



Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs and Consumer Protection

Legislature USVI

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- 0:00:00 and professionalism with which he served the families of veterans and residents at large during some of their most difficult times families in the case of those of our cherished veterans repeatedly express how comfortable they felt when mr sasso is present at their home going of their loved ones to see him extend his hands containing his penguin style hat in one and his cane in the other captures the attention of all in attendance. If a song of his liking or by the family's request is playing during the recession, it then becomes a wrap.
- 0:00:40 You will definitely get a couple of appropriate dance moves right along with it. He leads the coffin with a poise and style that brings a sense of peace to grieving hearts. While there are many capable funeral directors across our territory, Mr. Sussell is frequently requested by name, a testament to his lasting impression he leaves on all who witness his contribution. Let's not get it twisted though. Not only is he a joy to watch, Mr. Sussell gives all families the kind of attention needed from start to finish. His attention to detail, compassionate demeanor, and unwavering commitment to excellence have brought honor not only to his profession but to our entire community he is more than deserving of this honor director farrow respectfully asked the committee and the full body to pass bill number 36-007 formally recognizing mr sasso's invaluable contributions thank you for the opportunity to provide this written testimony respectfully director d farrow Thank you, Sergeant First Class. Mr. Armour, you may begin.
- 0:01:56 Honourable Senator Avery Lois, Chairperson, Committee on Government Operations and Veterans Affairs, Honourable Senator Angel Bulquist, Jr., sponsor of the resolution to honour Mr. James Sasso, and all other Honorable Senators on the Committee of Government Operations of the 35th Legislature, fellow testifiers, persons in the audience, and those listening by ear.

- 0:02:28 My name is Bernice A. Turnbull, and I am appearing before you to offer my support in favor of the recommendation to honor Mr. James Sasso for his distinguished service in death care, compassionate care, and life memorial industry to the people of St. Thomas and St. John as a funeral director. I have known Mr. Sasso as long as he has been a funeral director associated with Turnbull's funeral home and I find him to be humble, caring, considerate, and empathetic. I speak as one who has experienced his service. It has been said that the way a society treats their dead tells the story of that society. The story of how Mrs. Cecil treats the dead needs to be recorded in the annals of the Virgin Islands. For those who have not had the experience of his service, I will give you an abbreviated version of his program. Mr. Sasso handles the dead as if though he was interacting with someone alive. He ensures that your loved one looks the best he or she can. That means from the time the casket leaves the funeral home, it becomes his personal responsibility. Oh yes, he handles it with great care. Once he gets to the church where the service is being held, it is carefully removed with care and position. The pallbearers are given the instructions as to how to handle the dead. No half-stepping. At that point, Mr. Sasso takes charge. He respectfully requests that all in the church please
- 0:04:43 He stands in respect to the dead being brought in. Once inside the church, before the viewing begins, he makes sure that the dead is ready for viewing and asks relatives to please approve. During the viewing, he gives instruction about the use of cell phone during the service. Once the viewing is over, he takes the time to thank the attendees for coming and informs them as to what will happen during the charge service and after the service. He introduces the clergy who will be performing the service. At the end of the service, he gathers the pallbearers, ensures that the instructions given relative to handling of the casket are in place.
- 0:05:44 The highlight of the procession out of the church is Mr. Sasso leading the march, leading the casket as if though he's marching to Zion. Just to view this brings comfort and some humor to those who are grieving. This is something that was not seen at funerals before, hence a person grieving, they find comfort because someone has taken special care of their loved one. As a cemetery, there were accommodations of tent and water, and Mr. Sasso makes sure that the pallbearers, handle the dead with care and place the casket properly in its burial site. The extraordinary care he exhibits during burial rites of the dead is noteworthy. Under his care, he treats the dead with respect.
- 0:06:55 I salute the 35th legislature for honoring the dead by honoring Mr. Sasso for the loving care and empathic way he treats the dead and his or her survivors. I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you. God bless you all. Thank you, Ms. Turnbull, and it's the 36th Legislature. Oh, not the 35th.
- 0:07:29 No problem. I'd like to recognize Committee Member Carla J. Joseph. And then move on. Dr. Kaiser-Colwood, you may proceed with your testimony. A blessed good afternoon to you, Honorable Avery L. Lewis, Chairman of Government Operations, Veteran Affairs and Consumer Protection, Vice Chairman Novel E. Francis, Jr., Senator Kenneth L. Gittin, Senator Ray Fonseca, Senator Alma Francis Heiliger, Senator Franklin D. Johnson, and Senator Carla J. Joseph, along with your dedicated legislative staff and all those joining via Facebook, YouTube, television, or in the chambers. I am Dr. Kaiser A. Callwood, and I appear before you to offer heartfelt testimony in strong support of Bill No. 36-0007, a resolution to honor Funeral Director James Sasso as proposed by Senator Angel L. Bocas, Jr. There's an old saying that reminds us, it's not how long we live, but how well we are remembered. If that is true, then James Sasso has made it in his life's mission to ensure that every person is remembered with dignity, compassion, and grace. Before dedicating himself to funeral service, Mr. Sasso pursued a background in electrical engineering, a field rooted in precision, balance and understanding systems that are often unseen. It's poetic, then, that he now applies the same deep focus and quite strength to navigating life's most delicate and emotional transitions. He has transformed the technical into the spiritual and turning structure into solace. With over a decade of service as a funeral director and certified crematory operator, Mr. Sasso has guided countless families through some of the most vulnerable moments of their lives and he does so not mainly with technical skill but with a reverence of human experience that is rare and extraordinary. It is no surprise that he's
- 0:09:44 regularly recognized as a funeral director of top quality excellence at Turnbull's Funeral Home and crematory services. To place his service in a broader societal context, I draw from Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which positions self-actualization at the pinnacle of human fulfillment. Mr. Sasso's work is not just a profession, it is a daily expression of actualized empathy. His role transcends logistics, it touches the spiritual and emotional foundation of families and communities through him we see what it means to transform duty into purpose and compassion into legacy in that spirit i humbly propose what i call the sasso theory of transitional dignity a guiding belief that emotional strength of a community is directly impacted by the dignity we uphold in our farewell rituals the manner in which we honor the departed shapes the way we carry forward and individuals like Mr. Sasso are guardians of that sacred transition. Now, I must add that while many know Mr. Sasso for his calm presence and deep reverence, there's another side of him that brings joy, as much joy. He is a devoted family man whose love and commitment at home reflect the same compassion

he brings to his profession. and if you ever had the pleasure of attending a social gathering with him, you quickly discover that beneath his composed demeanor is someone who can effortlessly light up a room. In those settings, the same gentleman who helps us navigate our deepest losses is also the one who reminds us how to laugh again, often as the unexpected yet beloved comedic highlight of the evening. This rare balance of strength and softness, professionalism and personality, grief and grace is what makes Mr. Sasso a true community treasure. Honorable senators, in honoring Mr. Sasso we're not merely acknowledging a decade of excellent service. We are forming the value of every soul that he has helped celebrate and every life he has uplifted through his sacred vocation. His example teaches us how to serve with heart, how to lead with humility, and how to live in a way that helps others find peace. So today, I leave you with this. If you ever need a moment of comfort, a listening air, or even just a good laugh, don't call 911. Call 340-JAMES-SASO. And more importantly, let's collectively do what is right. let us enshrine his legacy in the record of this senate and the heart of this territory i respectfully urge this distinguished committee to unanimously pass this resolution not for just for mr sasso but for every virgin islander who has found healing through his hand and hope through his heart thank you and may god bless you all in your continued commitment to honoring those who serve our virgin islands community with integrity empathy and unwavering care with humility and

0:13:04 admiration respectfully submitted dr kaiser a callwood thank you dr kaiser callwood a callwood i'd like to recognize committee member honorable senator franklin d johnson Madam Clerk, please mark Senator Carla Joseph and Senator Franklin Johnson present. Mr. Jelani Sasso. That's correct.

0:13:34 Thank you. You may proceed. Thank you. Good day, honorable members of this body, distinguished guests, friends and family. Today we gather to celebrate an extraordinary man whose compassion, dedication, and unwavering service have touched countless lives in the Virgin Islands and beyond. It is with immense pride and gratitude that I speak on behalf of my family to honor my uncle James Asso for his remarkable contributions as a funeral director and a pillar of the Virgin Islands community. For many years, James Hasso has served the people of the Virgin Islands with a heart full of empathy, a commitment to dignity, and a distinct style. As a funeral director, he has walked alongside families during their most difficult moments, offering not just professional expertise, but genuine care and understanding. He has provided solace to those grieving, ensuring every farewell honors life and legacy of those who have passed.

0:14:40 His work is more than a profession. It is a calling, one he has answered with grace, humility, and an unshakable sense of duty. James's impact extends far beyond the walls of the funeral home. In the Virgin Islands, where community is the heartbeat of our culture, he has been a steady presence, a listener, and a friend to so many. Through his humor, his kind words, his willingness to lend a helping hand, or simply being there when words are not enough, James has woven himself into the fabric of the islands. His respect for traditions, his deep connection to the people, and his ability to bring comfort in times of sorrow have made him a trusted figure during one of the most difficult times one could endure.

0:15:32 To know James is to know a man of integrity. warmth and quiet strength he carries the stories of our community in his heart treating every family he serves as if they were his own his work has not only honored those who have passed but has also uplifted the living reminding us of the power of compassion and the importance of coming together in times of loss it feels like it was just last year When my cousin Lyle and I visited him in the Virgin Islands for our spring or summer high school vacations, our uncle would engage with us about our interests and how important it was to figure out what we would like to do when we completed high school. He expressed his interest in the noble profession of funeral service, along with a quite compelling reason of why we shouldn't fear the dead or death. It was in that moment or shortly thereafter that my cousin and I decided that we too would attend mortuary school one day, and upon completion of high school, we did.

0:16:39 Lyle and myself are licensed in New York State, where he still serves with dignity. His niece, Lyle's sister Maxine, also found her way to our alma mater, AAMI, the American Academy Macalester Institute of Funeral Service, where I happened to be employed as a clinical embalming adjunct professor at the time. She completed her education and currently works here in the U.S. Virgin Islands at the medical examiner's office. Lately my focus has been on my artist's entrepreneurial endeavors and funeral education, and the positive impact our uncle has had on our lives still echoes in a meaningful manner. On behalf of my family, I want to express our deep pride in Uncle James and gratitude to the Virgin Islands for recognizing this service. Thank you for entrusting him with your stories, your loved ones, and your memories.

