

## AMENDING SECTION 4 OF THE REVISED ORGANIC ACT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS RELATING TO VOTING AGE

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SEPTEMBER 29, 1970.—Referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed

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Mr. CAREY, from the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs,  
submitted the following

### REPORT

[To accompany S. 2314]

The committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, to whom was referred the bill (S. 2314), having considered the same, report favorably thereon without amendment and recommend that the bill do pass.

### PURPOSE

The purpose of S. 2314, and a similar bill, H.R. 18911, introduced by Mr. Carey, is to permit the legislature of the Virgin Islands to establish the voting age for residents of the Virgin Islands and not less than 18 years, if a majority of the qualified voters in the Virgin Islands approve in a referendum held for that purpose.

### NEED

The voting age for the Virgin Islands is presently fixed at 21 years by the Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands dated July 22, 1954, as amended. It may not be changed without an act of Congress. The Virgin Islands Legislature has petitioned the 91st Congress for authority to lower the voting age to 18 years if a majority of the qualified voters approve.

The Voting Rights Act of 1970 established 18 years as the voting age in the 50 States and in the District of Columbia.

The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico has the authority to set its own voting age requirement, and is in the process of adopting an 18-year-old rule.

The territory of Guam has the authority to set its own voting age requirement, and has in fact set it at 18 years.

The people of the Virgin Islands have demonstrated their political maturity. They elect their own legislature, and they have recently

been authorized to elect their own Governor. It is only proper that they be authorized to establish their own voting age requirement. The grant of such authority will be another significant step in the direction of local self-government.

### COST

Enactment of the bill will require no Federal appropriation.

### COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

The Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs recommends that the bill be enacted.

### DEPARTMENTAL REPORT

The favorable report of the Department of the Interior, and the petition of the Virgin Islands Legislature are as follows:

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,  
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY,  
*Washington, D.C., September 30, 1969.*

HON. HENRY M. JACKSON,  
*Chairman, Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs,  
U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C.*

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: This is in response to your request for the views of this Department on S. 2314, a bill to amend section 4 of the Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands relating to voting age.

We strongly recommend the enactment of this bill.

This bill authorizes the legislature of the Virgin Islands to establish a voting age for residents of the Virgin Islands at an age lower than the 21 years now prescribed in section 4 of the Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands. The change in the voting age could be made only if a majority of the qualified voters of the Virgin Islands approved the reduction in voting age in a referendum election held for such purpose.

The Congress of the United States has recognized the political maturity of the people of the Virgin Islands by the enactment of measures which have given the Virgin Islands and its people increased local autonomy. At present, the Virgin Islanders elect their legislature and have demonstrated their ability to do so in a most responsible manner over the past few years. In 1970, the recently enacted Elective Governor Act will become effective and the residents of the Virgin Islands will inaugurate their first locally elected Governor.

This is as it should be, since the right to self-government is the cornerstone of every true democracy. Basic, however, to this right of self-government is the ability of the citizens to set the qualifications for voting. In keeping with this concept, we believe that the residents of the Virgin Islands—who are also citizens of the United States—should be afforded the opportunity to lower the age for voting if, in their judgment, it is in the best interest of the Virgin Islands.

The Bureau of the Budget has advised that there is no objection to the presentation of this report from the standpoint of the administration's program.

Sincerely yours,

RUSSELL E. TRAIN,  
*Under Secretary of the Interior.*

## Resolution No. 443

Bill No. 3985

## EIGHTH LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS OF THE UNITED STATES

## Regular Session

1969

To Petition the Ninety-First Congress of the United States of America to Amend Certain Provisions of the Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands, Pertaining to the Voting Franchise

Whereas the Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands now provide that the franchise shall be vested in residents of the Virgin Islands who are citizens of the United States, twenty-one years of age or over; and

Whereas it is the determination of the Legislature that the People of the Virgin Islands should have the requisite power to determine the voting age for exercise of the franchise within the Virgin Islands; and that the many young citizens of the Virgin Islands should be granted the right to a meaningful expression of their views through positive participation in the democratic process; and

Whereas the Congress of the United States has recently expressed its confidence in the maturity and responsibility of the People of the Virgin Islands by its passage of the Virgin Islands Elective Governor Act; and

Whereas in recent years a number of States of the United States have lowered voting age requirements; and

Whereas it is the further determination of the Legislature that the young men and women of the Virgin Islands are educated for citizenship and are ready and willing to assume the rights and responsibilities of full citizenship prior to attaining the arbitrary age of twenty-one; that many of these young adults are married and assume family responsibilities; are gainfully employed and support their government through tax payments; and that they serve honorably in our military forces; Now, Therefore, be it.

*Resolved by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands*, That the Legislature respectfully petitions the Congress of the United States of America to adopt an amendment to the Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands providing that the Legislature of the Virgin Islands may lower the voting age in the Virgin Islands after approval by the majority of the Virgin Islands' electorate in a general referendum; and be it further

*Resolved*, That copies of this Resolution be transmitted to the President of the United States, to the Secretary of the United States Department of the Interior, to the Presiding Officer of the Senate of the United States, to the Speaker of the House of Representatives of the United States, to the Chairman of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs of the Senate of the United States, to each member of said Committee, to the Chairman of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs of the House of Representatives of the United States, and to each member of said Committee.

Thus passed by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands on March 5, 1969.

Witness our Hands and the Seal of the Legislature of the Virgin Islands this 5th Day of March, A.D., 1969.

JOHN L. MADURO, *President.*

A. DAVID PURITZ, *Legislative Secretary.*

#### CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW

In compliance with clause 3 of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, changes in existing law made by the bill, as reported, are shown as follows (existing law proposed to be omitted is enclosed in black brackets, new matter is printed in *italic*, existing law in which no change is proposed is shown in roman):

#### ACT OF JULY 22, 1954 (68 Stat. 497), AS AMENDED

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#### FRANCHISE

SEC. 4. (a) The franchise shall be vested in residents of the Virgin Islands who are citizens of the United States, twenty-one years of age or over. Additional qualifications may be prescribed by the legislature: *Provided, however,* That no property, language, or income qualification shall ever be imposed upon or required of any voter, nor shall any discrimination in qualification be made or based upon difference in race, color, sex, or religious belief.

(b) *The legislature shall have authority to enact legislation establishing the voting age for residents of the Virgin Islands at an age not lower than 18 years of age, if a majority of the qualified voters in the Virgin Islands approve in a referendum election held for that purpose.*

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