

# Virgin Islands Housing Authority

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*Office of the Executive Director*

## Testimony to the Legislative Body in Support of Bill No. 36-0022 Virgin Islands Housing Authority

**Greeting: Senator Marvin Blyden, and Honorable Members of the 36th Legislative Body,**

Thank you for granting us the opportunity to present our testimony regarding the critical and impactful Bill No. 36-0022. My name is Lydia Pelle, and I have the privilege of serving as the Chief Operations Officer for the Virgin Islands Housing Authority. I am joined today with Robert Prothro Director of Administration, Wean Farrell, the Interim Director of Asset Management and Emmanuella Perez-Cassius Director of Resident Wellness and Empowerment. Together, we represent our agency under the guidance and leadership of our distinguished Executive Director, Dwayne Alexander. Our collective mission is to provide equitable and sustainable housing solutions that benefit all members of our community.

### **Support for Bill No. 36-0022**

We wholeheartedly support the proposed amendments in Bill No. 36-0022, aimed at enhancing tenant protections through significant changes to Title 28, Chapter 31, Subchapter I, Section 752 of the Virgin Islands Code. These amendments are not merely legal formalities; they represent a vital framework for ensuring that tenants receive fair and adequate notice concerning the termination of month-to-month tenancies and any adjustments to rent.

### **Enhancing Tenant Protections and Housing Stability**

The stability of tenants housing situations is paramount to their overall well-being and quality of life. Bill No. 36-0022 signifies an important advancement in tenant rights. It mandates that landlords provide clear and reasonable notice prior to lease terminations or rent increases, thereby empowering tenants to take necessary steps to address their housing situations. This provision is particularly crucial for our low-income residents who are often the most vulnerable to the adverse effects of abrupt changes in their living arrangements.

By allowing tenants the proper time to evaluate their options, secure alternative accommodations, and manage their finances effectively, we are ensuring that their rights are protected, and their security is prioritized. This proactive approach not only supports the tenants but ultimately fosters a healthier and more stable community.



## **Balancing Landlord Responsibilities**

While we acknowledge that the bill introduces new obligations for landlords, we firmly believe these requirements are essential for cultivating a fair housing market characterized by transparency and mutual respect. The specified notice periods serve to reduce potential disputes that can arise from miscommunication or misunderstanding between landlords and tenants. They also allow landlords, including us at the Virgin Islands Housing Authority, to effectively plan and manage our properties in a way that aligns with the needs and rights of our tenants. Such an environment promotes a healthier landlord-tenant relationship, which is fundamental to the integrity of our housing market.

## **Community and Economic Benefits**

Supporting Bill No. 36-0022 aligns seamlessly with our broader commitment to enhancing community welfare and stimulating economic growth across the Virgin Islands. Transparent and equitable housing practices lay the groundwork for building trust and cooperation within our community. By creating an environment that is conducive to collaboration, we not only empower our residents but also establish a framework that encourages investment and development within the housing sector benefiting all stakeholders involved.

These practices are foundational to cultivating economic resilience, ensuring that our communities can thrive and flourish both socially and economically.

## **Fostering Long-Term Tenant Satisfaction**

At the Virgin Islands Housing Authority, our strategic focus is centered on enhancing long-term tenant satisfaction and retention. By supporting this bill and adhering to consistent and fair notice requirements, landlords not only strengthen tenant relationships but also significantly minimize turnover rates. This reduction in turnover holds far-reaching implications for our community. When tenants are secure in their housing situations, it alleviates the financial and logistical burdens that frequently accompany relocations.

Frequent moves often strain families and individuals, disrupting their lives and impacting their overall well-being. Lower turnover means that residents can establish roots in their communities, fostering connections with neighbors and becoming more engaged citizens. This stability also allows landlords to distribute more resources toward enhancing our properties and services.

With reduced turnover, landlords can invest in meaningful improvements, such as upgrading facilities, enhancing maintenance services, and creating community programs that directly benefit tenants. Ultimately, a stable and satisfied tenant base leads to vibrant communities where residents can thrive, thereby creating a more positive environment for all. Supporting this bill is not just an administrative measure; it is a fundamental step toward building stronger, more resilient neighborhoods.



A stable and satisfied tenant population contributes to community cohesion, empowers families, and fosters a sense of belonging that is essential for the social fabric of our neighborhoods.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, while we acknowledge that the passage of Bill No. 36-0022 may require adjustments on the part of landlords, we firmly advocate for this legislation as a fair and necessary step forward in housing policy. By supporting this bill, we reaffirm commitment to cultivating a balanced and equitable housing industry that serves the best interests of both landlords and tenants, ultimately enriching our entire community in the process.

We implore all stakeholders to unite in endorsing this critical legislation, which holds the promise of bettering the housing environment across the Virgin Islands. Together, we can work towards creating a more secure and stable future for all residents through our shared commitment to this vital legislative endeavor.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and for providing the Virgin Islands Housing Authority with the platform to discuss the significance of Bill No. 36-0022. We thank you look forward to your continued support in all our housing efforts.

