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Senate Pushes for Modern Reforms with Efficiency Bill Updating Outdated Marriage Law and Other Statutes; Measures Head to Full Body

Capehart's omnibus bill targets V.I. Code provisions, including an old statute allowing divorce if a spouse is deemed an 'idiot.' The bill also introduces amendments aimed at streamlining gov't functions and improving efficiency across agencies.

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Members of the Committee on Rules and Judiciary, on Thursday, voted to advance several pieces of legislation already vetted in their relevant committees of jurisdiction.

Among them was Bill 35-0388, which purports to provide efficiency in government operations across the agencies and departments. That legislation is an omnibus bill comprising various

amendments to the Virgin Islands Code first introduced by Senator Diane Capehart during two special legislative symposiums in August.

The symposiums were touted by Capehart, who chairs the Rules and Judiciary Committee, as a way to “expedite proposed amendments to the sections of the Code that directly impact each department's operations and functions.” While no votes were taken when the symposiums were hosted two months ago, Bill 35-0388 represents the culmination of that effort.

Presented on Thursday, the legislation made amendments specific to Title Five of the Code. For example, “you have legislation on our books [that says] if you're married to an idiot, you can get a divorce,” she said. “There is legislation from since the beginning of time that needs to be changed; simple words that need to be changed.” The omnibus bill includes provisions to address language “that needs to be changed for departments to be able to provide efficiency for their government operations,” noted Ms. Capehart. With no debate or discussion on the actual contents of the legislation, Sen. Capehart nevertheless reassured her colleagues that the measure was “nothing that is complicated, nothing that is controversial.”

She gained the support of lawmakers including Senator Kenneth Gittens who commented that the bill “aimed to simply enhance government efficiency in an era where effective governance is crucial.” Ultimately, all present committee members voted in favor of the measure.

Lawmakers also supported [Bill 35-0257](#), an act to develop and produce an annual U.S. Virgin Islands Beer, Wine, and Spirits Festival, debated before the Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture on Wednesday.

During Thursday’s Committee on Rules and Judiciary, lawmakers also voted favorably for several leases and conveyances heard before the Senate on Monday, including [Advance Power LLC’s](#) requests to lease land in both districts for the construction of wind farms. WTJX, too, is one step closer to constructing a new office after its [conveyance request](#) was approved by the committee. The Waste Management Authority and St. Croix Science Teachers Association also received support for [their leases](#) from the committee.

Most lawmakers supported Bill [35-0238](#), which corrects typographical errors and minor oversight within the Cannabis Use Act. Despite being described as “pretty straightforward” by Senator Franklin Johnson, Sen. Gittens voted against the bill. “Nothing happening in this industry,” he argued. “I don't see where this Cannabis Act will actually bring enough or generate enough revenues to address the enforcement portion of this.”

Senators also supported [Bill 35-0289](#) which seeks to raise the minimum legal age for the purchase of tobacco products, and an amended version of [Bill 35-0031](#), the Child Victims and Child Witnesses Rights Act.

The Committee on Rules and Judiciary was pleased as well to support recent honors and commendations voted up through previous Senate sessions. First, [Bill 35-0285](#) awarded the key to the Virgin Islands and other honors upon “Benny Demus” for his “outstanding achievements in the music and entertainment industries and for his contributions to the Virgin Islands community.” Finally, they voted favorably for [Bill 35-0286](#), which seeks to honor Verne Antonio Hodge for his years of dedicated service to the people of the Virgin Islands.

All the aforementioned bills will be considered in an upcoming legislative session, with those receiving favorable votes subsequently being forwarded to the Governor’s desk for assent.

