

Testimony on Bill 36-0144

Rules and Judiciary Committee

October 9, 2025

Testifier: Conn Davis

Good morning members of the Legislature and viewing public. Thank you for the opportunity to address the Legislature today, my name is Conn Davis. I stand before you today not as a Business Owner, an Investment Banker, nor as a former Legislative Page, but merely as a concerned Virgin Islander.

Why am I concerned? I have many concerns, however today we are here to address Bill 36-0144, a bill that seeks to impose specific firearms regulations and is part of a broader family of bills (and government a leases) which have been proposed and voted upon over the last 12 months.

Over the course of my 41 years of life, the U.S. Virgin Islands has maintained amongst the highest violent crime and homicide rates in the Nation, and amongst the highest in the world, over this same period of time the Virgin Islands has had amongst the most stringent gun laws under the U.S. Flag. As a small and remote U.S. Territory, we have been unable to stem the tide of illegal guns and been unable or unwilling to address the root causes of our crime epidemic. As Einstein once said, "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result."

As I have read and listened to testimony on this family of bills, I have noticed a painfully obvious consensus, a consensus that this family of legislation which seeks to put further restrictions and financial burdens on law-abiding citizens will do nothing to address illegal gun crime. There has been no confidence amongst the slew of testifiers or the broader body that this bill will accomplish its goal. The restrictions and financial burdens, which this bill places on legal and highly vetted gun owners, will do nothing to address illegal gun crime, as criminals by definition do not follow the law.

The next logical question is why is the body so motivated to push this family of legislation?

Is it for a first term Senator to be able to point to a Legislative "accomplishment"?

Is it a strategy to boondoggle the public into thinking that we have done something to address our rampant decade's long violent crime epidemic, when we have not?

Is there a financial motive to this family of bills and leases, which forces 6,000-8,000 registered gun owners to re-take a \$500+ safety course every 5 years and pay a slew of fees?

Is it a combination of the aforementioned?

Mississippi maintains the lowest median household income amongst the U.S. States at \$52,985. The U.S. Virgin Islands median income is over 20% less than that of Mississippi, with a much higher cost of living. Only 50% of Americans have \$500 or more of accessible cash, in Mississippi this percentage is significantly lower and yet even lower in the U.S. Virgin Islands. This brings me to my final point.

With a total initial cost of approximately \$1000 between government fees, safety courses, notary costs etc. and with a renewal cost of \$150 per gun (plus other fees) and approximately \$500 to retake the same mandated safety course every 5 years, what percentage of U.S. Virgin Islanders can afford to practice their Constitutional Right to bear arms? Is it 5%? perhaps 10%?

As a “straight shooter,” pun intended, I can honestly state that I can afford this additional cost burden. I can re-direct the \$1,000 per year, which I donate annually, to the Virgin Islands Police Department (Police Week), pay their increased fees and the exorbitant private training costs, but what about the majority of Virgin Islanders, which cannot afford these costs? Our Community will see a significant uptick in non-violent illegal gun arrests. This legislation will direct a huge number of otherwise law abiding Virgin Islanders into our overwhelmed criminal justice system, which currently has a backlog of 12,000 cases at a huge cost. This scenario will also disproportionately affect young black and Hispanic men, inherently making this both a Constitutional issue and a Civil Rights issue.

I implore the Legislature to consider the consequences of this unconstitutional bill, and the bill and lease which preceded it. This family of bills and leases will enrich a few individuals at the expense of many lives and potentially prompt Federal intervention, the withholding of much-needed Federal Grants, greater judicial costs and further consent decrees.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts and to participate in the Democratic Process.