

BILL NO. 35-0299

Thirty-Fifth Legislature of the Virgin Islands

July 15, 2024

An Act amending title 23 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 10, by adding a subchapter VI to establish the “Virgin Islands Meteorological Office” within the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency

PROPOSED BY: Senator Ray Fonseca

Be it enacted by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands:

SECTION 1. Title 23 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 10 is amended by adding a subchapter VI as follows:

“Subchapter VI. Virgin Islands Meteorological Office

§ 1088. Meteorological Office purpose and establishment

(a) The purpose of this subchapter is to establish the Virgin Islands Meteorological Office to monitor weather conditions, provide accurate forecasts, establish a Doppler Weather Radar Station in St. Croix, and enhance preparedness and response to weather-related hazards in the Territory.

(b) There is established the Virgin Islands Meteorological Office, ("Meteorological Office" or “Office”) that operates within the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (“VITEMA”) and is responsible for accurate weather data collection and reporting, monitoring and forecasting weather conditions, and reporting on climate patterns and atmospheric phenomena.

(c) The Meteorological Office is headed by a Meteorologist hired by the Director of VITEMA. The meteorologist may hire a meteorologist assistant, executive assistant, and other support staff that are necessary to carry out the duties and responsibilities of the Office. The Director of VITEMA is responsible for overseeing the operations of the Meteorological Office and insuring the implementation of the provisions of this subchapter.

§ 1088a. Definitions

As used throughout this subchapter:

(1) **“Agency”** means the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency.

(2) **“Atmospheric Scientist”** means a person who studies the climate, weather, and atmospheric conditions in the past and present, and a more likely to study ancient data. Atmospheric sciences are traditionally divided into three topical areas, meteorology, climatology and aeronomy.

(3) **“Meteorologist”** means a scientist who studies the atmosphere and its phenomena, including weather and climate, and who investigates long-term climate trends and the impact on human populations.

(4) **“Meteorological Assistant”** means a professional who supports a meteorologist or atmospheric scientist in various tasks related to the study and analysis of weather and climate patterns and whose responsibilities may include collecting and analyzing weather data, operating meteorological instruments, assisting with research projects, preparing weather forecasts or reports, and maintaining meteorological databases.

(5) **“Executive Assistant”** means a support staff who provides high-level administrative support to senior personnel, managing schedules, correspondence, meetings, and special projects, ensuring smooth office operations, and enhancing management productivity.

§ 1088b. Duties and Responsibilities

The Meteorological Office must be located on St. Croix, function territorially, and has the following duties and responsibilities:

(1) monitor weather conditions and collect data from various sources, including weather stations, satellites, radar systems, and buoys;

(2) measure parameters such as temperature, humidity, wind speed, air pressure, precipitation, and cloud cover; monitor factors like sea surface temperatures and greenhouse gas concentrations; use advanced numerical weather models to simulate atmospheric processes and predict weather conditions;

(3) maintain and operate weather observation stations, radar systems, satellite receivers, and other necessary equipment to support meteorological operations;

(4) conduct research and analysis to improve understanding of local weather patterns, enhance forecasting capabilities and inform policies related to climate change mitigation and adaptation;

(5) collaborate with national meteorological agencies, research institutions, and other relevant organizations to share data, expertise, and resources;

(6) provide training and education programs on meteorology, weather hazards, and preparedness measures for government personnel, emergency responders, and the public;

(7) develop and disseminate weather forecasts, timely warnings and advisories to the public, government agencies, and relevant stakeholders;

(8) coordinate with relevant agencies, including, but not limited to emergency management agencies, disaster response organizations, and environmental protection agencies, to support integrated approaches to weather-related preparedness and response efforts; and

(9) perform other functions necessary to fulfill its duties and responsibilities and employ best practices to improve weather prediction and climate understanding.

§ 1088c. Funding

1 In addition to funding from the Government of the Virgin Islands, the Office may obtain
2 additional funding through grants, donations, or other sources.

3 **SECTION 3.** Not later than 60 days after the enactment of this act, the Virgin Islands
4 Territorial Emergency Management Agency shall promulgate regulations to ensure the
5 effective operations of the Meteorological Office.

6 **SECTION 4.** (a) The Virgin Islands Meteorological Office, in collaboration with
7 relevant government departments, shall conduct a comprehensive needs assessment to evaluate
8 the necessity and feasibility of establishing a Doppler radar weather station on the east end of
9 St. Croix. Based on this assessment, the Office shall develop a formal proposal outlining the
10 purpose, benefits, and technical specifications of the Doppler radar station.

11 (b) The Office must engage with federal agencies, such as the National Oceanic and
12 Atmospheric Administration and National Weather Service to discuss the proposal and seek
13 assistance in identifying suitable locations and setting up the Doppler weather station on the
14 east end of St. Croix. This process must involve contacting regional offices or liaising with
15 relevant program managers responsible for radar operations and deployment.

16 (c) The Office must collaborate with federal agencies to secure funding and resources
17 for the procurement, installation, and operation of the Doppler weather station, which may
18 involve exploring grant opportunities, cooperative agreements, or cost-sharing arrangements
19 between the Office and federal agencies.

20 (d) The Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency, in collaboration
21 with federal technicians and engineers, shall oversee the procurement, installation, calibration,
22 and testing of the Doppler radar equipment at the selected site on St. Croix.

23 (e) Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency shall provide training
24 to the Meteorological Office for local meteorological staff and technicians on the operation,
25 maintenance, and data analysis procedures associated with the Doppler weather station, which

will enhance local capacity to effectively utilize radar data for weather forecasting, research, and decision-making.

(f) The Meteorological Office, through VITEMA, shall establish protocols for sharing Doppler radar data collected from the station with federal agencies, as well as other relevant stakeholders.

(g) The Meteorological Office shall conduct outreach activities to raise awareness among the public, media, and local communities about the benefits of the Doppler radar weather station in St. Croix.

(h) The Meteorological Office shall maintain regular communication and collaboration with federal agencies to ensure the continued operation, maintenance, and upgrade of the Doppler radar weather.

(i) The Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency shall monitor performance metrics and address any technical issues or operational challenges in a timely manner to sustain the effectiveness of the radar system.

BILL SUMMARY

Section one of the bill amends title 23 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 10 by adding a new subchapter VI to establish the “Virgin Islands Meteorological Office” within the VITEMA; provides for staffing of the office with a Meteorologist and support staff.; and delineates the duties and responsibilities of the office. Section two provides the funding source for the Meteorological Office. Section three requires VITEMA to promulgate rules within 60 days of enactment of this bill. Section four requires that the Meteorological Office to collaborate with relevant government departments to conduct a comprehensive study to evaluate the necessity and feasibility of establishing a Doppler radar weather station on the east end of St. Croix; engage federal agencies to identify suitable locations to set up the Doppler radar weather station; secure funding and resources for the procurement, installment and operation of the Doppler radar weather station; provide training for staff to enhance local capacity; establish

- 1 protocols for data sharing and conduct public education and awareness about the benefits of
- 2 Doppler radar weather station in St. Croix.
- 3 **BR23-0864/July 12, 2024/NS**