COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY, VETERANS AFFAIRS AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

10/22/2026-REPORTED OUT TO THE FLOOR
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BILL NO. 36-0319

Thirty-Sixth Legislature of the Virgin Islands

July 21, 2026

An act honoring and commending Rena Brodhurst for her extraordinary contributions to journalism and the preservation of the Virgin Islands' historical and cultural narrative and awarding her the Virgin Islands Medal of Honor

PROPOSED BY:	Senator Novelle E. Francis, Jr. Sponsors: Angel L. Bolques, Jr., Clifford A. Joseph, Sr., and Avery L. Lewis Co-sponsor: Ray Fonseca

WHEREAS, Rena Brodhurst was born on August 26, 1960;

WHEREAS, Rena Brodhurst graduated from Fairleigh Dickerson University in 1986 with a bachelor's degree in business management;

WHEREAS, the St. Croix Avis was founded in 1844 and is chronicled to have reported on the historic events of July 3, 1848, the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation and the 1878 Fire burn insurrection;

WHEREAS, the St. Croix Avis is the longest-running newspaper in Virgin Islands history;

WHEREAS, Canute A. Brodhurst Sr., along with Montclair Creque and Ariel Melchoir purchased the St. Croix Avis from Gustave Johansen in 1940;

WHEREAS, her father, Canute A. Brodhurst, Sr. served as the publisher, editor, and owner of the St. Croix Avis for 40 years until his death in 1980;

WHEREAS, Canute A. Brodhurst, Sr. placed his own freedom on the line in 1944 when he was sentenced to 10 days in jail after a judge objected to an article appearing in the St. Croix Avis;

WHEREAS, her father was vindicated in 1945 for defending and championing the freedom of the press when he won his appeal from the Third Circuit Court in the famous case of People of the Virgin Islands vs. Brodhurst, 148 F.2d 636 (3d Cir. 1945);

WHEREAS, Brodhurst's victory in this case cemented the family's commitment to advancing transparency, accountability, and the principles of a free press;

WHEREAS, Rena Brodhurst assumed leadership of the St. Croix Avis operations at the age of 25 with no formal training in running a daily newspaper;

WHEREAS, Rena Brodhurst and her father served as publishers/editors/owners of the St. Croix Avis, upholding the principles of free speech and freedom of the press included in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution;

WHEREAS, her two children, Britney and Lasiba Knight, followed in her footsteps, working for the St. Croix Avis as editor and reporter, respectively, until its closing;

WHEREAS, under her management, the St. Croix Avis continued to report local, Caribbean and national news and chronicled the social and political evolution of the Virgin Islands;

WHEREAS, her no-holds barred editorials were a must read, showing courage in keeping politicians' feet to the proverbial fire, speaking fearlessly on topics the community cared about and inspiring countless individuals and young journalists;

WHEREAS, her hiring of Eunice Bedminster as managing editor prepared Bedminster to make history as the first Caribbean woman and only the third female executive editor in the 95-year history of the St. Croix Avis;

WHEREAS, an astute businesswoman, in the late 1990s, Rena expanded her family-owned business to publish the Virgin Islands Independent, a daily newspaper on St. Thomas-St. John;

WHEREAS, while the Virgin Islands Independent ceased publication in the 2000s, the St. Croix Avis began to be widely distributed on St. Thomasa and St. John;

WHEREAS, in 2014, under Rena Brodhurst's stewardship, the St. Croix Avis staff won a second-place Sunshine Award in the Breaking News Category for Small Papers from the Society of Professional Journalists Florida Association for a series titled "St. Croix Hospital in Crisis," which highlighted gross neglect and mismanagement at the Gov. Juan F. Luis Hospital and Medical Center. The highlighted mismanagement led to the loss of certification from the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid, eventually causing the resignation of top hospital officials and prompting the Virgin Islands government to provide funding to improve conditions so the hospital could regain certification;

WHEREAS, Ms. Brodhurst guided the newspaper through the administrations of eight governors, economic booms and busts, and events including the historic election of the first black president, Barack Obama;

WHEREAS, outside of newspaper publishing, Rena quietly dedicated her time and resources to community initiatives that promoted literacy;

WHEREAS, she established the University of the Virgin Islands' Caribbean Writer's Canute A. Brodhurst Prize for short fiction, making the prize available to authors who carry on the fine tradition of excellence in writing;

WHEREAS, she donated weekly copies of the St. Croix Avis to the Golden Grove prison for literacy projects among prisoners, many of whom wrote poems and letters that were published on the op-ed pages;