0:17:35 And to James, my uncle, my brother in service, my friend. Thank you for being a beacon of light, a source of comfort, and a resource to your siblings and deceased parents, Clara Sasso and Edmund Sasso, who I know would be beaming with pride today. And last but not least for being an example of what it means to serve with love. May we continue to honor your legacy by carrying forward the same spirit of kindness and community that you embody every day. Congratulations on being honored at this time, Uncle James. This is a well-deserved recognition, and I trust that the people of the Virgin Islands today will ensure that this takes place, because we are stronger, and we are kinder, and we

are more connected, because of you. Thank you. Thank you, nephew Jelani Sasso, daughter Tichelle Sasso, you may proceed. Thank you, thank you.

0:18:40 Good day to the distinguished members of this body, honored guests, family, and friends. Today is a moment of profound pride for me and my family as we gather to recognize the legacy of a truly exceptional man, my father, James Sasso. To the community, he is known as Sasso, a name that has become synonymous with dignity, compassion, and service in the Virgin Islands. but to me, he is daddy, a man whose quiet strength, work ethic, and boundless love shape not only our family, but the many lives he has touched through his life's work. My father's journey began on the small island of Anguilla, the youngest of seven children, born to Claris and Edmund Sasso. From early on, he understood the value of hard work and humility, helping at his father's gas station and the family's convenience store. Those experiences rooted him in service, long before he ever donned a suit as a funeral director. While his career as an electrician spanned nearly four decades, it was later in his life that my father found his true calling in the funeral and mortuary field. For over 17 years at Turnbull's funeral home, He has walked beside grieving families with utmost care, offering not only his professional skills, but also his presence, his humor, and most of all, his heart. It takes a special person to serve people during the most vulnerable moments. It takes someone with deep empathy, reverence for tradition, and a steady hand. That person is my father. Time and time again, I have watched as community members approached him, not just with respect, but with deep affection and trust. Because when he shows up, he brings more than a service.

0:20:45 He brings comfort, he brings peace. He has been voted the number one funeral director in St. Thomas multiple times by the Daily News readership. And with that recognition is a testament to his professionalism. It barely scratches the surface of who he is. He is a husband of 32 years to my mother, Risa. He is a loving father to me and my siblings, Danelle and Latrell. He is a profound grandfather, a creative soul with a passion for design, and a man whose laughter can fill a room even with the heaviest of moments. My dad has taught us through his actions that service is not just a job, it's a responsibility. It's something you give from your heart with no expectation of praise.

0:21:32 And today, to see this coming to fruition with his resolution, to know that his decades of compassion, commitment, and quiet leadership are being recognized, it means the world to me and our entire family. Dad, your legacy is not just in the number of years you worked or the services you've performed. Your legacy lives in the families you've comforted, the traditions you've upheld, and the love you've poured into this community. Your parents, Grandma Clarice and Papa Edmund, are surely smiling down today with pride. And as your daughter, I hope you know how much I admire you.

0:22:10 Not only for what you've done, but for who you are. On behalf of our entire family, thank you to the Virgin Islands for seeing my father, what we've known all along, a man that's worth honoring. With all my love and gratitude, thank you. Thank you. Well, I hear sitting down saying, how are you going to build Delver for Alice Free advertisement today? Because I don't know how the other funeral room is going to make.

0:22:42 How big is it after today? Even the living room won't go down there. Mr. Sasso, Mr. James, Sasso, I know you don't have a prepared testimony, but it'll be always nice if you could say a few words on the floor today. You can go right ahead. Good afternoon, Honorable Sinta Avery Lewis. Good afternoon to other members of the committee. Good afternoon, Sinta Angel Bolkes, who bring this bill forward. Good afternoon, family and friends. Good afternoon to the management and staff of Tumble's Home. Good afternoon, Mrs. Tumble, who's here with us. I'm a man of many words, but today I'm left without words, Avery. Because, as you might know, Avery, and maybe you might know because you just started as a senator early in the year, this bill was forward about a year and a half ago, and I keep putting up this bill, saying I don't want no recognition. I'm just doing my community service, and the Lord will thank me. So, a couple of senators and other people say, sir, so take your floors while you're living.

0:23:44 Don't wait until you're dead for them to resume in the grave. So, somewhere along the line I had a change of heart, and I said, okay, I'll go ahead with the bill. but to be honest I really won't look in no kind of recognition I'm just doing my job so I want to thank everyone who's supporting me throughout this journey I want to thank the final home especially Mrs. Gumbs our manager who's not here this evening for giving me the opportunity that led to this day of us being here thank you Mrs. Tumble thank you miss Mrs. Gumbs and thank you to my wife where I often get up in the morning at 3 o'clock and leaving the bed alone where you going I said going for an old home. One time the viewing start, I say 9 to 10, we're going so early. I just have to make sure everything is right and everything is in order. She can tell you all that. I'm a man of perfection, OK? And Avery, you might know that you have seen some of my electrical work, OK?

0:24:36 So thank you, and thank you to the listening and viewing audience, and everyone have a wonderful afternoon. Thank you. One thing I know, beside waste management, nobody else working. Everybody tune in today, they got a man here today, Sasso, the man of the hour. Well, anyhow, Sasso, before we go to our round of questioning, we have one more bill in this block. It's proposed by Senator Kenneth L. Gittins. This committee stands in recess for two minutes.

- 0:25:19 Thank you. Thank you. Le lo la la, le lo no le l- quello là Le lo la la le lo Bogdame The Committee On government operation, veterans affairs and consumer protection is out of recess.
- 0:26:54 I'd like to recognize committee member Kenneth L. Gittins. Next up, we have a bill 360029, a resolution honoring and commending Sonia Hu, the creator of the St. Croix Cushion Hook Bracelet, and proprietor of one of the first-hand raw jewelry stores in St. Croix. Who speaks to this bill?
- 0:27:25 I do, Mr. Chair. Please proceed, Senator. Thank you. Good afternoon to all. First, I apologize for my tardy arrival as I was attending the Central High School graduation, and I want to say congratulations to all the students and especially to their parents. Go Caribs! Again good afternoon once again it is both pride and with a heavy heart that I introduce Bill number 36-0029 which is before us today a a resolution to honor and commend the late Sonia Howe. This moment is I would say bittersweet. Mrs. Howe passed away March 9th of this year, just days after this resolution was actually released to my office. While we often speak of the importance of giving people their flowers while they are alive or while they're still with us that opportunity does not always present itself I deeply regret that we were unable to bring this resolution to the floor sooner this is Sonia how was a pioneering businesswoman artists and jeweler based on st croix she is widely credited with designing and popularizing one of the most iconic symbols of virgin islands culture known as the crujan hook bracelet similar or like the one that i'm wearing
- 0:29:20 yes you know the one you're very familiar with it it is more than just a piece of jewelry it is a statement of identity if you see someone wearing a hook bracelet anywhere in the world there's a strong chance they've visited the virgin islands especially st croix i have yet to board a flight to the mainland to or from and someone doesn't make the comment or ask the question are you from st croix or have you visited st croix uh just the other day my colleague and i uh uh said into my left senator francis we were in washington dc and uh sitting in an establishment a lady from out of nowhere asked are you from st croix and i didn't even think about it because it was so cool i had on jacket and whatnot and i was like yes how you know that she said uh when you stretch your hands i i saw your bracelet i said wow and i thought of this uh resolution because this was back in november and i made sure i made a call and i said we need to get this resolution out quickly uh they did their best but you know god knows best um originally um sonia was from california uh she moved to saint croix in the early 1960s with her husband david and their children she was largely uh self-taught in the art of jewelry making a craft she began exploring shortly after they uh their move to saint croix together with her family she opened a small storefront in christian said town known as the corner shop we know that to be right on the corner there on company street coming out of town which would later become the beloved sonia ltd the shop originally featured her husband's artwork and a variety of handmade items created by the family but it was sonia's focus on jewelry especially the creation of the hook bracelet that would eventually leave a lasting legacy The Krusian Hook bracelet has become a powerful symbol of the cultural and artistic spirit of the Virgin Islands. It has elevated the profile of our territory globally and has instilled a deep sense of pride among Virgin Islanders. Her influence can be seen in the many local artisans who followed in her footsteps, inspired by her craftsmanship and vision. As we proceed, please note, colleagues, that an amendment to this bill will be introduced later on.
- 0:32:18 Not in today's hearing, but hopefully at the next step to reflect the recent passing of Mrs. Sonia Howe. I want to extend my sincere thanks to the co-sponsors who have joined me in bringing this resolution forward, and I respectfully ask the committee for your support in honouring the life and legacy of this remarkable woman, Mrs. Sonia Howe. Colleagues, I ask for your support as we move this measure forward. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, colleagues. Thank you, Senator Gittins.
- 0:32:53 Colleagues, we have two bills before us. Bill number 260007, one a resolution honoring and commending James Sasso for distinguished service in the mortuary and funeral service industry. And then we have Bill 360029, a resolution honoring and commending Sonia Hugh, the creator of the st croix crucian hook bracelet and proprietor of one of the first hand wrought jewelry stores in st croix colleagues the order that i have today is senator novel francis senator ray fonseca senator alma francis heiliger senator angel bolquez senator college joseph senator franklin johnson and then senator kenneth gittins we'll go to a round of three minutes uh before i open to senator francis i'd just like to ask mr sasso how long have you been in this line of business 17 and a half years plus wow seems like a long time you know the good part about i don't know if it's a good or bad but i think it's really great that people are going on requesting you you know don't bury my mother till sasso come don't bury this boss and i want sasso deal with it and i think that speaks value you know i really commend you for that and the great job you do miss tumble couldn't emphasize i mean everybody emphasize the great job you do i know you as a father i taught two of you i don't remember this young lady, but Denel and Lettrell, you know, at Olamola School, I knew you from in the West growing up. I mean, wow, and you fill the chambers here today, you know. Senator Francis, you're recognized for your three minutes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon to you, my colleagues, good afternoon to the testifiers in the audience there, as well as good afternoon to the people of the

Virgin Islands. I too want to join in commanding our CARBS

0:35:15 and our Central High School graduation today. And also to support you in sounding the conch shell in respect to the situation of sewage running in our streets. I think it's high time that this matter is addressed. And you know, we have similar situation here in the district of St. Croix, but it's unacceptable. It's truly unacceptable that we continue to be confronted with this type of situation. And it is really a health hazard and really needs to be addressed. So I join you in sounding the conch shell in that respect. But today I also join in commending both of the bill's sponsors, Senator Angel Bulquez Jr. as well as Senator Kenneth Gittins on the recognition of, of course, James Sasso, our funeral director, as well as Sonia Huw of Sonia's cruise and hook bracelet. I heard a lot of praises on Mr. Sasso, and I've certainly, despite coming from the St. Croix District for almost 20 years, I've had territorial responsibility and have often, you know, traveled over to St. Thomas and have witnessed his 17 and a half years as a funeral director, have been at many, many funerals and saw the work that he has done there. And certainly when we hear about him being exceptional, dignity, compassionate, his boundless efforts, as well as being a father, a daddy, I think is commendable on that. I wanna thank you, Mr. Sasso, for your service. And again, the fact that you bring some solemn to, bring some some joy to the hearts of individuals that may be solemn and at their low point and of course i often say that um funerals have a tendency to bring out uh the worst and the best

