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Crime-Fighting Bills, Dept. of Labor Building Purchase Among Measures Awaiting Governor's Approval

Senator Frett-Gregory voices her concerns over the timing and funding source of the Department of Labor's building acquisition

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Senator Diane Capehart is hopeful that two of her recently-passed bills will play a major role in crime fighting efforts in the USVI.

During last Tuesday's regular session, legislators largely supported Bills 35-0131, establishing the Real Crime Center, and 35-0187, the Red Flag Law.

In a press release from Ms. Capehart's office, she explained that "at its core, Bill 35-0187 is a gun violence prevention measure while Bill number 35-0131 provides a technology hub to house the territory's crime-fighting tools to provide real-time updates when a crime is committed."

Despite having to [rework some components](#) of the legislation in its committee of jurisdiction, the two bills now await the governor's signature. In her statement, Ms. Capehart assured that "the goal is always to provide impactful legislation that serves a great purpose to the residents of the Virgin Islands." She promised to work collaboratively with local agencies to "to meet the needs of the public."

A slew of other bills also await the governor's rubber stamp, including a [last-minute request](#) to appropriate funds for the purchase of a permanent home for the Virgin Islands Department of Labor. Primary sponsor Senator Angel Bolques reminded lawmakers that the "acquisition is prudent," noting that they often encourage government agencies to purchase their properties. "I don't say this to disrespect any of you my colleagues, but my point is we find money for what we need to find money for, and I believe that it is prudent that we find the money to acquire this building for the Department of Labor," he said.

A stickler for finances, Senator Donna Frett-Gregory criticized the timing of the request. "We have challenges with our cash flow," she contended. She also expressed concerns with the proposed funding source - the St. Thomas Capital Improvement Fund - which may have prompted Mr. Bolques to subsequently move an amendment to change the source of funds. Instead, monies will now be appropriated from the Penalty and Interest Fund. Despite the amendment, Ms. Frett-Gregory still voted no on the measure, although she was overruled by her colleagues.

Other successful bills included Bill 35-0173, establishing the Safe Haven Newborn Protection Act, and Bill 35-0217, introduced during the regular session to honor the St. Croix Majorettes for 50 years of outstanding service. The bill sought to celebrate their commitment to "nurturing youth, enriching community service, and promoting the art of baton twirling."