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- 0:00:00 Good morning everyone, good morning everyone, colleagues, one, two, one, two, check, one, two, three, four, five, six, we're good, excellent, good morning colleagues, good morning to our hard-working central staff employees good morning testifiers and a special good morning to the people of the u.s virgin islands the committee on rules and judiciary meeting of july 22nd 2021 is hereby absent senator milton e potter president senator potter present senator genevieve r whitaker Senator Whitaker absent thank you madam chair please record Senator Gittins as present and please record Senator Payne as a present okay So, Mr. Chair, that means we have six present, one absent. Okay, we have a quorum and we can proceed. Madam Clerk, are there any pieces of correspondence to be read into the record at this time?
- 0:01:45 Yes, Mr. Chair. On July 22nd, 2020, To the Honorable Milton E. Potter, Chairman, Committee on Rules and Judiciary, 34th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, Capitol Building, Shalda Mali, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, 00804. Dear Chairman Potter, due to several pre-scheduled committee engagements of importance that I must attend, I unfortunately will not be in attendance for today's hearing on Committee of Rules and Judiciary scheduled to begin at 9 a.m. in the Earl B. Otley Legislative Conference Room on St. Thomas. Please record my absence as excused. I do apologize for any inconvenience. Thank you for your understanding in this matter. Sincerely, Genevieve Whitaker, Legislative Secretary, 34th Legislature of the Virgin Islands.
- 0:02:51 And that concludes our correspondence. Madam Clerk, please record Senator Whitaker as excused. I'm Senator Payne. I'm seeing you via Skype. Can you do a sound check so we can make sure we're hearing you? All right. Good morning, Mr. Chair and colleagues. Can you hear me at this time? Hearing you loud and clear, sir. Thank you for your presence. 10-4. Madam Clerk, can you read today's agenda into the record, please? today's agenda the committee on rules and the judiciary has scheduled a meeting for july 22nd 2021 at 10 a.m in the earl b ottley legislative hall on saint thomas to consider the following bill number 340030 an act amending title 4 virgin islands code chapter 11 section 172 relating to the Virgin Islands Superior Court's jurisdiction over children to divest the court of jurisdiction over judicial consent for

the marriage of a child. Sponsored by Senator Javon James Sr. and co-sponsored by Senator Franklin Johnson. Bill number 34-0031, an act amending title 14, Virgin Islands Code chapter 24, section 504 relating to the penalties for child neglect to require the convicted person to attend counseling in addition to imprisonment or fine sponsored by senator javon james senior and co-sponsored by senators franklin johnson

0:04:56 and carla joseph bill number 34 0032 an act amending title 14 virgin islands code chapter 24 Section 505 relating to child abuse to require a person who abuses a child to seek counseling. Excuse me a moment, chair. I think this is the wrong agenda.

0:05:36 Seek counseling. One second. Okay, the Committee on Rules and Judiciary will take a brief one-minute recess. Thank you.

0:06:37 Committee on Rules and Judiciary is back on the record. Madam Clerk, can you continue to proceed with the reading of the agenda? Yes, Mr. Chair. Bill number 340032, an act amending Title 14, Virgin Islands Code 24, Chapter 24, Section 505, relating to child abuse to require a person who abuses a child to seek counseling. Sponsored by Senator Javon James Sr. and co-sponsored by Senators Franklin Johnson and Carla Joseph.

0:07:28 Our invited testifiers, Kimberly Kazi-Gomez, Commissioner of the Department of Human Services, Carla E. Benjamin, Assistant Commissioner, Department of Human Services, Clema Lewis, Executive Director, Women's Coalition of St. Croix, Anaya Stewart, Executive Director, Family Resource Center, and Jania John Straker, CEO of Lutheran Social Services, and Trayka Macmillan, Greater Changes. And this concludes the reading of the agenda for today. Thank you very much, Madam Clerk. Colleagues, we will proceed with the first item on our Agenda, Bill No. 34-0030, an act amending Title IV, Virgin Islands Code Chapter 11, Section 172, relating to the Virgin Islands Superior Court's jurisdiction over children to divest the court of jurisdiction over judicial consent for the marriage of a child. Who speaks to this bill? Mr. James, you're recognized for your introduction. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good morning to the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands colleagues. I come before you to offer bill number 34-0030, and I commend in Title IV, Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 11, Section 172, relating to the Virgin Islands Superior Court's jurisdiction over children to divest the court of jurisdiction over judicial consent for the marriage of

0:09:20 a child. My colleagues, this is a low-hanging fruit. In the 33rd Legislature of the Virgin Islands, my colleagues and I brought forward a bill that is similar to what is before us, which is now Act No. 8255, which was proposed by me, Senator James, and it was signed into law by the Governor Albert Bryan Jr. And basically, the Act amended Titles 16, Chapters 1 and 9 of the Virgin Islands Code by prohibiting the issuance of marriage licenses to persons under the age of 18. However, after careful consideration and reviewing of the Virgin Islands Code, my team and I recently saw a section in the Virgin Islands Code which speaks to Title 4, Section 172, which basically says, Except as otherwise provided by this chapter, the family division of the Superior Court shall have original jurisdiction, and it goes to E, saying for judicial consent for the marriage of a child when such consent is required by law.

0:10:22 So it's in conflict with Act No. 8255, and as we all know, colleagues, the Virgin Islands Code is very huge, and sometimes we tend to miss things when we bring legislation forward, so this is just one step forward to correct and to bring it up to par with the legislation that I've brought forward in the 33rd legislature, which is Act No. 8255. So, colleagues, without saying anything else or anything further, I just ask for your support as we just make this one minor change to the Virgin Islands Code to protect our children in the territory. Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the time. Thank you very much, Senator James. Colleagues, we're going to proceed with the introductions of the three bills on the agenda, and the bills are related. So we're going to proceed now with the introduction of Bill 34-0031, an act amending Title 14, Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 24, Section 504, relating to the penalties for child neglect to require the convicted person to attend counseling in addition to imprisonment or fine.

0:11:32 Who speaks to this bill? Senator James, please proceed with your introduction. Thank you once again, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to speak on the bills before us. Mr. Chair and colleagues, I offer Bill No. 34.0031 and Bill No. 34.0032. All three bills that we have before us today speaks to protecting our youth in the territory. And I just want to say to the stakeholders and the testifiers, thank you for your input. We have been in communication ever since I've come into office in the 34th legislature of the Virgin Islands when it comes to the two bills that I'm about to introduce. Colleagues, for far too long our children in the U.S. Virgin Islands have been abused and neglected.

0:12:20 And it's time to take additional steps to prevent such heinous crimes. The VI code defines child neglect as knowingly, recklessly or negligently causing or allowing a child to suffer physical injury or who knowingly, recklessly or negligently deprives a child of any of the basic necessities of life by any person who is responsible for the safety or welfare of a child, including but not limited to a child's parent, step-parent, guardian, school teacher or babysitter. There's an old saying that says our youth is our future, yet it is impossible to expect our children to improve the territory for future

generations if they are consistently becoming victims of generational curses.

0:13:11 Child neglect is often a case of underestimating the responsibilities of adulthood and the necessary tools to provide effective care for a child bill number 34.0031 seeks to address these issues from a legal perspective so that a mandate will assist the century-long fight of counselors social workers and the like in their effort to provide parents with the education necessary to care for their children according to a vipd testimony given in february 2021 Compared to 2019 domestic violence incidents, 443 cases, there was an 80% increase in 2020, which brings you 799 cases.

0:13:57 Compared to 2019 DVRS, in a total of 198, there was an 11% increase in 2020, which brought us to 177 cases. February 2020, one adult arrested for challenging after leaving their daughter in a car at 2 o'clock a.m. to meet a companion. The adult called police hours, Mr. Chair, I'm being distracted by my colleague on the phone. I've been trying to ignore it, but I cannot. Thank you very much. You may proceed, Senator.

0:14:41 I'm very good at knowing, but I can't take it. I'm asking for silence while I read. I'm going to start from the top. According to a VIPD testimony given in February 2021, compared to 2019 domestic violence incidents, which is 443, there was an 80% increase in 2020, which brings it to 799. Compared to a 2019 DVRS of 198, There was an 11% decrease in 2020, which brings us to 177. February 2020, one adult arrested for child neglect after leaving their daughter in a car at 2 o'clock a.m. to meet a companion. The adult called police hours after returning and finding minor missing. The minor had been picked up by a relative. March 2020, one adult arrested for child abuse and neglect.

0:15:39 I could go on with so many cases of child neglect in the U.S. to bring some clarity and understanding to the people of the Virgin Islands. What is the purpose of counseling? Counseling allows families with better appreciation of what is developmentally appropriate for children and to present a lower risk for child neglect. Parents gain an understanding of impact of neglect on their children. It also helps parents understand different developmental stages of children. Neglectful parents may not have an appreciation of what is developmentally appropriate for children.

