

THE DEPARTMENT OF SPORTS, PARKS & RECREATION



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,
JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY

JULY 16, 2026

Comissioner Vincent Roberts

Good morning, Chairman Joseph, members of the Committee on Homeland Security, Justice, and Public Safety, Senators of the 36th Legislature, all those present, and the listening and viewing audience.

My name is Vincent L. Roberts, Commissioner of the Department of Sports, Parks, and Recreation. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss Bill No. 36-0242, which proposes to grant peace officer status to enforcement officers within the Department of Sports, Parks and Recreation.

The Department of Sports, Parks and Recreation manages and oversees parks, beaches, athletic facilities, recreation centers, playgrounds, stadiums, racetracks, community centers, and public gathering spaces throughout the Territory. These facilities are intended to serve as safe, welcoming environments for residents and visitors alike. However, the realities we face daily have increasingly required our staff to address challenges that extend well beyond traditional recreation management.

On any given day, our personnel encounter individuals trespassing on government property after hours, engaging in unauthorized use of facilities, vandalizing public infrastructure, illegally dumping, and destroying equipment purchased with taxpayer dollars. We routinely address issues involving vagrancy in public parks and recreational spaces, where individuals establish unauthorized encampments, occupy facilities intended for public use, or create conditions that pose health and safety risks to patrons. Our staff also respond to complaints about smoking in prohibited areas, alcohol consumption where it is not permitted, disorderly conduct, altercations during sporting events, and activities that create unsafe conditions for staff, participants, and spectators.

Our beaches and parks have also become sites of unauthorized vending despite established agreements, permits, and regulations designed to ensure fairness, public access, and accountability. Department personnel are frequently tasked with enforcing vendor agreements, addressing violations of lease and permit conditions, preventing unauthorized commercial activity, and resolving disputes involving vendors who may operate outside the terms approved

by the Government. These situations often place employees in difficult circumstances where compliance is expected, but the enforcement needed to compel it may be limited.

In addition, DSPR regularly hosts large-scale events attended by hundreds of residents and visitors. These events require coordination of crowd management, parking control, facility security, and emergency response planning. Department employees are routinely expected to serve as initial responders to incidents involving violence, disorderly conduct, property damage, and other violations at Department facilities. Until law enforcement arrives, staff are often left to manage potentially dangerous situations with limited authority, placing themselves, patrons, and Government resources at unnecessary risk. This expectation is both unreasonable and unsafe.

The Department also faces challenges in protecting public assets and revenue. Employees are responsible for securing facilities, safeguarding equipment, monitoring public property, and collecting and transporting revenues from facility rentals, vendor payments, concession operations, and other revenue-generating activities. Department employees are routinely required to transport and deposit Government funds without dedicated security or law enforcement protection, creating an unacceptable level of risk for both Department personnel and the Government. These responsibilities place employees in situations where they are expected to protect public funds and government resources while possessing limited enforcement authority.

The reality is that our facilities do not close when government offices do. Parks, beaches, and recreational spaces operate after hours and on weekends. The challenges associated with these properties likewise arise at all hours. Whether it is a complaint about illegal activity at a beach late at night, vandalism at a ballpark, unauthorized occupation of public facilities, or disturbances during community events, the Department continually relies on assistance from our law enforcement partners.

I wish to emphasize that the Virgin Islands Police Department has consistently been a valued partner. We remain grateful for their assistance whenever called upon. However, the demand for law enforcement services across the Territory is significant, and response resources must be allocated among many competing priorities. As a result, there are occasions when Department personnel must manage situations until assistance becomes available.

I recognize that there may be differing opinions regarding the placement of peace officer authority within a civilian agency such as the Department of Sports, Parks and Recreation. Those concerns are understandable and deserve thoughtful consideration. Questions regarding training standards, oversight, accountability, operational scope, and interagency coordination are important discussions that should accompany any proposal involving enforcement authority.

Regardless of where individuals stand on this legislation, I believe there is broad agreement on one point: the Department of Sports, Parks and Recreation faces public safety, compliance, and enforcement challenges every day. The men and women of DSPR are expected to maintain safe facilities, protect public property, enforce rules and agreements, preserve public access, and support community activities across multiple islands and numerous facilities, all with limited resources.

For that reason, I appreciate Senator Alma Francis Heyliger for bringing attention to these operational realities and for creating an opportunity to discuss potential solutions to the challenges the Department faces daily. Any conversation that strengthens our ability to protect public facilities, support community safety, preserve government assets, and improve service to the people of the Virgin Islands is worthwhile.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am available to answer any questions the Committee may have.