



# Legislature Of The Virgin Islands

CAPITOL BUILDING, P.O. 1690 ST. THOMAS, U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS 00804

THE HONORABLE

**Carla J. Joseph**

SENATOR

34TH LEGISLATURE OF  
THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

Tel.(340)693-3515

Fax.(340) 693-3633

senatorcarlajoseph@legvi.org

senatorcarlajoseph.com

## CHAIR

Committee on Government Operations &  
Consumer Protection

## MEMBER

Committee on Rules & Judiciary

Committee on Education & Workforce Development

Committee on Disaster Recovery & Infrastructure

Committee on Youth, Sports, Parks & Recreation

## Press Release

**June 14, 2021**

**Contact: Senator Carla Joseph Office**

**(340) 693-3515**

**senatorcarlajoseph@legvi.org**

## COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND CONSUMER PROTECTION APPROVED ONE BILL AND HELD ROBUST DISCUSSIONS ON OTHER AGENDA ITEMS

ST. THOMAS, USVI - The Senate Committee on Government Operations and Consumer Protection, chaired by Senator Carla Joseph, met on Monday, June 14, 2021, in the Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall St. Thomas.

The Committee received testimony on Bill 34-0034 to enact the Uniform Electronic Legal Material Act and Bill 34-0048 to limit the amount charged in electric power bills based on estimated consumption. The Committee also received testimony on the Virgin Islands Department of Property and Procurement (DPP) operations and Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR) operations. The Virgin Islands Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV), scheduled on the agenda, had no representative at the meeting.

In Block I, the Committee received testimony on Bill 34-0034, An Act amending Title 1 Virgin Islands Code to enacting the Uniform Electronic Legal Material Act.

Senator Carla Joseph, Sponsor of Bill 34-0034, said, "It's critical for us to be able to assure that every person has the required access to legal documents and be aligned with other jurisdictions across the nation." She said, "we need to make sure that we are up-to-date with legislation of this framework and not lagging behind."

Attorney Tom Bolt, Chair of the U.S. Virgin Islands Law Commission, said, "this uniform state law can help the U.S. Virgin Islands expand access to justice by ensuring access to official, authentic and preserved electronic legal information." He said, "easy and reliable access to our

official territorial laws provide flexibility today in a time of COVID 19 as well as prepare states and territories to deal with future challenges."

Other testifiers appearing before the Committee in support of Bill 34-0034 included Attorney Libby Synder, Legislative Counsel of the Uniform Law Commission, Troy de Chabert-Schister, State Director AARP of the Virgin Islands, and Leslie Street, Director of the Wolf Law Library.

Testifiers stated that the bill provides the flexibility for states and territories implementing the law to do so at their own pace using the technology deemed most effective and cost-efficient. Twenty-one (21) states and the District of Columbia have implemented the Uniform Electronic Legal Material Act. Bill 34-0034, sponsored by Senator Carla Joseph, was unanimously approved, and moved forward for further consideration.

In Block II, the Committee held robust discussions on Bill No. 34-0048, An Act amending Title 30 Virgin Islands Code, Section 125 to limit the amount charged in electric power bills based on estimated consumption.

Testifiers include Mr. Noel Hodge, Interim Executive Director/CEO of the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority, other members of the VIWAPA executive team, and the Honorable Donald Cole, Director of the Public Service Commission.

Discussion held in Committee revealed that the VI Water and Power Authority does not have the legislative authority to charge consumers based on estimated consumption. The Bill sponsor Senator Steven D. Payne, Sr. stated that the bill's primary purpose was to protect consumers from the high rates being charged by the authority based on consumption estimates.

After much discussion, Bill No. 34-0048 was held in Committee. Senator Steven Payne, the sponsor of Bill 34-0048, said he plans to work with his colleagues to further develop more stringent guidelines in the interest of ratepayers.

Department of Property and Procurement Commissioner Anthony Thomas and members of his executive team brought the Committee up to date on recent actions and initiatives to improve the agency's operation and enhance overall government operations. Commissioner Thomas discussed the need for added personnel to effectively execute the mandates of his agency. Also discussed were agency enhancements that include improved timeline and processing of contracts, online access of available government properties for lease, and the implementation of a government vehicle tracking system.

DPNR Commissioner Jean-Pierre Oriol provided updates on his department's facilities, repairs, enforcement capacity, and the planned introduction of new mooring laws.

The last Block on the Committee agenda was the Virgin Islands Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV). The invited testifier was BMV Director Barbara McIntosh.

Senator Joseph expressed her displeasure with the BMV absence and lack of agency representation at the hearing when a formal request was issued on May 27, 2021. Senator Joseph said it was

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unacceptable and stated that she would follow up on a BMV meeting to include discussions on the recent tour of the agency's St. Thomas facility.

Committee members present at today's hearing include Chair: Senator Carla J. Joseph, Vice-Chair: Senator Novelle E. Francis, Jr., Members: Senator Marvin A. Blyden, Senator Alma Francis Heyliger, Senator Javan E. James, Sr., Senator Franklin D. Johnson, and Senator Milton E. Potter. Non-committee members present include Senate President Donna Frett-Gregory, Senator Steven Payne, Senator Janelle Sarauw, and Senator Genevieve R. Whitaker.

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