0:16:16 Counseling also helps parents understand healthy ways of dealing with stressors that do not involve harming children. It also focuses on breaking generational cycles of abuse and neglect. and they also educate parents in properly attending to their children's need and in cherishing and raising the children in a stable and caring home. We cannot guarantee that all parents and perpetrators of child neglect will be completely rehabilitated after counseling sessions and parenting classes. However, colleagues, we must start somewhere. We must be able to determine whether the perpetrators are suffering from a mental illness and take as many precautions as possible to prevent first-time and repeated offense of child neglect colleagues I actually support on bill number 34.0031 I would also like to introduce the bill number 34.0032 which is basically similar to the two bills we have before us the only difference with this bill this bill speaks to child abuse while bill number 34.0031 speaks the child neglect. The VI code defines child abuse as knowingly or recklessly causing a child to suffer physical, mental, or emotional injury, or knowingly or recklessly causing a child to be placed in a situation where it is reasonably foreseeable that a child may suffer physical, mental, or emotional injury, or be deprived of any of the basic necessities of life. Once again, we always love to say the youth is our future. Well, let us protect them, colleagues, by making sure that individuals who are charged with child abuse and child neglect in the territory are given the tools, I repeat, they are given the tools to be able to have a second chance and to be able to be productive citizens in the territory. As I was told by some of my stakeholders who are in support of this bill, counseling is not

0:18:23 punishment. Counseling is a form of treatment. Counseling is not punishment. It's a form of treatment. And we know here in the territory we have some people who have got a pride. But you'll be surprised what will come out of a situation when you free up and you allow yourself to express your concerns and matters to a subject matter expert who can help you find yourself. Colleagues, I just want to remind everyone of a recent incident in March of 2021 where two adults were arrested on St. Croix and charged with child abuse and neglect. One of the adults was later charged with first degree attempted murder. He attempted to mislead the police by attempting to pass off another child as the one in question the minor in question was eventually found to be severely injured he had bleeding in the brain kidney failure and one of his lungs was ruptured the child had to be airlifted out of the territory for medical treatment october of 2000 2020 two adults arrested on st croix for child abuse minor children with heart abject and minors were treated for first and second degree burns also again march of 2021 an adult and saint john arrested for child abuse and neglect as well as multiple counts of rape and unlawful sexual contact july 2021 one adult arrested on saint thomas and charged with aggravated rape child abuse and unlawful sexual contact colleagues you must protect our youth And I know when I was the chairman of the Committee on Youth Sports, Parks and Recreation in my first term, I did many things within my power and my reach to make sure that I provide legislation to protect the children of the territory, because I, too, am a father, and I would like to see my children protected. Thank you, colleagues, for the time. Thank you very much, Senator James, for your eloquent introduction. Colleagues, before we move forward, we have a number of invited testifiers who are here today who will be participating in this hearing and we want to give them an opportunity to

- 0:20:48 introduce themselves first before we start with their prepared testimony. So we're going to ask all of the testifiers to turn on your cameras and we're going to do a mic check by having you introduce yourself, stating who you are, and your name, and, you know, what your job title is. Okay? So we're going to start by asking you all to turn on your cameras, please, so that we can do a mic check. I'm seeing JJ, CL, and SP. Can you please turn on your mics? I mean your cameras, sorry. Thank you, Senator Payne. I believe you have Clement Lewis. Lewis can you turn on your camera? Oh I thought it was I pressed the video and it's on and I can see it but I'm not sure why it's not coming up on the screen for you to see. I don't know if I'm doing something wrong but I can see me on the screen. My video is off my mic is off I don't know why it's not coming up like like khakis and Stephen Payne I'm not sure it's like a little small box this is something I need to do I think normally you would click the video camera that's what I did yeah should I go out and come back in maybe that'll
- 0:22:40 Maybe, Ms. Lewis, what we'll do, we'll take a one-minute recess, and I'll ask you to sign off and then sign back on, and hopefully that'll correct the problem. Okay. Thank you. Committee of Rules and Judiciary stands in recess for one minute. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
- 0:27:10 Committee on Rules and Judiciary is back on the record. Ms. Lewis, I'm seeing you clearly now. Ms. Barrett, I see you clearly also. I don't have Senator Payne, I am not seeing you. Okay. I'm not seeing you, but we will go ahead and have Ms. Lewis, please just do a mic check, introduce yourself, tell us who you are. Good morning, my name is Clema S. Lewis and I'm the Executive Director of the Women's Coalition of St. Croix.
- 0:27:57 Thank you very much. Ms. Lewis, Ms. Barrett. Good morning, I'm Kaki Barrett and I am the child and youth therapist at Family Resource Center. Excellent, thank you very much for being here, Ms. Barrett. Ms. John Straker. Okay, I'm not seeing you or hearing you, but we'll go ahead and we'll proceed.
- 0:28:29 Senator, Ms. Lewis, I'll ask you to proceed with your testimony. Okay. Good morning again. Honorable Senator Milton E. Potter, Chairman on Rules and Judiciary. Honorable Senator Kenny L. Giddens, Vice Chair, Committee Members, Honorable Senators Novell E. Francis, Carla J. Joseph, Franklin D. Johnson and other Honorable Senators present. Good morning. My name is Clema Lewis and I'm the Executive Director of the Women's Coalition, but I'm also representing, I'm the chairperson of the St. Croix Child Abuse Task Force, the co-chairperson of the Virgin Islands Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Council as well. So I'm I'm representing three private groups here as well. I've been working with children on the island of St. Croix for over 40 years, previously as a social worker, a school counselor, advocate, and a mentor. First, let me thank the Honorable Senator Potter again for inviting me to testify. The Women's Coalition of St. Croix is in support of bills number 340030, 340031, number 340032 they are amending the vi code chapter 24 section 505 relating to child abuse to require persons who abuse a child to seek treatment and counseling and also to be able to prohibit the superior court from issuing marriage license the women's coalition of st croix has been providing services to crime victims since its inception in We are currently happily celebrating 40 years of service to the St. Croix community. Some of our services include individual and family counseling, advocacy and support for children at court, school and agencies in the community, grief counseling and support to children, families, school and the community, parenting skill classes for minor adults and families. Our Junior Angels Program, sponsored by the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands. We place high school students in areas in the community where they can learn the importance of giving back to the community.
- 0:30:57 We also run teen sexual assault groups. We have trauma-informed care services to school early head start. So when there's a crisis on campus, normally we'll call them to provide the trauma counseling. We do outreach to schools, mostly that's DVSAC, but sometimes we do it as a team, churches, government agencies, and other community groups, and the Youth Rehabilitation Center as well, because we feel that's important. Workshops to professionals on the VI child abuse law and other community-based agencies or community members based on requests. The Women's Coalition strongly believes that children are a most precious resource, and we have a responsibility to protect them from harm. The law will allow abusers who hurt children to reclaim slash treatment based on the needs. We believe that child abuse is intergenerational because we've had four generations to see it last. and we need to reach out to families and members of the community and offer them with the skills they need to cope with life and raising children. If we can provide treatment and counseling to those who are abused, we may save some children from father abuse or even death. Child abuse is a horrific crime and it can last a lifetime without counseling or support. We provide counseling support and advocacy for 139 children on the island of st croix this past year who were either physically sexually or emotionally abused as well as neglected the national child advocate senate in 2019 estimated that 78 of children were victimized by a parent 22 of abusers were abused
- 0:32:50 themselves 20 to 25 percent of the children from the child advocacy cases were hurting other children but what's important about that stat is with treatment 98 never abused again we believe with counseling training support advocacy

parenting whatever is necessary we can decrease the amount of abuse of cases in the territory we also support bill number 34003 order speaks to prohibiting the superior court from issuing marriage license to any person under the age of 18. this bill speaks to the exploitation of our children in the territory under child marriages that have been used to keep child rapists out of jail as well as some parents selling their daughters for the lack of income. We have to protect our children because they're the future and we want them to make the future of the Virgin Islands a better place for future generations. We would like to take this opportunity to really thank Senator Giovanni James who's been a champion for children, Senator Franklin D. Johnson for sponsoring, and the day added Senator Carla Joseph and we'd like to thank you all for giving us a voice today i'm open for any questions thank you thank you very much for your tireless and selfless so thank you very much for all that you do for this community uh next we're going to ask miss khaki barrett to proceed with her testimony thank you um good morning chairman potter and other members of the committee on roles and and judiciary of the 34th legislature staff other testifiers the viewing and listening audience. Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you. My name is Kaki Barrett and it is my honor to

0:34:50 be here representing Family Resource Center in support of these bills amending the consequences for committing the crimes of child abuse and neglect. I am the child and youth therapist at Family Resource Center as well as the co-facilitator of the women's anger management and parenting support groups. Our executive director is off island or she would have been here and that's why it's you're stuck with me. And our director of counseling is attending domestic violence court as we do every Thursday. Family Resource Center is a non-profit agency helping victims of domestic violence, child abuse, sexual assault and rape human trafficking and other violent crimes. We also offer support services for family members.

0:35:36 All of this at no cost to our clients. Our other wraparound support includes court and victim advocacy emergency shelter and outreach programs to businesses schools and community organizations. In addition to our victim services we also offer psychoeducational support groups to perpetrators of child abuse and domestic violence. A youth anger management program is due to also start this and next month we will celebrate our 40th year serving the communities of St. Thomas and St. John and I'm so blessed to be a part of this organization. A little background on my experience and why I was asked to speak today. I have been working with children and their families for the past 35 years in a variety of roles. I began as a kindergarten teacher and then spent 16 years as a school counselor and behavior specialist in predominantly Title I schools where at least 95 percent of the student population were minority children living below the poverty level. I served as a contributing editor of a parenting magazine, have conducted parent and teacher training classes, designed and conducted outreach for students on topics such as good touch bad touch teen dating violence child abuse and conflict resolution. In my role as a school counselor I started a Cub Scout troop so some of my students didn't have to go home and witness their mothers turning tricks in their apartments. I have chained myself to dilapidated playground equipment just to protest how dangerous it was. I have chased down drug dealers and gang bangers just so they would sign a permission slip so their child could go on a field trip. I share this to leave no doubt that I, as well as Family Resource Center, have the fundamental belief that childhood is the most crucial, precious time that should be protected and

0:37:33 celebrated by all means at our disposal. Children are our most precious resource, and it is with this mindset I sit before you this morning to address not only what these important bills will do but why they are necessary especially the bills 34-0031 and 34-0032 which seek to increase requirements for perpetrators of child abuse and neglect by requiring the abuser to seek counseling this will have pro a profound impact on the lives of our children and help us build a more resilient and flourishing community the fundamental purpose of counseling is to help individuals groups and society optimize our well-being by helping people navigate through life's difficult situations by combining the aspects of guidance and psychotherapy counseling focuses on wellness through creating a collaborative relationship that helps us discover our strengths and positive values it is within the counseling relationship that clients gain awareness of thoughts emotions and behaviors that perpetrate and perpetuate a cycle of self-defeating behaviors and they learn what steps are needed to gain control with an increased cognizance of maladaptive coping skills recognition of our anger triggers and unrealistic expectations. A client in counseling can develop better ways to express thoughts and feelings in healthy and productive ways. The general benefit of counseling is the partnership between a counselor and client in which difficulties can be explored, new and different perspectives can be learned, and in which it facilitates positive change. Additionally, counseling and psychoeducational programs can help normalize programs, decrease stigma, while enhancing new skills.

