

**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, USVI
July 16, 2026**

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 Denise Gomes, Occupant Protection Program Manager, of the Office of Highway Safety for the United States Virgin Islands Police Department. I come before you on behalf of Police Commissioner Mario M. Brooks to express support for Bill No. 36-0303— an Act amending Title 20, Virgin Islands Code, Part II, Chapter 38, Section 424 to update child passenger safety requirements applicable to rental vehicles.

The Virgin Islands Police Department stands in full support of Bill 36-0303. Child passenger safety is a significant health concern in the territory. Each day, and on every island, child passengers can be observed riding in unsafe and illegal ways.

In the Territory, child restraints – car seats and booster seats – are required

for children under the age of 8 or shorter than 4’9” tall. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), these safety devices have been proven to reduce the risk of injuries and fatalities by 71% for infants and 54% for toddlers. With an average of 14 crashes recorded daily on VI roadways, it is imperative that caregivers take preventive measures to keep child passengers safe.

According to the annual Observational Seat Belt Survey commissioned by the Office of Highway Safety in CY2025, 60.65% of this fragile population rode in the rear either unrestrained or under restrained – without the appropriate safety restraint. Work conducted by Child Passenger Safety Technicians (CPSTs) throughout the territory revealed that safety was even compromised for children riding in car seats. Approximately 95% of safety seats checked were found to have at least one usage error that could result in injury for a child crash victim. Although these statistics are not directly linked to this VI code section related to child passenger safety in rental vehicles, they help to describe a health and safety crisis that requires a concerted, cohesive, and collaborative approach.

Chapter 20, Section 466 clearly defines laws applicable to child passenger safety in the territory with standards comparable to districts nationwide. The differences found in Chapter 38, Section 424, are conflicting and, if followed, would put the lives of young riders in jeopardy. The amendment which references Section 466 reduces redundancies, ensures alignment, and facilitates future

amendments to the Code.

Our team thanks Senator Angel L. Bolques, Jr. and his team for championing this critical amendment. We respectfully urge the Committee to advance the amendments to Bill No. 36-0303 with a favorable vote and final enactment. The VIPD stands ready to assist the Legislature with implementation details and to answer any questions from you and the committee members.