0:37:07 in people and we're happy that you're able to show your empathy dignity and structure and certainly your compassion and care i wanted to ask you on one question because i think it's a big toss-up Well, you have been a notable and respected electrician, as well as being a funeral director. How do you separate those two responsibilities and which one you enjoy more? Well, good afternoon, Senator. To be honest with you, I enjoy being a funeral director more because I bring comfort to families that are grieving and when I close up my funeral I say, thank you for choosing Tom rules on home they say thank you Mr. Sasso we are very pleased in the service and that mean more to me than money I even doing electrical work I lose a big difference in pay I still prefer to stay with the federals thank you thank you and I'll tell you to be honest with you I try some of those moves that I see you through I did it with my baton back when I was a cop it don't work as well as you have done it but certainly you know you're very impressive the work that you've done. I want to thank all of the testifiers that came before us today and again you know I don't have a whole lot of questions because I think that they have painted an excellent picture of your contribution. Certainly the Honorable Bernie Sternbull, certainly Kaiser Cowood as well as the Sergeant Nibs as well as your daughter and nephew. I want to thank them for their testimony and certainly at the appropriate time I will be supporting this measure in this committee as well as the final session. So my congratulations to you and again thank you for your efforts there. I just want to wrap up by saying I know of the efforts that will be made by Senator Gittins, our Vice President, in bringing this bill forward well before Ms. Sonia had passed away. He kept saying that she was eminent and we need to get this moving and unfortunately, you know, we don't have the ability to stop the the clock so I again I I sympathize with the fact that that is a little bit late but nonetheless better late than never so thank you for still moving forward

0:39:17 with this piece of legislation I stand in support of these two measures mr. chairman thank you very much for your time and opportunity Thank You Senator Francis Senator Ray Fonseca you're recognized for your three minutes thank Thank you, thank you so kindly, Mr. Chair and Mr. James Sassou. Well, sir, Popeye, you bring an all-star cast in here with you today. I see Miss Thornbull in the back there. Oh yeah, that's right, we can't do no more free advertising, right? Bernie Thornbull, Dr. Kaiser, you know, your daughter, the wife, Risa, you know. It's awesome. But I got a question for you, right? Because this is something that I noticed, but I don't really know.

0:40:09 Okay, in the church, right, the head of the deceased faces where? Because I just see you turning around the casket, and I say, oh, boy, so where's the foot now, and where's the head? Because you know how to be watching your soul. And then also tell us when the person buried, is the head in first or the foot in? Because I'd be tracking this and I don't know. So tell us how it go, Popa. Good afternoon, Sinta Fonseca. Sinta, it all depends on the layout of the church and the layout of the cemetery in terms of the entrance to the vault.

0:40:47 In the church, the reason why we turn the casket is that the body always moves feet first. Like when you walk, you move your feet before your head. that's why you see the casket turn always feet first and in the at the gravesite all the pins and open up the tomb the body might go in feet first or head first the head always remain to the west to face the rising sun the head is always at the west in the tomb okay thank you okay you know i would have never figured that out thank you so you see that so the feet now is the the head is facing the west so you face the rising sun you know i never knew that before that is awesome awesome you know that's awesome so you know um one minute one other thing i want to talk to you about ask you about is um them step them move step yoga well supper but them is some step with the king and all of that you know i'm a kappa so we talk to all the king too you know so it's awesome you know congratulations um and to all your supporters you know um i see delver in the back there you even got thompson from the bank why you even come

with the money today yeah blessings so you know um i am definitely in support of this bill um both of these bills in this block and um i'd like to thank both of the bill sponsors um because you know the cushion bracelet um is a is a real real um souvenir and um you know we we're very familiar with that cushion bracelet so at the appropriate time mr chair i will be voting in the affirmative and thank you so much blessings thank you senator fonseca i too to be amazed by the steps i say one time i might uh tell a friend a good friend i was black seed i said black scene

0:42:44 sasso ain't look like the man on the peanut can the plant house with the long shoot and things he said i'm going to tell him i say i didn't give you no melee man leave the man alone but anyhow moving on senator alma francis heiliger you're recognized for your three minutes you recognize me thank you thank you thank you try again okay okay is the echo gone no it's still there you have on more than one device i am not certain No, I only called Okay, go ahead Okay This is interesting If you want to go ahead to the next person and see if the media could clear that up Alright, I'll move to the next Senator and come back to you Senator Angel Borges you recognize the sponsor of the bill uh thank you mr chair uh good morning mr chair good morning colleagues good morning listening and viewing afternoon i apologize the listening and viewing audience uh and of course good afternoon to mr sasso i apologize i couldn't be there i have a pressing issue to attend um but i see that you came with the family and supporters and i'm happy that you have your support around you and it's a well-desolved all of the work

0:44:30 that you've done especially in this industry and I think there are many industries in our society what I venture to say or even guess that that industry must be one of the most stressful if I can use that word you you know, having to deal with individuals who are experiencing loss and sadness and having to provide some sort of structure to help them get through that time of loss, you know?

0:45:06 So I really commend you and everyone in that industry. And many people have mentioned that you light up the room and I've seen you do that as well, whether it's, you know, having a casual conversation, light joke but I must say that when you perform in your duties I haven't really seen anything else like it and becoming a public official I have attended more funerals as a public official than I did prior and when I saw you go to work it was totally different than I had ever seen. You take the time, the effort, you know, the farewell walk I think it is. Could you tell us about that? I know everybody's sort of hinting on it but apparently it's it's a special type of walk that you had to learn like could you tell us or share with us a little bit about how you were able to develop that if there's a certification or if it's something you had to learn from someone else.

0:46:14 Good afternoon, Sintaboulkes. Sintaboulkes, the farewell walk is something I just developed. When I went in from home, I said in Istanbul, we must do something different. We must be above the competition. Let's shut down the competition. And I decide we can just do things different. The farewell walk depends on the recessional hymn. It's different music, different moves to different music. It's just something I just develop on my own, and people are kind of get to love it, and I'll go to the service of the man, they'll actually be going to see some today, you know, we come to see you march out, and I say, something, whatever the Lord permit me to do, I'll do on the legs, it's good. So, you know, you can do it, so it's just something I did on my own, Senator.

0:46:56 There is something so surreal and so royal about it. Especially, I've seen you do it more so when there is a burial or a ceremony for an individual who has served in the military, I see that you sort of make sure that you do the work during those types of processions. Time. Is there a specific time when you do that, or you are able to do it whenever you choose to? Well, Sinta, at every funeral I do, I give a march for the family.

0:47:26 But military funerals are something different because I deal with the flag and we must respect the flag. The flag isn't supposed to touch the ground, nothing isn't supposed to rest on the flag. So when I'm doing a military friendly, make sure I have my eye on the flag, that no one disrespect the flag. Thank you. Thank you. And Mr. Chair, if I may have one last question, please. Go ahead, Senator. Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I wanted to ask a question to the nephew of Mr. Sasso, because obviously, well, I'm assuming that his nephew has seen his uncle work, work and somehow between that experience Now his nephew is in the business. I wanted to learn a bit more about how he was Supported by his uncle or what what drove him to go into that industry. Thank you, Mr. Chair Thank you for the question senator and again, thank you for bringing forth this bill to honor my uncle When I would visit the Virgin Islands my uncle was actually a practicing electrician at that time and I mean the conversations we would have about his interests and at some point you know entering the funeral profession they were very special. I think it might have been a couple of years thereafter you know. Hold one second Jalani. hold hold that thought committee and government operation veterans affair consumer protection stands and recess for two minutes do Thank you.

0:50:28 The Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs and Consumer Protection is back on the record. Mr. Sasso, sorry for that. Continue. Certainly okay, just continuing as I mentioned. During that time, you know, when we were in high school, my uncle was a practicing electrician and when we visited the Virgin Islands, I mean, it was many

occasions, but there was one in particular where we spoke about, you know, trades and about professions and he shared his interest, you know, of becoming a funeral director at some point, and he told us, you know, very candidly, you know, he can teach us everything we need to know about electricity so we don't get shocked and stay out of trouble, but you need to find your way to mortuary school if that's your interest, and that's what happened. You know, I went to mortuary school a year after my cousin Lyle, and it was an amazing experience. Worked in New York City for several years, ended up in funeral education in the city as well, and again just wonderful opportunities with my uncle you know quietly behind at every step of the way you know we would share many stories many conversations of his service my service in the city you know just good times man thank you for that question senator volcas yes thank you mr chair um okay thank you for that time i appreciate it you're welcome um mr sasso one second senator francis heiliger mr sasso is mortuary a big thing in your family yes yes yes it is because you know we make we chuckle but I mean I was in St. Croix and there's another funeral home over there I really can't bring the name right now Divine Funeral Home yes and the guy tell me you know Sasso is my family yeah yeah Divine is my cousin

0:52:31 so I mean everybody in this thing like Latin family Avery enough that when I'm gone to carry on good good good good good Senator Almar Francis, are you recognized for your three minutes? It's good afternoon. Can you hear me? Much better. Go ahead. Oh, excellent. Good afternoon to the people of the territory. Good afternoon to the testifier, also the honoree. I have to say that I too am one of those individuals over the years have have been thoroughly impressed by Mr. Sasso's service that he provides to the community.

0:53:13 When I first attended a funeral that he was presiding over, when I saw what he was doing, what actually came to mind at that moment, I remember years ago, I had seen a funeral that had to do with back in New Orleans and how they look at funerals several of them more like a celebration of life and you know when I saw the bands and how the bandmaster would come forward with um that particular meticulous type of stepping I said wait a minute we are really you know stepping up our game here in the territory so I really was very impressed by that but some of the questions I want to ask you directly um specifically with the industry. Do you think there's anything here in the territory that we could adapt or that could be adapted here that could potentially improve the way funerals are done or do you think you know how we're doing it are pretty good? It's pretty good. Good afternoon Santa Francis. Funerals in the Virgin Islands could be a lot better. For many years I've been asking for the Western Cemetery to have the walkways fixed, and Eastern Cemetery is continuing without a plan.