0:39:38 The impact of the counseling relationship does not occur in a vacuum. As counseling improves the mental health and resiliency skills of an individual, the community reaps the benefits through economic and physical and emotional wholeness. Both individual and group counseling can help create strategies that bring about crucial behavioral changes, bring about opportunities for accountability and acceptance of responsibility in a safe and supportive environment. There is no harder job in the world than parenting. Even with the best intentions and the best skills, the day-to-day tasks involved in raising children can be draining on the emotional the physical and financial resources of parents and

caregivers when adults are faced with situations that result in the use of coping skills they have not learned or developed child abuse and neglect often result requiring offenders to receive counseling can help mitigate that we must recognize that child abuse is one of the most pervasive violations of human rights one of the least prosecuted crimes and our greatest threat to peace in our community without intervention prevention and education our children remain vulnerable to threats to their safety and healthy development the bills presented today will help address and alleviate family violence in our territory while sending a message that the quality of life for our children depends on all of us too often our tendency is to focus our efforts on helping victims and justifiably so repeated exposure to child abuse has serious long-term consequences for not only the victim but the community in which they live living with family

0:41:31 violence can create patterns of instability that cause addictive behaviors problems with impulse control in regulating emotions social dysfunction and can actually change the brain structure of a child which leads to cognitive distortions and lack of academic achievement however as victimization can only be generated after an act by the perpetrator services that focus on the risk factors and the maladaptive behaviors of offenders can help stem the tide of child abuse before it happens. If we were ever to have a positive influence on the cycle of violence it will be in part because we develop early and effective interventions for those who become perpetrators of violence. That I believe will be the outcomes of the bills 34-30-0031 and 34-0032 presented here today. These two bills mandating counseling for perpetrators of child abuse offers a systems by which offenders can learn strategies for overcoming and eliminating abusive behavior patterns. It is a big step in making our community making sure our community has the types of resources in place that protect and support our children. Through the processes of investing in social solutions including the implementation of laws and policies parenting programs and changing the harmful cultural norms we can change the life of our most valuable population.

0:43:07 Study after academic study tout the need for psycho educational counseling such as anger management and parent education in order to help mitigate the risk factors for parents and caregivers in perpetuating abuse and neglect. In appropriate counseling programs like those offered at Family Resource Center, offenders can explore topics such as anger triggers, thought distortions, and positive social relationships. Our participants control poor emotional regulation all by trying to heal from their own childhood traumas. Most perpetrators were victims first. Oh that was an ad-lib, sorry. By engaging in an in-depth exploration they can learn to divert their anger and accept responsibility while recognizing realistic boundaries of socially acceptable behaviors why is this important children who live in family violence are 30 times more likely to become either victims or perpetrators we have to stop the cycle to break the cycle of violence it is imperative that we limit exposure of abuse and neglect of our homes in our homes with the implementation of mandated counseling for perpetrators of child abuse we can provide a centralized focus on strengthening the coping skills offer treatment and education to help individuals create a better life for themselves and their families family resource center wholeheartedly supports these three bills as we move forward to serve and protect the most vulnerable in our community in closing i'd like to share a poem with you one man can awaken another the second can awaken his next door brother the three awake can arouse the town turning the whole place upside down and the many awake make such a fuss they finally awaken the rest of us thank you senators for your challenging

0:45:08 work and your commitment to the children and families of the virgin islands and in passing the bills thank you for making a fuss I remain available for any questions you may have thank you sincerely miss bad for your testimony here today and I it sounds like 40 is a magic number because the Family Resource Center has been around for 40 years and the women's coalition has been around for 40 years so that's a powerful coincidence thank you very much for all that you do for the work that you choose to do in this community for filling a real critical void in this community colleagues we will go ahead with our we have a statement Commissioner Kimberly Cusi Gomez could not be here today but she did provide a testimony which I'll be asked which I'll ask madam clerk to read into the record. Mr. Chair, the Virgin Islands Department of Human Services testimony on bill number 340030, bill number 340031, bill number 340032, presented on behalf of Commissioner Kimberly Kazi-Gomez. Good day, Honorable Senator Milton E. Potter, Chairman of the Rules and Judiciary Committee, committee members, other senators present, the listening and viewing audience. The Virgin Islands Department of Human Services is not available to testify at the committee hearing today, but offers written testimony to be read into the record on behalf of both Commissioner Kimberly Kazi Gomez and Assistant

0:47:05 Commissioner Carla Benjamin on the following bills sponsored by Honorable Senator Javon E James jr. bill number 340030 an act amending title for Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 11, Section 172, relating to the Virgin Islands Superior Courts jurisdiction over children to divest the court of jurisdiction over judicial consent for the marriage of a child sponsor, Wendy Johnson. bill number 340031 an act amending title 14 virgin islands code chapter 24 section 504 relating to the penalties for child neglect to require the convicted person to attend counseling in addition to imprisonment or fine and to require the convicted person to attend parenting classes if they are the parent of the affected child. Sponsored by Senator Javon E. James Sr. and co-sponsored by Senator Franklin D. Johnson.

- 0:48:28 Bill number 340032, an act amending Title 14, Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 24, Section 505, relating to child abuse to require the counseling and to require the convicted person to attend parenting classes if they are the parent of the sponsored of the affected child sponsored by senator javon e james senior and co-sponsor thank you for your awareness of these is critical issues and your dedication to protecting the children of the virgin islands We truly appreciate the opportunity to weigh in on this issue.
- 0:49:16 The Department of Human Services supports the passing of Bill No. 340030 in its entirety. The Department supports Bill No. 340031, which seeks to amend Title 14, Chapter 24, Section 504 of the Virgin Islands Code, captioned as Child Neglect and Bill No. 340032, which seeks to amend Title 14, Chapter 24, Section 505 of the Virgin Islands Code captioned as Child Abuse with a caveat.
- 0:49:59 DHS agrees that counseling may be helpful for those found guilty of child abuse or neglect because identifying and addressing the root causes of criminal behavior may help with preventing that behavior from reoccurring. Therefore, DHS supports the counseling requirement. However, DHS recommends that the parenting class mandate not be added to the criminal statute. Parents criminally charged with abuse and neglect will also have matters before the family court. The family court judge orders rehabilitative or ameliorative services with the goal of increasing parenting capacity and protecting the child. The family court is the better vehicle to address court-ordered parenting class or other supports needed for the protection of the child. We appreciate the meeting held prior to this committee hearing with Senator Devon E. James and the other testifiers to discuss our thoughts the challenges bills and the amendments made based upon our conversations. This concludes our presentation chairman this concludes our presentation chairman potter i would like to personally thank our department of human services team of professionals who have been on the front line providing direct services to our virgin islands community throughout the covet 19 pandemic the continued support of governor albert brian jr and lieutenant governor
- 0:51:48 Trogenza-Roach as DHS continues to be committed to working together to make a difference. This concludes the reading of the testimony. Thank you very much, Madam Clerk. Colleagues, we will proceed with a six-minute round, starting with Senator Joseph. Senator Joseph, If you may proceed with your six minutes. A pleasant good morning to you, Mr. Chairman, colleagues, and our testifiers, as well as our listening and viewing audience. Please know that I am definitely pleased, having worked many years in the trenches, providing service forms, not specifically with persons who may have the academic and clinical, but it can take place in a school, a classroom with your peers, pair-to-pair counselling, as well as in a religious setting, in a faith-based setting. It takes place all over. It does take place all over for us. It truly, it truly, that African adage that says it takes a village to raise a child is critical. And we are a small community.
- 0:53:16 I would like to commend the sponsor of bill number 34.0031 and 34-0032, I have signed on to co-sponsor those two, having seen some of the issues that we have encountered in our community when we don't have good counseling. I just want to commend the two ladies who testified from the Family Resource Center and, of course, everybody knows Ms. Clement Lewis from St. Croix. and for your testimony on this important matter and for taking time. And more importantly, to commend you, because the work that you do in the trenches in our community is critical, providing that level of counselling and guidance and support. Some persons don't realize that sometimes you even, with the program I used to manage, we used to have to go and do home visits, and I'm sure you do the same thing. And these were young people who were 16 and 24, they're not coming to class, I'm here knocking on their doors, sitting down in their homes, doing home visits, so that we could get them to that place where they are economically self-sufficient and they are positively contributing to their families, knowing that in the long run, they too will be parents. So we offer them that level of parenting skills. And I do still keep in contact with many of them, if not all. So they become a part now of your wider family. So it's critical.
- 0:55:06 But we have to really put in place that level of counseling, which is critical, and to assure that our persons who abuse, that they are mandated to actually provide and be able to get some of the services for counseling. I do want to point out, and I really concur with the testimony that was read into the record from Commissioner Cosi Gomez, who is the Commissioner of the Department of Human Services, relative to offering the judge, the family court judge, the ability to make certain decisions based on the evidence that have been put before them. Not everything is a lockstep when we're dealing with human beings. We definitely want to be able to have that level of evidence. So she did mention that in her testimony that the family court judge orders rehabilitative and other services with the goal of increasing parenting capacity.
- 0:56:18 So we may want to look at the parenting class mandate because the family judge would be and human services would get involved in all of these issues to find out what is the best fit and to help the persons who are perpetrators of child neglect and or child abuse. I, again, just want to really commend the sponsor of that legislation. I did also want to ask the sponsor of the legislation, Mr. Chairman, if I may, relative to, and also the two testifiers relative to 34.0030. I understand that the

age of consent is 18. However, if I am in love and I'm younger and I'm in love with this human boy who is 17 and I am 17 myself and, you know, life happens and sometimes you don't want to but you're so in love what do you do should I become pregnant?

