



United States Virgin Islands

Bureau of Corrections

COMMITTEE TESTIMONY

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY, JUSTICE, AND PUBLIC SAFETY
36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands

Presented By :
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**DIRECTOR WYNNIE TESTAMARK
VIRGIN ISLANDS BUREAU OF CORRECTIONS
TESTIMONY BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,
JUSTICE, AND PUBLIC SAFETY**

**An act amending title 14 Virgin Islands Code prohibiting incarcerated persons from
possessing or using electronic communication or recording devices**

Good morning, Chairman Clifford A. Joseph, Sr., Vice-Chairman Ray Fonseca, esteemed Members of the Committee on Homeland Security, Justice, and Public Safety, Senator Gittens, Senator Lewis, Senator Bolques, Senator DeGraff, and Senator Johnson, distinguished Members of the 36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, legislative staff, and all those joining us in person and virtually via YouTube and Facebook.

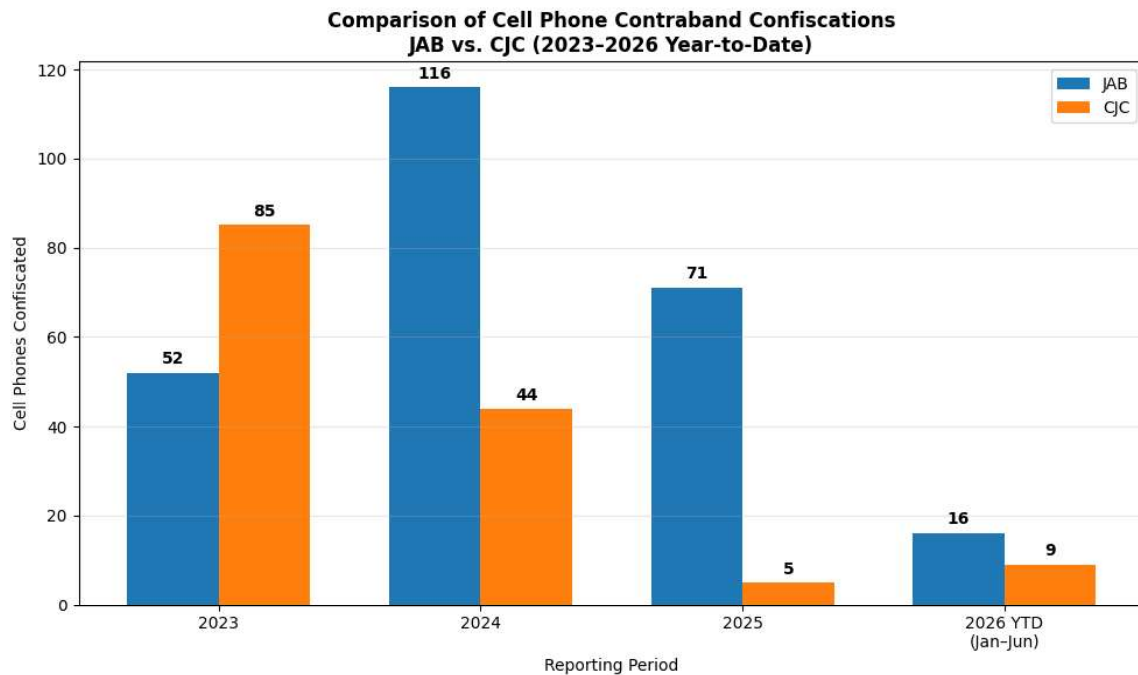
My name is Wynn Timermark, and I have the honor and privilege of serving as the Director of the Virgin Islands Bureau of Corrections. Today, I appear before you with deep respect and a renewed sense of purpose to provide testimony for the Virgin Islands Bureau of Corrections.

The Virgin Islands Bureau of Corrections respectfully submits this testimony in support of the proposed Bill No. 36-0301, legislation that strengthens the Territory's ability to prevent the possession and use of unauthorized electronic communication and recording devices within correctional facilities.

The Bureau's foremost responsibility is to maintain safe, secure, and orderly institutions while protecting correctional officers, incarcerated individuals, visitors, and the public. The growing availability of contraband electronic devices, particularly cellular telephones and wireless communication devices has become one of the most significant security challenges facing correctional agencies nationwide. These devices undermine institutional security by providing unmonitored access to outside individuals and networks, allowing incarcerated persons to circumvent established communication systems and institutional oversight.

