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**OFFICE OF THE
TERRITORIAL PUBLIC DEFENDER**
Government of the U.S. Virgin Islands



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September 3, 2025

Honorable Carla J. Joseph
Chair
Committee on Rules and Judiciary
36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands
PO Box 1690
St. Thomas, Virgin Islands 00804

Re: Bill No. 36-0101: Legislation to Provide for Continuity of operations in the Superior Court in the Event of Prolonged Judicial Vacancies - Position of Office of the Territorial Public Defender

Dear Senator Joseph,

I write to you today on behalf of the Office of the Territorial Public Defender (OTPD) to provide you with our position on Bill No. 36-0101, which seeks to amend the qualifications and appointment process for judicial officers in the Superior Court.

Chief Justice Rhys S. Hodge made a clear and direct request for the passage of Bill 36-0101 during his recent appearance before the 36th Legislature. As he explained, the judiciary is facing the challenge of multiple judicial officials currently facing re-appointment or replacement. As the head of our judicial branch, Chief Justice Hodge is in a better place to understand the necessity of this request and OTPD has no reason to doubt anything in his testimony.

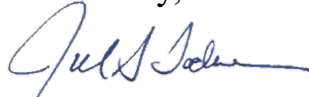
OTPD may be directly impacted by the proposed legislation. Should the bill result in an increase in the number of Judges or Magistrate judges

hearing criminal matters, it will naturally lead to an increased demand for legal representation. OTPD represents the vast majority of criminal defendants appearing before the Superior Court. While an increase in judicial officers does not necessarily lead to more cases, it will certainly result in more courtroom hours for the cases already assigned. One attorney, of course, cannot appear before multiple judicial officers at the same time.

As I have previously testified before the Legislature, our Assistant Public Defenders already operate under heavy caseloads. An increase in courtroom time, may well necessitate additional professional staff for our office in order to ensure adequate representation and maintain the quality of our defense services.

While these comments are brief, OTPD sincerely appreciates the opportunity to provide input on this important legislation and its potential impact on our office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Julie Smith Todman".

Julie Smith Todman, Esq.
Chief Territorial Public Defender