0:57:36 What is the recourse? So he will now go to jail too? That's my only concern. And we grew up in a Christian household. So can I get married to this young man? That's my question, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much. Senator Joseph, are you seeking a response from the testifiers, or? Senator Potter, I would like to say something.

0:58:22 Go ahead, go ahead, Ms. Lewis. I would like to say, number one, the age of consent is 16, not 18. That's the issue. That's why we're trying to bring the marriage up to 18. Right now, you can consent to have sex anyway at the age of 16, up to five years and over. So we're trying to say that they have to be 18 to get married Because what has happened historically is that when young women engage, when older men engage sexual activities with young girls and get them pregnant, they run and marry them or they pay the parents off so they don't have to be penalized for rape.

0:59:05 So that's the whole purpose of protecting young people. And Senator Joseph, I believe that if we're 16, if we're 17 and in love, if we love each other that much, we could wait another year. waiting to 18 is not going to break the bond if the love is that heavy and if i'm pregnant by him and i'm 17 hopefully him myself and his parents will all get together and help me take care of the child until i'm 18 but it it doesn't prohibit them from being on with their life and you know young love and real love is another story we want to just make sure these young people are 18 everything here is you have to be 18 to drive you have to be 18 to drink we want to make sure you have to be 18 to continue to engage in sex and make decisions for the rest of your life and that's what that's one of the main purposes of that um piece there i'm just speaking to that the other piece i want to add to uh uh senator joseph you mentioned about the parenting thing um if i could weigh in on that i've been running parenting classes for 13 years and 75 percent of my parents come from the department of human services and even though the judge might order it and human service are ordered the parents don't come unless they're threatened so to take that piece out then i'll get from the social workers when they don't attend well we can't make them miss lewis or it's not mandated i and you heard uh khaki speaking from family resource center we have a proven record of the parents we work with we've seen the difference it make and we feel like it's an i feel and khaki could speak for herself the importance of keeping that peace and the legislation because if not it's going to be left up to the parents and let's be real about our community if we're not pushed forced or told we're going to go to jail or whatever we're really

1:01:00 not going to do it and that's why their piece is so important point of information sir james thank you mr chair for the opportunity for the point of information colleagues i just want to remind everyone that we have two amendments before us that's amendment 34-200 and amendment 34-201 and the section of concern when it comes to to the Department of Human Services is this section. In addition to a term of imprisonment or fine, a court shall require the person to attend counseling in accordance with any terms and conditions as the court may specify.

1:01:48 Counseling mandated under this subsection must include abuse and assault intervention programs. In addition, if, and I repeat, if the convicted person is the parent of the affected child, the convicted person shall also attend parental classes. What we are doing is not reinventing the wheel, this is a practice in other jurisdictions in the U.S. mainland, so if you're the parent of the child, having parental classes will not hurt you. Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the time. Thank you very much, Senator. James, Ms. Lewis and Ms. Barra, does the Women Coalition and the Family Resource Center, do you do parenting classes or parenting workshops? Yes, sir. We've been doing it for 13 years. Okay.

1:02:42 And Family Resources Center just does parenting, and it is usually either court-ordered or mandated by DHS the participants in our parenting class okay and for us it's also voluntary if the parents they just want to take the classes they're welcome and they're free and confidential and they're free okay okay they are free that's the most important and confidential excellent excellent thank you very much for that and you know and senator joseph the law right now as it exists you have to be 18 years of age for the court to issue you a marriage license. So even as much love as you may be feeling at age 17, you know, you hold on for another year because no court in the Virgin Islands will sanction it. You cannot be issued a marriage license.

1:03:34 I believe a good senator was responsible for making that adjustment in a prior legislature. Alright, let's proceed. Next up, we're going to ask Senator Payne, you're recognized for your six minutes. Senator Payne? Okay, we will get back to Senator Payne. Hon. Francis, you're recognized for your six minutes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

1:04:16 Good morning to you. Good morning to the people of the Virgin Islands. And, of course, good morning to the testifiers. I, first of all, want to commend the bill's sponsor for bringing forward this very important piece of legislation before us today. And it's really about how do we break the cycle. Obviously, when you have individuals that have been abused, the potential possibility or chances are that they, too, will become abusers. So it's all about breaking this cycle. I want to thank the testifiers for their testimony today.

- 1:04:55 Hi, Clement. How are you doing today? As well as Ms. Kaki Barrett, thank you for your testimony. I certainly appreciate reading that. So I stand in support of all of the three important proposed legislation, as I've indicated, and I really want to commend the bill's sponsors. You're protecting and safeguarding our youth from any form of abuse and neglect, be it mental, physical, spiritual, sexual, psychological, emotional, rest with all of us. Whatever we can do, again, to ensure that we're protecting our young people, we have to. People fall in and out of love. In love today?
- 1:05:38 Tomorrow, out of love. So, yes, you know, while you may want to be married at the age of 17, you know, certainly after recognizing and living with each other for a period of time, then we have situations where they want to fall apart, and certainly it creates some blood blood between them. You know, some countries allow for individuals to be married at a young age. Under doing some research, I see that 1.5 million individuals in one particular country get married under the age of 18. 16% of adolescent girls, 15 to 19, are currently married. Child marriage can end your childhood. Child marriage not just impacts the girls directly, but also impacts the family and the community.
- 1:06:41 So I believe that the testimony that has been put forth by both Ms. Barrett and Ms. Clement Lewis certainly set the tone, as well as I have had the opportunity to work within the Youth Investigation Bureau over the years and see some of the child abuse cases that have come before us. And I know how important it is for us to be able to close those loopholes and be able to move in a different direction. And so certainly I believe that the time is right for us to do that. Clema, I just wanted to really pick your brain real quick. You know, while we do have you in respect to some of the younger marriages that you have seen, have you had the opportunity, again, to provide counseling to those type of individuals? Have you even provided support to parents? even in instances where we have young females that have been impregnated?
- 1:07:44 Yeah, and that's my concern with the bill. We've had definitely the opportunity to work with the families. What we've seen over the years is when the young people get forced to get married by either the church or the parents because they want to save face or they do it under religious pretense, the young woman ends up being abused the child is not taken care of her life is ruined because she can't even go back to school because she have to take care of the child it's very rare at those young ages that we excuse me okay it's very rare that I've seen couples that young get married and it's a positive turnout so we really try to encourage them to wait not to get pregnant to take care of themselves. But my history with the families, and I've had parents call me after the fact. They feel bad that they agreed to let him get married because now he's not paying support and his family is not paying support. So now they want to go back to court. So a lot of it is really tied up into economics and who's going to take care of the baby. It's really not about the quality of life for that young woman who gets pregnant and the baby because the young man can continue to go to school he can continue with his life but hers tend to stop so that's why we think this legislation is so important. Thank you very much for Ms. Lewis. Ms. Barrett would you like to weigh in on that as well? I don't think I could add anything that Clema didn't mention. I totally agree She's been around a long time and certainly have been up against some of these very...
- 1:09:29 For the resources that we have locally, I remember one case in particular where there was an arranged marriage that had been put together and obviously you had the rebellious youngsters that say, I'm going to get married. There the Virgin Islands Police Department, the Youth Investigation Bureau had had had to investigate the missing missing report of these youngsters and for years and years we were had an open case and I know that even situation we're missing an applied time children agencies were brought in to investigate that matter and years and years later we had determined that those individuals had actually ran away and went to Tennessee consequential to that arranged marriage and had refused to be married at that given time. And, you know, the resources that had been expended by the Virgin Islands Police Department consequential to that report was one that really left the community in uproar as to what had transpired during that report of missing minors.
- 1:10:43 So, you know, we have had an experience of our challenges as well. So I believe that the The legislation that's before us, again, is something that I could support because I've lived it and I've seen it in terms of investigating some of these matters, and I will be supporting it at the appropriate time. And like the bill sponsor have indicated, there's a number of amendments to certainly strengthen those concerns that have been raised by the Department of Human Services. So with those amendments, I'll be supporting these measures moving forward. Thank you very much for the time, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much, Senator Francis. Senator Payne, you are recognized for your six minutes.
- 1:11:23 Can you hear me, Mr. Chair? Very loud and clear, Senator Payne. Okay, thank you. Thank you very much for the time. Good morning to the testifiers. Good morning to the listening and interviewing audience. Thank you, thank you, thank you to the Family Resource Center and the Women's Coalition and all the agencies that actually dedicate and provide valuable services to the children of the Virgin Islands. We are better as a society because of the hard and diligent work that you do to make our home a more resilient Virgin Islands for our young people. Thank you. Mr. Chair, I strongly believe that there is absolutely no circumstance, none whatsoever, which a child should be afforded opportunity to obtain a marriage licenses in our society we need a license to fish a license to drive a license to own and operate a business a

license to marry a license to fly a plane we want a firearm even to be a social worker but no license to be a parent but Mr. Chair we saved that for another discussion I must say kudos to the bill sponsor and bringing these measures forward he's someone I'm not ashamed to say because someone I consider to be very sharp and forward thinking and Senator James is an I consider it a privilege and an honor to serve alongside you he held my utmost respect and as sad as it is in our society unfortunately most of the child abuse most of the children who suffer child abuse do so by a family member or close friend

1:13:22 ah in my former career both as a law enforcement officer most of the cases i worked on were actually sexual assault cases and abuse against minors some of these cases tear apart or families and separate them for decades and even though as a community we look towards punishment of the perpetrator there should be a strong push towards counseling and statistics have shown that most of the offenders actually um who abuse themselves as children and they are actually just contained that vicious cycle neglect and abuse impacts a child for decades short deformative years and goes well into their other life and if left untreated it actually leads into their own family life and miss correct let me ask you um given the variety of counseling programs that have been offered at the family resource center have you all conducted a robust analysis of the effectiveness of the council program used and if so can you share the methodologies to use for analyzing the effectiveness of your programs as well as details of your findings well the the parenting part is relatively new and most of our data collection is based on how many return people how many people are court ordered to return the women's anger management the recidivism rate is very low. In the last five years I think we've had two repeaters. And since the parenting class is relatively new it is a 12-week cycle and so you know we don't really have a whole lot of data on that.