Across the United States, correctional agencies have identified contraband cell phones as a major and growing threat to institutional safety and public security. A 2024 national assessment conducted by the Urban Institute, in partnership with the Correctional Leaders Association and the American Correctional Association, which I am an active member, found that more than 25,000 contraband cell phones were recovered across 20 state correctional systems in a single year. The report also concluded that correctional leaders overwhelmingly view contraband cell phones as a significant threat to institutional operations and public safety, while acknowledging that the actual number of devices in circulation is likely much higher because only recovered devices are counted. In contrast, a review of contraband cell phone confiscations within the Bureau's facilities indicates an overall downward trend in recoveries. At JAB, confiscations increased significantly during 2024 before declining in 2025 and continuing to trend downward through June 2026. CJC has demonstrated a consistent reduction in confiscations since 2023, with only a slight increase observed during the first half of 2026. Overall, the data suggests continued improvement in the Bureau's cell phone contraband control efforts, reflecting the effectiveness of its comprehensive security measures, staff training, and proactive enforcement strategies.

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Contraband electronic devices have been used to coordinate criminal enterprises, intimidate witnesses and victims, facilitate drug trafficking, arrange the introduction of additional contraband, compromise institutional security, and direct criminal activity beyond prison walls. Federal authorities have long recognized these risks, prompting continued investment in technologies such as signal detection systems, managed access, and targeted signal interruption to combat unauthorized communications within correctional institutions.

Correctional institutions are also confronting evolving methods of introducing prohibited devices into secure facilities. In addition to traditional smuggling methods involving visitors or staff misconduct, agencies across the country have reported a substantial increase in the use of drones to deliver cellular telephones, narcotics, weapons, and other contraband directly into prison compounds. These developments illustrate that correctional security must continuously evolve to address emerging technologies and increasingly sophisticated methods of introducing contraband.

The Virgin Islands Bureau of Corrections has taken proactive steps to address these evolving threats. The Bureau has implemented a comprehensive contraband interdiction strategy that includes established policies governing the prevention, detection, and seizure of prohibited items within its facilities. Correctional officers receive annual training on contraband detection, search procedures, evidence handling, and institutional security practices to ensure they remain prepared to identify and respond to emerging threats. In addition, all other staff complete annual policy review training to maintain awareness of applicable procedures, responsibilities, and institutional security requirements.

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Additionally, the Bureau has its specialized K-9 capabilities to strengthen interdiction efforts. Officer Speedy, a certified narcotics detection canine, plays a critical role in detecting illegal drugs and other controlled substances entering Bureau facilities. Complementing those efforts is Officer Blondie, an electronics detection canine specially trained to locate hidden cellular telephones, electronic communication devices, and electronic storage media. The deployment of these specialized canine teams, in conjunction with comprehensive staff training, demonstrates the Bureau's commitment to utilizing innovative and proven correctional security practices to intercept contraband before it can compromise institutional safety.

The proposed Bill No. 36-0301 complements these existing efforts by providing stronger statutory authority to address unauthorized electronic devices. The legislation establishes clear prohibitions against the possession of cellular telephones, wireless communication devices, electronic recording devices, and equipment capable of transmitting or broadcasting audio or video. It also defines constructive possession, establishes criminal penalties for violations, and imposes accountability on individuals who facilitate or participate in the use of prohibited devices to record or disseminate violent incidents within correctional facilities.

The proposed bill's provisions requiring policies for the detection and seizure of prohibited devices and annual training for correctional officers are consistent with practices the Bureau has already implemented. The Bureau's policy is reviewed and updated on an annual basis or whenever an incident or operational need dictates that revisions are necessary. Codifying these measures in law reinforces the importance of maintaining uniform standards and ensures that future correctional operations continue to prioritize contraband interdiction and institutional security.

The Bureau believes that secure and well-managed correctional facilities are essential to public safety. Unauthorized electronic devices compromise the integrity of correctional operations, endanger correctional staff and incarcerated individuals, and create opportunities for criminal conduct that extends beyond institutional walls. Bill No. 36-0301 provides an important statutory framework that enhances the Bureau's ability to deter, detect, and address these threats while reinforcing accountability throughout the correctional system.

For these reasons, the Virgin Islands Bureau of Corrections respectfully supports the proposed Bill No. 36-0301 and urges the Committee to give the measure favorable consideration.

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