



36TH LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & CONSUMER PROTECTION
THE HONORABLE AVERY L. LEWIS

BILL NO.

36-0190

TESTIMONY

JULIEN E. HENLEY SR.

TERRITORIAL ADA COORDINATOR

DECEMBER 2, 2025

BILL 25-0190
PRESENTATION
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
Submitted by:
Julien E. Henley Sr.
Territorial ADA Coordinator

1 Good day, Honorable Chairman Avery Lewis, members of the Committee on
2 Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection—other
3 esteemed Senators present, my fellow testifiers, and the listening and viewing public.

4 I am Julien E. Henley Sr., Territorial ADA Coordinator for the Government of the
5 Virgin Islands. I thank you for the invitation to provide testimony today regarding
6 Bill No. 36-0190, which seeks to require sign language interpreters at all
7 Government of the Virgin Islands broadcasts and official functions.

8 This proposed legislation is not only timely but also essential. It addresses a long-
9 standing communication inequity faced by individuals who are Deaf or hard of
10 hearing: the inability to access critical information during emergencies, official
11 announcements, and all televised or broadcast public meetings or hearings. Under
12 the Sunshine Act, codified in Title 1, Chapter 15 of the Virgin Islands Code (§§ 251–
13 256), government meetings must be open and accessible to the public. Section 254
14 specifically mandates public access and notice for agency meetings, while §253
15 defines what constitutes a ‘meeting.’ Equal access means ensuring that individuals
16 who are Deaf or hard of hearing can participate fully in these proceedings.
17 Furthermore, when hurricanes, earthquakes, or other disasters strike, timely and
18 accurate communication can save lives.

19 Yet, while most residents hear these updates repeatedly on radio or television, our
20 Deaf community often receives little to no information, leaving them vulnerable and
21 uninformed.

22 This bill's certainty that American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters are present
23 during all visual broadcasts and official functions will provide equal access to vital
24 information and empower our Deaf residents to prepare, respond, and recover with
25 confidence.

26 I want to highlight some recommendations for successful implementation:

27 First, the current language of this bill does not specify an amount to be allocated for
28 this purpose. Without clear funding, this crucial legislation risks becoming an
29 unfunded mandate and may face delays in implementation.

30 Additionally, our territory is experiencing a shortage of local ASL interpreters due
31 to scheduling and procurement challenges. Most interpreters work for the
32 Department of Education or hold other jobs, making availability limited. These local
33 interpreters are especially important because they help overcome cultural
34 communication barriers that out-of-state interpreters often misinterpret when
35 serving our deaf community members.

36 To ensure consistent availability across St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John, we
37 recommend simplifying the contracting process to allow qualified interpreters to
38 provide services even if they do not hold a business license.

39 Next, create an accessible video archive. We recommend that VITEMA post all
40 emergency briefings with ASL interpretation on its official website. This will allow
41 individuals to revisit the information for clarity and reassurance.

42 Lastly, it is vital to plan ahead for the 2026 hurricane season and beyond. Interpreters
43 should be integrated into emergency planning now, and funds should be budgeted to
44 cover services for disasters throughout the year.

45 In conclusion, I commend Senator Bolques for his leadership on this issue. By
46 passing Bill No. 36-0190, the Virgin Islands sends a clear message: that we value
47 accessibility, equity, and the safety of all our residents. This legislation will give our
48 Deaf community the comfort of knowing they will receive critical information in
49 real time.

50 I humbly submit this testimony into the legislative record and am available to answer
51 any questions the Committee may have. Thank you for your attention and for your
52 continued commitment to inclusive governance in the Virgin Islands.