0:54:33 I've spoken many times that people are over the cemetery and they seem to have their own ideas, Ms. Francis, but Eastern Cemetery is going to be worse than West because West is flat, East is upper hill, and we already start burying on top of each other. One minute. You have to be working on other people's tomb to get into the burial site. So I think we need to look into that and have someone look into it to come up with a good engineering plan in terms of having some walkways and areas that we could at least roll the body through instead of having to lift so far. Because I've seen people fell in east when the rain is a real disaster, it's muddy, it's a real disaster. So there's a couple of things we can fix into, yes. Well, I'm very happy you brought that to our attention because I wasn't even fully aware just even based on the logistics of how you guys have to traverse um the ground and just what you're saying not only might be hazardous but it also from to be disrespectful from some regards i personally thought a lot of these things were resolved um because i had a specific issue where my mother's coffin was built around so you can't even access it so that was a concern for me and they they assured me that these things going forward would have been cleaned up but what you described to me is a major concern um um i want to ask your daughter um being your that your father is so well known and he's into this particular industry as a father-daughter relationship what qualities do you think that he has that made him so well-suited for this role? Thanks for the question. So I think empathy is one of the main qualities that he holds and also just the ability to have that personal touch with the

0:56:28 families, right? I think it's so important to be able to feel for people to feel comfortable during a time of grief and he has the ability to make you feel comfortable even though you know a lot of these families are going through some maybe their most toughest time so you know i think definitely that empathy and that ability for him to be able to make folks feel comfortable oh excellent um mr true could i just wrap up with one final question good thank you um mr sasso you know you are very well trained in the community is there other things that you participate in or you would like to see happen in the community to really you know continue that connection that we as a people have you know funerals bring people close together but as a community we work as a village to look out for one another are there any thoughts that you might have to share in that regard thank you mr chair for the additional Cinta, I would like to see a scholarship coming from the legislature, a private entity, that we can have students come to high school that's interested in martial arts science, that they can go after college and come back and serve. And on the electrical side, I'd like to see a trade school.

- 0:57:50 We're losing too much young men, the mountain young men that have buried, I can't count them. And we're losing too much young men, we need to take the guns out of the hand and put some tools in the hand. As an electrician I could donate my time, I could speak to many other electrical companies such as Brian Electric, M&M Electric, and I know that they will donate materials we need at trade school, and I could get people to help teach the youth electrical, and I could get plumbing and some carpentry. We need a trade school in Ireland, take the guns out of the young people's hands, let's put tools in their hands and give them a positive future. Thank you. Excellent. Thank you. Thank you so much for that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.
- 0:58:28 Thank you, Mr. Sasso and Senator Francis Heiliger. You're so correct about that. But one thing I have to say on the record today, Mr. Sasso, I know you for a very long time, and everything you do is about precision, timing, and being right. But I know it isn't all about you. I have to give your wife, Mr. Sasso, some credit too. One thing, she don't got your razor sharp boy. I never seen nothing like this. You don't lie about your age. I ain't going to ask you how old you is. But anybody that ever encountered Miss Sasso, especially that homebuyer's class, that first-time homebuyer's class, well done. I wish I'd listened to her and Desiree, Miss Brooks, umpteen nine years ago. I had about three homes.
- 0:59:20 But anyhow, whether you've got good credit, bad credit, low credit, no credit me sasso to make you really feel and help you and guide you to be a homeowner and me sasso I thank you for all you do with the children and with the bigger boy here sasso for everything you do we move to the next senator Senator Carla Joseph you're recognized for three minutes i thank you so kindly mr chairman a pleasant good day to you uh all my colleagues as well of you in a listening audience and the testifiers who are here in support of the first bill and our agenda bill number 360007 this bill which is going to honor and commend mr james sassel for his distinguished service in our community I want to just say that this is a very commendable piece of legislation because Mr. Sasol as everyone has stated gives the level of compassion needed when people are going through some very tumultuous time of their life when they are burying a loved one and he brings that to the whole service and a level of professionalism i really think that that is very commendable i always too also want to commend the bill sponsor of bill 360029 which is a resolution honoring and commending
- 1:01:19 sonia ho the creator of the saint croix cruzian hook bracelet and the proprietor of one of the first hand raw jewelry stores in st croix this lady was the catalyst for all of the other cruisian crafted bracelets that have come out of our big island of st croix sister island of st croix i really want to commend the bill's sponsors i do have a very thought-provoking question uh for mr sasso i really heard what you said and you are right parents with young people we have to be able to provide them with something positive to do i just went to the central high graduation today and the guest speaker she turned something that happened negatively in her life around to something positive and to do good in our community not only in st thomas well st croix where she lives and she graduated from central but also in st thomas and that's what we have to do so mr sasso i'm very elated to hear that you would be willing to donate your time um kindly tell us time what was motivating mr chairman continue senator tell us what was your motivating factor to switch careers from being an electrician to now being a funeral director what was that motivating factor that aha moment that you said you know what I think I want to do this. Good afternoon, Santa Joseph. Senator it was when
- 1:03:14 Tumble from home first opened I think it might have been the second funeral that they were doing was my good friend Auban Descartes the jeweler his mother and when I attend the funeral Ms. Tumble says Sasso can you help me today I don't have anyone with me I said Ms. Tumble I got you And when I help her at the church and at the gravesite, thereafter her mom, which is our general manager, Mrs. Gumbs, they call and when I went, I tell them, you know, I can't commit because I'm still doing electrical work. At the time, I was doing my Gottlieb for Gottlieb Gas Station House, 3Ds, Gleason, Jewelry, and Jimmy Vedd for Glickers. I was doing those three homes at the same time. So I said, I really can't commit, but what I can do, if you all let me know two days in advance, I will take the time off and come and do a funeral. But after I started doing those funerals and I realized that the families are kind of like me and like the different style that I bring to a funeral, I decided after a while it's time to transition and keep out of the hot sun all day, go into some AC and then some sun. So that's how come I transition.
- 1:04:23 Thank you so much for that. You know, we always have to look at how, when people come into their aha moment, and this is something that I know that you are very passionate and committed to do, and I just ask God to continue covering over you in this work. Thank you so kindly, Mr. Chairman, for the time. Thank you. Senator Franklin Johnson, you are recognized for your three minutes. Thank you very much, the Chair. do want to definitely give kudos to students down at Central High in their ceremonies today at graduation. Mr. Sasso, I must say that you are a very genuine man when you say that you prefer to do this and you prefer to lose the money and bring this service to family. I have family members that are electrician and I always recommend to young men if you're gonna take a trade be an electrician you got real money there so I'm knowing I know you're passing up some real money to do this because it's your pride it's your joy something that you love doing and when families is at the worst you bring out that joy you make the service a real

celebration and I thank you for that I can recall a couple times seeing your performance but not only that seeing when you go and grab the young ladies them and they run from you because you're measuring them what come about you to be measuring people at this service mr sasso help me with that one because all i just say is ladies running sasso stop stop stop and you just i got your measurement already what what what gets into you mr sasso help me with that one please good afternoon center johnson sometimes

1:06:12 when i'll go to shake the lady's hand they'll say i ain't touching your hand he was touching it there don't touch my hand so it's i will tell him if you don't touch my hand i can measure you and that's how i come about that well you're sure what's happening ladies skipping around it when you come to shake the hand and that that's that humor and that joy that you bring to that service and to those loved ones and family and i really sincerely thank you for that because people sometimes is at the lowest point and you you bring that joy your steps remind me of when I look at a funeral in Louisiana or you know the New Orleans that Louie that New Orleans and those marching and those people performance you remind me a lot of that did you any time take some time out to look at what they do and do some of them too no Santa I never ever seen a funeral New Orleans I just developed my own style. I get my cane, I get my top hat, my long coat, and I just decided we can do it different and bring joy to the families and that's what I'm here for. Thank you.

1:07:18 You sure do bring that and I thank you. I thank your family, your nephew, your daughter, Dr. Kaiser, all the folks that came out and support you today. And I haven't seen the audience but I was told there's a big audience there so there's no funeral home today. That's no service for sure from the tumble funeral home service and I thank you I wish you all the best and I really appreciate those real genuine words about willing to help young men or young women if they want to learn that trait of electrician again thank you very much for your service and congratulations and I also glad that you're taking your flowers now because tomorrow is promised to no one thank Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, have a wonderful day.

1:08:02 Thank you, Senator Johnson. Senator Kenneth Giddens, you're recognized for your three minutes. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good afternoon to all. Special good afternoon to my good friend there, Sasso. How are you doing today? Good afternoon, Senator, I'm doing fine, how about you? yeah yeah keep the camera name uh media you don't need to get a camera on me that's that's the star uh today um congratulations i see you brought out the calvary there with you today uh if you could span the audience as well too um media will appreciate it to all his supporters uh that came out. You know, I wanted to ask them some questions, but it don't make no sense to ask any questions because there ain't enough time to go around. But I wanted to really know, you know, what set you apart from the rest. And I would have loved to hear, I'm sure, each one of them would have had something different to say. You know, as I think back on the first time I saw anything like it at a funeral, I'm thinking back on our former lieutenant governor, Gerard Loss James, and I was like, what was he doing? But it looked good, it looked really professional, and then I saw he gave another young man a good opportunity, and he too was doing it, Henry Milligan, we call him Gange, and I said oh, this thing must be real. And then when I got to St. Thomas and I see my good friend, and the difference was he was dressed in black, and he was more stiff than anything else. I couldn't tell the difference between him and the baton.

1:09:53 And I mean, you guys just professionalize this whole thing. Only one favor I want you to do for me, Sasso. When you see Holland, the retired big National Guard guy guy for the other funeral home tell him walk like you going down the mile okay tell him tell him i send that message but uh congratulations for sure colleagues i also want to respectfully ask you for your support on this uh resolution uh to honor correct commend miss uh sonia how i'm i'm really sat in here today as we just lost her just about two months ago. But what comforts me is that her legacy will definitely live on through her remarkable handcrafted work that she's done and started right here on St. Croix which has touched many in our community and will continue to inspire many for many years to come and I will continue to wear my bracelet proudly and these bracelets were bought somewhere like about in the early 90s just put it that way you know and so she's been around for quite some time and I want to say our condolences to our family friends and the great community thank you and i ask you for your support thank you mr chair thank you senator gittins um i'll ask any of my colleagues committee members or non-committee members if they have that one person question the anyone senator francis novel francis I'm just making sure if we have no Mr. Chair I'm I'm ready to um to go to a vote I think that uh certainly I've heard motion I've actually seen the work of this individual all right I think I hear

1:12:14 motion thank you mr chair mr chair i move bill number 36 dash 0007 a resolution honoring and commending mr james sasso for distinguished service in the mortuary and funeral service industry be voted upon favorably by this committee and forwarded to the committee and rules and judiciary for further review and action i so move second second bill number 36007 a resolution honoring and commending james sasso for distinguished service in the mortuary and funeral service industry proposed by senator angel l bolquez was moved by senator ray fonseca second by senator kenneth l gittin senator alma francis heiliger roll clock roll call madam clerk senator avery l lewis yes senator lewis yay senator novell e

francis jr yeah senator francis jr yay senator ray fonseca yeah senator fonseca yay senator alma francis heiliger yes senator francis heiliger yay senator kenneth l gittins yes senator gittins yay. Senator Franklin D. Johnson. Yes. Senator Johnson, yay. Senator Collar J. Joseph. Yes.