1:15:11 DIRECTOR DEWOLF- Two minutes. DIRECTOR DEWOLF- Thank you for your response. Ms. Lewis in regard to counseling for the offender let me ask you how important is it to offer counseling services to other family members as well as children who reside in the house and witnessed the abuse yeah that's why i think the parenting program is so important in the family uh the family counseling as well because you have the childless abuse you have more than likely and 80 both parents participated in abuse or one parent was there but couldn't do anything about it and what people don't understand those children are witnessing and watching and sometimes children are being forced to family members it is so critical that we work with the whole family when we get calls of child abuse the first thing i tell my staff you gotta intake the whole family we got to see what the family needs and we got to work with the family you can't take one or two people and think you're gonna make them whole because when they go back you still got the injured party so the putting the family together as a whole is critical the abuser needs help the victims need help and most importantly our children need to support and help so it's critical and we make sure that we bring the family together regardless of what we do here the end result is bringing that family together if they want to go back together let's be honest some families shouldn't have been together in the first place and some people shouldn't be together but at least they'll get to that point on their own it won't be up to us they might realize that weeks months years down the line but the whole purpose is is to make the family better whether you're together or not and supportive and learn how to co-parent whether we living together or not we're both parents and we can have healthy children and we can raise our families healthy as co-parents that's what we got to teach our community about time okay mr j can i wrap up please yes you may

1:17:15 send it okay okay lastly uh miss barrett and miss louis this is the question for you both we'll be going to miss barrett and miss louis you can wrap up um can you take a few minutes to tell a listen of your audience uh what are the warning signs of child abuse and what's on what steps you should be taken if the suspect that a child is suffering from child abuse um the biggest thing that the thing that i tell people to look for is if there's been a dramatic change in a child's behavior if at one time they were very outgoing and boisterous and they become quiet if one if they were very complacent and quiet but they become combative drastic our children tell us what's going on with them through their behavior and so when you see a drastic change that's a red flag something is going on and so you know if if someone suspects that a child is being abused there is they need to call human services they can call family resource center or women's coalition if they're unsure but it's not it's not our job to investigate but it is our job to report and protect the children our children can't protect themselves they need the adults that are around them and it's you don't have you know if someone suspects they don't need to know for sure they just need to reach out to dhs to family um resource center or women's coalition um or they can call the police department as well they can call now one one and what some parents or neighbors do or family members they are afraid to make the call because they don't want repercussions so they'll call my agency and say this is going on and we will make the call for them as long as i have all the information i will do the report for them if that's going to get them to make the report so we also do that as well to help it through so it's important if you know a child is being abused i think khaki said it great you might be wrong you might be right even if you suspect you should say something because the children can't protect themselves and at least if you make the report human services and the police can go and investigate and if it's not child abuse i'm willing to bet is probably neglect or some other dynamics taking place therefore they can refer them and that's what normally happens human services and the police do the investigation and then family

resource and women's coalition do the follow-up counseling, support, and all the backup work. That's how we work together as a team.

1:19:57 OK, ladies, thank you so very much for the answers. Mr. Chair, thank you very much for the time. Thank you very much, Senator Payne. Point of information, point of inquiry, Senator Joseph. Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. This question can be handled either by Ms. Barrett or Ms. Lewis. In your, because you ladies are social scientists similar to myself in your experience and putting forward the type of counseling that you do do you have evidence-based counseling as far as the parenting or any of the other counseling components that work specifically and have shown evidence of really transforming the person from being abuser to be more responsible individual?

1:20:58 I don't have evidence-based backup in terms of evidence-based in terms of a program. You can come in and say it's evidence-based, Senator. But what we do have is documentation and the records that who have who who returns who we've seen success with um and we do follow-up and we monitor them we do pre and post tests and we keep documentation on who received service who did who followed through who comes back so we have that kind of uh base evidence base but we don't have the the community the evidence base in terms of creating a whole program around evidence base that you can just take out and put it out there at least we don't at the coalition I don't know if Family Resource Center do I don't think so because normally we don't really have time to do all that to be honest to do all that piece the parenting and the acre management programs at Family Resource Center are based in evidence-based theories cognitive behavior therapy co-parenting cognitive behavior however in order to create the programs that are specific to our client's needs and that's how we come up with the program if this is what the parent needs this is the topic we discuss and so it's like Clema said it's I've got a notebook but it's not something I can hand off to somebody and say here you go do this program I think what I'm sending to Joseph to we we are our services around our community and not a lot of evidence-based work in in this culture and this community so my parenting classes have been catered and worked around and created based on our community our culture and what's needed here and that don't always work for what comes out of the community-based stuff and out of the mainland so thank you ladies I just wanted to just find out your understand clearly and I don't want

1:23:13 to in any mean or have it implied or perceived that I don't appreciate what you do because you do a lot of work and that evidence comes out just like you said Miss Lewis from those persons who have returned you're checking and making sure everything is in place and you're supporting that family by providing the wrap-around required and needed wrap-around services and you're also tracking that family to assure that they are following their counseling and goals and meeting their goals so that is what I was looking to hear from you a little bit so we could put it on the record all of the complexities that goes into to counseling and providing that level of service to families, it's a lot of work.

1:24:11 And again, I want to commend you two ladies for staying the course and being able to provide that work unceasingly. Thank you kindly, Mr. Chairman, for the time. Thank you, Senator Joseph. Mr. Johnson, you're recognized for your six minutes. Good morning. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Good morning to my colleagues. Good morning to the listening, viewing audience. And a special good morning to Ms. Clement Lewis and Ms. Kaki Barrett. You know, I really want to start off by saying thank you, thank you, thank you for all the the work that you do in this territory to help our young children and families. It's a job that I don't know how you do it, actually. I've been on the next side of the fence. I've been fortunate to work in the prison system and around the court system. And when you see some of the abuse and hear of some of the cases, it's such a challenging thing to thing to go home and lay down in your bed knowing what has happened to a child or a woman or anybody individually.

1:25:26 So I must say to you guys, thank you, thank you, thank you. In my years of working in the prison and also in the court system, I must share a story of mine that I pretty much came close to losing my job. And the reason why I came close to losing my job to the prison, I knew of a case where an individual had abused a child and me and that individual got into a confrontation and what was in the back of my head was what he had done to that child and I was aggressively trying to do anything to take that individual out with the knowledge that I had in my mind. And so happened an ex-prisoner got involved and avoided me from doing something that I would end up being in prison. And many days working to the district court and seeing the different cases of child abuse coming through those courts, seeing what has happened to our children, I must say that we have to do something to make sure that this type of case and situation does not continue. If you walk up to a bear tomorrow morning and try to molest her cub, that bear will do any and everything to tear you apart in protecting her cub. we must, as leaders and elected officials, do any and everything to protect our children. It wasn't with any doubt or any fear of me to join on and be a co-sponsor with these three different measures that I see will be definitely a help in our system to protect our children. look at the child marriage and what you call it it's a shotgun wedding you might not want to say that but that's what it is and we must do everything to avoid shotgun weddings it doesn't last many of time and many occasion we must protect our children and I understand and I thank Senator James

dearly for bringing me on board and sharing this information and it was easy for me

- 1:27:57 to be a part of it based on my work experience. I must say these are three very important pieces of legislation that we definitely have to move forward and make sure that our children have a better chance in life, especially our females. You know, I listened to James Brown saying it's a man's world, but it's nothing without a woman or a girl. And we have to protect that child to make sure that she becomes that adult woman in this community.
- 1:28:34 Again, I say thank you very much to the testifiers and for all what they have done and continue to do to make this community a better place for all of us. I definitely have one simple question to Ms. Kaki Merritt and Ms. Clement Lewis, and it's basically with, it's more than one question, but I'll ask this particular one at this time. What impact do child marriage have on the overall child life when it comes to education, when it comes to health, and when it comes to livelihood? If each of you could just chime in a little bit on that, I really appreciate that.
- 1:29:14 children get married early they're less likely to finish high school so therefore they don't meet their potential earned income potential their growth is stifled i know they'd like to think they're grown-ups at about 18 but your brains aren't fully developed until you're 25 26 and so when children enter into adult situations they get into they get in over their head they don't understand you know they don't fight fair they don't you know they don't relate very well and so these marriages are much more likely to you know perpetrate abuse end up broken marriages if they're getting married because they're pregnant then you've got a teenager a single parent teenager raising a child who hasn't finished high school not gone on to college or to trade school their livelihood is um diminished and then they perpetuate the abuse and neglect all over again i just want to say ditto kathy covered kathy did a great job i just want to add the piece about i would say uh senator johnson about maybe 60 of the young women that come through my office have not completed their education yeah and most of them has been because they have anywhere from three to five children and they range in the age of 18 to 35. that should be your answer they don't have any skills they have all these babies they can't get a job and so they only have five years of welfare so they end up going with older men or men who gonna take care of them and then it just perpetrates the cycle of violence and that's what I want to say to that it's just not a good
- 1:31:06 thing for young women or young men not to have the potential to be who they can be all statistics show the more education they have the more independent they come and a better contributor to our society that's the bottom line thank you very much Mr. Chair I'll wrap up on this and I I really want to say thank you very much again to these two young ladies. But it's also interesting when you listen to the ratio that Ms. Lewis gave. 98% of those that get counselling, that get help, does not commit that act again. That's why these three legislations really go hand in hand, and we definitely must make sure that we afford these counselling and make sure that our children are protected. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for the time. Thank you very much, Senator Johnson.
- 1:31:59 And for the testifiers, the court reporters who are participating virtually reminded me to ask you to state your names when you begin to speak, just so they can track you without having to guess. So thank you very much for that. Mr. Gittins, you are recognized for your six minutes. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good morning to all. We certainly have a responsibility to protect our future, and therefore I want to take this opportunity to commend the bill's sponsor and all those who have signed on to these measures that seeks to further protect our children here in the territory i also commend and thank the testifiers in their respective capacities for working with the bill's sponsors on this measure you know You know, according to previous research that I did, widespread failure to protect our children is a global crisis. So I'm happy to see us here today having these discussions, and experience certainly matters. I'm happy to see Ms. Clema Lewis, a special good day to you, and to see that you're still continuing with your work.
- 1:33:47 And I say experience matters because when you speak, I notice that you continue to speak. As this discussion is about our children, you continue to speak about both the male and the female. Well, oftentimes we think that only women get raped, et cetera, just for an example. And again, if we look at research, there was a research that I did, I can't remember for what year it was, but there was somewhere like upwards of 170 million girls raped, while reports of males being raped was only about upwards of 70 million.
- 1:34:32 But again, you could only imagine that those are only those that were reported. So again, I'm happy that our discussion today speaks to children and not necessarily one particular gender. Now, while I support all three measures, I certainly wish that others, such as the Attorney General's Office, the Bar Association, and the Public Defender's Office, etc., had an opportunity to weigh in on this important discussion and be part of this. I do intend to support all three measures at the appropriate time. However, before these measures are voted upon, I just wanted to say that 0030, the first bill, seeks to bring the code into compliance with each other or to mesh with each other, Whereas the course jurisdiction over children should not be granting any consent for marriage of children. This is totally in opposition to a measure that the good chief sponsor of this bill sponsored before. So we just have to bring both into compliance with each other. However, 0031 and 0032, before the measures reach to the full body, the sponsors should identify proper funding for these two measures as

