

**THIRTY-SIXTH LEGISLATURE OF THE U.S.
VIRGIN ISLANDS
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,
JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY
Chairman: The Honorable Clifford A. Joseph Sr.**

**Virgin Islands Police Department
St. Croix, USVI
June 5th, 2025**

Good morning to the Chair, The Honorable Clifford Sr., Legislative body and Staff, Members of the VIPD Team, and to the listening and viewing audience. My name is Daphne O’Neal, Director of Highway Safety for the United States Virgin Islands Police Department. I come before you on behalf of Police Commissioner Mario M. Brooks to discuss an act amending title 5 Virgin Islands Code, subtitle 3, part I, chapter 311 by enacting “Jah’niqua’s Law”.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of the Senate, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in this matter.

VIPD is honored to provide testimony in support of Bill 35-0318, commonly referred to as “Jah’niqua’s Law.” This vital legislation will hold defendants accountable for the financial impact of their reckless actions when driving under the influence, particularly in cases where their behavior causes death or disability to a parent or guardian of minor children.

The necessity of this bill becomes clear when examining data from the Virgin Islands Office of Highway Safety. In recent years, impaired driving has significantly contributed to fatal and serious crashes in our territory. For instance, in FY2023, the Virgin Islands reported over 5,000 traffic crashes, an increase of 8% from the prior year. Impaired driving accounted for several fatalities, with St. Croix being hotspots for such incidents. For the period FY2020 to June 1st FY2025, the DUI related fatalities in the territory were St. Croix 7, St. Thomas 2, and St. John zero. However, for the same period the number of persons injured in DUI related crashes were 154 on St. Croix, 92 on St. Thomas, and 2 on St. John.

The data further underscores the prevalence of DUI-related crashes peak during the hours between 5:00pm-8:00pm. On St. Croix the highest number of crashes occur during the month of March, while on St. Thomas it is the month of April. During those periods enforcement efforts are heightened but challenges persist in ensuring compliance with safety laws. The VIPD recorded a total of 390 DUI arrests for the period referenced in this testimony.

The broader societal impact of these tragedies is devastating. When a parent or guardian is killed or permanently disabled by a DUI offender, the financial and emotional toll on their dependents is immeasurable. The bill addresses this gap by requiring convicted offenders to pay restitution in the form of child maintenance, recognizing the long-term repercussions for the victim's family.

This proposed legislation aligns with our collective commitment to justice and public safety. It provides a mechanism to alleviate some of the burdens placed on families left behind, while sending a strong message about the consequences of driving under the influence. Moreover, it complements existing enforcement strategies, such as DUI checkpoints and patrols, which aim to deter impaired driving and protect lives on our roads.

We urge the committee to advance Bill 35-0318 and support its implementation as a critical step toward accountability and community safety. Together, we can ensure that justice serves not only to punish offenders but also to support those most affected by their actions. We stand ready to respond to your questions, thank you for your attention and consideration.