WHEREAS, Rena has made a lasting impact on the community through her civic and philanthropic work;

WHEREAS, she employed the St. Croix Avis as a tool to mobilize community resources to support vulnerable populations, including children in need, after the devastation of Hurricane Hugo in 1989;

WHEREAS, her sponsorships included the Virgin Islands Department of Energy's KidWind Challenge, and Little League Baseball when funding became a challenge;

WHEREAS, she helped revive the Foreday Morning Serenade with Stanley and the Ten Sleepless Knights, which is now on a 20-year rebirth thanks in part to stories documented by the St. Croix Avis, and she established the tramp portion for the Crucian Rican Ole Time Breakfast and Tramp held annually during Three Kings Day;

WHEREAS, Rena contributions to journalism and the Virgin Islands community have not gone unnoticed;

WHEREAS, in 2016, Chief District Court Judge Wilma Lewis invited Rena Brodhurst to speak to a new group of U.S. citizens about First Amendment rights and her family's history in paving the way for freedoms in the Virgin Islands that at one time were enjoyed only on the U.S. mainland; and

WHEREAS, in 2016, the Rotary Club of St. Croix honored her as its first "Woman of Distinction" during a brunch in recognition of International Women's Month where chapter president Sonia Boyce praised her as someone who "kept people connected" and was there for the community in good and bad times;

WHEREAS, in August 2019, she was awarded the first D. Hamilton Jackson Lifetime Achievement Award by V.I. Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett, recognizing nearly two centuries of barrier-breaking journalism by The St. Croix Avis's staff;

WHEREAS, Delegate Plaskett also read the newspaper's century-long achievements into the Congressional Record to further honor its legacy and impact in the Virgin Islands;

WHEREAS, in January 2024, the St. Croix Avis printed its "Final Edition" on its front page, marking the last issue of a 180-year era as the territory's oldest publication and the longest-running newspaper in the Virgin Islands;

WHEREAS, in an open letter to readers announcing the shuttering of the publication, she cited that the Avis could no longer compete in today's environment of free social media, as well as challenges from tech giants Meta and Google, taxes, and the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority;

WHEREAS, in that same letter, she thanked the Moravian Church for insisting that the enslaved learned to read and write during the time Denmark owned the territory; and

WHEREAS, on the first day of Black History Month in 2025, V.I. Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett stood on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives to honor the legacy and long-standing impact of the St. Croix Avis;

WHEREAS, the University of the Virgin Islands conferred an honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters (L.H.D.) upon Rena Brodhurst during its 2026 commencement ceremony on St. Croix, in recognition of her extraordinary contributions to journalism and the preservation of the Virgin Islands' historical and cultural narrative; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Brodhurst's career-long dedication to documenting Virgin Islands history has provided an invaluable service to the territory and inspired future generations of journalists; Now, Therefore,

Be it enacted by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands*:*

SECTION 1. The Legislature of the Virgin Islands, on behalf of the people of the Virgin Islands, honors and commends Rena Brodhurst for her 39 years of exemplary leadership and dedication as the publisher, editor, and owner of the St. Croix Avis and her steadfast

commitment to the First Amendment, upholding the principles of free speech and freedom of the press throughout her tenure. The Legislature expresses its profound gratitude for her profound sense of community partnership, her quiet but impactful advocacy for literacy, and her support of local cultural and educational events. The Legislature also commends Ms. Brodhurst for sustaining the 180-year legacy of the territory's oldest publication and the longest-running newspaper in the Virgin Islands, ensuring the people of the Virgin Islands had a fearless voice and a daily chronicle of their history.

SECTION 2. In recognition and appreciation of the profound impact of Rena Brodhurst in the field of journalism, the Legislature of the Virgin Islands, under 1 V.I.C § 103(b), awards the Virgin Islands Medal of Honor to Rena Brodhurst. The President of the Legislature, or the President's designee, shall present Rena Brodhurst with the Virgin Islands Medal of Honor, cast in gold, and shall present a perma plaque copy of this act to Rena Brodhurst at an appropriate ceremony.

BILL SUMMARY

This resolution honors and commends the life and legacy of Rena Brodhurst and her accomplishments through journalism and the St. Croix Avis to the Virgin Islands community. This bill also awards Rena Brodhurst the Virgin Islands Medal of Honor.

BR25-0927/June 22, 2026/PFA/Revised July 9, 2026/PFA