both measures places the responsibility of the Honorable and the Department of Human Services through the Commissioner to make sure that the counselling takes place. However, putting any of these mandates on the respective agencies, I'm saying we just need to make sure that we're not pushing another unfunded mandate. We already know that the Department of Human Services have a humongous task on their

1:37:01 hands and I just want to make sure that they have the financial resources to execute what we're putting in place. Again, I do support all three measures. However, I ask the sponsors to let's look at the funding source. Human Services does not have an unfunded mandate to ensure that these counselling takes place. Thank you again, and let's continue to protect our precious resources, our future in our children. Thank you so much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the sponsors. Thank you, testifiers, for your input today as well. Thank you very much Senator Gittins. Point of Inquiry, point of information Senator James. Thank you Mr. Chair for the time. I just want to place on the record quickly that we met with Ms. Clema Lewis from the Women's Coalition, Ms. Stuart and Barrett of the Family Resource Center, we met with Junior John Straker for the Lutheran Social Services, Ms. Ulster Huber, formerly of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Counseling, Mr. Tariq McMillan of Greater Changes, Judge Jessica Gallivan, Ms. Brenda Bally of the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands Family Court, and also Commissioner Cassie Gomez and Assistant Commissioner Carla Benjamin of the Department of Human Services. We did discuss the whole conversation with funding, and during the conversation, it was made mention that they are funding for certain things, and we were going to put certain things in the amendment, but it said that we're going to leave it up to the judge.

1:38:56 So the judge is the one who determines whether it will be while the person is serving in jail, because I think in the Bureau of Corrections, they do have those forms of counseling that can be offered in jail. If the person can afford it, then they will deal with it, whether in jail or out of jail. But that will be at the discretion of the judge. So we didn't want to over-legislate. Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the term. Thank you very much for that clarification, Senator James. Senator James, you are recognized for your six minutes. Thank you, colleagues, for this wonderful conversation that we had here today. and I will make it very clear no one is above the law even though we make the laws so this applies to me as well this applies to every single one of us so I will say this much I want to thank my hard working staff by the way for the patience and many meetings that we held regarding bill numbers 34-0030 0031 and 0032 I also want to say a special thank you to my summer intern he's a fast learner and colleagues watch out for this one whether he's on the private sector the public sector this guy is a fast learner he's just absorbing everything and as we speak about counseling I see myself as a counselor and a mentor when it comes to this young man so Mr. Trey Francis thank you for being with us this summer and as far as individuals who are accused of child abuse and child neglect there's a thing called behavioral patterns and sometimes you pick it up from the time they're in elementary school sometimes from from time someone is in elementary school you know that person is just going to be a troublemaker and it's not to say that you're judging them it's not to say that it's the end of the world for them

1:40:52 but as guidance counselors in the school we have to pay attention to these behavioral patterns because if we missed it, then it rolls over into the adult life. I am here today because I had many mentors and counselors. If you don't believe me, ask me to go to the former principal who is a finance chair. He was my principal. But they were able to identify those behavioral patterns from all of you. So what we want to do by providing these pieces of legislation is to make sure that, yes, that person may be incarcerated. But at the same time, when you come back into society and you already pay or do your time, we want to make sure that there's some level of rehabilitation there. And this is not a 100% guarantee that a person will be rehabilitated. But I can tell you this much.

1:41:40 As much as anyone wants to consider themselves to be hardcore and gangsters and bad people, most of the time somebody just wants somebody to talk to. And that is why I put the trust in the experts such as Ms. Clement Lewis and all the stakeholders who provided input on this legislation. I am not a subject matter expert. This was a team effort, and I really want to say thank you to the testifiers and my colleagues for weighing in on this important measure. And one thing about the Virgin Islands Code, we might think that we're doing a great thing here today. And in the next legislature, somebody will say, well, hey, you have another way to strengthen it.

1:42:18 So this is an ongoing conversation when it comes to protecting our children in the territory. But today, we're taking the first step. Yes, we can leave it to the discretion of the judge, but sometimes judges make mistakes. And that is why we are the law of making body that makes sure that when individuals who are charged with child abuse and child neglect go before a judge, we as leaders are saying, Judge, this is the right thing to do. And like I repeat and I repeat, counseling is not a form of punishment. It's treatment.

1:42:55 It's giving an individual a second chance to get back into society. Because as we speak about behavioral patterns, behavioral patterns that just go untouched turns into a monster. I remember when I lost my dad and he passed away. I was going through a down spiral. And my brother told me, Javon, if you don't get some help, you're going to become a

prisoner of your own mind.

- 1:43:22 And here in the territory, we went through Hurricanes Alma Maria, we went through Hurricane Hugo, we went to Hurricane Marilyn. Now we're going through this pandemic. Two minutes. And as a result of these traumatic experiences in the U.S. Virgin Islands, you'd be surprised that people just fall into a dung spiral. And it's not to say it's an excuse for them abusing their child, but sometimes you're so angry because you can't pay the WAPA bill. the rules them jack up, can't fix your vehicle the cars that live in the territory out of reaction, you just get upset and you abuse your child now that is not an excuse for abusing a child but when you commit these acts you're going to pay for it and I'm asking my colleagues once again to keep in mind, just next door we had Jeffrey Epstein for about two decades, run a conspiracy against our young men and women and there are many Jeffrey Epsteins in the Virgin Islands and we're going to take care of them. You're going to seek counseling to child abuse and child neglect. But once again, when you look up in the Virgin Islands, quote, the definition for these acts, something is wrong with a person mentally. And it can be any one of us, but that's at least, you know to yourself, you have a second chance by receiving counseling. And I just want to use my remaining of the time to just speak to the two testifiers who have been very patient with us here today as we brought these two measures forward when it comes to the parenting classes are these classes expensive well what's the average price of these classes i don't want people to feel like it's some expensive
- 1:45:07 thing you could find money to buy spinning rims you could find money to buy the latest ipad and iphones but something that could rehabilitate you your friend excuse me and say you can't afford it how much do these classes cost so let me just say all both my services and family all our services are free and that's i think that's probably one of the issues with some of the people that have issues with the bill we don't charge for anything parenting counseling support everything we do that's why we apply for lepc grants and we do fundraising so we can provide these service free to the community i'm hoping in my lifetime because i'm i'm coming to the end that there'll never be a time where family needs help and they can't get help because there's no bad they don't have the money and that's where our two agencies come in people you might not have money for a \$135 therapist or \$300 therapist, but you can walk into either one of our agencies and all you have to do is be willing to get help and make a change. And that's why we're here.
- 1:46:13 Once again, I just want to say thank you to testify as individuals can find money to buy big set, white dog and cock and ass and all these things, which I'm not saying they can't invest in those things but invest in your mind counseling if need be but then again it's free thank you mr chair for the time and thank you colleagues for waiting on this in these important measures and like i said the good thing about the virgin islands code it can always be amended so years or now somebody may find a better idea but for now this is the idea and this is the treatment god bless the virgin islands as you protect our children thank you mr chair thank you very much Thank you very much, Senator James. I definitely applaud Senator James for this initiative. I know that child abuse and neglect destroys families. It really does.
- 1:47:07 And if our families are in crisis without a doubt, our communities will be in crisis. And I think a lot of what we're seeing right now is a manifestation of our families in crisis. and I think this is visionary legislation recognizing the importance and the value of counseling. Counseling works. It doesn't perform magic because the counselee has to do the work also, but it is something that has proven to be effective over the years. I know in a past life I served as a counselor. I did some work briefly on a part-time basis at family resource center which i definitely see the value of that organization quietly and behind the scenes doing some major work in this community and i did a co-counseling a program called a men terminating violence program or mtv for short those men were ordered by the court they had an option either go to jail or to go to counseling so as you would imagine They opted to go to counseling, but they were not very happy to be there, 90% of the times. My expectation, they really exceeded my expectation. I was surprised. I expected pushback and pouting and anger. Probably got that the first day, but eventually we got young men and older men who were appreciative of the tools and the skills that they learned during those sessions and i saw transformation taking place in these young men so i mean i do believe that replicating that program will put a dent on improving the quality and the caliber of the families that we're producing in this community.
- 1:49:09 If our families are in crisis, our community will be in crisis, and a lot of what we're seeing in the form of gun violence is a manifestation of our families that need significant attention. So I do support Senator James' initiative, and I think it will go a long way towards strengthening families in our community. colleagues we've exhausted a round of questioning point of inquiry point of inquiry senator senator payne you're recognized for your point of inquiry uh thank you very much uh miss lewis and miss burke um i know i heard you say that um the counseling and so the services provided to the community is free but uh is that cost to the to your agency well the basic cost of of salaries, materials overhead, but we don't charge, but it does cost us money to put on the program. Yes, Senator.
- 1:50:15 It definitely costs the agencies, and that's why we write grants. Yeah. And that's where we get the VOCA, Victims of Crime Act money, and the Violence Against Women Act money. Those funds are used to provide these services at the

two agencies, And we do fundraising, and that's why we'll now to provide the services free. Okay. Thank you very much for that, ladies. Thank you. Thank you for the time, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much, Senator James. Colleagues, we've exhausted our round of questioning. We will proceed with taking action on these initiatives right now. So, do I hear?