- 1:14:12 Senator Joseph, yay. Mr. Chair, there are seven yays. Thank you, Madam Clerk. Bill number 36007, a resolution honoring and commending James Sasso for distinguished service in the mortuary and funeral service industry has been voted upon favorably by the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs and Consumer Protection and will be reported out to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary for further consideration and action.
- 1:14:55 I have a motion. Senator Giddens, you are recognized. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair and colleagues, I move that Bill No. 36-0029, a resolution honoring and commending Sonia Howe, the creator of the St. Croix Krugian Hook Bracelet and proprietor of one of the first hand wrought jewelry stores in St. Croix, be voted upon favorably here in this committee and be forwarded to the rules and judiciary committee for further consideration i so move second second bill number 36 0026 a resolution honoring 29 sorry sorry about that Yes, sorry. Bill number 260029, a resolution honouring...
- 1:16:01 You don't have to say... You don't have to say improperly. Sorry. A resolution honouring and commending Sonia Hugh, the creator of the St. Croix crucian hook bracelet and proprietor of the first hand wrought jewelry stores in St. Croix has been moved by Senator Gittins second by Senator Carla Joseph and Senator Alma Francis Heiliger Madam Clerk could I have a roll call please Senator Avery L. Lewis. Yes. Senator Lewis, yay. Senator Novel E. Francis Jr. Yay. Senator Francis Jr., yay. Senator Ray Fonseca. Yay. Senator Fonseca, yay. Senator Alma Francis Heiliger. Yes. Senator Francis Heiliger, yay.
- 1:17:01 Senator Kenneth L. Gittins. Yes. Senator Gittins, yay. Senator Franklin D. Johnson. Yes. Senator Johnson, yay. Senator Carla J. Joseph. Yes. Senator Joseph, yay. Mr. Chair, there are seven yays. Thank you Madam Clerk. Bill number 36.0029, a resolution honoring and commending Sonia Hu, the creator of the St. Croix Crucian Hook Bracelet and proprietor of one of the first hand wrought jewelry stores in St. Croix has been voted upon favorably by the government operation by the Committee on Government Operations Veterans Affairs Consumer Protection and will be report it out to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary for further consideration and action. Point of personal privilege. Point of personal privilege, Senator Ángel Borges.
- 1:18:12 Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair and colleagues, I would like to express my thanks for the support of Bill 36-0007, the resolution to honour Mr. James Sasso. I want to say also that I express support as well for Bill 36-0007 and look forward to supporting it in the Committee on Rules and Judiciary. Thank you, Mr. Chair. thank you senator bolquez um i'd like to thank the testifiers i'd like to thank mr james sasso like to thank senator gittins for that bill with miss sonia hugh um she rest in peace and the committee on government operation veterans affairs and consumer protection Stands and recess for 15 minutes.
- 1:19:36 Thank you. ¶¶ Li-lo-la-la-li-lo-le-lo-la Li-lo-la-la-li-lo-la Oyame Thank you. Thank you. so so
- 1:23:05 so so Thank you.
- 1:24:35 so Thank you. Oh Thank you. Thank you. [3 such phrases repeated 8 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]
- 1:29:35 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
- 1:31:05 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
- 1:33:35 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
- 1:35:05 ¶¶ do Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. so so so so so
- 1:40:05 so Thank you.
- 1:41:05 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
- 1:44:35 so Oh, my God. Thank you. [2 such phrases repeated 13 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]
- 1:52:05 Thank you. Thank you.
- 1:53:05 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
- 1:54:35 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
- 1:56:05 ¶¶ Thank you.

1:57:05 ¶¶ All right, all right, all right. Thank you.

1:58:34 Thank you. Le lo la le lo le lo la Le lo la le lo le lo la Oh yeah man Good afternoon to the people of the Virgin Islands good afternoon to my colleagues good afternoon to the listening and viewing audience the committee on government operation veterans repair and consumer protection is back on the record madam clerk could you read the agenda for block two please yes mr. chair block 2 bill number 36-0026 an act amended 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 good thank you madam clerk so this afternoon madam clerk we have bill number 36 0026 an act amending title 23

2:00:36 virgin islands code chapter 10 by adding a sub chapter vi to establish the virgin island meter meteorological office within the virgin island territorial emergency management agency who speaks to this bill please recognize senator fonseca's mind thank you thank you thank you so kindly mr chair and a pleasant good afternoon to all the listening audience and my colleagues Mr. Chairman, I rise to formally introduce and speak in support of Bill No. 36-0026, an act amending Title 23 of the Virgin Islands Code to establish the Virgin Islands Meteorological Office within VITEMA. This legislation is simple but profound. It's to save lives, protect property, and improve our territory's readiness in the face of weather-related threats. And this meteorological office will serve as a centralized professional hub for monitoring weather conditions, producing accurate forecasts, and conducting real-time hazard analysis, all from right here in the Virgin Islands. And Virgin Islands know about the devastation that can be caused by severe weather. weather. We live in the Caribbean, a region vulnerable to flash floods, high winds, ocean storm surges, hurricanes, and sometimes without much warning. When storms come close to our shores, as Hurricane Dorian did in 2019, we cannot afford to wait even three hours for

2:02:43 updates from San Juan or from the National Weather Service in the continental United States. This bill gives the USVI the capacity to track and to generate and to interpret weather data for ourselves. Additionally, the recent federal budget cuts to the National Weather Service and its parent agency, the National Oceanic and Asmospheric Administration, NOAA, posed significant risks to the Virgin Islands as we approach the 2025 hurricane season. The Trump Administration proposed 30% reduction in NOAA's \$6 billion budget has already led to the loss of over 2 000 employees since january including meteorologists and data scientists critical to weather forecasting and the national oceanic and atmospheric administration which oversees the national weather service they have experienced a 20 workforce reduction since the start of 2025 this includes over 880 terminations and more than a thousand additional resignations and buyouts while there is no official breakdown available for the national weather service office in san juan puerto rico these cuts are being felt nationwide today vitima pro employs approximately 156 funded staff positions and operate with nearly a 10 million dollar budget yet not one single full time meteorologist is employed in vitima and on page three of the testimony from last year's budget the director indicated no one in vitima is dedicated to tracking the weather full time The budget from last year, Vitima, was \$9,871,572, the recommended budgets.

2:05:00 You know, when flash floods occurred, on May 8th of this year, we had one. Carnival Saturday parade, we had one. February 27th, again, there was another flash flood. The public received no warning. You know, Carnival race day, last year, Friday. The village rained out. This meteorological office will be established to hire a professional meteorologist and allow for hiring support staff, including a hydrologist. They will monitor the local conditions using satellite, radar, weather stations, and buoys. They develop and disseminate accurate real-time forecasts and alerts, conduct public education and outreach on weather preparedness, and collaborate with the national agencies like NOAA and the National Weather Service, and most critically, begin the process of establishing a Doppler weather radar station. It's going to be located on the east end of St. Croix. We're recommending an S-band Doppler. I know funding is going to be an issue from that, but it has to be done with a meteorologist. You have to give them the tools. This S-band radar gives you 180 degrees circular radius coverage, So we'll be able to see from the Dominica, from Dominica all the way to the east coast of the Dominican Republic, including all of Puerto Rico. As you know, those are the areas where the hurricanes come from and all the storms and the weather. You know, right now in El Yunque Rainforest, with its high elevation, Their Doppler there significantly is obstructed by the line of sight to the Virgin Islands. They have radar beam blockage.

2:07:02 That radar is over 3,500 feet up, and the beam has problems reaching lower altitudes to the southeast, which is the Virgin Islands. We're southeast of Puerto Rico. And it also, because of this blockage, the radar beam must tilt higher to clear the mountain, which causes the beam to overshoot weather systems closer to the surface, etc. Heavy rains, flooding, and tornado activity is sometimes missed. This results in poor level radar coverage, making it harder to detect early signs of severe weather in the Virgin Islands. And also, it's a blind spot for the territory. The U.S. Virgin Islands, particularly St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix, fall within a known radar shadow or low-level coverage gap. And supplemental resources are limited.

- 2:08:03 And this obstruction is a major reason why I'm advocating for the installation of a dedicated radar, the Doppler-S system. Additionally, an S-band Doppler based on St. Croix would provide weather coverage for all of the Caribbean from the Dominica up to the east coast of the Dominican Republic. Our fishermen need real-time marine advisories to avoid deadly conditions like those in January 2024 rough seas claim the life our fishermen leave their families late at night to go out fishing they need to know about all of the weather conditions our farmers need to know when drought or flooding is coming to protect their crops investments our pilots and seaplane operators need better data on windshare and crosswinds that affect landings and takeoffs. Our children play on beaches or even commuting to school need to ensure they are safe, not guessing as to the storm, whether it's coming or not. So this is more than weather. It's about building scientific capacity, about ensuring preparedness, and about owning our future in the face of a changing climate. We should not have to call Puerto Rico to find out whether it's safe to swim at Megan's Bay or when a flash flood may strike Bovoni. We should know this and we should be able to generate our own data. The Meteorological Office will allow us to defend our disaster declarations locally with locally generated data. so when the president declares a hurricane we can produce the data here and you know that happened with hurricane marilyn and hugo they had them as classification one and two hurricanes when we know there were four and five we can generate our own data so we ask those who ask about the cost of
- 2:10:17 this and i ask you and i remind you what is the price of a single virgin islander's life i say this investment will pay for itself even if we save one life so colleagues this bill is about smart government it's about empowering vitima to fulfill its core mission which is to save lives and protect property and i ask for your support on bill number 36-0026 and with it the creation of the virgin ounce meteorological office and let's take this bold step forward not just for ourselves but for the safety security and sovereignty of a of your territory of our territory and thank you so much mr chair for the time thank you senator fonseca i think in today we have not i think today we have two testifiers I believe one is online miss Santa Burke meteorology and climate science major University of Delaware and we have assistant director mr. Ovid Williams right of Virgin Islands territory money to Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency better known to all of us as VITEMA well we're going to start with mr. Williams so you're going to put your name and position on the record and then I'll go online and then they'll come back to you okay good afternoon honorable senator my name is Ovid J Williams I am the assistant director of the Virgin Islands territorial emergency management agency great online good afternoon my name is Sine Burke and I am a meteorology and climate science major at the university of delaware and i am here to testify and support of the bill 36-0026 good thank you i'll come back to you in a few minutes sit tight don't move mr williams floor is yours good afternoon senator avia lewis chairman of the committee on government
- 2:12:33 operations veteran affairs consumer protection other committee members the 36 legislation SLAFF and those in the viewing and listening audience. I am Ovid J. Williams, the Assistant Director of the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency. I am providing testimony today to Bill number 360026, an act amended Title 23 Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 10, by adding a subchapter VI to establish the Virgin Islands Meteorological Office within in the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency, dated February 27, 2025, sponsored by Senator Ray Forsyth.
- 2:13:16 VITEMA already maintains a strong relationship with the National Weather Service in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands Meteorological Office at VITEMA with appropriate technical staff would serve to enhance that relationship. on a recent discussion with the leadership of the National Weather Service in San Juan. Not only does the National Weather Service provide my team a 24-hour telephone support and emergency alert service messages to smartphones throughout the Virgin Islands, but it also provides, as needed, virtual meeting capability with the government agency officials and provides its written products on social media and host online meetings in English and Spanish. One of the greatest benefits of adding a meteorologist to the VITIMA team is to provide the much needed technical input to San Juan National Weather Service for timely notification of weather conditions to St. Croix, St. Thomas, St. John, and Water Island based on the input from local observations in the territory with input on existing threats conditions from a vitima meteorologist severe weather warnings could go out earlier from the national weather service on vitima's alert vi mass messaging notification system as well as the national weather service's wireless emergency alert system and the noah 24-hour radio broadcasting from the one tower were located at the east end of St. Thomas at the frequency 162.45 megahertz. As to the inclusion of the Doppler radar located on St. Croix, unfortunately, the construction of the new Vitima Emergency Operations Center at Herman Hill and St. Croix using FEMA hazard mitigation funds is several years behind schedule and is currently only a 30% design.
- 2:15:15 VITEMA cannot provide an anticipated date of availability and recommends partnership with the National Weather Service for identification of alternate locations on St. Thomas or St. Croix. Besides an improved weather forecast linked to the National Weather Service, these positions at the VITEMA Meteorological Office would also be responsible for coordinating with federal and Caribbean agencies on the maintenance of critical weather-related instruments located here in the territory. These instruments monitor atmospheric weather conditions, marine conditions, changes in sea levels,

