

BILL NO. 35-0334

Thirty-Fifth Legislature of the Virgin Islands

September 18, 2024

An Act amending title 3 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 1, adding a section 11 establishing the Office of Faith-based and Community-based Initiatives

PROPOSED BY: Senator Samuel Carrión

WHEREAS, compassionate groups of individuals have selflessly aided the Virgin Islands in serving our most vulnerable residents and our most debilitated neighborhoods;

WHEREAS, in January 2001, President George W. Bush, by executive order, established the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community-based Initiatives “to strengthen and to expand the role of faith-based and community organizations (FBCO) in providing social services”, and urged state governments to establish offices of faith-based initiatives in order to encourage state and local government partnerships with faith-based community organizations;

WHEREAS, inspired by faith and civic commitment, faith-based and non-profit community organizations have accomplished much in changing the lives of thousands of citizens and residents;

WHEREAS, it is essential that the Government of the Virgin Islands cooperate with these organizations to provide an opportunity to participate on an equal basis, regardless of each organization’s orientation, whether faith-based or secular;

1 **WHEREAS**, the Legislature of the Virgin Islands intends to recognize the contributions
2 of faith-based and community non-profit organizations;

3 **WHEREAS**, the Legislature encourages opportunities for faith-based and community-
4 based organizations to work cooperatively with government agencies to deliver services more
5 effectively;

6 **WHEREAS**, the purpose of the Office of Faith-based and Community-based Initiatives
7 is to advise the Governor on policies, priorities, and objectives for the Government's
8 comprehensive effort to enlist, equip, enable, empower, and expand the work of faith-based,
9 volunteer, and other community organizations to the full extent permitted by law; Now,
10 Therefore,

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

12 **SECTION 1.** Title 1 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 1 is amended by adding a section 11
13 as follows:

14 **"§ 11. Office of Faith-based and Community-based Initiatives**

15 (a) The Office of Faith-based and Community-based Initiatives Advisory Council is
16 established within the Office of the Governor. The Office is administered by an Executive
17 Director, who is primarily responsible for directing and coordinating the Office of Faith-based
18 and Community-based Initiatives throughout the Virgin Islands and is the principal to interface
19 with local and federal counterpart organizations. The Executive Director, with the assistance
20 of the Advisory Council, shall advise the Governor on community and volunteer service issues.
21 The Executive Director shall represent the Governor on boards, forums, and councils as
22 appropriate. The Executive Director shall serve as a liaison for the Governor with community
23 organizations, social aid, faith-based groups, religious communities and non-faith-based groups
24 and the community. The Executive Director serves at the pleasure of the Governor.

(b) The Advisory Council is established within the Office of Faith-based and Community-based Initiatives and shall be administratively housed within the Office of the Governor. The Governor shall include an appropriation to fund the operations of the Office of Faith-Based and Community-based Initiatives in the annual budget of the Office of the Governor.

(c) The Executive Director shall report annually to the Governor and President of the Legislature of the Virgin Islands on recommended best practices to:

(1) engage with other organizations for the delivery of state services, regardless of an organization's orientation, whether faith-based or community-based;

(2) develop and coordinate activities of faith-based and community-based programs and initiatives, to enhance community efforts and to seek resources, legislation, and regulatory relief as necessary to accomplish these objectives;

(3) ensure that government policy decisions consider the capacity of faith-based and other community-based initiatives to assist in achieving the government's priorities;

(4) identify and promote best practices across state and territorial governments relating to the delivery of services by faith-based and other community-based organizations;

(5) coordinate public awareness of faith-based and community nonprofit initiatives, such as demonstration pilot programs or projects, public-private partnerships, volunteerism, and special projects;

(6) encourage private charitable giving to support faith-based and community-based initiatives;

(7) bring concerns, ideas, and policy options to the Governor and the Legislature for assisting, strengthening, and replicating successful faith-based and other community-based programs;

(8) develop and implement strategic initiatives to strengthen the institutions of families and communities in the Virgin Islands;

(9) showcase and herald innovative grassroots nonprofit organizations and civic initiatives;

(10) eliminate unnecessary legislative, regulatory, and other bureaucratic barriers that impede effective faith-based and other community-based efforts to address social problems;

(11) monitor implementation of state policy affecting faith-based and other community-based organizations; and

(12) ensure that the efforts of faith-based and other community-based organizations meet objective criteria for performance and accountability;

(d) By May 30th of each year, the Executive Director shall submit a written report to the Governor and the President of the Legislature of the Virgin Islands containing an accounting of its activities and recommended policies, priorities, and objectives for the government's comprehensive effort to enlist, equip, enable, empower, and expand the work of faith-based, volunteer, and other community-based organizations.

(e) Composition of Advisory Council, appointment, and term of members:

(1) The Advisory Council consists of nine members who are residents of the Virgin Islands. Four members must reside on St. Croix, three members must reside on St. Thomas, and one member on St. John. The Executive Director serves as the board chairperson.

(2) The Advisory Council composes of a pastor from each district, a faith-based organization representative from each district, a non-faith-based organization representative and a chaplain from each district.

(3) The Governor appoints members to the Advisory Council who shall serve terms of three years. A member may serve until the member's successor is qualified. Members of the Advisory Council who are employees or non-employees of the Government of the Virgin Islands are entitled to receive a per diem of \$75 and expenses for each day the member attends a meeting of the Advisory Council plus any other necessary and authorized meetings.

(4) The Governor shall consider the recommendations of representatives from the Virgin Islands faith-based organizations and non-profit community-based organizations.

(5) Appointed members of the Advisory Council must be individuals who, by their experience, participation, creativity, and interest, embody community service work.

(6) Advisory Council members may include, but need not be limited to, representatives from various faiths, faith-based organizations, community-based organizations, non-profits, foundations, corporations, and government.

(f) The Advisory Council shall meet at least once per quarter per calendar year. Meetings may be held via teleconference or other electronic means. The Advisory Council shall annually elect from its membership one member to serve as vice-chair. Five members of the Council constitutes a quorum."

BILL SUMMARY

The bill establishes the Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives within the Office of the Governor to encourage faith-based and community-based organizations to work cooperatively with government agencies to deliver services more effectively.

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