

Testimony on Bill 36-0144

Sgt. Bernard Burke, Former Director of Firearms at VIPD and Retired National Guard Member

October 9, 2025

Good morning, Madam Chairperson, distinguished members of the Senate and personnel of the Legislature here today. Good morning to my fellow testifiers and good morning to those here in person and to those in the viewing and listening audiences. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Bernard Burke. I am a retired Virgin Islands Police Department Sargent after 30 years of service. I was also the Director of Firearms Department from approximately 2009 to 2020. Additionally, during my tenure at VIPD, I proudly served in the National Guard for 23 years as a military police officer and a combat engineer with a tour of duty in Afghanistan as part of the ***“Operation Enduring Freedom”*** and a tour of duty in Iraq as part of the ***“Operation Iraqi Freedom.”***

As a person who has been asked to defend this great nation and defend the constitution of the United States, I have grave concerns regarding Bill No. 36-0144, which proposes to: confiscate legal firearms; turn law-abiding citizens into criminals overnight; and minimize legal options for law abiding citizens; and at the same time failing to stop any illegal weapons on the streets. For these reasons and others, I oppose this Bill. Despite the good intention of this Bill, I believe this Bill will be ineffective in combating and reducing the violent criminal activity in the Territory. The criminals do not abide by the law or register their ILLEGALLY obtained firearms with the Firearms Department. Additionally, any unregistered firearms criminals possess is by definition already illegal.

Based on my past experience as the Firearms Director for over 10 years, I made several observations that I offer to this Honorable Committee on this Bill. First, I can tell you that no criminal has been willing to endure the registration process because they are not willing to provide their finger prints and social security number along with the other extensive background check information on that individual, which includes local and federal police records. In certain cases, we even reviewed international police records as well. Therefore, this Bill will only unreasonably increase the burden to the law-abiding Territorial residents, while handicapping their ability to defend themselves against the illegal weapons we already know are out there. Second, this Bill criminalizes the wrong people. In my decades of experience, I have not observed any data or pattern of legal, registered firearms being used to commit crimes or endanger any police officers. The vast majority of the criminal cases are from unregistered weapons, and this Bill will not improve that issue. Third, this Bill with vague definitions, only increases the discretion of the Government, specifically the Police Department, and concentrates too much power in hands of a single person.

Finally, I respect and support the work of Virgin Islands Safe Gun Owners, who have been working to restore the Second Amendment Rights to the Virgin Islands while promoting safe gun ownership. I also support the “*Safer Communities Act*” proposed by VISGO, which will streamline the firearms registration and approval process creating accountability and transparency to the Territory and help bring our laws in line with the Second Amendment. If “*Safer Communities Act*” is passed as proposed, I believe it will have a greater chance of reducing any firearms illegally making it into the hands of criminals.

I thank the Committee for allowing me to testify on Bill No. 36-0144, and I oppose this Bill. I request this Honorable Committee vote it down. I welcome any questions you may have.