indicating potential tsunamis, and seismic sensors detecting earthquakes. With proper training and coordination with the National Weather Service, my team of meteorological staff could release daily weather balloons, which provided real-time information to San Juan for more accurate weather forecasts to our islands. The Vytema meteorologists can also conduct education outreach to schools and to further provide awareness on the science behind our unique conditions such as Sahara dust, hurricanes, droughts, floods, or conic ash, sagas and earthquakes, just to name a few. These positions could also provide education on the role of the hurricane-hunter aircraft which fly out of St. Croix during tropical storms and hurricanes. As to funding any meteorologist positions, a competitive salary is required to draw and retain qualified individuals. Additionally, recurring visits for training and coordination to the National Weather Service, educational outreach material, travel between islands to support weather instrument maintenance and outreach, and equipment for daily weather balloon wreaths and reporting data are also a part of operational cost. Due to the duties of the meteorological office staff,

2:17:22 vehicles will be required for both St. Croix and St. Thomas. As VITEMA currently does not possess the funding for the portions of the atmospheric scientists, meteorologists, or meteorological assistants, our other funding sources would need to be identified to maintain a meteorological office for the territory. Thank you for the opportunity to present on bill number 360026. In summary, Fatima recommends the inclusion of a meteorological office with recommended staff positions, but does not support the Doppler radar as there's no current location available for deployment or available funding. I would request that the bill's sponsor, a safer second consider amending bill number 360026 as such i am prepared to answer any questions to the best of my ability to any members of this committee may have at this time thank you assistant director williams for your testimony miss sanna burke you're next good afternoon chairman lewis vice chair francis jr members of the 36 legislature of the virgin islands and my fellow virgin islanders my name is sinay burke and i'm honored to provide testimony in support of bill number 36 0026 which proposes the establishment of the virgin islands meteorological office under the virgin islands territorial emergency management agency also known as vitima i appear before you today as a lifelong resident of the virgin islands and a committed student of atmospheric science i'll be graduating on may 22nd with a bachelor of science in meteorology and climate science with a minor in geography from the university of delaware i have recently been

2:19:10 accepted into the graduate program in meteorology and atmospheric science at the pennsylvania state university where i have been awarded a full research assistantship this opportunity will allow me to pursue research on tropical cyclone formation and intensification in a warming climate with my emphasis being on the caribbean region as it is my home and the area to which i am devoted professionally and personally the need for a local meteorological office is no longer a matter of convenience or academic interest it is a necessity the virgin islands continue to face the escalating impacts of climate change including increasingly powerful hurricanes erratic rainfall extended drought periods and rising sea levels these conditions are not distant threats there are active realities that threaten our infrastructure food supply public safety and economic stability this issue is deeply personal to me when i began high school hurricanes irma and maria devastated the virgin islands my family like many others was left without electricity for months our schools were damaged and my peers and i were placed on double session schedules dramatically reducing instructional time these storms disrupted education displaced families and left lasting psychological impacts i have often wondered whether better localized forecasting earlier warnings or more effective public communications could have softened these impacts i believe they could have built the number 360026 seeks to address these vulnerabilities by equipping our territory with tools and expertise tailored to our unique environmental conditions the proposed doppler radar station is a particularly critical component radar remains one of the most essential technologies in meteorology it enables the detection of storm rotation intensity rainfall rates and wind fields in real time according to

2:21:09 ealing and colleagues radar continues to be indispensable for improving lead times in severe weather forecasting and filling observation gaps in under served regions such as ours without radar coverage centered over our territory we are left to rely on data from distant sources that often do not capture the nuances of our localized weather patterns moreover this investment in infrastructure will enhance forecasting not only for emergency response but also for daily applications such as aviation marine operations and agriculture which is a large component of our culture and source of economic stability in the virgin islands localized radar and sensor data allow meteorologists to produce high resolution forecasts that improve accuracy and public trust this is especially relevant in regions with complex terrain and variable microclimates such as our very own islands hyper local observation networks dramatically improve responsiveness to sudden weather shifts and short-term hazards in addition to enhancing public safety this meteorological office would provide substantial benefits to the agricultural sector our farmers face significant challenges due to the shifting rainfall patterns extreme heats and the unpredictability of seasonal storms according to the university of delaware's cooperative extension real-time local weather data improves agricultural planning for irrigation pest control and harvesting these symptoms these systems help reduce losses and boost yield thereby strengthening food security in a

territory that heavily depends on imported goods furthermore hyper local forecasting is critical to the accuracy and relevance of public warnings as highlighted by meteorologist scott damage neighborhood scale data can detect fast developing storms and localized threats that broader forecasting

2 : 23 : 06 systems may miss in a place like the virgin islands where one community can experience torrential rainfall while another remains dry this level of precision is essential i have had the privileges i have had the privilege of exploring these topics through my academic research in my senior project i utilize the weather research and forecasting also known as wharf model to simulate the potential impacts of a two degrees celsius increase in sea surface temperatures on hurricane katrina these results demonstrated significant storm intensifications lower central pressure stronger winds and substantially higher rainfall totals these findings underscore the urgency of preparing for stronger and weather storms in the caribbean this past friday i also presented research at my university symposium titled investigating the spatial temporal evolution of pre-landfall rainfall in gulf coast tropical cycles this study analyzed 252 historical landfalling hurricanes and found that many produced substantial rainfall days before landfall.

2 : 24 : 12 These features are often overlooked in operational forecasting and can result in unexpected flooding. Improved local analysis capabilities would allow us to anticipate such impacts more effectively and issue earlier warnings. The establishment of a meteorological office would also contribute meaningfully to the territory's intellectual and economic development. It will provide employment opportunities for local scientists and technicians, including myself, promote STEM education and foster partnerships with national and international research institutions. As a young Virgin Islander pursuing a Korean atmospheric science, I know firsthand how rare it is to find professional opportunities in this field within the territory. territory. This legislation signals to students like me that our expertise is valued here at home. Finally, this bill aligns with the broader national efforts to invest in regional resilience.

2 : 25 : 08 As noted by public health reports, strengthening local climate infrastructure in underserved communities enhances long-term public safety and fosters the next generation of climate professionals. A permanent meteorological presence in the Virgin Islands may also encouraging visiting may also encourage visiting researchers intergovernmental partnerships and media coverage positioning our islands as a caribbean leader in tropical meteorology chairman lewis members of the senate i commend senator ray fonseca for his insight in introducing this bill and i respectfully urge you to support its passage the virgin islands must be equipped to meet the challenges of a changing climate with foresight preparedness and resilience bill number 360026 provides the structure and support needed to do just that thank you for your time and consideration and i'm happy to answer any questions you may have thank you miss burke for your testimony how's things in delaware it's it's warming up so it's pretty good i'm actually in the middle of moving everything out of my dorm so great great great great i have um my legislative aide miss whatley and very good friend of mine also went to the university of delaware so big ups to you so thank you uh mr williams for your testimony miss burke for your testimony colleagues we're going to go to a five minute round of questioning I have the opportunity to start the first question, and I'll ask you, Mr. Williams.

2 : 26 : 57 You mentioned about 24 hours monitoring currently. Does the government pay for that? Senator, at this time, we do not, sir. Oh, we do not? No. So that's a free service to the government at this time? From my knowledge, yes, sir.

2 : 27 : 23 From your knowledge. Okay. Thank you. I understand where the art of the bill is going, but just coming from my previous position as administrator i know that i've been in settings where we get real time and information just as puerto rico get it we get it so i do understand the need for it i'm more thinking of actually hiring not standing up a whole office but just hiring maybe an individual to provide that information but also comes with a cost because then we have to get equipment and whole host of things but i'll i'll go to the floor, to my colleagues, and we'll go from there.