- 1:51:03 Motion. Motion? Senator Johnson, you're recognized for your motion. Mr. Chair, I move that bill number 34-0030, sponsored by Senator Javon James, Sr., and Act Amending Title IV, Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 11, Section 172, relating to the Virgin Islands Superior Court jurisdiction over children to divest the court of jurisdiction over judicial consent for the marriage of a child. I move that this be voted on favorably in the Committee of Rules and Judiciary and be forwarded to the full body for further consideration. I so move.
- 1:51:46 Second. Second. Was I second? Properly moved by Senator Johnson, seconded by Senator Payne and Senator, did I miss a second? Second? On St. Croix? Senator Francis second. Seconded by Senator Payne and Senator Francis. Roll call on bill number 34.0030. Senator Novell E. Francis, Jr.
- 1:52:20 Yay. Senator Francis, yay. Senator Kenneth L. Gittins. Yes. Senator Gittins, yay. Senator Franklin D. Johnson. Yay. Senator Johnson, yay. Senator Carla J. Joseph. Senator Joseph, yay. Senator Stephen D. Payne, Sr. Yes.
- 1:52:46 Senator Payne, yay. Senator Milton E. Potter, yes. Senator Potter, yay. Senator Genevieve R. Whitaker and Senator Whitaker absent. Mr. Chair, we have six yay, one absent. Thank you very much. Colleagues, Bill Number 34-0030, an act amending Title IV Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 11, Section 172, Relating to the Virgin Islands Superior Court's jurisdiction over children to divest the court of jurisdiction over judicial consent for the marriage of a child has been favorably considered by the Committee on Rules and Judiciary and will be forwarded to the full body for further consideration. Congratulations. Motion.
- 1:53:42 Motion. Senator Johnson, you're recognized for your motion. Mr. Chair, I move that Amendment No. 34-200 to Bill No. 34-0031 is amended by striking all the language after the enact clause and insert new language that reads as follows. Section 3, Section 1, Title 14, Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 24, Section 504, is amended by designating the existing provision. Motion. Motion. Motion. Senator Francis, you recognize your motion.
- 1:54:22 Motion, Mr. Chair. You recognize your motion, Senator Francis. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair and colleagues, I waive the motion that we waive the reading of the amendment at this time. I so move. Second. Moved by Senator Francis, seconded by Senator Payne, objection, Senator Joseph? Okay, roll call on the amendment.
- 1:54:55 I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. This is on 0031. The amendment to 0031. Okay. Um, Senator Novelli Francis Jr. Yes. Senator Francis Yeh. Senator Kenneth L. Gittins. Yes. Senator Kittin, Senator Gittins, yay. Senator Franklin D. Johnson, yay. Senator Johnson, yay. Senator Carla J.
- 1:55:34 Joseph, Senator Joseph, nay. Senator Steven D. Payne, senior. Yes. Senator Payne, yay. Senator Senator Milton E. Potter, yes. Senator Potter, yay. Senator Genevieve R. Whitaker, Senator Whitaker, absent. Mr. Chair, we have five yay, one nay, one absent. Thank you very much, Madam Clerk. The amendment, the motion carries.
- 1:56:11 I so move. Second. Motion. Roll call on the amendment. Roll call on the amendment. Senator Novell E. Francis Jr.
- 1:56:40 yay senator francis yay senator kenneth l gittins senator kenneth l gittins yes senator gittins yay senator franklin d johnson yay senator johnson yay senator carla j joseph Senator Joseph nay. Senator Steven D Payne Sr. Yes. Senator Payne yay. Senator Milton E Potter. Senator Potter yay. Senator Genevieve R Whitaker. Senator Whitaker absent. Mr. Chair we have five yay one nay one absent thank you very much madam clerk the amendment carries motion motion is johnson you're recognized for your motion mr chair i move that bill number 34 zero zero three one as amended sponsored by senator jevan james who sponsor senator franklin johnson and Carla Joseph, and Act Amending Title 14, Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 24, Section 504, relating to the penalties for child neglect required a convicted person to attend counselling in addition to imprisonment for a fine, be voted on favorably in the Committee of Rules and Judiciary, and be forwarded to the full body for further consideration.
- 1:58:14 I so move. Second. Properly moved by, properly moved by Senator Johnson, seconded by Senator Gittins. Roll call, Senator Francis, roll call on bill number 34-0031 as amended. Senator Novell E. Francis Jr. Senator Francis, yay. Senator Kenneth L. Gittins, yes. Senator Gittins, yay. Senator Franklin D. Johnson, yes. Senator Franklin D. Johnson, yes. Senator Johnson, yay. Senator Carla J. Joseph, Senator Joseph Yeh, Senator Steven D. Payne Sr.
- 1:59:12 Yes. Senator Payne Yeh, Senator Milton E. Potter Yes. Senator Potter Yeh, Senator Genevieve R. Whitaker, Senator Whitaker absent. Mr. Chair, we have six yay, one absent. Thank you very much, Madam Clerk. Colleagues, Bill No. 34-0031, an act amending Title 14, Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 24, Section 504, relating to the penalties for child neglect to require the convicted person to attend counseling in addition to imprisonment or fine, has been favorably considered by the Committee on Rules and Judiciary and will be forwarded to the full body for further consideration.

- 2:00:00 Point of personal privilege, Senator Joseph. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, for recognizing me. Point of order. Point of order, Senator Francis. Mr. Chair, I motion for an amendment to be read. I should take precedence over any point of personal privilege at this time. Okay. You are correct, Senator Francis. You will proceed with the amendment.
- 2:00:41 Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair and colleagues, I offer amendment number 34-201 on behalf of the bill's sponsor senator jayvon e james senior bill number 34-0032 is amended one by striking all of the language after the enacting clause and inserting new language that reads as follows section one title 14 version of code chapter 24 section 505 is amended in the following instances by designating the existing provisions as subsection a and by adding subsections b c d e and f to read as follows in a b in addition to the term of imprisonment or find a court shall require the persons to attend counseling accordance with any terms and conditions as the court may specify counseling mandated out of this section must include abuse and assault intervention programs in addition if the convicted person is the parent of the affected child the convicted person should also attend parenting classes c if the convicted person fails to begin their classes or programs mandated by this section within 12 months after the court's order the convicted person shall one serve a prison term of not less than no less than 12 months and and pay a fine no less than \$4,000 for a first-time offender of child abuse, or two, serve a prison term of no less than two years and pay a fine of no less than \$6,000 for a repeat offender of child abuse, and D, failure to complete classes or programs mandated by this section shall result in a court-mandated community service of no less than 300 hours. E, all professionals who provide court-mandated counseling, social work, psychological, or psychiatric services
- 2:02:53 must have all of the appropriate valid license and credentials. F, all professionals who provide court-mandated services in the form of counseling, social work, or parenting classes provided by the community-based organization must have all of the appropriate and valid credentials. 2. In the bill summary, by striking, by requiring that the abusers seek counselling under the direction of the supervision of the Commission of Human Services and inserting to require the convicted person to attend treatment in the form of counselling in addition to imprisonment or fine. I so move.
- 2:03:30 Second. Second. by senator francis seconded by senator johnson and senator payne having no objections so ordered motion motion senator francis you recognize your motion thank you very much mr chair mr chair and colleagues i move that bill number 34 that's zero zero three two as amended an act amended title 14 version analysis code chapter 24 sections 505 relating to child abuse to require a person who abuses a child to seek counseling be approved by the committee of rules and judiciary and sent to the full body for further consideration i so move second second moved by senator francis seconded by senator johnson and senator payne rule call on bill number 34-0032. As amended. Senator Novel E. Francis Jr.
- 2:04:37 Senator Francis, yay. Senator Kenneth L. Gittins, yes. Senator Gittins, yay. Senator Franklin D. Johnson. Yay. Senator Johnson. Yay. Senator Carla J. Joseph. Senator Joseph. Yay. Senator Steven D. Payne Sr. Yes. Senator Payne. Yay. Senator Milton E. Potter. Yes. Senator Potter. Yay. Senator Genevieve R. Whitaker. Senator Whitaker absent. Mr. Chair, we have six yay, one absent. Thank you very much, colleagues. Bill number 34-0032, an act amending title 14, Virgin Islands Code, chapter 24, section 505 relating to child abuse to require a person who abuses a child to seek counseling as amended has been favorably considered by the Committee on Rules and Judiciary and will be forwarded to the full body for further consideration.
- 2:05:47 Point of personal privilege, Senator James. Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the point of personal privilege. I am not a committee member, but I want to thank the members of the Committee on Rules and Judiciary for seeing the need of these three legislations that were brought forward today. Once again, I want to stress the importance of there is no eyeing team. As you can see, I have three gorgeous people sitting behind of me and many others who have done the groundwork while I steer the ship. I just want to say publicly thank you to my staff and thank you to the testifiers and everyone who is listening here today. I pray for a day in Virgin Islands history where we can see a reduction in crime. I just made 34 years old on July 7th of this year.
- 2:06:38 And by the time I reach the age of 40 and 50, I pray that we can see some reduction in crime in the territory where we can get back to those good old days where the culture was taken seriously, the mannerism was taken seriously. And just the basic things that I experienced as a child in the early 90s, I hope that we relive those moments and we'll be able to do those things once we identify problems problems by bringing forward legislation such as these so once again thank you to my colleagues for understanding importance of these measures and like i said the virginance code can always be amended but it always can happen when we do it thank you mr chair for the time thank you very much senator james and kudos to you and your youthful team i see behind you youthful but talented um we're gonna ask um as we wrap up we're gonna ask miss clema lewis and miss khaki barrett to just offer some closing remarks as we close out starting with okay we're gonna let you do your point of personal privilege as soon as we allow miss lewis and miss barrett to just put their brief remarks on the record senator johnson miss lewis okay you may proceed good afternoon now i would like to thank

all the senators for uh supporting the bills a special thank you to senator james who went to school with my son so So I have a little special place for him.

