getting the domestic law passed, and it is used in other jurisdictions.

Domestic Violence is on the rise in the Virgin Islands, and many abusers are becoming more dangerous. I have personally been at the police station when several abusers were released based on one of the following:

- 1) He had \$100.00 for bail.
- 2) A call was made to a judge, lawyer or person in authority and the perpetrator was released on his recognizance.

This puts the victim in harm's way. WCSC then had to provide emergency shelter, food, clothing and sometimes transportation off island for the safety of the victim and children.

Sometimes the abuser revictimized the victim once they are released, and we cannot get the criminal justice system to enforce the bail conditions or violation of the restraining orders. Further, the criminal justice system is always using the terms “abusers deserve fair and equal protection.” What about the victims? Don’t they deserve the same?

We need to connect the dots. Domestic violence is intergenerational violence in our community. It is now leaving the home and spilling out to the streets of our community. We must hold these abusers accountable, help families and try to make our families whole again!

The Women’s Coalition of St. Croix is in support of Bill No. 36-005. An Act amending Title 16 VI Code, Chapter 2 Section 99 establishing a mandatory minimum bail amount in DV cases.

We would like to offer some suggestions:

Section 1

(b) # 14 To be released the defendant must demonstrate to the court that he/she is not a danger to the victim. Example:

- 1) Victim testimony of contact
- 2) Nature of contact with victims
- 3) Severity of the crime

C subsection (e) other appropriate treatment

- 1) They must complete the Batterers Intervention program with a certificate of completion. Historically, some batterers start and do not finish.

This bill is very important to the community because it is about providing safety for victims and their families.