2 : 28 : 05 Senator, some of my colleagues had to step out for a critical meeting. Senator Fonseca, you wanna go first? I wanna, well, first of all, congratulations, Ms. Burke, on getting this degree in meteorology at the University of Delaware. That's awesome that we have Virgin Islanders all over the world with all of the skills that we need right here in the Virgin Islands. So congratulations and continue all of the great work. I wanted to get into some particular details here because it involves math. mentioned in your testimony um a two degrees increase in sea surface temperature can impact tremendously a storm give us some more specifics on what you're saying there because not many people realize that the temperature of the sea has a lot to do with the power of a storm so i will thank you so much for the question and i'll gladly answer it so right now with carbon emissions contributing to like greenhouse effects that's happening the earth is warming which includes land and sea surface temperatures and as these temperatures over the water increased they strengthen storms as storms need warm ocean temperatures to be on generate themselves and to intensify which is why we only have tropical cyclones during the summer times as that is when the water is warmest and these temperatures continue to increase as they are expected to within the next century we are expecting an almost two degree celsius increase in sea surface temperatures if we do not make any efforts to combat and mitigate the effects of climate change

and i believe that especially since we're in a region that is prone to tropical cycles it is really important that we educate ourselves and the community about exactly what this could look like for the future of the territory and um as a meteorology major that's

2:30:14 exactly why i went into this field i know what it's like to be on the receiving end of these severe storms and i know that it's only going to get worse with time and i think that it's imperative for us to understand and um prepare for what the future has in store for us okay good so i want to get another technical question because it's important for people to understand because right now we have no capability to generate our own weather data right is that correct okay so now explain to us why it is um a doppler radar that's located in mountains can miss accurate coverage of the virgin islands like we have in el yunque rainforest in puerto rico explain how that can miss our weather and potentially cause flooding that we don't even know is coming but had we had a doppler here we would know give us the details yes so with doppler radar what it does is it sends out signals to um kind of pick up on particles that are in the atmosphere and mountains obstruct this so what doppler radar radars are calibrated to do is send out these signals at an angle to avoid these structures and if there's um mountains or other like hilly terrain in between us and that red um doppler rather station it will be angled upwards so it has more up into the atmosphere itself instead of overland so we tend to miss important things like like accurate precipitation rates flooding um and other meteorological phenomena because they have to account for the terrain and the terrain could skew data so they have to angle it so that it's only within the atmosphere and not what's actually happening

2:32:00 overland okay thank you i want my next question mr chair if i may is for vitima so last saturday um well two saturdays ago for the carnival adults parade um they had severe flood warning one minute and um you know since we were doing this bill we checked and the national weather service actually had a flood warning for the virgin islands up but it was not broadcast and it happened last year for the carnival um horse race as a matter of fact friday me and the former assistant director the person that had your office we were out at the horse race track friday five o'clock with the horse race me and him talking like how we're here now and seven o'clock they had a flood and he didn't even know that a flood was coming that seven o'clock the night and i'm with him the five o'clock and the national weather service had it up so the issue is the question is is does vitima have a staff position that monitors the weather full time on our senator at this time no we don't no you don't okay so there's no one at vitima monitoring the weather full time so then if the national weather service has issued a flood warning time and there's nobody monitoring the flood warning then the flood warning doesn't get out to the people and hence you can cause damage to property lives etc and we know in the community we suffer billions of dollars in damages from storms not millions billions of damages thank you mr chair for the time thank you senator um miss burke yes hello uh office of what we're talking about here today uh how many staff do you think we need we have a great question um i would assume that um for it would be in our best interest if we were able to have at least one person representing um the st croix st thomas and st john island so three in total that would be i think the best course of action um to to handle the current situation because while it is it meteorology is very very um intense at times

2:34:32 um looking into forecasts running forecast models yourself to improve the predictability of what could be coming our way um it takes time it takes efforts it takes computers large-scale computers it takes a lot of effort so i think having people that are um at least two three people that are experts in this field may be best and to best guess best known what's the running cost now of starting salary of a meteorologist starting salary i believe could be anywhere from 70 i know some are 90 depends on exactly what institutions or organizations you're working for private versus public sector final seven to ninety thousand good so thank you miss burke mr sorry let me do this senator alma francis heiliger you're recognized for your five minutes good afternoon to my colleagues good afternoon to the testifiers good afternoon to the people of this territory and special good afternoon to our staff you know we definitely appreciate you here in the legislature um i i did quite a bit of research um when i was preparing um in regards to this piece of legislation because anything that has to do with potentially opening a new office in the territory, especially dealing now with the economic situation that we're dealing with, i have to weigh the pros and the cons, whether it has to do what benefits outweigh the potential cost versus what can be done and what can't be done. And after doing some extensive research over the past week or so, i have some major, major

2:36:31 concerns because i was listening to the narrative that was being put out today and i'm wondering a lot of the services that we get with noaa and the national weather service directly next door through puerto rico are free services it doesn't really cost us anything they have already set up the infrastructure we have access to the data i know there was some concerns as it relates to how quickly we do get information. And i really dived into that part because that would have been the catalyst for me as to whether or not this is something we should or should not do because if time-wise is a situation where it could potentially cost a life. i heard earlier information might take three hours to come out i you know when it comes to severe weather when it comes to hurricanes when it comes to flash floods no one puts out that information almost instantaneously roughly within zero to three minutes so that that is not an issue who were, okay, would this justify us

putting out money to do that?

- 2:37:53 When it comes to the radar system, that happens in real time. That system, I even went and checked to see how much it would cost us. It's millions of dollars we would potentially have just to purchase the item outside of finding a new location based on what Vaitima had just shared, as well as even setting up the infrastructure to house this particular system. When I took the time out to, I said, well, okay, is this justifiable when it comes to tsunamis and earthquake alerts? We already get that information instantaneously within one to two minutes when it happens.
- 2:38:33 All of this stuff is already tied to my TEMA where we get the necessary alerts. I heard one particular concern my colleague just spoke about as it relates to a flash flood happening, even though the National Weather Service via Puerto Rico had put the information, we here locally did not do our job to make sure the information was put out. So that is where I see a door opening for maybe having a dedicated staff within VITEMA to be responsible to make sure I monitor the data and the information as it comes in so that if anything, you know, slips through the cracks and it doesn't automatically get sent out, that somebody's there monitoring to make sure that information is out there. But outside of that, in all honesty, with all the research that I've done, in looking at every angle of it, I have to look, does the benefit outweigh the cost?
- 2:39:38 One minute. And I'm the type of person, if we were in a situation where we had millions of dollars to look around at this current moment, I would be more than happy to support the bill. Because, okay, we're getting local information, but that local information is only going to benefit when it comes to potentially dealing with forecasts. As you know, forecast today is Friday. I'm going to get a forecast that next week, Wednesday, is going to rain. That data comes out of the National Weather Service roughly within three hours on a continuous basis, several times a day. So I'm very much concerned at the narrative because we as a community and as representatives of the people, we have to right now start putting things based on priority.
- 2:40:28 We have, as my colleague earlier said, we have sewage running in the streets that is a major health hazard that we can't even clean up because a lot of it has to do with infrastructure as well as funding. And I cannot, in good conscience, Mr. Chair, could I wrap up? Go ahead. Go ahead, Senator. Thank you. I cannot in good conscience after digging up all this information and comparing to our priorities and our needs right now in the territory, especially with us losing grant monies and fundings, and we know what is happening with us nationally, to now make this a priority when the bulk of the services we're already getting for free. So you're potentially asking me as a legislator to now come up with millions of dollars to not only set this up, but also roughly about \$1.5 to \$2.5 million on an annual basis to maintain something we're already getting for free.
- 2:41:32 Now, I understand the localized aspect of it, but when we get to a point that we need to focus on that, I think maybe in the future, if we have the necessary resources, we can do that. But in good conscience, I can't do it at this particular time. But I do understand what the message and what the sponsor is attempting to do. Thank you very much, Mr. Chief. Thank you, Senator Francis Heiliger. Senator...
- 2:42:03 Francis Heiliger. Senator Bulquez. I don't see them. Senator Franklin Johnson, you're recognized for your five minutes. Good afternoon. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon to the testifiers. Good afternoon to the viewing list in audience. I do have some concern as to my colleague and what she just spoke about. I would ask Mr. Williams, do you have any idea of your budget? If you have positions that are not being filled, can you sustain this? This is my main question, simple.
- 2:42:42 Can VITEMA sustain this operation? Something that I can see can be used in cases when, and we all can experience, have experienced when the storm passes, the Virgin Islands, and it's going towards Florida and all of that. Once the United, Continental United States are in danger, it's hard for us to get any information, what's coming to us. so i i can understand my colleague and the direction you want to go but we must be responsible i want to hear from vitima if you have any idea about your budget and you can you sustain this at this current funding ceiling no sir do you have any analysis as as a cost or what it actually would cost because we we haven't seen numbers and this this thing have numbers is have money involved in it and and we need to know before we just make decision without any knowledge as to what the cost is going to be you have any idea of the cost of this at this time no we don't sir i definitely i don't have a lot of questions i want to definitely congratulate miss burke and her accomplishment and I'd hope one day we would definitely have you here with us to assist us in in your profession but I am always a real person I'm not going to play games here and so let's go ahead with this not knowing where the funding source is coming from so I I rest at this moment with this but we need to figure out that before we start pushing something down the road knowing we have a lot of budgetary restraint coming up we need to be very responsible and to our decision i i rest for no mr um chair thank you very much thank you senator johnson miss burke good afternoon as someone entering the field what do you what do you believe are the most critical

- 2:44:52 first steps in establishing a successful and effective meteorological office here in the virgin islands i believe that one of the first steps would be to of course find the personnel needed to run the office we would need um a meteorologist on standby they'll be able to communicate with other offices nearby um or other stations or services weather services nearby so that we can also um if in the event that we cannot have our own red um doppler radar station here that we can communicate with other stations receive data from them and then tailor it towards the virgin islands i think it also be imperative that of course we would like to have our own instruments whether that is a precipitation gauge or rainfall gauge um a wind gauge and an anamometer um to monitor pressure levels within the virgin islands i think that would be really great i think it's just a matter of materials and personnel that would be and of course a location and office in which you can actually house these things so but those would be i believe we need so doing a little rough research you think we need a chief meteorologist a lead forecast meteorologist a hydrologist hydrologist and i'm pretty sure they're going to want some kind of administrative somebody to us this right so right there loan us about including fringe benefits and everything maybe close to a half a million right right so that's something to think about right there my next question to you is given your academic background and research how would you advise the office this office if successful to balance the short-term forecasting needs that we have with long-term climate monitoring as well so i believe that and this is why i'm a huge advocate
- 2:46:48 for the obtaining of local data because while we use models from other stations those models were trained with larger countries and branches the us countries in europe in mind and not tailored towards the climate and variability within the caribbean regions we're very the field of tropical meteorology is overlooked they tend to focus on larger countries as those um receive like the most costs the most damages and most costs were related with damages when these storms come through which is why i believe that we should focus on obtaining data here within the virgin islands but i believe that as climate change continues to progress and worsen and as i mentioned sea surface sea surface temperatures continue to rise it is imperative that we understand the small term changes so of course yes we may have longer drought periods which affects our agriculture sector we may have wetter rainier seasons which may be a benefit in some cases but also a detriment in others because it could lead to erosion and um the beaches as well being we have to deal with more testing of the water and stuff like that with the epa so it depends on it depends but for long term we're going to see these drought seasons and these rainier seasons become more intense we may have longer drought seasons and of course we know in the virgin islands we rely on rainfall to for cisterns i know i do this particularly rely on rainfall to fill my sister and to use water when i'm home so to just educate the community about this as well as having our own data that we can create models that can help us understand what to expect in the future if we have our own data we can run models like i mentioned the weather research and forecasting model that i use to do a recent project that i just submitted about a week ago um using the data that we have here we can definitely understand and prepare ourselves because of a better understanding of exactly what climate change will do to the virgin islands we already
- 2:48:41 know that intense the intensifying of storms droughts rainfall seasons will come alongside this change but we need to know exactly how and what we can do to prepare the virgin islanders better in this regard good so mrs burke if this office is established would you personally see yourself returning to the virgin islands to work in it after graduate school or i mean you just graduated and what would make that opportunity viable for you and others in your field i would absolutely love to return to the virgin islands i there's no place like home i love home i i don't want to be anywhere else but home if i'm being very honest um i would love to return i my i went into this field with the intention of helping in the virgin islands if you ask anyone i know i went into this field because i know what it's like to be on the receiving end of these storms and i know what it's like to live in a community where i felt as over overlooked we hear everything about puerto rico we hear everything about different islands but we never really focus on the virgin islands and i wanted to be the person that could allow for there to be focused on the virgin islands so in any way that i'll be able to do that i would love to that is that is my goal in my career which is why i'm going to graduate school to focus on tropical cyclones in the caribbean because i love home there's no place like it and if i could make it um better for our residents to fully understand and adapt to climate change i would absolutely love that and can you repeat the second part of your question i said what would make it viable for you or even others in the profession i think what would make it viable of course pay is always a factor um the cost of living in the virgin islands has been increasing in recent years especially now that the entire nation is dealing with inflation it's gotten much worse a part of eggs was almost 20 the other day so i think of course we need to have like a reasonable
- 2:50:35 pay and also the resources that we need again having the ability to have localized data specific to the virgin islands to help us with these models and forecasting as well as just informing the community of what is occurring at that very moment in time i think that that's imperative it's really a matter of funding um materials and an office all right you so i i see early i asked you about salary and tell me about 75 or so and i see here in the paper it's a 120 so i'm gonna save some money with you so come home for the 75. well we're starting starting but when we start to work our way up there so it