2:08:21 But I would like to thank Senator James. I'd like to thank Senator Johnson and Senator Joseph and all the honorable senators, the committee chair, your assistant, all the senators that was here today to support. It shows your commitment to our children. It shows your commitment to the future. And I don't want it. I want it to be clear that this legislation is not going to stop child abuse tomorrow. This is another beginning. And this is another piece of the wheel we're putting in to make a difference in our community. It's going to take parenting classes, individual counseling, therapy, wraparound services, community-based organizations like ours. It's going to take all of us to stop child abuse. And it starts from small.

2:09:07 and I am such a strong component and I realize DHS and some of the people not as me about parenting because I'll never forget the day I guess it was about six months ago when a young man walked in my office he was I'll never forget at 38 and he was ordered to come to us for parenting and he was very angry soon as he walked in the office he was cussing my staff and can't nobody tell I mean he was horrible so of course I got up out of my office real nicely and I went out there and I said young man what's the problem who you be so you know I said sir I'm the director if you have a problem you want to come in my office and speak and he went on and on anyway I got him in my office to cut the story cut the story short set him down and told him why he was ordered here I said did you do something did you hurt your child why you wouldn't be here if you didn't do anything and he proceeded to say they accused him of slapping up his daughters and he loved his kids he paid child support and he went on and on what i want to say was the bottom line which keeps me moving which makes me sure we'll do parenting whether we have the funding because i raise funds was when he looked at me and said miss lewis from the time i was a child i was beat where were you where was the principal where were the counselors when my mother and father was beating my behind none of you all were there for me but today because I tried to correct my daughter now I wanted to go to all these classes for me that showed how important parenting is and it shows how deep rooted the abuse is in the generation in our community whether it's a male or whether it's a female doing the abuse is then our families, we need to wake up in this deep. And we got to stop this with beat the child and spoil the rod and I got beat and I'm a better person today because most of you not, but we like to use that. The bottom line is this legislation today at least sends a message from our leaders that it's not okay to abuse children and not get help.

2:11:19 So again, from the bottom of my heart and my agency who works tireless we'd like to thank you all for supporting the legislation and doing the right thing as leaders thank you so much thank you very much miss lewis well said i'm miss barrett you recognize for your closing remarks um thank you very much thank you to all of the senators who have worked hard on this bill to make sure and ensure that our children are safe which in turn makes our community a better place for us all to live child abuse is very pervasive i don't and you know when a child when two children fight you know they're called aggressive and they're pulled apart when two adults fight they're arrested it's called you know assault but when an adult hits a child for some reason we call it discipline and for some reason we think a child needs to fear us in order to change behavior and so the parenting classes and the anger management classes and the individual and group counseling can help you know eliminate those myths that we need to shame a child to change their behavior we need to beat them to change their behavior and so i i applaud every each and every one of you all of the staff that worked hard on this thank you thank you thank you on behalf of the family resource center and the children and the families of the virgin islands miss barrett thank you very much for your remarks and thank you very much ladies for all that you do senator johnson you're recognized for your point of personal privilege thank you very much mr chair i would like to take this time out to acknowledge a young man that's working over this summer here doesn't work in my office but he's in my office every day mr franklin mate today is his birthday i want to wish him a very happy happy birthday These are summer students that work with Senator Kerry Young, but it's best I hire him because he always come by and look out for me. And I think the reason you have that passion, we have the same first name, Franklin and Franklin. Enjoy your day and the party day

2:13:27 in my office, by the way. Happy birthday, Franklin, my day. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much, Senator Johnson. Point of personal privilege, Senator Joseph. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. I'll be very succinct. I want to really commend two ladies. And, of course, the proponents of the measures. These are some really trying times. We have a pandemic. We went through two major Cat 5 hurricanes. We're going to see an upswing, an uptake of persons who are going to need counseling services throughout. Even we who are counselors need to be counseled ourselves. I could attest to that, knowing that that is really required. So I wanted to just make sure I commend the ladies who are deep in the trenches. I'm not a learned counselor, but I have had to counsel in our work young people and others. So I really just wanted to thank you, ladies, for all that you do so lovingly and willingly. Thank you so much for your service. Thank you very, very much. Tadek, thank you very much for your participation in this very meaningful session. Again, kudos to Senator James for these three, I think, significant pieces of legislation that will pass through rules today. So I want to thank the central staff for their support, for all that they do.

- 2:15:03 I mean, we really cannot do these things every day without central staff's effort behind the scenes. Quietly doing things, court reporters, legal counsel, videographers, photographers, sergeant-at-arms, they all do a great deal of work quietly behind the scenes to make the magic happen. So thank you very much, central staff, for all that you do. Additionally, I want to give a little update to you, a little plug. Wealthy Habits Initiative, a financial wellness boot camp that, you know, has been taking place for the last, well, last month or so. We had close to 300 young people between the ages of 11 to 18 who signed up to participate in our financial wellness seminar. And I think talking about families and talking about, you know, healthy families, I think healthy families have a financial wellness component to it also so it is something that's very important we want to change the culture change the climate we want virgin islanders who can be responsible spenders who can understand the importance of putting a budget together who understands that investing isn't for somebody else those are all for us too so i think it's awesome to have 300 folks in our community who prior to this had little or no knowledge of financial health. And it goes a long way, so I'll continue to update you regarding our Wealthy Habits Initiative. Colleagues, that is it. We've exhausted our meeting. I want to definitely thank my personal staff also for all that they do. The Committee on Rules and Judiciary is hereby adjourned.
- 2:17:25 Thank you. We'll be right back.

People named in this transcript

SUSPECTED, and a finding aid only. Names were matched by machine against the spellings used across all 426 of our transcripts, and the title is the one used in the room. Being named here is NOT evidence that a person attended or spoke - only that the name was said. Speech recognition mishears names, so a spelling may be wrong even where no alternative is offered.

- 22x **Senator Steven D. Payne Sr.**
heard in this transcript as: Payne, Stephen D. Payne Sr., Steven D. Payne, Steven D. Payne Sr
- 20x **Senator Franklin D. Johnson**
heard in this transcript as: Franklin Johnson, Johnson
- 19x **Senator Carla Joseph**
the surname alone also matches: Clifford Joseph; Karla J. Joseph
heard in this transcript as: Carla J. Joseph, Joseph
- 18x **Senator Novelle Francis**
heard in this transcript as: Francis, Novel E. Francis Jr, Novell E. Francis Jr, Novell E. Francis Jr., Novelli Francis Jr
- 16x **Senator Marise C. James**
the surname alone also matches: Javan James; Giovanni James Sr
heard in this transcript as: James, James'
- 13x **Senator Kenneth L. Gittens**
heard in this transcript as: Gittins, Kenneth L. Gittins, Kenny L. Giddens
- 13x **Senator Milton E. Potter**
heard in this transcript as: Potter
- 12x **Senator Genevieve R. Whitaker**
heard in this transcript as: Whitaker
- 5x **Senator Javan James**
heard in this transcript as: Javon E. James Sr, Javon James Sr, Javon James Sr.
- 3x **Commissioner Carla Benjamin**
- 2x **Governor Albert Bryan Jr**
- 2x **Senator Devon E. James**
the surname alone also matches: Javan James; Marise C. James; Neville James
- 2x **Senator Giovanni James Sr**
the surname alone also matches: Javan James; Marise C. James; Neville James
heard in this transcript as: Giovanni James
- 2x **Senator Kerry Young**
- 2x **Senator Milton E. Potter Yes**

Bills and acts referred to

Matched by number against our own acts corpus. The number is what the recognition heard, so it may be wrong; where it resolved, the title is the one the Legislature gave the act.

Bill 34-0030	Act 8459 · August 3, 2021 · An Act amending title 4 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 11, section 172 relating to the Virgin Islands Superior Court's jurisdiction over children to divest the court of jurisdiction over judicial consent for the marriage of a child
Bill 34-0031	Act 8460 · August 3, 2021 · An Act amending title 14 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 24, section 504 relating to the penalties for child neglect to require the convicted person to attend counseling in addition to imprisonment or fine; and for other related purposes
Bill 34-0032	Act 8461 · August 3, 2021 · An Act amending title 14 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 24, section 505 relating to child abuse to require a person who abuses a child to seek counseling; and for other related purposes o=-0
Act 8255	Act 8255 · December 19, 2019 · An Act amending the Virgin Islands Code, title 16, chapters 1 and 9 by prohibiting the issuance of malTiage licenses to persons under the age of eighteen (18) ---0
Act 8459	Act 8459 · August 3, 2021 · An Act amending title 4 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 11, section 172 relating to the Virgin Islands Superior Court's jurisdiction over children to divest the court of jurisdiction over judicial consent for the marriage of a child
Act 8460	Act 8460 · August 3, 2021 · An Act amending title 14 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 24, section 504 relating to the penalties for child neglect to require the convicted person to attend counseling in addition to imprisonment or fine; and for other related purposes
Act 8461	Act 8461 · August 3, 2021 · An Act amending title 14 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 24, section 505 relating to child abuse to require a person who abuses a child to seek counseling; and for other related purposes o=-0

Referred to but not found in our acts corpus: Bill 34-0003