goes up okay all right thank you for your response um I just let me share some personal experience I was as the world know I was in a previous position this thing almost Waterland administrator and I know when weather coming we have had briefings and you know we we did a local media center meteorological center in PR and we start that there's a six o'clock briefing at eight o'clock briefing at 10 o'clock briefing 12 go right through the whole weather right and we've heard about drought we've heard about you know different things you know even earthquakes every morning I get up I see some type of alarm when I sleep treat or something that we may have any seismic activities a little more than usual some day ago we had a strong earthquake and shortly after that it came out ding-dong on your phone during the same kind of a break the parade day or whatever whichever day was when we had all that torrential rain the alarm went off everybody phone start alarming so I know we do get information and right now I have to kind of agree that it's

2:52:41 kind of cost effective but should we have our own yes and i don't understand colleagues we're going to go to uh three minute round uh not around and we'll start with i don't see senator is only okay I'm seeing Senator Ray Fonseca thank you you're recognized for three minutes yes thank you so kindly Mr. Chair so we we have an issue here where right now the Virgin Islands we don't generate any weather data you know a storm has to be declared by the president he has to rely on data that's coming from some place that's not in the Virgin Islands we received testimony from Miss Burke that the Doppler that's in Puerto Rico due to the mountainous terrain can misdiagnose the accurate actual weather conditions in the Virgin Islands. This build here is about saving lives and being able to predict and generate our own data. You know, storm systems form immediately. We've received testimony from VITEMA that no one monitors the weather full time. So if a storm Some forms at whatever hour that they're not monitoring, maybe it might take two, three, four, five hours. Flood happens, you know, things happen.

2:54:30 The Virgin Islands suffer billions of dollars in lives due to storms and weather related issues. And we need to be able to generate our own data. This is about saving lives. is about the virgin islands going to a new frontier and remember there's federal cuts that's come into the national weather service that's going to affect the virgin islands and those cuts are going to further deteriorate our ability to predict weather so now let me just get to vitima um because you've gave testimony on the bill what do you estimate it would be to hire the meteorologists and also um how many vacant positions that you have in in the budget right now honorable senator at this time um we as i said before we have not taken the we have not begun to do the breakdown in regards to creating the salary or the cost the fringe cost as well as any of the operation costs needed to run this this um office um to to then speak about your second question if i may um at this time from my preliminary research we are about um from a local perspective about 28 vacancies and from a federal perspective we're at uh 16.8.4 vacancy full-time um employment so you're telling me that you have a total of 60 vacant positions in vitima right now no sir no no no okay i i misunderstood tell me what's your total vacant positions all right i'm gonna have to give it um in two different ways right from a federal standpoint and from a local standpoint from the local standpoint um we're looking at the approximately 28 vacancies from the federal standpoint we're at 8.4 full-time ftes okay

2:56:34 so 28 plus 8 so it's 36 total vacancies in vitima more or less okay so mr chair if i can just wrap up so how important is this meteorologist is this meteorologist more important than those 36 vacant positions or those 36 vacant positions are more important than the meteorologist because it all comes down to the funding um it's going to be in vitima and so you have to determine you have 36 vacant positions is a meteorologist important to vitima it comes down to vitima wanting to move this thank you mr chair for the time you can answer on the chair's time thank you chairman um i i don't think it's it's i think it paints the wrong picture if we say that one is more important than the other what i would say is that with our um with our vacancies we are currently working on filling them those vacancies are part of our response and preparedness structure those um so the meteorologist yes it is important um and it is something that we do support as based to our testimony however that funding that we use there especially on the federal side we all know federal funding stays you know we have to have it for certain things right we as soon as as we as we write the the the narrative and saying to the feds you know they have to approve of it right and then on a local side we do have local response and local preparedness persons that we need to fill and so it's not that it's more or less important but as right now that is what we have in regards to our our vacancies Thank you. Senator Franklin Johnson, you're recognized for your three minutes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I really don't need three minutes. I think it's very clear that we all do agree that meteorologists for the territory will be good. But we must have that funding. Yes, there might be available position. I think we need to sit down with the agency, find out if there's errors that you can delete position. That can't happen here on the floor that's something that has to happen out the box so I you know

2:58:50 I really don't want to go any farther with this I know that we need to make real sound decision and not just run to do something to do it and I like I said I I if it's a funded position I do support it but just put in a position and putting it on the agency I just can't do that I think that more conversation need to be had, and this measure could come once more conversation is had. Thank you very much Mr. Chair. Thank you Senator Johnson.

- 2:59:22 The Committee on Government Operation Veterans Affairs and Consumer Protection is going to I'm going to take a two-minute recess. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
- 3:03:28 So, let's go. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
- 3:06:28 the committee on government operation veterans affair and consumer protection is back on the record I hear motion senator ray Fonseca you're recognized thank you thank you so kindly mr chair mr chair i move that bill number 36-0026 be held in the committee on government operations veteran affairs and communal consumer protection for further review and consideration i so move hearing second all right hearing no objections properly moved on second hearing no objection it's properly moved by senator fonseca second by senator franklin johnson Hearing no objections, so audit.
- 3:08:03 Mr. Oven, I give you 30 seconds to give closing. I just want to say thank you to you, Senator Avery Lewis, and your committee on the Government Operations, Veteran Affairs, Consumer Protection, for the opportunity to present testimony on this matter. I also want to thank my fellow testifier, Ms. Burke. Congratulations on your graduation, and I wish you well on your future endeavors. And I just wanted to ensure that VITEMA's mission statement and our promise to the Virgin Islands is to save lives and to protect the property of the Virgin Islands and we will always work to do so. Thank you, sir. Thank you, Ms. Burke. You want to give a closing statement?
- 3:08:49 30 seconds. Yes. I also want to say thank you to everyone for the well wishes regarding my graduation. It's in two days and I look forward to representing the VI on a larger stage. I'll make sure to shout us out while I'm up there and also want to say that just thank you for the opportunity for me to express my love for meteorology and why i believe that the virgin islands needs a meteorologist and why i believe that we need localized data to help us understand and mitigate risk association associated with climate change but i want to thank everyone on the floor all the senators the chairs thank you so much and i hope you have a wonderful day all right point of personal privilege point of personal privilege senator kenneth giddens Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for the point. I just wanted to say congratulations to my cousin there, Ms. Burke, and her graduation. I think her mom told me from the University of Delaware, Bachelor of Science in Meteorology. I just wanted to say congratulations to you. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you. Any other point of personal privilege?
- 3:10:09 All right. Thank you. Thank you all the testifiers today. Thank you my committee members. Thank you colleagues. Thank you everyone, non-committee members, all the support staff, thank the media, legislative reporters and the sergeant at arms thank you mr. Fleming and your team for your assistance I would also like to thank the central staff for providing additional support support for this meeting I'd like to thank my staff thank you there being no further business to come before the committee the committee and government operation veterans affair and consumer protection this meeting is hereby adjourned. Thank you, everybody have a wonderful day.
- 3:11:24 Oh, my God. so

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.

- 12x **Senator Franklin D. Johnson**
heard in this transcript as: Franklin Johnson, Johnson
- 11x **Senator Kenneth L. Gittens**
heard in this transcript as: Giddens, Gittins, Kenneth Giddens, Kenneth Gittins, Kenneth L. Gittin, Kenneth L. Gittins
- 8x **Senator Carla Joseph**
the surname alone also matches: Clifford Joseph; Karla J. Joseph
heard in this transcript as: Carla J. Joseph, Joseph
- 7x **Senator Novelle Francis**
heard in this transcript as: Almar Francis, Francis, Francis Jr, Novel E. Francis Jr, Novel E. Francis Jr.
- 7x **Senator Ray Fonseca**
heard in this transcript as: Fonseca
- 6x **Senator Alma Francis-Heyliger**
heard in this transcript as: Alma Francis Heiliger, Francis Heiliger

- 5x

Senator Avery Lewis
heard in this transcript as: Avery L. Lewis, Avery Lois, Lewis
- 3x

Senator Angel L. Bolques, Jr.
heard in this transcript as: Angel Bulquez Jr, Angel L. Bolques Jr., Bulquez
- 2x

Senator Angel L. Bocas Jr
heard in this transcript as: Angel L. Bocas Jr.
- 2x

Senator Angel L. Borges Jr
heard in this transcript as: Angel Borges
- 2x

Senator Angel L. Bullquist Jr
heard in this transcript as: Angel Bulquist Jr.
- 2x

Senator Collar J. Joseph
the surname alone also matches: Carla Joseph; Clifford Joseph
- 2x

Dr. Kaiser A. Calwood
heard in this transcript as: Kaiser A. Callwood

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 26-0007** Act 6727 · (title not held)
- Act 6727** Act 6727 · (title not held)

Referred to but not found in our acts corpus: Bill 36-0007, Bill 36-0029, Bill 36-0026, Bill 26-0029